

Biographical Record

Henry William HALEY (1819 – 1896)

Henry Haley was born in London, either in Bethnal Green or in Spitalfields. His first employment was as a weaver, one of the local trades, but later in life he worked as a tuner of handbells for the bell founders, Warner and Sons, in Cripplegate as he had an exceptionally good ear for tuning bells.

Henry apparently started his ringing career by ringing handbells: between 1839 and 1842 he rang seventeen ‘lapped’ handbell peals, most of which he conducted. The methods included Stedman Cinques and Double Norwich Maximus. He believed that his experience doing this helped his ability to conduct and compose peals. At around this time he joined the St. James Society and he became a member of the Royal Society of Cumberland Youths on August 4 1840. He conducted his first tower bell peal, Stedman Caters, for the St. James Society on 16 May 1842 at Fulham. He used his own composition for the peal.

His peal total included several long lengths and in all he rang 183 peals, of which he conducted 162: many of the peals were to his own compositions. He was a renowned composer of the standard methods of his time, though he is remembered nowadays mainly for his peals of Stedman Caters and Cinques.

In 1850 Henry, plus four other Cumberlands, were engaged by the famous showman, P.T. Barnum, to tour the United States of America for a year playing tunes on handbells. They appeared as ‘The Lancashire Ringers’ at first but later were known as ‘The Swiss Ringers’, when they wore appropriate costume. During this time, with four ex-pat English ringers and Henry conducting, they rang the first peal outside the British Isles at Christ Church Philadelphia on 9 June 1850. Many people came to listen to the peal.

In 1849 Henry became Steward of the Cumberlands and he was elected Master in 1851. In 1853, John Cox, a great rival of Henry Haley, left the College Youths and joined the Cumberlands. On 19 December that year, the two of them, plus Thomas Powell and Thomas Britten, met at The Three Kings at Clerkenwell and rang what was claimed to be the first peal of Stedman Triples on handbells. Later a witness claimed that this peal was false, but nevertheless, it was a great achievement. On February 10th 1854 Haley and Cox took part in the first peal of Stedman Cinques in hand at the Whittington and Cat in Bethnal Green. On 11 March 1854 Haley, Cox, Cooter and Wood met and rang a peal of Stedman Triples in hand ‘without a bob or single being called or a sign being given’, as Henry wrote in his peal book. His handbell peal total was ten but this included the dubious peal of Stedman Triples and also one of Stedman Caters which, at the time, was thought to be the first of Stedman Caters in hand but was later, sadly, found to be false.

In 1854, Henry left the Cumberlands and joined the College Youths. It is thought that might have been because of his rivalry with John Cox. With the College Youths Henry rang some remarkable peals including long lengths; 8580 Stedman Cinques on 27 April 1861 at Cornhill; 15,840 of Kent Treble Bob Major at Bethnal Green on 27 April 1868.

He conducted both of these peals, having composed the Stedman Cinques himself. He was Master of the College Youths in 1873/4.

Henry's last peal, of Stedman Cinques at Cornhill on 14 March 1885, was one he composed and conducted himself.

A tribute appeared in The Bell News on 13 February 1886.

This description is based on the account given in John Eisel's book *Giants of the Exercise*, available from [Central Council Publications](#).