

Prolific Peal Ringers

26: ARTHUR PATRICK CANNON (1913-1982)



Arthur Patrick Cannon was born on January 6, 1913, in Wimbledon of Irish parentage. He came from a fairly well-to-do family, his father being much older than his mother and Pat used to contend that there was no need for him to work. However, his father had insisted that he should have some job, no matter what it was. For example, one that he had in his early days was working in the office of the Mount Street Mansions Company near Westminster Abbey. This involved little work other than answering the telephone on the many days the Company Secretary, the only other employee, was absent. While he was here Pat seemed to spend most of his time studying bound volumes of *The Ringing World!*

He was educated at St Laurence College Ramsgate and Chard School, Somerset, and learned to handle a bell at St Laurence Thanet, Kent, in May 1928. His first peal was one of Stedman Triples on the 14cwt tenor at St John, Deptford, on July 19, 1930, and his first as conductor was in December 1933, when the peal of Kent Treble Bob Major he called at St Olave, Hart Street, was rung by a group of youngsters of average age less than nineteen. During these early years he was part of the Sunday ringing band at Deal, Kent and, after the war, till 1952, he was at Betchworth, Surrey.

During the war he served in the Royal Corps of Signals for five years. Much of this time was spent in India but some was spent in South Africa. On his return to civilian life he became a schoolmaster and moved to Dorking where he lived with his wife Sylvia whom he had married in 1945.

In the 1930s he had used his bicycle frequently for peal ringing, often cycling fifty miles each way for a peal. With the passage of time he was now tending to use trains and public transport for the increasing number of peal attempts. He rang his 300th peal in July 1952, all of which had been on tower bells and of these he had conducted 166. His 500th followed in July 1956, 267 of which he had conducted.

He appeared as the fifty-first subject of the article "Servants of the Exercise" by Jafus in *The Ringing World* of December 16, 1960. He said that to call Pat enthusiastic was a real understatement as there were hardly any limits he would not go to if the reward were a new tower or perhaps even a sluggish tenor to "turn-in" to another peal! Was there any wonder that his nickname was "The Tenor King"! He emphasised what a character Pat was, the subject of many stories and how truth and fiction were hard to separate. One, for instance, was that he miscalled an early attempt for his first peal as conductor on a heavy eight in Essex but carried on until what should have been the end in order to see whether he could ring the tenor for the required length of time!

He rang his 1000th peal at Pilton, Devon, on August 26, 1964 at the age of 51. It had taken him 34 years and one month to reach this total and he was the twenty-sixth person to do so. The peals were all rung on tower bells and included no fewer than 750 different towers in sixty counties. Tenor ringing always appealed to him and he "turned in" 584 different tenors to peals.

In 1965 he took part in "Great Adventure II", the first around-the-world ringing tour visiting Australia, New Zealand and the USA. Other notable achievements include ringing five peals of Surprise Major in a day in five different towers in April 1967; the first to ring a peal in all 63 towers in the Guildford Diocese in 1971; the first to ring peals in one thousand different towers by August 1972.

As a member of the Surrey Association he was Master of the Southern District from 1951 to 56; a Vice-President from 1958 to 82 and Master of the Association for two periods from 1966-69 and 1973-75. He represented the Guild on the Central Council, serving for three periods from 1951-54; 1957-63; and 1966-75, attending 18 meetings.

When asked to describe Pat one of his best friends said he was lively, effervescent, full of good humour and fanatical about ringing. He had a long list of heavy tenors he was certainly going to ring. In general he was the life and soul of any party, recording some mad escapade or joining the hearty laughter that was seldom absent when Pat Cannon was with a band of ringers.

One of the stories that Pat used to tell was about his successful raise of the tenor at Lahore Cathedral in India. Asking if he might ring it he was flatly refused permission. Not taking no for an answer, he announced "Me big gunty wallah" (heavy bell ringer) and pushing the chap aside, set to and, with some difficulty, raised the bell. He certainly told this story quite often!

In the autumn of 1982 Martin Fellows organised a ringing tour to the six towers of South Africa and offered Pat an opportunity to join the band. He was pleased to be able to take part especially as he had been a bit under the weather following an eye operation. During the first week he successfully conducted a peal of Double Norwich at Parktown, which enabled him to achieve another record, that of ringing Heywood's composition on each of the four continents. On October 10 they were at Durban and, after Pat rang the tenor to the Sunday morning quarter peal of Grandsire Caters, six of them set off for a car tour of the city. The car drove off and shortly afterwards was in collision with a bus and Pat Cannon received fatal injuries.

At least 180 ringers and friends were present at the memorial service held at St Martin's, Dorking immediately prior to the funeral. Mr Jim Prior acted as escort to the widow, Mrs Sylvia Cannon and Mr P Corby, Vice-President of the Central Council, read the lesson. At the end of the service handbells were rung to a slow steady beat as the small group of family and close friends moved off for the private funeral.

Pat was well liked and held in great affection by many ringers. His ringing career was a distinguished one and he had taken part in some memorable performances, but he was always justly pleased that he had been the means of enabling a host of young and not so young, ringers to ring their first peal or first peal in a method. To quote one of his many friends: "A good and valued friend has gone but the memory of 'a character' will remain." Total peals rung 1622, conducted 715,

References

Ringing World 1952/460 1956/566 1960/833 1964/614 1972/717,775 1982/875, 965, 966, 1008, 1053 1983/213, 679 1993/168 1994/648 1996/924 1997/1188 1998/100 2003/386