

Prolific Peal Ringers

17: HAROLD JOSEPH POOLE (1902-1955)



Harold Joseph Poole was born on October 21, 1902 at Lutterworth, Leics. During the First World War he was a choirboy at the neighbouring village of Bitteswell and in his mid-teens Tom Briggs, the verger, taught him how to ring on the six bells there. In 1917 the family moved to Leicester and he, with his father and brother, became members of St Mary-de-Castro tower.

With the steeple keeper, William Millar, as a tutor, Harold learned to ring Grandsire Doubles and for the next eighteen months rang practically nothing else by attending their weekly practices and Sunday Service ringing! This was brought to a close in July 1919 when the bells of St Mary-de-Castro were condemned as unsafe to ring. Harold, who also sang in the choir, was then faced with the choice of either ringing or singing. He chose ringing and left St Mary-de Castro and joined the band at St Martin's.

He had a great aptitude for learning difficult methods and a quick positive attitude towards conducting and Frederick H Dexter, who was the conductor at St Martin's, recognised his potential and gave him great encouragement. His first peal, one of Stedman Triples, was on July 3, 1920 at Stoney Stanton and then, before his 21st birthday, he conducted the record length of Cambridge Surprise Major of 12,896 changes! By May, 1923 he had rung a hundred peals, and his second century was completed in 1925. This photograph shows him at the age of 21.

In November 1925 he joined the Leicester City Police Force and his peal ringing slumped, only achieving 130 peals over the next sixteen years. However, he did get married! He had met Phyllis

Hare, a young well-known ringer from Woodston, near Peterborough, and they married at St Augustine's church, Woodston on October 24, 1927. Phyllis had rung her 100th peal the Saturday before the wedding!

In 1930 whilst on a special detective course at New Scotland Yard he rang his first peal of four-spliced surprise major, conducted by William Pye. He was later invited to stay a weekend with C T Coles and his wife, enabling him to ring his first peal of Cambridge Surprise Maximus, Whilst with them he also conducted a peal of Stedman Cinques on hand bells, which was, incidentally, George Pye's nine-hundredth peal. Later on that day the Gofton brothers from Whitley Bay arrived and with the brothers Pye rang courses of London, Cambridge, Superlative and Bristol Surprise Major. They also rang the first courses of Cambridge Surprise Royal ever to be rung on handbells.



In 1931 The Ringing World carried news of the collaboration of Inspector W Botterill of the Metropolitan Police and Detective Constable Poole of Leicester in inviting police ringers from all over the country to join a proposed Police Guild. The National Police Guild was formed and Harold was the first secretary and treasurer. After sixteen years in this post he was elected President.

For a period he acted a Secretary to the Leicester District of The Midland Counties Association and in 1945 he represented them on the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers. Following the division of the MCA in December 1946 into The Leicester Diocesan Guild, The Derby Diocesan Association and the Southwell Diocesan Guild Harold was elected first President of the Leicester Diocesan Guild and also their CC Representative. He was a good public speaker, always speaking with conviction. He attended

twelve Council meetings and was a member of the Standing Committee and The Ringing World Committee.

When the new ring of 13 was installed in Leicester Cathedral in 1937, Harold replaced his former tutor, Fred Dexter, as Ringing Master. Under his inspired leadership the Cathedral band became the foremost band in the country, making St Martin's a centre of ringing excellence. The Bishop and clergy of Leicester recognised the value of his service as a ringer to the cathedral and in 1941 he was elected a lay canon of the cathedral.

Some of his personal ringing achievements included: being the first person to conduct peals of Cambridge Surprise from Minor to Maximus, both on tower and handbells; also to do it for tower bells all in one day; the first to conduct peals of Stedman Triples, Caters and Cinques all with bands of policemen; conduct Stedman Cinques with a band of married couples; conduct Stedman Caters on handbells at Ostend – first on the Continent. (This was one of his only two ringing tours!) Longer lengths include the 12,896 Cambridge Surprise Major mentioned earlier, 13,440 Bob Major at Loughborough Bell Foundry in 1922 and 10,400 Real Double Superlative on the same bells later that year. He was the leading peal ringer in 1949, ringing 143 peals, conducting 131. No-one had ever rung so many peals in a single year before. His 1000th peal was on December 11, 1952 and he rang 766 on tower bells, conducting 517, and 234 on handbells, conducting 187.

His last peal was at the Loughborough Bell Foundry, Stedman Caters, conducted by his son-in-law, Peter J Staniforth on July 13, 1955. He died aged 52 the following morning.

His funeral at Leicester Cathedral on Monday July 18 was a wonderful tribute of affection by a very large congregation of relatives, ringers, policemen and friends. The tributes sent in show how he was valued as a friend, how his advice was always worth listening to for he gave it without reservation and without fear or favour.

His final peal total was 1,248 rung, conducted 879. Of these 252 were on handbells and he conducted 201 of these. Other ringers have rung a greater number of peals, but his list shows a greater variety of methods. For instance, it contains the only peal of Cambridge Surprise Maximus rung on handbells up to 1955 and many twelve-bell methods rung in the tower that would have seemed impossible at the end of the war ten years earlier.

References

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