

The Revd Roger Fry 1930-2010



A Service of thanksgiving for the life of the Revd Roger Owen Fry took place at St Mary's Church, Westonzoyland, Somerset, in glorious sunshine on Friday, May 21st 2010. Roger, aged 80, had died on May 8th after a relatively short final battle against cancer this spring. He had faced this very bravely, and had planned the details of the Service meticulously.

Refreshments had been laid on in the church hall beforehand. Over a hundred people, most of whom were ringers, had taken advantage of these with the result that the Service did have an atmosphere of celebration.

Revd Dudley Goodfield conducted it, assisted by Revd Michael Lewis. The lesson was read by Prebendary Christopher Marshall. Roger's lifelong friend, the very talented Malcolm Drummond was our organist. Tributes were given by Barbara and Brian Wylde, and by Malcolm. Michael Lewis also shared some memories of days spent with Roger in Theological College in the 1950s.

The final voluntary, S. S. Wesley's *Choral Song*, was followed by a touch of Grandsire Doubles, as requested by Roger. Most of the band had rung with him some 60 years ago!

As a fifteen year old, Roger was taught to ring in his native Bath by a well known ringer from Weston, Bath, called Seely Woodburn. He was obviously a quick learner, because he rang his first full peal at the age of 16, and also conducted a peal later that year. By the end of 1948, and still aged only 18, he had rung in peals all over southern England, with such eminent conductors as Alf Pulling, Patrick Cannon, Walter Judge and Wilfred Moreton.

Roger was a very good organiser, and was appointed General Secretary of the Bath & Wells bellringers in 1953. He was responsible for producing the first composite Bath & Wells Association report book, listing the 430 churches, and names of local ringers. This was of course long before the days of word processors, computers and the internet!

His reward was to be appointed an Honorary Life-member of the Bath & Wells Association at the age of 28. This is a rare honour, and most people who are given it are already in their dotage.

During the 1950s Roger's ringing career had expanded, and he now was being invited to join in peals all over the country. He rang with the best ringers of the day, and was indeed one of them. He was particularly good at ringing heavy bells, and nearly half of his peals were on the tenor.

His peal towers included all of the "heaviest" rings from five up to twelve, and many other notable rings. He often talked fondly of Wilfred Williams' peal tours, particularly the one in Ireland in 1965. Before the 4 hours 48 mins peal at Liverpool Cathedral in 1966, there had been a broken rope in a false start, so he spliced the rope before ringing the tenth to that peal!

He set high standards in his ringing, and expected them of other people – there are several instances where Roger controversially stopped a peal because he thought it was not good enough.

Roger was a good after-dinner speaker, and my first meeting with him was at the University of Bristol Ringers' dinner in 1957. He was the visiting speaker, and was just starting his speech at 9pm, when Great George, the splendid 9-ton bell in the University tower struck! He paused until it had finished, saying that he could not possibly compete with that!

1957 was also the year in which Roger rang three peals in a day. These were at Easton-in-Gordano, Weston-in-Gordano, and Clapton-in-Gordano. Little did Roger realise at the time that he was later to become Vicar of two of those parishes.

In 1958 he started training for the ministry. This drastically reduced his peal ringing activities, and only six peals were listed in the next three years.

I do not have many details of his time as a curate, or of the long and busy years he spent in Portishead. I do know, however, that by 1968 his peal total had risen to 366. Portishead Rectory was used as a base for more than one 'Around' peal tour in the '60s.

By 1968, his regular peal ringing had stopped, although he was persuaded to come out of 'retirement' for just three more peals, the last of which was in 1994 at 'Pip 'n Jay' in Bristol.

He came here to Westonzoyland in 1980, and joined the local ringers for outings and social events. He was always very supportive. I remember one branch striking contest in which there were six teams. He came along to listen without telling us. He then left a note on our car telling us that we had rung third, that we had rung a particular touch of Grandsire, and that we would win. He was right on all three counts!

In his retirement, Roger did very little ringing, but he always asked us how ringing here was going, and he maintained a keen interest in ringing in this Diocese. Right up to the end, he regularly borrowed my copies of *The Ringing World*.

May he rest in peace and rise in Glory.

Brian Wylde
Westonzoyland, Somerset

The following "Memory in Verse", which Barbara wrote and read at Roger's funeral service will bring back many memories of Roger's life.

In the mid 1950s through ringing we met,
So many memories I'll never forget.
Early peal, Ebbw Vale, I waited with dad,
The belfry door opened, Roger rushed past quite mad.
He'd "stood up" the peal 5 mins from the end
Often recalled still by many a friend,
An eminent ringer, conductor of fame,
Heaviest rings on all numbers – his claim.
He travelled by motor bike – later by car
To ring many peals both near and far.
He taught many ringers near Bath, namely Twerton
An excellent start to their ringing – that's certain.
It was there with my sister, our long friendship grew,
Several today will remember it too.
Discipline, tradition, appointments for date,
A stickler for time, you'd best not be late.
Events sadly missed, his reason we're not knowing –
Maybe a phobia, prevented his going.
15 years as Vicar in this church employed,
12 years his churchwarden, I shared and enjoyed.
Shrewd listener to our ringing, each method he'd tell
Many occasions, who was ringing each bell.
Dog sitting, enjoyment, many dogs he would spoil,

He loved every minute, never found it a toil.
His cooking quite expert, second to none,
Roast potatoes and parsnips so perfectly done.
The dessert, a surprise, we'd eagerly await
Always included "fruit from estate".
His jacket, and cassock and surplice I made,
Turned the collar on his cloak when it started to fade.
His humour and wit was often quite frisky,
Birthdays, 2 cards, one polite, one quite risqué!
The *Telegraph* crossword, if stuck for a clue,
He'd give me a ring to see if I knew.
Over the years, there've been good times and bad.
Shared many events, some happy, some sad.
So many memories enjoyed as his friend,
Remained faithful and loyal right to the end.