

## **Jessica Vale, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1958 – 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013**



Jessica Beatrice Vale

Jessica Beatrice Vale was a regular ringer at St John the Baptist, Yeovil. There were Thanksgiving Services at both Yeovil and Cerne Abbas.

Many of us were privileged to know Jessica. It was ten or twelve years ago that she came to live in Yeovil. This was to be nearer her parents when her father's health was failing. Having moved in to her house on a Friday, on the first Sunday thereafter she joined us in the tower to ring. It was good to have a new and ready-made ringer! And she joined the congregation. Jessica became a loyal member of our team and would always, very helpfully, let us know whether she would be present or absent from a practice or Service ringing, something we could all do. Besides being one of our team, Jessica was active in the Ilchester Branch. She organised some one day ringing outings and attended meetings regularly. By attending practices at other towers in our area she had progressed to ringing some of the more intricate "Surprise" methods. Recently she had enrolled in a scheme for teaching ringing, (ITTS) a voluntary task at which she would have been excellent.

Jessica herself was taught to ring in the late 70s or early 80s by Frank Hamlin at Cerne Abbas where her parents had a home. She continued to ring there occasionally when visiting her mother, often at New Year and would join the local ringers for the Midnight ringing. At Cerne Abbas there is a custom of ringing out the old year with half muffled bells, then tolling 12 on the tenor bell at midnight before greeting the New Year with open ringing. For two recent years Jessica had been selected to ring the twelve tolls, listened to by the crowds gathered in the street below.

On the day after Jessica died a peal of 5152 changes of Spliced Surprise Major was rung at Shepton Beauchamp, Somerset, and it was dedicated to her memory. Two of the ringers taking part, Jeff and Leslie Knipe, were regular visitors to towers where Jessica rang.

Before moving to Yeovil Jessica had worked as curator of a Museum at Hall Place, Bexley creating a number of outstanding displays. Whilst there she rang at Bexley, St Mary's and sang in several choirs in that area. At one time Jessica was Tower Captain at All Saints Church Snodland near Maidstone. During this period she taught the lady vicar (Sue Brooks) to ring and also the vicar's daughter. Jessica was also very involved in the life of the church at Snodland and was instrumental in getting the six bells refurbished, including the fund-raising. Quarter Peals were organised at Snodland in her memory.

In Somerset she was employed by the Museum Service, mainly in Bridgwater, but living in Yeovil. Later Jessica worked for a time at the Park School, Yeovil, an independent Christian Boarding School with many students from the far east. As a result of working there the headmistress is learning to ring. Part time work as Clerk of Hardington Mandeville Parish Council led on to becoming an Assistant Town Clerk for Yeovil, and it was at her desk there that she suddenly became very ill.

Besides her ringing, Jessica was keen on her allotment and baking. Also, as an accomplished musician and singer, both Alto and Soprano, she became Chair of the Yeovil Chamber Choir. In all these capacities, both work and leisure, her colleagues found her to be a very caring, competent and helpful member of the team. This part of her nature is shown by two examples.

A former ringing friend from Bexley came to Yeovil for her Thanksgiving Service and said that he met with Jessica at a very difficult time in his life. Her positive support through the church there had helped him to make a fresh start for which he was most grateful. Then, about three years ago St. John's opened a CAP centre in Yeovil, (Christians Against Poverty) initiated and led by another of the ringers. This is linked to a national agency, which helps people in debt in Yeovil, by encouraging them to live on a tight budget, thereby enabling them by careful negotiation with their creditors, to pay off their debts slowly and manageably. Meanwhile, the centre supports their families through friendship and care and practical help, as well as through prayer and inviting them to church services and events. Jessica was what we call a CAP support worker, making regular visits to one particular young couple, quite a difficult couple, but Jessica took them food parcels, helped them sign on at the Job Centre, provided some transport for them at times, and really made a huge difference to their lives. They came along to her funeral in St. John's, and helped in the kitchen with the washing up afterwards.

Having been trained for the museum service, Jessica's curatorial instincts were hard to suppress. During breaks in the ringing on Practice nights in St John's she would be seen inspecting the woodwork for beetle damage and getting out the polish for the table and chairs! We shall miss her for that, and all the other aspects of her friendship. We have lost a good and faithful servant.

Our sympathy goes to her sisters and especially to her mother still living in Cerne Abbas. *Roger Fox, Tower Captain St John's Yeovil, May 2013*