

Elizabeth M Parfrey (Bette)

27.05.1930 - 24.06.2016

Bette Parfrey learned to ring at All Saints Corston in 1946 at the age of 16. She learned in response to a plea for new ringers to recommence bell ringing in Corston following the ending of the mandatory cessation of ringing during the Second World War. At that time the scope of ringing in Corston was three set changes, known there as first, second and third change.

After leaving school she began working in the centre of Bristol which gave her the opportunity to further her ringing ability by attending the Bristol School of Ringing at St John's on the Wall. It was through ringing that Bette met her husband, Harold, and together they led Corston as a happy and successful band until his untimely death in 1968. During that era Corston were regular winners of the Branch Striking Competition, and the year they took the first three places is still remembered.

Following Harold's death Bette carried on as Tower Master until unable to climb the tower. Throughout those years she led her band by example, encouraging them as fervent supporters of the Association and its principles and activities. Even after she was unable to climb the tower her close interest remained, and until the end she enjoyed hearing the latest ringing news.

Bette never particularly enjoyed peal ringing, much preferring quarter peals, however she rang 24 peals together with Harold, coming out of retirement three times to make a total of 27. The 26th was to take her place as Branch Chairman in a Branch Officer's peal in memory of Albert (Bert) Butt of Dunkerton and the 27th, perhaps one of her proudest moments, was for an "all Corston" peal of Grandsire Triples to mark the Silver Jubilee in 1977.

Bette held Branch office as Chairman and also as Ringing Master, and it is to her credit that these offices have also been held by her children. In 1968 Bette was elected National President of the Ladies Guild. Even when she was not an officer Bette worked tirelessly to support activities, teaching new ringers, encouraging others, keeping other towers ringing, and by simply attending meetings (and providing tea wherever required).

At the forefront of her ringing was always the first object of the Association, "Recognition of the position of ringers as Church Workers and the encouragement of ringing for Divine Service." It was this that governed her whole ringing, that the bells should be heard for Sunday Service. To this end she spent many a Sunday morning moving from tower to tower (attending service at the last) just to make sure the bells were there to call the people to worship.

In 1996 the Bath & Wells DACR awarded Bette Honorary Life Membership of the Association in recognition of her service, and in March 26th 2016 she was presented with a certificate marking her 70 years of Association membership. Latterly ringers of the adjacent villages of Corston & Newton St Loe, being in the same benefice, have joined and ring as one band, and Bette was delighted when on 16th April they brought home the "Harold L Parfrey Memorial Shield", as winners of the Bath Branch Striking Competition, and just a few weeks before

she died she was equally delighted to know that the team had gone on to win the Bath & Wells DACR 6 bell striking competition.

Although infirmity had caused her to step back from active ringing in recent years, she had been very well known and respected across many counties and associations. I recall visiting a very distant tower and after answering the "where do you ring" question with "Corston, near Bath" being asked if I knew Bette Parfrey, the result of answering "yes, she's my Mum" was to be given the tenor rope for Little Bob Royal - the question of "what can you ring" was never asked!

Bette leaves her tower in good heart with ringing flourishing. As her legacy she leaves ten ringing members of her direct family, having been joined during the last year by the first of her great grandchildren, learning to ring at the age of nine.