

## John Brain, 1928 - 2010

Although he had been unwell for some time, we were all shocked and saddened to learn of his death on November 11th at the age of 82. John learned to ring at Backwell in 1954 and two years later was encouraged by Michael Horseman to expand his ringing horizons by visiting the neighbouring tower of Nailsea. This was the beginning of a long friendship and John quickly increased his ringing repertoire. He was an only child, who never married and lived all his life in the family home. His father and uncle were local bakers and in his early days John was expected to help out on the bread round. When he left Bristol Cathedral School, at the age of 16, his life-long interest in railways led him to start work in the Station Master's Office at Bristol Temple Meads. In later life he worked for the Port of Bristol Authority, latterly as chief cashier at Avonmouth.

Ringing and singing accounted for much of John's social life. He joined the Bath & Wells DACR in 1956, later acting as Chew Branch chairman and secretary at different times. He was a very able performer on heavy and difficult bells and organised many ringers' outings, including one to Ireland. A memory of him on this occasion was of John striding across the tarmac at the old Bristol Airport with a spare bellrope coiled around his shoulder!

Apart from Sunday Service ringing he was also a member of the Ancient Society of College Youths and various Diocesan/ territorial ringing guilds. He kept meticulous ringing records which he instructed are to be kept in Backwell tower. He rang 113 peals, 2,228 quarters and visited 2,191 towers. He often added personal comments in his record books. One, apparently not very satisfactory, performance during a Royal visit to Bristol drew the comment: 'If the Queen had heard this ringing she would have thought it was being rung by a band of republicans'! In his younger days he had been on tour with the Roving Ringers and for 20 years was a member of the 'Old Codgers' (group of retired ringers). He was made an Honorary Life Member of the B&W Association in 2009. RW readers will not be surprised to learn that John's church duties included editing the parish magazine for many years. He was also Verger and churchyard 'manager', painstakingly deciphering and recording inscriptions on tombstones for posterity.

John was also very musical and enjoyed choral singing and orchestral concerts. He joined Backwell church choir at the age of 7, serving continuously until a year ago. He had a very good bass voice and sang for many years with Bristol Cathedral Special Choir, and later with the Chew Valley Choral Society. In the past he was also a valued member of the Nailsea Merry Beggars Carol party led by the Nailsea doctor's wife – a rare example of Anglican/Methodist unity when church and chapel didn't generally mix!

He was very good at writing letters and articles for the press, especially *The Ringing World*. His 'The Spirit of Christmas Past ...' (RW 3/1/86) detailing his earliest singing and ringing experiences was a classic! When on a visit to Winchester Cathedral with the Roving Ringers in August 1957 he became impatient with the local tradition of firing the bells on Royal birthdays (the Queen Mother's). It is a remarkable coincidence that his letter to the RW about this was reprinted in the '50 years ago' column as recently as September 24th and John's final contribution on 15th October – a contrite apology – was his final offering.

His health went downhill during 2009 and despite many hospital admissions he eventually moved into a local Nursing Home. About three hundred people attended the Service in Backwell Church 'In Celebration of his Life' – he didn't like the word 'funeral' and cremation had already taken place. John had planned it all. We sang 'Ye holy angels bright', 'Ye choirs of new Jerusalem', 'Angel Voices' and Psalm 8 (complete with pointing) and all sung enthusiastically by choir and congregation! Three young ladies (neighbours) read 'Christmas' by John Betjeman and Michael Horseman read from Ecclesiastes Ch. 13. The bells were rung open before and after the service, following which an excellent quarter peal was rung by a band representing ringing friends far and near.

In addition to the above, 4 peals and 18 quarter peals have been recorded (at the time of writing). It was a wonderful send off. John will be sadly missed by all his friends.

