

Biographical Record

Alice Muriel REAY (1918 – 2015)

Alice Muriel Reay was born on October 4th 1918 in the Aston area of Birmingham, the daughter of Francis Robert and Alice Reay, nee Sparkes.

Muriel trained to be a teacher at Birmingham School of Art in Moseley. Her first teaching post was at West Houghton in Manchester, where she learned to ring under the tutelage of Albert Greenhalgh. Her first peal, Grandsire and Stedman Doubles, was at Hindley on June 23rd 1948.

She was elected a member of the Ladies Guild in 1948 and a member of the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths on April 11th 1952 and she rang eleven peals for the Cumberlands.

After leaving Lancashire in the early 1950s she taught at several schools in the Birmingham area, including Charlemont Secondary School in West Bromwich and Dartmouth High School in Great Barr, where she rose to be Head of Art and remained until her retirement. Once Muriel was back in Birmingham, she rang at Northfield and the Cathedral. She became a member of George Fearn's famous Thursday night peal band and she was invited by Albert Walker to ring at St. Martin's on Sundays. She was the first lady to be offered this privilege and indeed the only one for many years. In many of her early peals she was the only female member of the band. She was the secretary of the St. Martin's band for 28 years, finally handing over the pen in 2005. At the time of her death, Muriel was a member of both the St. Martin's band and the St. Philip's band. When the twelve bells were installed at Solihull, Muriel used to visit the tower to ring Grandsire Cinques.

Muriel rang many new Surprise Major methods to peals; these were interspersed with peals of Stedman Cinques. Later she rang many new Surprise Royal and Maximus methods to peals. She was known to be an impeccable striker and a very reliable ringer. Her artistic abilities were used to illustrate her beautifully written peal books.

She was a great supporter of the St. Martin's Guild, holding various offices, including Master, in the Guild. She enjoyed the Henry Johnson Dinner, speaking on several occasions and attending it every year from 1949-2007 – a record! She was also a supporter of the West Midlands Mid Week Group, who met on one Wednesday a month to ring at two towers, interspersed with a pub lunch.

Muriel rang her 1000th peal on February 24th 1977 at Birmingham Cathedral. The new method, specially devised for her by Rod Pipe, was Northfield Surprise Maximus, a name chosen by Muriel. Her final peal total was 1041; she rang her last peal on October 12th 1998; it was Cambridge Surprise Major at Shirley.

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Muriel was an active member of the National Trust and visited many of its properties over the years. She enjoyed going to Greece for her holidays and took many slides to show her friends on her return. She was still learning Greek until shortly before she went into a home.

Muriel died on January 19th 2015, aged 96. Her funeral was held at St. Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham on February 19th.

A long article about her appeared in The Ringing World on April 10th 2015.

