

## Jenny M A Astridge

I dont know much about Jenny in her early years. I didnt come across her until July 1986 when I rang a peal with her on the difficult and heavy 8 at Frome. Bits that I do know were that Jenny rang her first peal on 27th February 1960, on the now long gone 6 at Brentford St Lawrence and this saw the beginning of a long peal ringing career which lasted up to her last peal in April 2016 at Marston Bigot St Leonards. In her youth she was known as Marilyn (Gibbs) and changed to be known by Jenny before she came to Somerset.

She was a remarkably accomplished ringer and rang peals on all numbers of bells from 5 to 12. Her peal total in 2016 was 1573 with half of these being Major with 301 on ten and 231 on 12. In her early years from 1960 to 1984 she contented herself with a few peals most years but in the 1980's her peal ringing increased dramatically until 1991 when she first rang over 100 (114) in a year and was followed by her most prolific year in 1992 (144). After 1992 her peal totals each year declined a bit and were fairly consistently between 20 and 40 most years.

As with most peal ringers there were a number of conductors who materially increased her totals. Most, 973, of her peals were for the Bath and Wells Diocesan Association which she joined in 1976 and although she rang relatively few peals in the first 9 years as a member, whilst her children were growing up, her ringing prowess soon came to the notice of conductors such as Tony Cox (234), Brian Woodruffe (151), Tim Collins (213) and Adrian Beck(82) who all had great influences on her ringing.

In her peals with Tony Cox of which 190 were at Barrow Gurney she rang many of the new methods of the day and both with Tony and Tim Collins(at Cattistock) took part in some of the difficult Spliced Surprise Major series ringing 208 peals of spliced surprise major in up to 54 methods. In the 1990's.

With the coming of the new idea of peal ringing on minibells she rang 116 peals at Marston Bigot, Piglet in the Wylde. Specifically many of these were conducted by Brian J Woodruffe and were long and record peals. In all she rang in 55 peals over 10000 changes of which 41 were at Piglet. Many of these were not "easy" methods and included many new methods as well as 12096 Huddersfield Surprise Major and 14976 Belfast Surprise Major. Of the 8 she rang at Lyme Regis particularly noteworthy are her longest peal (22320 Yorkshire Surprise Royal) as well as , 18360 London No 3 Surprise Royal and 17040 Bristol Surprise Royal.

The 82 peals she rang with Adrian Beck conducting were spread pretty evenly over the last 30 years with many peals at Chilcompton both on the old six and on the new 10 and 12 and also down the road on the 12 at Midsomer Norton. These enabled her to ring 773 Peals with Adrian Beck and 733 with Rob Beck, her 2 leading peal ringers.

Her peal record stands as evidence of her stamina which for a small stature person never ceased to amaze me. A runner of quite fast half Marathons in her day she happily took on some big and lumpy tenors to peals. One of these was Wedmore tenor (30cwt 5 lbs) which she rang beautifully to

Cambridge Surprise Major to mark the 60th anniversary of the day Edith Fletcher rang it and by so doing became the first lady to ring a 30 cwt bell to a peal.

973 of her 1573 peals were for the Bath & Wells Association. She was very active in the association being the organiser of several hugely successful Association dinners as well as being peal secretary for the last 26 years. She was very proud of being made an Honorary Life Member in 2015

This rather special small person also showed her stamina in other ways. Ringing was not the only pastime in her life. It is rumoured that Jenny was a nurse in her early life but she rarely spoke of it. She held down a demanding teaching job at Richard Huish College in Taunton teaching Maths at GCSE and Advanced level and for a number of years was her college link with a Boys Catholic boarding school in Calangute, Goa which was mainly for orphaned boys. She was much loved by staff and pupils and raised lots of money for them to improve facilities. At least one boy of exceptional talent was sponsored in England and at least one Goanese taxi driver got started with a healthy donation towards his first cab from money Jenny raised.

Jenny found a great love for India which she visited many times. Her visa tally was 26 in 2000 and she went many times afterwards during retirement years. She tried to pass on this knowledge by involving friends and organising College trips and I was fortunate to be involved in 2 of the trips to the Jaipur, Delhi, Agra areas and also to Cochin, Bangalore, Madras and the Western Ghats. The students really appreciated the transformation in Jenny from the stern, focussed school teacher to the happy, funny adventurous leader of the expeditions.

One of Jenny's trade marks, not just in India, but in England on peal expeditions as well, was a large black bag full of the exam papers that she seemed to be constantly marking. Can you imagine a delayed flight and a crowded waiting area on Delhi airport at 3.00am with everyone else sitting or lying and dozing but with Jenny sat cross legged in the centre marking furiously.... I think they were Maths GCSE scripts from Ghana.

On another occasion we saw her staying power.... just as with her tenor ringing.... when we were very late arrivals at Mumbai Central Railway Station. We ran with rucksacks flapping up this huge long platform and jumped on as the train started. But then realised that the little figure panting along outside the train, and carry the large black bag, was Jenny. Even knowing that the platform was very long and that Jenny had run a number of successful half marathons we decided to pull the chain. We stood to collect a fine of 500 rupees or 3 months in prison for doing so but Jenny was most amused to see us trying to explain our actions to Indian officialdom who don't take kindly to people who delay their trains.

She loved the good things in life including food and although I remember her eating street food in Madras I also remember at the other extreme eating with her in the restaurant of the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel just by the Gateway to India in Mumbai..... one of the top five of the World's restaurants. And of course she loved the crispy Duck at the Nobody Inn at Doddiscombeleigh in Devon especially after the long Dartmoor treks she was so fond of.

It is sad to think of Jenny gone but hopefully some of these words will have brought back happy memories of the times you shared with Jenny and will help to keep her in your thoughts.

Barrie Hendry