

## Prolific Peal Ringers

### 19: CHARLES WILLIAM ROBERTS (1904-1984)



Charles Roberts was born at Evershot, Dorset, on November 10, 1904 the son of William and Alice Kate Roberts. His father was a butler, which may explain why he appeared to have a number of different residences before he came to London as a young man. When he joined the Ancient Society of College Youths in 1921 he gave his home as Blandford Forum, Dorset. It has not been established who taught him to ring. One writer suggests a local advised him to give it up as he would never be any good: events quickly proved how wrong he was!

His first peal was one of Stedman Triples at Ashted, Surrey, on October 15, 1921, conducted by W E Garrard and rung for the College Youths. In his first twenty peals he rang a further two of Stedman Triples, seven of Stedman Caters and

seven of Stedman Cinques, one of Cambridge Surprise Major and one of Maximus and one of Kent Treble Bob Maximus! He still hadn't achieved his majority!

He was 18 years old on Whit Monday, May 21, 1923 when he took part in the record peal of 12, 675 Stedman Cinques at Southwark Cathedral. The peal was shortened from the 15,051 that the band intended to ring as the tenor ringer, Alfred Peck, was feeling the strain with the long sustained effort of ringing the fifty-hundredweight bell. Contemporary opinion said this peal was some of the finest ringing ever heard. Edwin Barnett, Snr. passed through Southwark on his way to the Central Council meeting and stayed all day listening to it.

Sadly it was Charlie Roberts who, thirteen years later proved the peal was false, six changes repeating four courses from the end. He was in a conversation about starting and turning courses in peals of Stedman Cinques and had just said "You can't have that starting course with that turning course" when he suddenly realised that is what they had rung in the long peal.

He was a perfect striker, whether on a heavy or a light bell, a brilliant conductor and one who hardly ever made a mistake in his method ringing. His peal ringing was in two spells of phenomenal activity. In the twenties and early thirties he took part in various tours and numerous performances with many of the outstanding ringers of the day, concluding with a peal of Stedman Cinques at St Paul's Cathedral in 1938. After that he virtually gave up practical ringing.

He married Miss Grace Church of Waltham Abbey on Easter Monday, April 26, 1943 at Holy Trinity, Waltham Cross. After the service instead of the Wedding March a touch of Grandsire Triples was rung on handbells by Mr and Mrs J Thomas and Mr and Mrs G E Fletcher.

During the wartime ban on ringing John Thomas and his wife Amy, who lived at Enfield, taught a large number of youngsters to ring handbells. They began to ring handbell peals and Charlie Roberts became involved and joined in with tremendous enthusiasm. His remarkable ability of knowing where all the bells were all the time and what each lead end and half lead was going to be was a fantastic asset! Tower bell peals followed when the ban was lifted and gradually replaced the handbell peals.

His 1000th peal was one of Whitwick S Major at Willesden on November 19, 1953 and his last one also there on September 16, 1954. He rang a total of 1007 peals, conducted 407 (3 non-conducted) of which 897 were tower bell peals, 110 were in hand with 71 conducted. He kept no record of his peals, but Leonard Stilwell looked each one up individually and John Acres confirmed them.

He was appointed an honorary member of the Central Council from 1933 to 1944 and in 1950; the Middlesex County Association elected him their representative from 1951 to 1953 and he was an honorary member again in 1954. He was greatly interested in religion and politics, and in the early 1950s was received into the Roman Catholic faith. He became devoted to the service of St Joseph's Church, Waltham Cross, attending Mass every day and serving as sacristan and organist. He did no more practical ringing but retained an interest in composition and continued to read *The Ringing World*. He died on September 18, 1984 at the age of 79. At his funeral a large congregation supported his wife Grace including six past Masters of the College Youths and a President of the Central Council.

#### References

*Ringing World* 43/202 84/906,973