

Biographical Record

John HOLT (?? – 1753)

John Holt was born, probably in the London area, in the 1720s, but it is not known exactly when. Neither is it known where he learned to ring or who taught him. It is thought that he earned his living as a shoemaker.

Holt's ringing career was relatively short but during the time he rang he established himself as a competent conductor and an extremely gifted composer, particularly in the field of Grandsire Triples. He had not had the advantage of a good education but he was the first person to compose peals of Grandsire Triples which used only two singles and which were true. 'Holt's Original' was the first true peal of Grandsire Triples not to use the three lead course plan and to have only two singles. There are 150 calls in this composition. It is still used in the 21st century and is still a test for an aspiring conductor.

John Holt's name first appears in ringing records in 1745 when he joined the Union Scholars, a renowned London Society at that time. In 1747 Holt conducted a peal of Plain Bob Major to his own composition at St. Margaret's Westminster. This was the first peal for the Society for nearly six years and was the beginning of a fairly prolific peal-ringing era for it. During the next five years, the Union Scholars rang twenty-two peals. Holt rang in twenty one of these peals and called twenty of them. Many of the compositions used were recorded in the Society peal book.

On July 7th 1751 the composition 'Holt's Original' was rung for the first time, at St. Margaret's Westminster. Holt himself conducted the peal but he was not ringing; he called it from a manuscript as he sat in the ringing chamber with the ringers. Shortly after that he left the Union Scholars and joined the College Youths, possibly because at that time there was some unrest in the College Youths and he may have been persuaded to join them because his compositions might then be published in a broadsheet. A College Youth by the name of John Cundel proposed to publish a broadsheet of compositions; in the event, because of dissent among the leading ringers of the time, the broadsheet was not published until after Holt's death. When finally it was published it contained many of Holt's compositions, including a ten-part one of Grandsire Triples which became very popular and is still popular in the early 21st century. In addition to peals of Grandsire Triples, for which he is still most famous, Holt composed peals of Plain Bob Major, Grandsire Caters and Union Triples. His style of composition for these methods was much the same as other composers had used but his compositions for Grandsire Triples were ground-breaking and excitingly new.

Holt's last peal was rung on December 31st 1752 when he called 6390 changes of Grandsire Caters for the College Youths.

It is thought that Holt died in early 1753 at the age of 27.

This description is based on the account given in John Eisel's book *Giants of the Exercise*, available from [Central Council Publications](#)