

**John L. Aldridge**  
**27.3.1920 - 6.1.2011**

Commander John L. Aldridge RN was born at Combe St Nicholas, Somerset, the only son of Revd Geoffrey de Y Aldridge who was a ringer and Master of the Bath & Wells Association from 1901-1906.

John always wanted to pursue a naval career and was commissioned from Dartmouth just before WWII. During the next five years he served with distinction in many theatres of war, including the evacuation of Dunkirk, escorting Atlantic convoys to Russia and laying and sweeping mines in the North Sea. On one occasion his ship, HMS *Express*, was blown up by a mine in Dutch enemy waters. The Captain and 91 officers and crew were killed or injured. The ship had lost its bows, but under its own steam, proceeded astern during the night across the North Sea into home waters. John, one of the few surviving officers, was mentioned in despatches for his part in this extraordinary rescue.

His first marriage was to Joyce and they had two children Louise (Lulu) and Charlie. They lived happily at Holford in the Quantock Hills for many years and John took on responsibility for the (then) five-bell tower where he taught many people, including Joyce, to ring. Sadly, she died with breast cancer in 1974.

Later John met and married Penny and added five step-children to his family, moving to Stogursey and Spaxton before finally settling in Holford.

John rang just two peals. The first in July 1965 was the first peal on the bells rung to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Bath & Wells Association. A week later he rang a peal of Minor at Durleigh, both of these being conducted by Brian Wylde. John also rang and called several quarter peals in the 1960s and 70s.

He did not seek the limelight, but was a loyal Sunday Service ringer and a great asset to various local towers, teaching and supporting sometimes struggling bands. He also undertook the job of Bridgwater Branch Secretary between 1966 and 1969.

John was a man of unshakeable faith, modest regarding his own achievements, but full of praise for those around him. The following words are taken from his own journal written ten years ago.

“After eighty years I can view death with equanimity, it is, after all, only a doorway we all have to pass through; what’s on the other side none of us know, but we hope for the best. Sixty odd years ago one’s expectation of life was about two minutes. Beyond that it was unwise to speculate; one might be dead, wounded or trying to keep afloat in the oily water. So, at my age, who am I to complain? I am just humbly grateful to have lived this long”.

Ten years later, the tiny church at Holford was full to overflowing for John’s funeral. The bells (now 6) were rung half muffled before the service. As the coffin, draped in the national flag and with John’s sword and medals on the top was carried from the church and taken to Taunton, a quarter peal was rung by six ringers who had all rung with him at the time he was Branch Secretary.

Valerie Stone