

Biographical Record

Professor David Edward NEWLAND (1936 – 2020)

David was born in Knebworth in Hertfordshire on 8 April 1936, the son of Robert, an insurance broker, and Marion (Née Dearman) who let property. He was Head Boy at Alleyne's Grammar School, Stevenage, and in 1954 went to Selwyn College, Cambridge to read engineering, coming top of his year. After four years working at English Electric he did a PhD at MIT while working as a teaching instructor. He returned to UK in 1964, first as a lecturer at Imperial College, London, and then at 31 as professor of Mechanical Engineering in Sheffield – the youngest engineering professor in the country. In 1976 he returned to the Engineering Department in Cambridge, and in 1996 was elected Head of Department.

Outside of academia he worked as a consultant, and acted as expert witness for the Flixborough disaster enquiry – where his conclusions influenced changes to both management and legislation – and the Piper Alpha oil rig disaster. He specialised in the analysis of vibration, which led to an innovative design for the bogies of railway trains to stop them 'hunting' from side to side, and to investigating the cause of the 'wobbly' Millennium Bridge in London and the design of a solution to stabilise it.

He ran marathons and kept bees. He was an expert on butterflies and wrote a book that was both popular and authoritative. He seemed to excel at everything he tried. In 1979 he became a churchwarden at Ickleton shortly before a major fire, so what he expected to be a simple administrative job became the management of a major restoration, which was complicated by discovering some of the best remaining medieval wall painting in England. David's involvement with Ickleton church deepened as he supported his wife Tricia who became a Reader in 1980, and a Non Stipendiary Minister in 1997.

David took up ringing at Ickleton in May 1997, one of a group recruited for 'Ring in 2000'. Progress was slow with many learners, but in June 1998 he rang a quarter of Plain Bob Doubles inside, with a University engineers band. He found ringing hard – he was a brilliant and it was the only thing in his life at which he didn't excel. But it didn't diminish his enthusiasm and good humour. He rang 56 quarters, including Cambridge and Norwich Surprise, though the footnote for latter (thanks for 'invaluable additional conducting') suggest it didn't run smoothly. He rang three peals: Plain Bob Minor at Duxford in 2004, then Cambridge Minor at King Edward's, Cambridge to celebrate his father-in-law's 105th birthday., and a third with two of the other Ickleton/Duxford learners ringing their first peals.

David was always enthusiastic in his ringing, and no matter how lost would cheerfully persevere until put right again. He was always very gratefully generous with his praise for those he considered 'experts'.

Sources: Tom Ridgman, David Lilley, Maureen Havill, Jenny Goodwin and Andrew Downs and published material.

