

# Biographical Record

## Marie Rosine CROSS, MBE, (1909 – 2001)

Represented the Universities Association on the Central Council from 1945 – 1968  
and attended 22 meetings

Marie Cross was born in Wokingham on 2nd August 1909 and learned to ring at Twyford, along with her brother Gordon. Her mother, Rosine Marie, had learned during World War I when ladies were recruited. Marie joined the Oxford Diocesan Guild in 1922 and continued to ring at Twyford while at Reading University. Her first post was at Whitchurch, Hants, as a secondary Maths teacher but, realising that many children entering secondary education were illiterate, she transferred her allegiance to the primary sector and started a one-woman crusade to educate the nation. After a successful spell in High Wycombe she became headmistress of Radley C of E Primary School in 1939, a post which she held until 1974. So persuasive was she that she inveigled the authorities into rebuilding the school, which at that time had the most primitive sanitation arrangements.

During the wartime ban on ringing she kept the art alive in the Oxford area by teaching handling on tied bells and ringing handbells. She became secretary of Oxford City Branch of the ODG. Between 1936 and 1956 she gave significant help to the Oxford University Society which, on a good day, could ring Bob Minor. Marie conducted many of the handbell peals at *The School House*, Radley.

She was the Guild's first Librarian, setting up the library in 1954. She was Guild Secretary from 1956 for 14 years and instituted many changes. She masterminded revision of the Guild rules in 1958, introduced annual striking competitions and Guild training programmes. The first week-end course was near her home at Big Wood, Radley, in 1958. She organized it for the benefit of new instructors, to increase the number of ringers able to teach new learners. She laid great emphasis on the initial stages of learning; not rushing the teaching of handling and listening, especially for older learners. She always took the Plain Hunt group at the Easthampstead Course, commandeering the best helpers, and she ran remedial handling practices before her normal tower practice.

Each post she took on she attempted with the same energy and zeal with an unparalleled talent for organization and, even after retiring as Guild Secretary in 1970, she continued to 'plug' key posts that were vacant, developing these posts. She was a Guild 'Steward', helping to represent the Officers at Branch events. She took over the Guild newsletter, *Odd Bob*, and developed it with her own particular style. Even when out of the country for many months she ensured that deadlines were met. *Odd Bob* became widely read by ordinary members as well as by branch and guild officers who saw it as a handbook because Marie insisted on recording achievements and naming first quarter-pealers.

At a time when teaching youngsters was not the norm she encouraged many younger ringers and taught countless young people from the local school at Radley, also boys and staff from Radley College on Radley's light 6, where she had instigated the rehang in 1952, teaching a band from scratch. She used to pick out all the likely youngsters at school who might have the ability and sticking-power for ringing and take them along to learn. Her regime was very strict and she insisted on obedience at all times but, accepting the increasing pressures and demands on youth, in her later years she made a table available for learners to do homework on practice nights when not ringing.

In 1944, prior to which Oxford and Cambridge had been the only Universities with ringing societies, she helped to found the Universities Association to promote ringing among University students and she supported the societies set up at Bristol in 1944 and London in 1945. She believed that the future of ringing lay with the youth at University.

Before official retirement as Head at Radley, she was seconded to the University of Oxford to assist with Overseas Teaching. She taught prospective overseas Head Teachers, using Radley C.E. Primary as a model. The M.B.E. which Marie received for ringing might well have been awarded for services to education.

After retirement in 1974 she spent much time teaching ringing in America, including six month spells in Houston for several years. She later made shorter visits to Washington, Miami, Texarkana and Little Rock, teaching new ringers and advising on the installation of bells at Texarkana and Little Rock. These visits often led to Americans joining Oxford Guild courses in UK. She referred to a group from Groton School who visited Guild Festivals in the '60s, some joining the Guild, as the American branch of the ODG. Marie was given the American equivalent of the Keys of the City at Little Rock and was invited to President Clinton's Investiture.

She chaired the Guild Education committee from 1985 – 1995 and even when was hospitalized with Myasthenia Gravis, which took her in the end, she continued to provide ideas and wrote an education pamphlet from her hospital bed. It was her idea to invest in people for the Millennium, with an attempt to man every tower with bells in the Guild to ring out at the Millennium.

Marie rang her first peal aged 15, Grandsire Triples inside at Warfield, Berks. Her brother, Gordon, rang in many of her early peals and conducted some of them. She rang peals with many notable ringers including Vera Robinson, daughter of the Guild's first Master, F. E. Robinson, and George Gilbert, famous for teaching young boys and girls when the war killed so many boys. A footnote in her peal book says 'A Henry VIII peal' referring to George Gilbert, the other members of the band being women! Others included Gilbert Thurlow, Elliot Wigg, Albert Lock, George Hollifield Jun., Tony Price, Alan Pink, J. Armiger Trollope, Nolan Golden, Pat Cannon. She rang many peals with Walter Judge, including silent peals of Cambridge Major and Stedman Triples, spliced Minor in competition with a Leicester band aiming for the record number of minor methods to a peal and of the legendary 25 Spliced Surprise Major at Dorchester in 1951, where she rang the treble but had rung inside for all previous attempts. She rang in the first peal at Inveraray in 1938 and she rang in the funeral peal for Sir Winston Churchill at Bladon.

She left records of her early peals but had no wish for self-aggrandisement. She said that ringing a peal was like "playing a hockey match. You did it and then forgot it." She was always more interested in other people than in what she did herself. She had an impressive peal ringing career but it came nowhere near to describing the person that she was.

Although she was a hard task master she never forgot her humanity. She was certainly one of those special 'larger than life' characters and had that rare ability to combine high intellectual ability and a passion for high standards with a manner that encouraged all and demonstrated a care for each individual she met.

At Reading University, two years into her maths degree, the financial climate had hit the family business and they could only afford to send one child to University, so she volunteered to stand down in favour of her brother. He never forgot this and admired his older sister as someone who was brilliant and could have done anything in life: one wonders how much more she could have got into her busy life!

She died on 18th November 2001



*Tributes to Marie appeared in The Ringing World in 2002 on pages 86, 94, 192 & 250*