

Norman Henry Yeo
Long Ashton – England's oldest ringer
12th March 1907 – 13th November 2010



Norman Yeo lived in Long Ashton, Somerset all his life. He sang in the church choir at All Saints until 1922 when his voice broke and he was taught to ring by his father George. He qualified for membership of the Bath and Wells Association in 1924 when one had to ring 120 changes on treble or tenor as well as raising and lowering a bell. In 2004 he was elected an Honorary Life Member. He ceased ringing only after his 101st birthday when it became difficult to raise his arms sufficiently. Most of his ringing had been confined to Grandsire but he learnt Stedman after his retirement and was a reliable treble for plain Minor or Major. He rang one peal and about 40 quarters.

Norman worked in gardens since he was 15, firstly for his father's market garden until 1951 and then at Farleigh Hospital (Cambridge House) until 1972 when he retired as head gardener. He married Gwen in 1933 and they had one son. Gwen passed on in 1985 and Norman had lived on his own since then. He worked an allotment until he was 97. Apart from ringing Norman served on the Parish Council for many years, chairing committees on allotments, street lighting and footpaths where he inaugurated the parish walks which continue today. His proudest moment was as council Chairman in 1968 when he cut the ribbon to open the Long Ashton bypass to traffic. He still had the pair of scissors used for that. Another post he held for many years in succession to his brother Percy was that of Parish Clerk who wrote the minutes of the Vestry Meeting to elect the churchwardens each year.

His practical skills at woodwork and electrical wiring were put to good use in the tower of All Saints to provide a rope 'spider', pulleys for the Ellacombe apparatus, rope bosses and particularly an apparatus to enable 'silent' ringing during the wartime ban. He and two others made switches and fixed solenoids to sound handbells in the ringing room when the clapperless bells should have struck. thus enabling practices and Branch meetings to continue. More recently he fixed a warning bell to tell us when to pull off at weddings.

Norman died after a short illness in the Bristol Royal Infirmary. We shall miss him.

John H. Gilbert