

Prolific Peal Ringers

28: PETER BORDER (1932-2000)



Peter Border was born in Cambridge on February 8, 1932, the son of a pharmacist from Lincoln. He attended Cambridge High School and in 1944 he learned to ring at Trumpington with several other eleven year olds. He rang his first peal, one of Grandsire Doubles at Rampton, Cambs, on February 1, 1947, conducted by Roger Leigh, and rang seventeen more before entering Oxford. He read mathematics at Hertford College and initially spent his leisure time on the rugby field although his poor sight put him at quite a disadvantage.

The Oxford University Society and the City ringers replaced the rugby team in the course of time. Walter Judge was steadily increasing the number of spliced surprise methods he was incorporating into peals and inviting some of the more talented university men. Ringing began to play a larger part in Peter's life and he had rung 130 peals before he went down.

His first job was working as a mathematician on ballistics in Coventry but before long he was also taking a keen interest in the resurgence of ringing in Birmingham. When the Cathedral bells

were reopened in July 1959 three peals of London Surprise Royal were rung in a week and Peter rang the tenor and conducted all three.

Peter was, however, very much a family man. He met Ruth Jackson on a Universities Association week whilst she was studying mathematics at Manchester University and they were married at St Mary's, Bowdon, Cheshire on April 5, 1958. They had three children, Helen, Janet and John, all of whom learned to ring.

Whilst at Oxford Peter developed a lifelong interest in method construction and composition and during the 1960s and 70s he led the way in the production of new Surprise Royal and Maximus compositions for the many new methods that were being rung in the Birmingham and other areas. He personally enjoyed ringing Maximus and often said that he was never happier than when ringing it. He achieved over 1000 peals on more than twelve bells.

The Ely Diocesan Guild elected him their Central Council representative from 1954-59 and the Coventry Diocesan Guild from 1972-98. He attended 29 meetings.

As a tenor ringer, Peter's huge frame was an enormous asset and through it he got the affectionate nicknames of "the gentle giant" and "the great man". Described as "the finest heavy-bell ringer of all time", his list of successes is legendary and includes ringing the tenor to: the record length of 16,368 Cambridge Surprise Maximus, rung at Birmingham Cathedral on May 15, 1965 in eleven hours and twenty-nine minutes. A year later in the same tower the St Martin's Guild recaptured the Stedman Cinques record from the Oxford Diocesan Guild with a peal of 15,699 changes in ten and a half hours on November 12, 1966 with Peter on the tenor. He rang the tenor to peals on all the towers in the UK with tenors over 40 cwt., and, lastly, and perhaps his greatest achievement, he became the first person to "turn-in" the four biggest tenors, Exeter, Liverpool, York and St Paul's.

Peter was intrinsically a relatively shy person who did not "blow his own trumpet". It was all but impossible to get him to tell you exactly how many peals he had rung he didn't consider it to be of real importance. For instance, his 1000th peal was on April 22, 1965 during the Tyneside and Birmingham Ringers' Peal week, when he called ten courses of Cambridge Surprise Maximus with ten singles at Birmingham Cathedral. However, the peal only received five lines in *The Ringing*

World, noting he had joined the group of ringers who had rung 1000 peals and he was the 28th!

His 2000th peal was one of London Surprise Major at Bulkington, Coventry on January 23, 1982, and his 3000th was four-spliced Surprise Maximus at St Lawrence, Reading on March 16, 1995. Neither of these had footnotes recording these facts! His total peals numbered 3472, of which he conducted 1544. He rang 48 on handbells, of which he conducted ten.

Ringling was not the only subject in which he was interested. He had a love of intellectual puzzles and conundrums and had an exceptional talent for crosswords. He brewed his own beer and wine and, for one with such large hands, was an accomplished knitter. After he retired he would make large quantities of jam and marmalade and make his own bread and ice-cream.

He died during a peal attempt at Tanworth in Arden on October 18, 2000 at the age of 68. His funeral took place at Barford, near Warwick on October 27 and was attended by over 300 ringers, family and friends from all over the country. The emphasis throughout was on the celebration of a life lived to the full, studded with remarkable achievements.

The tributes to Peter as "The Gentle Giant" were many and any appreciation of him would be incomplete without quoting from a few of them. For instance:

"He was the greatest of them all. He could repair bells, splice ropes, call peals from any bell and keep everyone right." To that could be added that he was "one of the finest heavy bell ringers of all time and a composer of exceptional quality."

"His stature in ringing far exceeded his massive presence on a tenor box. He was a designer of new methods, composer and conductor."

"Peter was a big man in many respects; a huge physique, a forceful personality, a considerable thirst and a list of ringing achievements likely to remain unequalled."

"He had a quiet sense of humour – although he could make his voice heard if required!"

"His performance" (on the tenor at Liverpool) was described as "could be equalled some time in the future, but never surpassed".

May he rest in peace.

References

Ringling World 1965/295, 313 1966/554, 634 1970/240 1982/293 2000/1080, 1104, 1177-8, 1200 2001/1019 2002/1267 2003/216 *Memorial fund* 2001/679, 796