

Biographical Record

Noel James (Jim) DISERENS (1931 – 2011)

Represented the Oxford Diocesan Guild on the Central Council from 1966 to 78
and attended 12 meetings

Jim was born in Brighton, on Christmas day 1931 and christened Noël but this was thought to be impractical and he soon became 'Jim'. Both his parents were ringers at a high level: his mother, Freda Orr, rang in the first ladies' peal of Cambridge Surprise Maximus but did little further peal ringing after the four children were born. In 1935 the family moved to Balham, South London, to live with his grandmother but at the outbreak of war they were evacuated to Bracknell. Shortly after this they found a house in Reading where they lived for many years.

Jim's introduction to ringing was on handbells during the wartime ban on tower bell ringing. Tom Lanaghan later taught him to handle a bell, with this sister, Audrey, at St Laurence's in Reading. Jim's mother preferred 8-bell ringing and the family changed to St Mary's. When brothers Neville and Ron became ringers they all formed the basis of a surprise major band, and took turn as Tower Captain, furthering peals of surprise which progressed to Glasgow and Belfast. This band was further boosted by the arrival of Bernard Groves in 1969.

Jim's first peal was the treble to Double Norwich CBM at Goring-on-Thames in 1945, conducted by Walter Judge, who later called Jim's first of Stedman Cinques at St Laurence, Reading in 1946 and first of Maximus, Cambridge, at Christ Church, Oxford. Walter's band was progressing towards the greatest number of Surprise Major methods to a peal (25) and Jim learned them all in case needed as a reserve. He rang 16 of the methods at Kidlington with Judge in 1950. This attitude got him his first peal of London S Royal as 1st blows in the method. His first peal in hand was Plain Bob Minor in 1946 conducted by Edgar Rapley with Plain Bob Major in 1948 where the other two ringers were his father, Albert, and his sister.

Jim left school at the end of 1948 before taking his Higher School Certificate and went to work as a lab assistant at EMI Research Labs. With part-time study he eventually gained a BSc degree and for several years he worked on Klystron Amplifiers for RADAR transmitters.

In 1949 Jim joined the Society of Roving Ringers who had an annual cycling and Youth Hostelling ringing tour. They were aged between 15 and 25 and comprised a number of the up-and-coming youngsters of the day. Several peals were rung with members of this group and were all recorded as being by the 'youngest ever band'. These peals included Stedman Caters at Beddington in 1949 and Stedman Cinques at Exeter Cathedral in 1952. Later on Jim conducted peals of 6-spliced Surprise at Pershore Abbey for this society and Cambridge Maximus at Worcester Cathedral to which he rang the tenor.

On March 1st 1950 he married Helen Brant at St Mary's Reading. They rang 236 peals together. They lived in Woodley until 1973 and then moved to Wallingford. Both took an interest in growing vegetables, making marmalade and keeping bees. They had 4 sons, Michael, Anthony, Roger and Brian, all of whom were capable ringers and celebrated their Silver Wedding with a family peal at St Nicolas' Abingdon. Helen and Jim also took an interest in choral singing and joined the Abingdon Choral Society.

In 1958 Jim started work at Harwell in a group commissioning Van De Graff Accelerators. They set up the Harwell Tandem Accelerator then went on to design and commission a larger machine for Oxford University. The group disbanded in 1966 and he transferred to the Rutherford Laboratory working on an ion source for a nuclear accelerator. Later he joined a small group computing magnetic and electronic fields, initially for use in accelerator hardware but later in other devices such as power generators. This brought involvement with computers in his work and he realised they could also be used for ringing composition and proof.

Jim used the computer to dissect Pitman's compositions to see how they were constructed. Eventually he produced an all the work (atw) palindromic peal in the 'Standard 4'. They never rang it because he wasn't sure of its veracity but he later proved by computer. In 1968 he achieved an atw composition of the 'Standard 8' Spliced Surprise Major – not thought possible as Pitman hadn't done it. He derived most of the proof tables by hand as he didn't always have use of a computer. Finally they rang it at Stratton, Swindon. By then he had a computer program to check the final version. Very soon the complexity of the composing and proving took hold to the point where John Mayne's band was ringing a peal of Spliced Surprise 16 in hand. Jim checked the composition the day they were to ring it and found it to be false. A phone call to John gave him time to make the correction and the peal was duly rung!

In the late '60s David Hilling and Michael Moreton gathered a peal band to ring peals of Surprise Maximus. Jim was asked to join. Most of these were rung for the ASCY and the band was dubbed The Flying Circus. It became one of the leading Surprise Maximus bands: their 'firsts' included Bristol Surprise Maximus in the City of London at Bow and St Paul's Cathedral; non-conducted Bristol Surprise Maximus at Cripplegate; non-conducted 8-Spliced Surprise at St Margaret's, Leicester and 6-Spliced Surprise at York Minster where Jim rang 11th.

In 1968 Jim started ringing handbell peals with Frank Price and Bernard Groves, gradually progressing to Surprise Maximus. They achieved the first peals of London Surprise Royal and Cambridge Surprise Maximus for the Oxford Guild and two peals of Newgate, the first ever London type method on handbells. Later Chris Rowson joined them and conducted the first ever peal of Bristol Surprise Maximus in hand.

From 1968 he was involved with Tony Peake who gathered a band of talented ringers and conductors with the aim of ringing multi-method Spliced Surprise peals in 100 methods on various numbers. He rang in peals of 126 Spliced Surprise Royal and 110 Spliced Surprise Maximus. They also rang the then record of 45 methods in an atw peal of 10,080 Sliced Surprise Major, the atw peals of 14 Spliced Surprise Royal and 10- Spliced Surprise Maximus.

Jim joined the Oxford Diocesan Guild in May 1945 and represented it at all levels, locally and as Guild Ringing Master, Newsletter Editor, Steward and Bell Fund Trustee. He served on the Education Committee for many years and organized the Easthampstead Ringing Course. He served on the Central Council Peals Analysis Committee for the final three years of his membership. In later years he helped run afternoon learners' practices, mainly for older Millennium learners in the Reading and Old North Berks branches. After all his 'glamour' years he was quite content to help those of lesser ability.

He died on holiday in Germany on 7th September 2011.

Tributes were in The Ringing World on 25th November 2011.

