

Bath & Wells Diocesan Association of Change Ringers

Jeremy Dugdale July 1939 – January 2012



We look at the 'exercise' in our own individual ringing worlds, be it just our own church, the benefice, our branch, or even diocesan association. In that world we only truly realise the presence and stature of an individual when they are suddenly taken from us. Over the last few weeks that has been the overwhelming experience of all in the Taunton area who knew Jeremy. He was unique. His kindness and generosity of spirit, time, good humour and enthusiasm pervaded everything he did and in consequence affected all about him, especially for us, when he was in the tower and when he was ringing.

As a young man, following his degree at St Andrews University, he joined the family firm in surveying and estate agency in Taunton. Soon, he met and married Stella and settled down in Corfe at the family home, where the three children grew up in hugely happy times.

Changing direction from the surveying side of the business, he set up and ran his own printing firm, typically a totally Jeremy-confident leap into the unknown that was to become a great success and his signature upon events still much in the future.

Fortuitously, they lived but a very modest stone's throw from St Nicholas Church, Corfe.

During the mid 1990's ringing there had become a struggle and had all but ceased, particularly with the departure of the previous tower captain when he had to move away. Despite knowing little or nothing about ringing, Jeremy wasn't having any of that and decided, single-handed, if no-one else was going to do it, then he would rebuild a band of ringers for his church in Corfe. He took himself to neighbouring Pitminster Church, where he fell into the kindly arms of Dennis Whatmore and who, over the next few years, taught Jeremy and Stella to ring. Simultaneously, Jeremy went from door to door in the village recruiting friends and neighbours into ringing at his church. He soon realised that his band were limited because of lack of experience and he started to travel to other towers further afield to learn more and then brought this knowledge and experience home to the Corfe ringers. Subsequently, comparative over-use now of Corfe bells, compared to nothing previously, led to complaints. Jeremy then manufactured and fixed his own sound louvres for sliding into position in Corfe tower; problem solved.

A few years prior to this, Taunton branch was fortunate to find two brilliant ringers, Mike & Jill Hansford, who had moved into the area a few miles away and were also busy restoring their church tower and bells. Mike became Branch Chairman and immediately proposed Jeremy as new branch Education Officer. Jeremy in his self-effacing way said that he didn't know anything about training and he wasn't a 'clever' ringer – and Mike said "but that is just the point". He went on to add that he thought Jeremy would understand what people didn't know and look to change that and build on it. How right he was. Jeremy introduced training half days for all ages and all levels of ringers, but primarily aimed at 'the struggling band.' He was unstinting in his support for neighbouring towers when they were struggling, often travelling some distance, most evenings and week-ends, just to lend a hand, 'pull a rope and hope' and encourage.

He made friends wherever he went and because of his travels he did indeed come to understand the learning needs of others. Appointing him to the Education post was an inspiration. Suddenly, he was emailing or 'phoning us to attend or run courses and gradually he brought those of us he could reach, together as a Branch, in a joint effort to improve our ringing.

Next, he rekindled interest in the striking competition, which he restarted and, ably abetted by the Hansfords, it was held for the first year at Corfe. His team were not strong, but they won a trophy, and his enthusiasm took away the mystique and made it accessible for the average ringer. So it became the competition it is today, a sociable gathering of members from around the branch with some serious ringing, as well as lots of encouragement and fun for the beginners and the call change ringers. This year, 2012, one of the trophies will be dedicated in gratitude and in his memory.

He was instrumental in the resurgence of the branch newsletter, which he generously printed and published at his own home business, 'The Trout Press', refusing any recompense for his time and materials, together with a similar involvement in the Corfe Gardening Club of which he was a keen member and supporter, amongst many other village activities.

After a Wednesday evening practice at Corfe, it was almost impossible to escape his persuasive invitation to his home, where everyone was welcome at the 'Bell Ringer's Arms' as he always called it, for a 'gargle', being a glass of wine, often followed by a 'tincture' of scotch. His last ringing was at the second Saturday branch general practice in January, fittingly at Pitminster with Dennis in charge, before being taken poorly the next day, early Sunday morning. He was on radiant good form at that practice, with a laugh and a smile for all, within a touch of his real Jeremy best. After quite a while of indifferent health over the last year or two, he appeared now at last to be on the mend and well again. That is how we shall remember him.

In our ringing too, we shall remember Jeremy and all that he gave us, and in particular we remember Stella, Richard, Rupert and Rowena and their families, who have lost so much more than we ever have.

Tom Harris
Taunton Branch PRO