

David John Buckley  
1946 - 2005

David was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 1946 in Rochdale, Lancashire and, despite moving south at the age of 11, he never lost the accent that gave away his northern origins. The family moved firstly to Derby, where David completed his secondary education, and secondly, for health reasons, to Sunset House in the village of Easton close to the city of Wells. It would become an area that David would form a strong association with for the rest of his life.

At around this time, David went away to University Hall in Buckland, Oxfordshire where he studied for and achieved a degree in Spanish and French. His ambition was to become a teacher and, as part of his course, he spent a year in Spain teaching English. It was an experience that seemed to put him off foreign travel somewhat as he never ventured abroad again (something to do with the olive oil and garlic soup).

Whilst at University Hall he met Alan O'Shaughnessy who introduced him to the intricacies of church bell ringing in the village. It would appear that David took to ringing like a duck to water as he and Alan spent many happy evenings travelling around to practices at the local towers and, it would appear, a similar amount of time in the pub afterwards. Such was his progress that Alan admitted that it wasn't long before he had been overtaken by the new recruit. David always regretted that he hadn't discovered ringing much earlier in life citing the mental stimulation, particularly the concept of spliced, as a key attraction.

Back home in Somerset he joined the local tower at Wookey and was elected into the Bath & Wells D A on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1970. He rang his first peal later that same year on 31<sup>st</sup> December covering to Grandsire Doubles at St Benedicts, Glastonbury. He also played a very active part in the Bath & Wells D A to the extent that he was elected Glaston Branch Secretary in 1973 and, over the years, his name would become synonymous with ringing in the immediate Wells area, the Branch and the Association. On 28<sup>th</sup> September 1976 David's ringing achievements were recognised on a wider stage when he was elected into the Ancient Society of College Youths

Armed with his qualification and his experience in Spain, David embarked on his teaching career. This lasted exactly 4 terms before he decided that teaching maybe wasn't where his talents were best suited. He got a job at the local paper mill in Wookey while he contemplated his future. A significant career change saw him apply for and be accepted into the Civil Service. After a brief period in Llangennech, South Wales David was then assigned to London where both his career and his ringing capabilities reached new highs.

It has been difficult to establish what David actually did for the Civil Service. Whilst there is no suggestion that it was covered by the Official Secrets Act, David rarely talked of his work and, when enquiries were made to a former colleague, he just gave a knowing smile followed by silence. Family members claimed that David "dabbled in wrens

knickers” before finally offering the term Victualling. Research on the internet suggests that this is concerned with the procurement of anything and everything that is needed by HM Armed Forces. Some of the entries even suggested that this included the procurement of naval beer. If this was in David’s remit then it would appear to be a task to which he was eminently suited. Whatever he did he must have proved himself to be more than competent as he remained in the Civil Service for the rest of his working life and was looking forward to retirement in about 18 months time.

Arriving in London late in 1977 as an experienced ringer combined with his skills as a useful back ender honed on the weighty rings of North and East Somerset, David joined the band at St Mary Abbot’s Kensington. He was also able to play a far more active role with the College Youths by becoming a regular attendee of the Society’s many events in the capital. Despite the immense amount of ringing available in London, David remained loyal to the Bath & Wells and, over the years he worked in London, far more weekends were spent in Somerset than were spent in London. He continued as Glaston Branch Secretary and, 1981, also took on responsibility as a Central Council Rep for the Association.

In 1979 he was a late addition to the well known “ringers flat” in West Kensington but soon, with everyone under notice to quit due to structural problems with the building, he and two other members of the flat moved to Chiswick. Whilst here and subsequently when David moved on to Acton, he established a strong link with the local band at St Nicholas Church where Jay Bunyan was tower captain. In April 1984 Jay decided to play Cupid by dragging her sister Kate (a non-ringer) down to the Bath & Wells AGM in the hope of matching her up with David. Jay described her actions as not so much finding a husband for her sister but rather finding a wife for David. The plan worked and the couple were married in August that same year.

Working for the Civil Service meant that there was always a strong possibility that he would be made an offer that he wasn’t going to be allowed to refuse and so it was late in 1988 that David was transferred to be based at the Devonport Naval Dockyard in Plymouth. He and Kate decided to make there home “over the border” in Liskeard where David joined the local band and also became a regular both at nearby Menheniot and at the 8 bell practice at Callington. Many new friends were made particularly at Menheniot where the experienced call change band were keen to master method ringing. David with his experience, enthusiasm and conducting skills made a significant contribution to them realising their ambitions.

During his time in Cornwall David became a regular member of John Body’s annual Peal Day and, after much persuasion (and no doubt liquid bribery), he agreed to attempt Norman Smith’s 23 Spliced at Stratton followed by the small matter of Glasgow at Launceston in the afternoon. An early howler in one of the easier leads very early in the spliced certainly got the conductor worried but, apart from a few very minor self corrected trips, both peals passed off with no further trouble for David. Later, lying in bed, he was quoted by Kate as groaning “Oh my brain does hurt!”

December 1995 saw David experience another work related move, this time to Bicester in Oxfordshire where, once again, David enthusiastically became a regular at the local towers of Bicester, Caversfield and Launton. This proved to be a shorter assignment as, only 3 years later, he was posted to Bath which enabled them to settle back in the Wells area.

Wherever he was living David always showed tremendous loyalty to local ringing in Wells and the activities of his home association to the extent that all other ringing, of which there was a great deal, had to be fitted in around. He was a regular at Branch and Association meetings and functions and, in addition to his 2 posts which he held up until his death, also gave service on the General Committee for a number of years. He was also Deputy Ringing Master of the Wells Amateur Bellringing Society having previously had spells as Ringing Master and Secretary.

David was also immensely proud of his membership of the Ancient Society of College Youths. When living in London he regularly attended the many practices and other functions. When he left London he maintained his contact by returning to London every year for the annual dinner. During his 3 years in Bicester he also managed to attend practices on a monthly basis.

1977 saw David arrange his first Peal Tour centred on his home and covering Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire. David was one of many ringers who never recognised the county of Avon and so places like Bath were always considered as Somerset. Whilst managing to retain a nucleus of "die-hards", over the years many ringers, from far and wide, have been part of this event. For several years David would pack his mother off on holiday for the week so that Sunset House could become a hostel for refugee peal ringers with every available square foot of floor space used to accommodate them. At the time of his death many of the arrangements for peal week 29 had already been made.

In the mid 80s he started to arrange regular ringing weekends in Somerset in order to bring together his friends from London and Somerset. This rapidly developed into a the format of a quarter peal weekend and, after moving to Cornwall, this added a new dimension by bringing together all three areas. This event again has proved equally durable with its schedule of one quarter peal weekend in Cornwall and one in Somerset each year.

David seemed to be one of those people who can gain respect merely from their presence. In the tower his ability on the end of a rope, particularly on heavy bells, coupled with his solid appearance made David seem very intimidating to people who didn't know him. However, after the serious matter of ringing had been concluded, a trip to the pub would reveal the real David, an intelligent, friendly, loyal and generous individual who was great fun to be with and was always a welcome addition to any gathering.

David's other great passion was beer and, in particular, the consumption of beer. His capacity and ability for beer drinking almost matching his those of his ringing. On weekends in Cornwall it was quite an impressive sight watching him set about the

lengthy list of guest ales at The Royal Oak in Lostwithiel starting at the bottom with the weakest offering and gradually working his way up until he reached the strongest with his final pint. He was also renowned for, when buying a round, to order a pint for himself and drink it whilst ordering the other drinks so that he was ready for a refill in the same round. During his days in London, if he found himself drinking south of the river, at closing time he would make a quick dash to the north side of the river to enjoy the extra 30 minutes drinking time enjoyed in those licensing areas. There may be one or two breweries that notice a dip in profits following David's passing.

Everyone who knew him will retain their own particular memory of David, many of them will reflect that sense of fun and often with David on the receiving end. One ringer recounted his first meeting with David when a mutual friend proclaimed "It's David J Buckley" and, after gently patting David on the stomach, continued "...all of him". A petite London ringer recalled how, in her mid 20s, whilst travelling on the bus with David, who at the time was mid 30s, managed to get away with a half fare as the conductor was convinced that she was his daughter.

David rang a total of 850 peals (183 as conductor) of which 478 were rung for the Bath & Wells. He rang 24 peals at Wells Cathedral five of which were on the tenor. It is believed that David rang more peals on the tenor than any other ringer and is also believed to be the only person to have circled the tower. He also rang 23 peals for the College Youths (2 as conductor) with perhaps the highlight being turning in East Pennard in the morning followed by a peal at Westbury, Wilts in the afternoon with little or no time for lunch in between. David also rang 1232 quarter peals (562 as conductor) and rang at 1733 different towers.

In January this year, suffering with breathing difficulties, David was admitted to Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton. Whilst the medical staff managed to bring the problem under control, it seemed that they had little idea of the underlying cause. He was able to return home but, as progress appeared to be limited, he was not able to return to work. A relapse in April saw him admitted to Royal United Hospital in Bath where he died a week later on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2005.

A changeable day with intermittent periods of heavy rain saw over 200 friends, family and colleagues gather at St Cuthbert's church in Wells for David's funeral. The service was preceded by quarter peals at both St Cuthbert's and the Cathedral producing the rarity of both sets of bells ringing concurrently. Father Peter Farrell, who knew David personally, conducted the service and Preb Chris Marshall, George Massey and Sheila Jenkins, all long term ringing friends, delivered the tribute and two readings respectively. All the hymns were from those chosen for David & Kate's wedding at the same church in 1984.

Following the main service, the family retired to the cemetery at Wookey for a private burial. Just as they arrived, the sun came out, the wind dropped and the sound of Wookey bells could be heard gently drifting across the fields ceasing just as the coffin was lowered into the ground. Then it was back to St Cuthbert's for more ringing, tea,

sandwiches, cake and, of course, beer.

David's passing will leave a large hole in the lives of all who knew him, be it as friend, colleague, ringer or fellow officer. He was talented, knowledgeable, loyal, generous, dedicated, hard working and, above all, enormously good fun to be in the company of. He had great presence in everything he was involved in both from his physical stature and from the gentle, thoughtful and reasoned manner in which he always conducted himself. With all the ringing posts he held and all the ringing activities that he organised the phrase "and had done so for a great number of years" seems to be a recurring theme.

David, may you rest in peace, you will be sorely missed by all who knew you. The contribution you made to ringing at many levels, Tower, Branch, Association and beyond, will be a lasting legacy and will provide inspiration to those who carry the work forward.

At this time our thoughts and prayers are very much with his widow Kate. May she gain comfort and strength from the high esteem in which David was held by his family, friends and colleagues. His early calling is a sign that his many talents are required at a higher level. As Chris Marshall suggested during his tribute, he could quite see David being welcomed at the gates of heaven by the voice of St Peter saying "your just in the nick of time David, we're one short for a peal of Cambridge Royal".

DONALD B CARTER