

Audrey Mary Short 1931-2008

We all knew that Audrey had been far from well recently, but it came as a great shock to hear of her death on 11th March at the age of 77.

I first met Audrey Bailey (as she was then) when I joined the Society of Roving Ringers on a ringing, cycling and Youth Hostelling tour in Norfolk in August 1951. As we cycled along and chatted, I soon realised that she was a fellow "tower grabber", and this led to invitations to come down to Somerset for ringing and even (in January 1954) a peal of Bob Minor at Nailsea. Audrey brought along a ringing friend, Betty Olney, on that occasion, and she not only rang her first peal on the Treble, but also sampled the local farmhouse cider rather too enthusiastically afterwards. I remember Audrey looking after her with both firmness and compassion that evening!

Audrey was made a member of the Bath & Wells Association in 1954, and also the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths and several other Associations. She had arranged many ringing tours for us country bumpkins in London and the Home Counties in the fifties and later on joined in week-long outings which I had arranged based on railway camping coaches. These brought forth "thank you" notes in the form of poems about the trips, highlighting some of the amusing incidents and revealing her talent for humorous verse.

Our "North Somerset Tower Grabbers" (NSTG) tours in those days were often joint affairs with like-minded young ringers from the Bridgwater area, among them Ron Short who was local Branch Secretary. This was when Ron and Audrey first rang together and in due course (April 1960) we rang a quarter peal to celebrate their engagement! They were married at Tewin, Herts, in September of that year.

Ron and Audrey first lived at his family home at Chilton Trinity, then moved to Chilton Polden and Puriton before settling at Ruishton near Taunton, during which time they were active members of the Bridgwater Branch and ringing both peals and quarters.

Shortly after the move to Ruishton, problems with the medieval tower meant that the bells were no longer able to be rung full circle. While Ron decided to concentrate on handbell ringing in future, Audrey continued with tower bell ringing in the Taunton Branch and the nearby tower of Creech St Michael. Their handbell team has given many polished performances over the years and raised a lot of money for charity, Audrey arranging much of the music herself.

Ron and Audrey were enthusiastic supporters of the West Somerset Railway, a 24-mile scenic route operated mostly with steam between Bishops Lydeard and Minehead. With her accountancy background, Audrey found herself Treasurer of the support Association for a while, ran the "700 Club" until last year and was a member of the Board of the parent company. Their support was also of a practical nature, and they were members of the team that operated the very popular "Quantock Belle" dining car train, working both "front of house" and washing up! Audrey's literary talents were again put to good use with a book "Rhymes along the Lines" and, jointly with Ron, one about walks which could be undertaken from stations along the railway.

In her earlier days, Audrey spent some time working in Canada, and until Ron's death in 2004, they were adventurous travellers visiting many parts of the world. More recently she had developed an interest in calligraphy; also knitting many large toys for children in hospital.

As we gathered in a packed church at Ruishton for a service of celebration for her life on Wednesday, 19th March, it was specially appropriate that the bells were being chimed to well known hymn tunes; a practice that Audrey herself had instigated when the bells could no longer be swung. The service was taken by the Vicar, Revd Ian Aldersley, assisted by Revd Dudley Goodfield. The lesson was read by Brian Crudge, Reader. Committal was in the churchyard, in the grave with Ron, situated close to the tower. She leaves a son Malcolm, daughter in law Natalie and their family Lewis and Ashley.

Quarter peals rung in her memory have been recorded at Brompton Ralph, Lydeard St Lawrence, Taunton St James and Durlleigh.

MICHAEL HORSEMAN