

Biographical Record

Frank Muir (1920 – 1998)

Frank was born on 5th February 1920 at his grandmother's pub, The Derby Arms, in Ramsgate. He grew up in Leyton, East London and was educated at Leyton County High School after a brief period at Chatham Grammar School in Ramsgate. He served as an aerial photographer with the RAF during the war, mainly in Iceland. He once commented, "When we had a plane we didn't have a camera and when we had a camera we didn't have a plane". After the war his talent led to a successful career as a prolific writer and broadcaster. As well as writing for radio, he wrote a series of children's books. He became famous for his puns in over twenty years of appearing on the panel shows 'My Word' and 'My Music'. He was Assistant Head of the BBC Light Entertainment Group 1960-64; Head of Entertainment, London Weekend Television 1968-69; President, Johnson Society, Lichfield 1975-76; Rector, St Andrew's University 1977-79.

Frank learnt to ring when he was about 12, along with his brother Charles, at St Mary the Virgin Leyton, near to where he lived at 28 Church Road. They were taught by Charles A Hughes, Tower Master at Leyton from 1928 until he died in 1973. Frank became a full member of the Essex Association at the December 1933 annual meeting, when he was 13. There is no record of him ringing a peal or quarter peal but it seems likely that he achieved a reasonable standard of ringing. Charlie Hughes was a stickler for striking and the Leyton band repertoire at the time included Stedman, Grandsire, Kent, Cambridge & occasionally Superlative. Frank remained a member of the Essex Association until 1938, so he probably gave up ringing just before the start of the war, shortly before his brother, who remained a member until 1940.

In his autobiography *A Kentish Lad*, Frank remembers ringing as: "... agreeably dangerous for a young person as the bells were extremely heavy and if you pulled one off balance and held on to the rope too long it would whisk you off your feet and crash your skull against the belfry roof". No doubt he was exaggerating for effect. His other abiding memory of his teenage ringing years was of ringing outings with a "traditional bell-ringers' meat tea of ham and salad and mustard pickles".

Frank took up ringing "to bring a little diversity to Sundays that otherwise consisted of morning service, afternoon Sunday school and evening service." He also joined the church choir and he described his time at St Andrew's as "spending three lovely years attending church with a terrific choir". In later life he was described as a devout Anglican and is quoted as saying: "I think there is some kind of after-life, but it's not pearly gates. I wish it to remain a mystery."

In 1989 Frank was asked if he could attend the Leyton ringers 21st annual dinner two years later and replied: "I cannot *possibly* promise that I will be with you on an evening in 1991. In our business we never know where we will be more than three or four months ahead. Also I am in my seventieth year and might have fallen off the twig by 1991."

He remained on his twig for another eight years and died at Thorpe, Surrey on 2nd January 1998, aged 77.

Frank's autobiography *A Kentish Lad* (Corgi, 1998) briefly mentioned his ringing.