

Prolific Peal Ringers

25: JACK LEONARD MILLHOUSE (1916-1999)



Jack Millhouse was born on April 17, 1916 in north Lincoln. He grew up on a new housing estate and went to church in the wooden hut that was used by the residents. When moves were made to replace the hut with a new church the suggestion was made to transfer to it the bells of the old church of St Peter-at-Arches from the centre of the city. Jack was one of the locals they decided to teach at Lincoln Cathedral in preparation. This was in 1934: the church of St Giles was dedicated on April 4, 1936 but the bells were not installed and dedicated until June 5, 1938.

Meanwhile, Jack had joined the Cathedral company in 1936 and benefited from the excellent leadership of John Freeman. After the bells at St Giles were dedicated he joined the Sunday Service band and rang there nearly all his life.

His first peal was on the treble at Navenby, Lincs on February 23, 1935. He was keen on conducting and his sixteenth peal was his first as conductor. This was of Seven Minor methods and rung at Elston, Notts. Two years later he rang his first of Major as conductor with a peal of Double Norwich Court Bob Major at East Markham, Notts on October 23, 1937.

Jack was an upholsterer, working in the furnishing business in Lincoln. He never married, but lived with his sister Betty, tending his garden and allotments in his spare time. In his early ringing days he cycled everywhere but later graduated to a motor-cycle and eventually to an old car. In this he visited many towers and helped, encouraged and motivated many just starting in the art. He was popular with many ringers for he had a jolly and friendly nature.

Besides being captain of the St Giles ringers for nearly quarter of a century, he was also a member of the parish church council for many years. He was a keen Lincoln Diocesan Guild member and was their Secretary from 1969-73; Master from 1982-86 and President from 1989-90. Besides his work for the Lincoln Diocesan Guild he was also

a staunch member of the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths which he joined in 1937 and served as a trustee from 1964 to 1995. He was also a Central Council Representative for the Lincoln Diocesan Guild from 1960-89, attending 28 meetings.

He was called up at the start of the Second World War in 1939 and joined the Royal Navy, becoming Able Seaman Millhouse. He was trained as a Royal Naval Gunner and attached to the Merchant Navy, visiting ports in all the continents except Australia. He had some risky tours of duty, being torpedoed several times and reported missing on three occasions. He returned to civilian life in 1946 after six years' service and picked up life again in Lincoln in his old job as an upholsterer.

He rang his 500th peal on October 23, 1954 and of these 462 had been on tower bells. He conducted 283 of them and 2 of the 38 he rang on handbells. However, after the war he became more involved in handbell peal ringing and rang a considerable number of peals of Stedman Caters and Cinques and, together with George Fearn as conductor, peals of Spliced Plain Major in 27, 36, 42 and 50 Plain methods. Amongst his tower bell peals were spliced Minor in 70, 100, 104 and 125 methods; spliced Surprise Major in 16, 22 and 32 methods and on October 4, 1947 a 14,144 of London Surprise Major at Heydour, Lincs. (The account of the peal reported that there were only four houses in Heydour, and two of those were a long way from the church!)

In 1961 he featured in no. 11 of the series of articles on "Personalities of the Exercise." Besides his achievements this emphasised his ready attitude to assist aspiring new peal ringers in getting started and held him up as an example to other keen peal ringers on what their duties should be.

Two years later, at the age of 47, he achieved his one thousandth peal, becoming the first Lincolnshire man to do this. It was a peal of Cambridge Surprise Royal, rung at St Peter, Evercreech, on George E Fearn's peal week of Gloucester and Somerset. The date was October 2, 1963, and Peter Border conducted it. Of his 1000 peals, 937 were on tower bells, conducted 551 and 63 on handbells, conducted 2. It was about this period that he became a regular member of two annual peal tours, George Fearn's and another arranged by Phillip Corby.

Twenty-one years later Jack became the seventh person to ring two thousand peals. This was one of Stedman Cinques at Lincoln Cathedral on December 20, 1984. Worked out as an average over his ringing life this gives a figure of 40 peals a year. This is not a high figure by modern standards but his war service and the difficulties of travel during his early ringing days make quite a difference. Of the 2000 he had conducted 1196, nearly sixty percent of the total.

Jack kept up his peal ringing over the next nine or ten years, his last tower bell peal being on December 27, 1993. This was one of Stedman Cinques at Lincoln Cathedral and it was his 100th as conductor on the bells. His last peal on handbells was in 1995, making his totals on tower bells 2050 (1227) handbells 204 (84) Grand Totals 2254 (1311).

His eightieth birthday was a cause for celebration in Lincoln. Peals were organised, including one especially composed for the occasion; 6000 Stedman Cinques at the Cathedral. Another was arranged at Navenby where he had rung his first peal. The competition to take part in these peals was intense as many of those competing considered they owed their ringing careers to Jack for without his help and encouragement they would never have become ringers.

He was parted from his sister Betty when she was taken into a care home, but Jack visited her every day until she died in September 1997. He was finding his gardening difficult and gave up his allotment although he still climbed the 127 steps up to the ringing chamber at Lincoln Cathedral every Sunday morning up to his last visit on July 11. He was taken ill and admitted into Lincoln County Hospital where he died in the early hours of Sunday, August 29 at the age of 83. His funeral was at Lincoln Cathedral in St Hugh's Choir, on Wednesday, September 8, with the Dean and Precentor officiating.

A last anecdote illustrates Jack's sense of humour. There was a peal of Cambridge Surprise Maximus on at Manchester Town Hall that Ken Lewis was conducting and Ken was always known for calling his bobs and singles very loudly. About halfway through one was much louder than usual and Jack leant over and whispered something that caused Christine Andrew almost to collapse with laughter. When asked later what his remark had been she said: "There's another peal on at Ashton-under Lyme and Ken is calling that one as well!"



References

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1963/694,697,734 1985/126 1994/196 1996/
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"*Jack Leonard Millhouse, A Biography*"
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