

Prolific Peal Ringers

37: CHRISTOPHER WELDON WOOLLEY (1906-1991)



Christopher Weldon Woolley was born on November 21, 1906 at Long Stanton, Cambridgeshire, the younger son of the Vicar, the Revd H B Woolley, who was himself a ringer. Chris was taught to ring at Seaford Park School on handbells by the Revd E Banks James in 1916 and on tower bells at Stoke on Nayland in 1918

and rang his first peal on September 19, 1919. This was one of Plain Bob Minor on handbells at Long Stanton Vicarage.

He rapidly showed his prowess at ringing handbells. Early in 1920 he rang the tenors to Bob Major and Grandsire Triples, both conducted by Alfred Pulling. Several other handbell peals followed, but his first tower bell peal had to wait for the Pye band to come to Long Stanton for a peal of Cambridge Major. He was at Dover College at this time and also interested in long distance running but once he went up to Cambridge rowing took over, as it had for his elder brother, and he too became President of Selwyn College Boat Club.

A schoolmaster by profession, he took a post at the Royal Masonic School at Bushey, Herts. He became attached to this tower and rang here for the rest of his life.

Handbell history was made in March, 1933 when the first peal of Cambridge Surprise Major (as distinct from New Cambridge) was rung on handbells. Harold Cashmore conducted this and Chris made up the band with Fred Brinklow and Henry Hodgetts. London followed in 1934 and Spliced London and Cambridge a year later.

In the late 1930s spliced Surprise followed and the frontiers were continually being edged back. Chris helped a considerable number of ringers to fulfil their ambitions with regard to change ringing on handbells and his book, "Change Ringing on Handbells", written in 1949, is still popular today.

He represented the Hertford County Association on the Central Council from 1936 to 1956 and attended seven meetings. He was also a member of their Peals Collection Committee from 1948 to 1957. The members of the Hertford

County Association also honoured him by electing him their President in 1955.

On March 31, 1948 he was married to Miss Margaret D Telford at Crosthwaite Church, Keswick. There was considerable interest in the wedding and some rivalry amongst the ringers present between the Oxford University Society and the Cambridge University Guild!

His 1000th peal was on handbells at Watford on September 2, 1970. The five methods were London, Wembley, Cambridge, Bristol and Superlative with John Mayne conducting. Of the one thousand peals, five hundred and twenty-eight had been on tower bells, conducted one hundred and twenty-four, and four hundred and seventy-two on handbells, conducted one hundred and forty-six.

Amongst his notable peals were 12,663 Stedman Cinques at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford in August 1946; 13,664 Double Norwich Court Bob Major on handbells on February 28, 1948; Sixteen Spliced Surprise Maximus on Handbells in April, 1970 and the first peal of Surprise on Sixteen Handbells on January 15, 1971. His final peal total was 1330, with 693 on tower bell and 637 handbell peals, with 324 as conductor. His last peal was one of Stedman Caters on handbells on February 11, 1987, his last peal but first as an octogenarian.

He died on July 15, 1991 at the age of 84. A touch of Stedman Triples was rung on handbells during the service at his request and at the end of the service a band including his two grandchildren rang rounds on sixteen handbells.

References

Ringing World 1919/420; 1946/420; 1948/127, 158; 1969/803; 1970/762 1971/195; 1991/782, 824, 826, 956; 2000/18