

Prolific Peel Ringers

23: EDWARD JENKINS (1894-1971)



Edward Jenkins was a dynamic little man, probably only a little over five feet two in height, who through his excellent heavy-bell ringing became a legend in his own lifetime. He was born in the Paddington area of London on December 19, 1894, and was named Leopold Ladas Jenkins. (Ladas was the name of the Derby winner in 1894!) His father, Edward Jenkins, died shortly after his birth and when Leopold was about five years old the Paddington Board of Guardians was considering his future. They later adopted him and the 1901 census shows he was boarded out at Rectory Cottage, Baylham, in Suffolk. Ten years later he was still here, working as a gardener's boy and had taught himself to ring. He always said that no one would offer to teach him so he taught himself, starting with a bell down and gradually raising it higher and higher, learning how to control the sally. He wouldn't say how many sessions this took, but he was a superbly neat handler with an impeccable style. After he became a ringer Ted gave up his given name and adopted his father's name of Edward Jenkins.

Little is known about his early days in Suffolk. His first peal is recorded as being at Henley on April 26, 1913, the method being Kent Treble Bob Major and the conductor Thomas W Last. It was his first attempt for a peal. Then, like so many others, the First World War took him away and he served for four years in France in the King's Royal Rifle Corps till he was taken prisoner in March, 1918. On returning to Earl Soham, near Lavenham, after demobilisation in March 1919 he found it very difficult to get work and through May, 1921 he placed this advert in *The Ringing World*;

"Situation wanted as GARDENER or Rough CARPENTER. Change ringer on all numbers. Conductor 6 and 8. - E. Jenkins, Earl Soham, Framlingham, Suffolk."

By coincidence, in that spring a Warrington business man, Mr Fairclough, had decided that, as part of his church work, he would take up ringing at his parish church, St Matthew, Stretton, Cheshire. He had joined the local band, but had found after a few weeks that he was not progressing as fast as he thought he should. Using his business acumen he decided to speed up his progress and, seeing Ted's advert, came to an arrangement with him where Ted worked at his building works but also acted as instructor to him and the village band. That was why there were three Suffolk peals, one each at Framlingham, Worlingham and Dennington in *The Ringing World* of July 22, 1921, all rung as a farewell to Edward Jenkins who had left the district for Stretton, Cheshire.

Ted arrived in Warrington on his "iron horse", found lodgings in nearby Wilderspool and started work. He carried out his duties loyally, taught his boss to ring and helped the local bands at Grappenhall and Daresbury. One Sunday evening a cycle trip took him out to Frodsham where William Bibby had a promising young band ringing Plain and Treble Bob methods. He welcomed Ted with open arms and he, in return, was pleased with the opportunity to join a progressive band. Ted became their conductor but trained several young men to take over from him and Frodsham became a Mecca for aspiring ringers to visit in the early 1920s. The first peals of Yorkshire and Cambridge Major by resident bands in the north-west were due to his influence.

As the Frodsham band improved, some wanted to progress to higher numbers and joined Ted in trips to Chester, Liverpool, Manchester and South Lancashire and he was soon ringing peals regularly with such ringers as Henry W Wilde, Robert Sperring and George R Newton. He called the first peal of Cambridge Surprise Royal in the area at St Nicholas, Liverpool in 1926, followed by Maximus in 1928. This was the first for the entire band and the Lancashire Association and also the first in the North of England. He also called 11,232 Superlative at Bolton, 17,824 Oxford Treble Bob Major at Heptonstall and rang in William Pye's 15,312 Cambridge Surprise Maximus at Ashton-under-Lyne. He was a great friend of Thomas B Worsley and some time later met with A J Hughes and A Pegler, two North Wales' ringers. They worked as railway officials in South Yorkshire and they introduced Ted into ringing circles in that area as well.

He was now firmly established as a northerner. He adopted their style of speech, accent and type of humour and it may have been in this period that he acquired the nickname of "The Buzzard"! By 1927 he had become unsettled at work and,

getting an attractive offer from the wagon department of British Rail, moved to Bradford and began a new chapter in his ringing career.

In the mid 1930s he retired from the ringing scene, leaving a legend of a man who could ring any tenor and whose conducting ability was almost incredible. But he also left behind a nucleus of ringers whom he had made aware of the real art of conducting and had profited by his advice and help: men such as Tom Wilde, John Worth and Ernest Bennett carried on where he had left off.

His "resurrection", as he called it, came about when Halifax bells were recast in 1951 by Gillett & Johnston. He was persuaded to attend the re-opening and, although he went, he had little intention of ringing. However, his friends were not going to lose the opportunity and by further persuasion got him to have a ring and from that moment on he was captivated again.

His 500th peal was one of Yorkshire Surprise Major at Skipton, Yorks on July 24, 1948. Leslie W G Morris conducted this. His 1000th peal was on March 25, 1961. This was a peal of London S Major at Worsley, Lancs, conducted by John Worth. He rang a total of 1353 tower bell peals, of which he conducted 330. On handbells he rang 11 peals, conducting them all, making his final total 1364 (341).

When C K Lewis penned his obituary in the *Ringing World* in 1972 he commented that it appeared that Ted was mainly interested in the practical side of ringing but this was not so. To spend an hour chatting to him revealed knowledge of many diverse fields on which he could speak with authority. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the Exercise was the stimulation he gave to the minds of others, suggesting different lines of investigation. For instance, he was interested in different compositions of Cambridge Surprise Major and he persuaded J S Wilde of New Zealand and T B Worsley to investigate these and called over twenty-five of their compositions.

Most writers about Edward Jenkins have made the point that he never sought the limelight or self-glorification. He never accepted any Central Council office, although he did act as secretary to the Framlingham District of the Norwich and Ipswich Association for a short while in the 1920s. He left Bradford in 1953, finally settling in Oldham where he died on December 7, 1971 at the age of 76. Perhaps the final word ought to be as one correspondent to *The Ringing World* phrased it. "So again we say "This is all" to a thousand-pealer, probably the smallest in stature but a giant in ringing ability."

References

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