

Prolific Peal Ringers

6: FRANK BENNETT (1869-1957)



Frank Bennett was born in Basingstoke, Hants on January 28, 1869. He was nearly sixteen when he first went up into St Michael's belfry where Henry White, father of Alice White, taught him to ring and had just progressed as far as Grandsire Triples when he moved to Guildford where he joined the band at St Nicolas' church. He rang his first peal here, Grandsire Triples, on March 2, 1889, conducted by George Williams. On October 3, 1889 Frank conducted a local peal of Grandsire

Triples at St Nicolas, Guildford, the first local peal to be rung in the tower since the year 1824.

In 1895 he moved to Brighton and joined the St Peter's Society. During the twelve years he spent with them he rang 409 peals including the first of London Surprise Major in the city of London and the first ever peal of Bristol Surprise Major on March 2, 1901. The St Peter's Society held an annual Peal Week when they would attempt a peal at a different tower every night. On one of these weeks he rang a peal in a different Surprise method on seven consecutive nights.

He moved again in 1907 to New Cross, London, where he built up a Surprise band which rang many peals at St Clement Danes and other towers in London, amongst them the first of Forward, Duffield, Double Norwich and Cambridge Surprise Royal. Many of these were rung for the Kent County Association. He was also a member of St Alfege's, Greenwich, and rang some local peals with them, including one of London Surprise Major.

He joined the Society of Cumberland Youths in 1889 that was, at that time, going through a period of low activity. On his move to London, Frank was elected secretary and in the seven years he remained in the capital spent time in revitalising it.

He represented the Sussex County Association on the Central Council from 1906 to 1908, the Society of Cumberland Youths from 1908 to 1914 and the Sussex County Association again from 1951 to 1953. He attended eight meetings. For ten years he was also the Peal Secretary for the Sussex County Association.

His one thousandth peal was one of Double Norwich Court Bob Major at St Nicolas, Chiswick on December 27, 1924. His daughter was in the band and he composed the peal especially for the occasion and conducted it himself. On June 21, 1953 nearly thirty years later, a few of this band assembled at Westbourne, Sussex for a peal of Cambridge Surprise Major, in which Frank Bennett rang his 1,600th peal. He was in his mid-eighties and had called one octogenarian peal and had plans for another but sadly, it was not to be, for this was his last peal.

He rang 1,573 tower bell peals, of which he conducted 919, whilst he rang 24 on handbells, conducting 14. This makes his overall totals 1600, conducted 933. He was the sixth to achieve more than a thousand peals, whilst only two ringers had exceeded his number of peals. (William Pye, with 1969, and George Pye, with 1878.)

He died on Sunday, November 10, 1957 in Brighton Hospital, aged 88. His funeral took place at Brighton Cemetery preceded by a service at St Nicolas' Church. Present at the funeral were Mr and Mrs F I Hairs (daughter and son-in-law), Mr and Mrs R F Bennett (son and daughter-in-law) and Mrs E A Barnett (grand-daughter). Members of his family rang a course of Grandsire Triples on handbells around the open grave.

References

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