

# Biographical Record

## James BARHAM (1725 – 1818)

James Barham was born in 1725 in Leeds, Kent, the third son of James Barham Snr who was probably a ringer on the 6 bells at nearby Lenham. Like his elder brothers, Thomas and Abraham, he was introduced to ringing at an early age and learned to ring with the Lenham Society in 1742/3. He was a very quick learner and rang his first peal in 1744 at the age of 19 on the bells at Harrietsham, which had been recently augmented to 8. He went on to ring 112 peals in the next 69 years during which time he built up a band whose expertise was a legend in its own time and whose ringers were invited to ring in many maiden peals on rings of bells in Kent and some in East Sussex.

On April 7th/8th, 1761, the band rang the extent of Major to Plain Bob with a band of 14 men where substitutes were used. However, it is claimed that James Barham, who conducted it, rang the 7th and conducted it 'putting in all the bobs and singles', implying that he rang all the time, or at least continued to conduct from outside the circle while someone rang his bell, and that on a 20 cwt ring. The peal lasted 27 hours and hasn't been exceeded for length of ringing time. He must have been exceptionally strong and healthy and very assured of his worth and the ground-breaking work he was achieving since he erected his own tombstone long before it was needed which was not until his 93rd year. Pre-death monuments are not unknown and the following extract from My Diary of Sixty-Three Days by Robert Cabbell Roffe is also quoted in other contemporary sources. A contemporary of Roffe's father sent the following to The Mirror and it appeared on Saturday January 22nd, 1881:

"An inscription on a gravestone, which was put by the deceased during his lifetime had blanks for inserting his age and the time of his death. The blanks have long since been filled in and the inscription now reads:

'In memory of James Barham of this parish who departed this life January 14th 1818 aged 93 years and who, from the year 1744 to 1804 rung in Kent and elsewhere, 112 peals, not less than 5,040 changes in each peal and called bobs etc. for most of the peals; and April 7th and 8th, 1761, assisted in ringing 40,320 bob majors on Leeds bells in 27 hours.'" R. Roffe.

When Roffe's father saw it Barham was still alive and he encountered him walking in Leeds churchyard.

James Barham, ever intent on keeping his band up to the mark and having rung the extent of major, set about varying the repertoire to include treble bob methods. In May 1784 the band rang a peal on the newly augmented 10 at Leeds called New Oxford Treble Bob Royal, which is probably Kent Royal, and the first of such ever rung on 10 bells.

This description is based on the account given in John Eisel's book *Giants of the Exercise*, available from [Central Council Publications](#), together with a report on the Leeds Youths in *The Ringing World* December 2001