

Biographical record

Dennis BERESFORD (1934 – 2011)

Represented the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths on the Central Council from 1960 to 1977, and attended 17 Council meetings.

Dennis was born in Lichfield on 12th May 1934, and educated at Pool Walk Primary School and King Edward VI Grammar School. From 1953 to 1955 he did National Service in the Royal Army Pay Corps, and went on to read chemistry at Kings College London, where he graduated in 1958. He joined Shell International, where he remained for the rest of his career. He married Mary in 1959, and had four children, Hilary, Alison, Anthea and Jeremy. After being struck by a mystery virus in 1976, in his early forties, and surgery to correct complications, he was reduced to a wheelchair for the remainder of his life. He continued working from his wheelchair, but was eventually forced to take early retirement, and then moved to Devon in 1991, where he remained active, albeit from his wheelchair. He died on 30th June 2011, aged 77.

Dennis learned to ring at Lichfield Cathedral under the strict tutelage of George Oliver and Frank Sedgwick, and became a good ringer and conductor before he arrived in London. He joined the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths in 1956, and quickly became an active member by organising additional practices. He became Junior Steward the following year, and served as Master from 1960-68. The practices he organised were initially by invitation, mostly on eight and occasionally on ten. He applied rigorous standards as well as encouragement, and over months and years the band progressed through Glasgow and Belfast to London and Bristol Royal and then to Surprise Maximus with eventually Bristol. This took a lot of hard work, but almost certainly turned round the fortunes of the Cumberlands.

Dennis rang 565 peals, of which he conducted nearly half (256). His first peal three, in 1947, were all of Grandsire Doubles. He conducted the second, and the third was his first in hand. Peal ringing was at a low ebb when he joined the Cumberlands, and he set about changing this after he became Master in 1960, laying the foundations for the later explosion in numbers and complexity, which culminated in six peals of 9-Spliced on the same day by different bands in 1968 and two peals of Bristol Maximus by different bands on the same day in 1969. He was an accomplished heavy bell ringer, and rang Wells tenor to London Royal, and Sherborne to Bristol. He rang in several firsts for the Cumberlands, notably Maximus peals at Shoreditch (18 methods in all), and silent peals of Pitman's spliced, four, six, seven and eight methods. 250 were rung for the Cumberlands.

As well as performance, he was active in other areas. He was the moving force behind the rehang at Shoreditch in 1969, and the two year project to transfer the bells from Clapham Park to provide a ringable eight at Spitalfields in 1972. He was very active in the Central Council Redundant Bells committee. Under his leadership, the Cumberlands were able to build bridges with its historic rival the College Youths, the most visible manifestation of which was when they jointly hosted the Central Council meeting in London in 1972. He had a strong interest in teaching throughout his life, and in Devon would run practices from his wheelchair.

Outside ringing, Dennis loved classical music, especially Elgar and Beethoven, and was a connoisseur of fine wine. He was interested in politics and the workings of the Church. At parish level he served as PCC Secretary and Treasurer and was also Deanery Treasurer, through which he became a regular adviser on financial matters to parishes far and wide. He was member of the Diocesan Assets Group and with a clear and incisive mind made valuable contributions to discussion. He would ask difficult questions and encourage the Diocese to face up to difficult decisions. Even in hospital he continued to provide argument and advice tempered with good humour.

A tribute to him appeared in The ringing World in 2011 on 2nd September

