

Prolific Peal Ringers

22: FRANK NOLAN GOLDEN (1908-1991)



Frank Nolan Golden was born on May 1, 1908 at Northrepps, Norfolk. Educated at Paston Grammar School and St Alfred's College, Winchester his profession was a schoolmaster. However, long before this he was a choirboy at Northrepps, and in 1923 when his voice broke he decided to teach himself how to handle a bell. (This may have been why he had a slightly unorthodox grip on the rope!) The mathematical side of ringing fascinated him and, under the tuition of Cyril Pooley, he rapidly developed into one of the most skilful ringers the Norwich Diocesan Association had ever known.

In 1929 he became schoolmaster at Diss and when The Norwich Diocesan Association was re-established became secretary to its new South Branch. In 1932 he moved to Norwich and from then until 1968 was one of the St Peter Mancroft ringers at Norwich.

His first peal was on handbells, one of Grandsire Doubles at Northrepps on November 24, 1924 when he rang 2-3 and Cyril Pooley rang 4-5. His second was a similar peal, this time on December 30, which he conducted from 2-3.

Tower-bell peals followed slowly. His first was at St Mary, Denver, one of Kent Treble Bob Minor in August 1925 and his next was at Wroxham, Norfolk in June 1926. Many more followed, most of which he conducted so that by February 1938 he had amassed a total of 380. Three hundred and thirty-five of these were for the Norwich Diocesan Association, of which he had conducted 259.

On Wednesday, August 5, 1936 he married Miss Iris Daly, of Checkendon, Oxon. The report of this also mentioned that he was now the secretary of both the North and the South Branches of the Norwich Diocesan Association! From 1937-41 the Association elected him their General Secretary and Treasurer; from 1945-55 he was Ringing Master and from 1958-68 and 1973-77 he was President.

He represented the Norwich Diocesan Association on the Central Council from 1930-68 and again from 1972-77 and attended 22 meetings. He served on the Methods Committee for many years and helped with the publication of the Collection of Plain Major Methods in 1952 and the Collection of Doubles Methods in 1955.

Nolan was a versatile man and his many hobbies included reading, photography, music and printing. Besides being one of his hobbies he taught the latter at school and a number of his pupils took it up as a career. He would also provide bookplates for the church, programmes for outings, place names for dinners and other similar items. His skill with the pen was also well known and appreciated, both in presentation and in content.

He was an expert in the field of composition, especially in the field of the plain major methods, a genre he almost made his own. His list of Double Norwich Court Bob Major compositions seems almost endless! Two of the long lengths he conducted were his own compositions including 11,264 Double Norwich Court Bob Major at Saxlingham Nethergate, Norfolk on Dec 12, 1931 and 7,168 Superlative Surprise Major in 1934.

On February 25, 1938 *The Ringing World* carried No 7 of their Leading Conductor articles, selecting Nolan Golden as their subject. This perhaps shows that the establishment regarded him, still in his twenties, as the seventh best conductor of the time. They concluded: "His peal ringing has been devoted in considerable degree to encouraging others, and among those who have taken part in them have been a good sprinkling of "firsts" of one sort or another."

He never personally kept any records of his peals but was able to claim that the peal rung on January 18, 1956 at Gressenhall, Norfolk, where two trebles had been added to make a ring of eight, was his one thousandth. The peal, composed and conducted by him, was in one of his new methods, Gressenhall Delight Major. Most of his peals had been rung for the Norwich Diocesan Association and their reports indicate that he rang for them a total of 1284 peals on tower bell and 39 on handbells.

He took early retirement in 1970 and moved to Aylsham and then spent a lot of his (and Iris's) time fund raising for the church and ringing. Amongst their many projects were a long-playing record, "Bells of the Norwich Diocese" and an Annual Calendar. They gave two treble bells to Northrepps church following the sad loss of their daughter Christine when she was eighteen and they gave two more to Gimingham to make them a five to mark their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Nolan had a long history of aiding restoration work in the Diocese and he researched and photographed every ringable tower and their bells in the diocese.

He was awarded an M.B.E. in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 1989 for services to bells and bell ringing in the Norwich Diocese and it was fitting that he was able to accept this from the Queen at Buckingham Palace. He rang his last peal on August 19, 1991 and died on October 27, 1991 aged 83.

The funeral was held at Northrepps church on Saturday, November 2, conducted by the Rector, Rev'd David L Ainsworth. The congregation was large and had attended from as far away as Essex and Buckinghamshire. A course of Grandsire Triples was rung on handbells alongside the coffin by friends.

And so passed one of the greatest ringers of his era. One of his great friends, H William Barrett, in writing about his achievements, said that Nolan wouldn't really wish him to tell others about him but that it was always a great pleasure to be in his band, whether for a peal or a touch, for he always created such a feeling of confidence in him.

A final calculation on his total number of peals working from Pealbase and his one thousandth peal gives a figure of 1,518.

References

Ringing World 1936/532 1938/129 1956/68,73 1989/589,1005 1991/1153-55 1992/323 1998/506