

Prolific Peal Ringers

13: JOHN HERBERT CHEESMAN (1872-1939)



John Herbert Cheesman was born on January 23, 1872 at Stowting in Kent. His father, Alfred, was a farm bailiff and lived with his wife, Sarah, and eight children on Mercer's Farm. John began ringing when he was eleven on the five bells at

Stowting and on his seventeenth birthday conducted his first peal at the neighbouring village of Lyminge! This was one of Plain Bob Minor, rung on January 23, 1889. Shortly after this he lodged with his elder brother Horace and his young family at Charles Street, Stone, in North Kent and worked as a gardener,

With the move to North Kent, he joined the Crayford company at St Paulinus and began to join them in their peals. An excellent conductor and a splendid striker, he was soon greatly in demand. He was only nineteen when he turned in the tenor at St John, Erith, to a ten thousand of Canterbury Pleasure Major in five hours and ten minutes.

Shortly after turning twenty-one he decided to emigrate to New Zealand. After four years the absence of ringing was making itself keenly felt so he decided to return home. As a born and bred "Man of Kent" he returned to the Greenhithe area where he joined William Pye's band of peal ringers. At that time Erith was the scene of much peal ringing. For instance, on April 3, 1899, they rang 15,072 Double Norwich, then on April 9 he and the Pye brothers rang their first peal of London Surprise Major and then another peal of Double Norwich on April 22, Altogether, he rang nearly 150 peals at Erith and nearly as many at Crayford.

In 1906 he married a girl from Greenhithe, Daisy Blanche, and they lived in Charles Street, Stone, near where he had lodged with his brother, Horace, twenty years earlier. He was now trading

as a house painter: later he worked as a bricklayer. He was elected as a member of the Central Council in 1903 and continued to serve as a representative member of the Kent County Association until 1936.

Amongst his notable peals were the 15,072 Double Norwich mentioned earlier; the famous 18,027 Stedman Caters at Loughborough parish church in 1909; 15,264 Bristol S Major at Hornchurch, 1912 (where he was reputed not to have made a single trip) and 11,008 Double Norwich Court Bob Major at Erith in 1927. As a conductor John had few equals and no composition was too difficult for him. He was particularly brilliant in calling Stedman and conducted about 240 peals on all numbers, mainly from non-observation bells. He rang a total of 1066 peals, conducting 433.

John Cheesman should be remembered not only as a brilliant ringer and conductor who was not method-proud but also as a quiet, modest, unassuming man with whom it was impossible to quarrel. He fell and broke his arm two years before he died and spent many, many weeks in various hospitals. His final operation was on December 13, from which he didn't recover.

He died on December 15, 1939 aged 67 and is buried at Dartford, Kent.

References

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