

Biographical Record

Henry LAWRENSON (1918 – 1999)

Represented the Oxford Diocesan Guild on the Central Council from 1978 to 1984
and attended 6 meetings

Henry was born at Woolton Hill, North Hampshire on 12 December 1918. He did National Service in the Army in Germany and came home with a German wife. They had three children, but his wife died very young so he had to raise them alone. Mary and Anne learned to ring but Henry Jnr, who learned and rang rounds in a single lesson, declared it too easy and never became a fully-fledged ringer.

Henry learned to ring in the early 1930s and rang his first quarter peal, Grandsire Triples conducted by Reg Rex, at Highclere on 21 January 1934. His first peal soon followed on 7 April at Hungerford, also Grandsire Triples. Henry rang several peals before the war, and rang in a Victory peal on 8 June 1946, but appears to have been less active until he rang his first peal of Treble Bob – Oxford at Newbury of 7 December 1957. He rang a few peals a year until 1975 when his peal ringing took off and he went on to ring well over 500. His last peal, Arran Delight Royal at Thatcham on 26 March 1987, was painful because of arthritis, which prevented him from ringing any more.

Henry rang peals from Minimus up to Surprise Maximus, with half of them Major. Two thirds were for the Oxford DG and a quarter for the Winchester & Portsmouth DG. Nine were for the Cumberland Youths. He rang mostly with local ringers, notably Geoff Dodd (371), Bob Crocker (277) and Bernard Groves (197). He never called a peal but he did call some quarters. Henry was a good ringer, always happy to help out.

He worked as an accountant at James & Cowper in Newbury, where he rang. His competence and demeanour led to his election as elected Secretary/Treasurer of Newbury Branch in 1957. He kept his finger on the pulse of work needed within the branch, and he began to attend Oxford Diocesan Guild meetings. His yearly contributions to the Guild report were always brief and apposite: he extrapolated from the facts and spelled out in plain language what members had to do to improve local ringing. He had a desire to ‘get things done’ and his basic message was “Get off your backsides and go to the Branch Practice”. In 1971, Bill Butler, then Guild General Secretary, reported that “In his 14 years of office he has become a well-known figure at Guild meetings. He has done an immense amount of work in this area and the Branch members, unwilling to lose him, have retained him as Chairman.” He became a Guild Steward, and was elected Deputy Master in 1983.

Henry played a key role setting up the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund in 1974, as a capital fund, where only the interest is spent. Many supported the Fund, but its capital nature had detractors. Arthur Barker, Guild Treasurer for over 30 years, refused to be put forward as Treasurer.

Henry died on 5 May 1999, a gentle, humorous man, whom Howard Egglestone called ‘The Grand Old Man of Newbury’.

Tributes appeared in The Ringing World 1999 on pages 588 & 860

