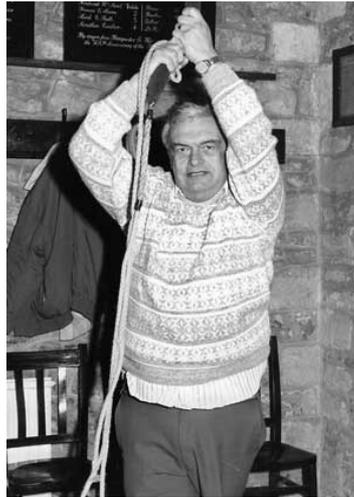


Gilbert Davis 1932-2010



I first met Gilbert in 1964. I was a new recruit to bellringing and Gilbert was then a “veteran” of 20 years. Many years later he was to become a loyal and supportive member of Durleigh where I am now Tower Captain.

Born in Sampford Brett, Somerset in 1932, Gilbert began his ringing career at the age of 12. His father was a ringer and a choir member, and Gilbert was expected to follow suit. Gilbert’s voice, or rather lack of it, meant that the choir did not want him and he was promoted to organ blower. One sunny day he was sitting outside reading a book waiting for the Vicar to finish his sermon, when suddenly the last hymn was announced, the lady organist started to play – no sound, no air, and no organ blower! Shortly after this an electric blower was fitted and Gilbert, out of a job, was shown the belfry door. Thus began a life-time of ringing all over Somerset and the UK.

Because of the war, the bells were silenced and Gilbert began a long apprenticeship on silenced bells. When the ban was lifted after the war, he quickly became a competent method ringer. He was elected to the Bath & Wells D.A. in 1946 (and was, at the time of his death, the longest serving member of the Bridgwater Branch). He started to attend Association meetings and visit other towers in the area, travelling by pedal cycle, meeting other ringers and learning new methods.

After leaving Senior School in Williton, he worked for Gliddons the Agricultural Engineers until called up for National Service in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. Whilst doing his National Service, he went ringing wherever he could, ringing at Aldershot, Farnham, Portsmouth and later in Shropshire.

On his return to Somerset he went back to Gliddons for a while. He met Molly and they married in 1956. He joined the Police Force the following year and after a short period in Bridgwater, was posted to Weston-super-Mare. It was there that their two daughters Wendy and Melanie were born. The responsibilities of marriage, a young family and work commitments meant that ringing activities were curtailed for a few years.

After six years in Weston-super-Mare, Gilbert was posted to the village of Cannington, west of Bridgwater and remained there until his retirement in 1987. He then served another ten years as a civilian on the front desk in Burnham-on-Sea and Bridgwater. By this time he, Molly and the girls had settled into a house in Durleigh, having had several house moves over the years.

In the years following his posting to Cannington, Gilbert’s ringing activities increased. He joined the local band, but also rang in many other towers in the area, whenever it fitted in with police duties. Sometimes, when booked for a particular ringing event, work intervened and he had to find a substitute at short notice. One day a fellow Cannington ringer was at work and was sent for by his Supervisor because he was wanted on the phone by “the police”. After talking to the caller, the ringer turned to his supervisor and asked for the afternoon off work, and was given permission. Little did the supervisor know that it was Gilbert on the end of the line, wanting a stand-in for a peal attempt! Incidentally, it was that ringer’s first peal. By now Gilbert was a member of the National Police Guild of Ringers. He and Molly made many new friends as they travelled all over England on Police Guild outings. He served as President from 1988 to 1991. He rang three peals and several quarter-peals for the Guild.

In 1982 Gilbert became a member of Durleigh Tower, which at that time was part of the United Benefice of Bridgwater St Mary (8 bells), Durleigh (6 bells) and Chilton Trinity (5 bells), and rang in all three towers. Ten years later Gilbert had to undergo open-heart surgery in St Mary’s Hospital in London, but within a year, he was back ringing again with renewed energy. In 2005 Gilbert went into Bristol Royal Infirmary for a 2nd heart operation, which did not go according to plan, and it was a long time before he was able to venture up the tower again. He did very little ringing from then on, but continued to come to the ringing room occasionally to sit and watch, all the time longing to catch hold and have a pull.

Gilbert's records show that he rang 491 quarter-peals, 249 of them at Durleigh, and 23 peals. His first peal was Kent Treble Bob Minor at Combe Florey, Somerset in September 1949. Before the year was over he had rung 3 more peals, Plain Bob Minor, Grandsire Doubles and Stedman Doubles, all within cycling distance. Molly remembers a trip to Minehead, before they were married. They met some ringers who needed one more for a peal at Exford. Gilbert said yes and off they went. Molly asked how long they were going to be: "Oh, not very long" was the reply, and so began one of her many walks while Gilbert was ringing in one church or another. His last peal was in April 1994 at Isleworth, Middlesex – Grandsire Caters rung with the Zipper Society, ringers who had undergone heart surgery.

Gilbert had many other interests and hobbies. He loved motorbikes, trials, scrambles and other events. He rode in the Police Force and for many years rode in front of the famous Bridgwater Carnival Procession. He loved his cricket and the family were taken to watch Somerset play, including a trip to Lords. He enjoyed music, especially Bach, photography and drawing and painting. His water colours adorn walls not only in houses, but in ringing rooms as well.

He had a great sense of fun and loved playing harmless tricks on people, not just his family but ringers, too, were often caught out. Underneath all this he was a very kind man and would always help anyone out. When a crisis occurred the cry would go up "send for Gilbert" and he would respond. Once, he took in a family who had been involved in a road accident whilst on holiday in the area. He and Molly looked after the parents until their daughter, who was critically injured, was discharged from hospital.

Sadly, the last 18 months of Gilbert's life were dogged by ill health, and he died on July 25th. St Mary's Church, Bridgwater was packed for the Memorial Service on August 5th. The bells were rung open for an hour prior to the Service, and again afterwards, to allow as many ringers as possible to have a ring for Gilbert. May he rest in peace.

Molly and the family would like to thank all the ringers who rang for Gilbert.

Valerie Stone