

Biographical Record

Benjamin ANNABLE (?? – 1 February 1756)

The date of Benjamin Annable's birth is not known, though it is thought that possibly he was the Benjamin Annable who was baptised at St. Giles, Cripplegate on August 28th 1702. In 1703 his parents moved to Dove Court, Gutter Lane, off Cheapside where they stayed until the death of his father some years later.

Annable was the son of a porter, though he himself was a baker by trade. It is not known where or when he learned to ring, but he developed into a noted heavy bell ringer, a capable conductor and a gifted composer. He was part of a new class of ringer; previously most ringers had come from the gentry and upper levels of society, but the new influx brought new life to ringing. Annable helped the ringers of his time make huge strides forward in the art of change ringing.

Annable became a member of the College Youths in 1721, being the only new member that year. He rang in the first peal of Grandsire Cinques, which was rung by the College Youths in 1725; he rang the second but in his next recorded peal a month later, he rang the ninth and called the peal, which was Grandsire Caters at St. Magnus the Martyr. Annable used his own composition for this peal; the bells were in the tittums position apart from the opening and closing courses. Annable composed and conducted the first peals of Plain Bob Major, Plain Bob Royal and Plain Bob Maximus; he conducted each of them from the tenor. The venue for all these peals was St. Bride's, Fleet Street. The Major was rung on 26th April 1725, the Royal on 22nd November 1725 and the Maximus on 28th February 1726. It had been the custom in the days before Annable started to compose peals, for the observation bells to be the small bells, but Annable composed many of his peals with the heavier back bells being in fixed positions, thus improving the music obtainable. This custom is still usually observed in modern times.

He also rang in the first peal which might be considered a 'long length'. This was 6832 changes of Plain Bob Major, which he conducted at Lambeth in 1726. In 1728 he called what was then the longest peal ever rung: 10,800 changes of Plain Bob Major at Bermondsey.

From 1725-1729 Annable was the leading ringer of the College Youths and he conducted seventeen peals for them during those years, but the following year he conducted only one College Youths peal and did not even ring in the other five peals which were rung. His name re-appeared in the peal records in 1732 and thereafter.

Thomas Hearne, the Oxford diarist, noted that Annable, was about to put out a new edition of *Campanologia Improved*, 'is judged to understand ringing as well as, if not better than, any man in the world.

Annable was elected Steward of the College Youths in 1737 and Master in 1746. Following his election as Master, the College Youths did not ring any further peals for the next four years. It seems as if there was some internal friction between different factions of the College Youths. In total Annable rang fifty five peals, of which he conducted forty. Many of his peals were notable first performances.

Annable kept a notebook about ringing. The original is kept in the British Library. In it there are many methods which he had devised. He did not keep a note of whether they were rung or not. But since then, in recent years, several bands have enjoyed trying these methods and the more responsible ringers have used the names which Annable gave them.

He died on 1st February 1756. An obituary for him survives:

‘A few nights ago was buried under the tower of St. Bride’s Mr Benjamin Annable the best ringer that was ever known in the world. Till his time ringing was only called an art, but from the strength of his great genius he married it to mathematics and ‘tis now a science. This man in figures and in ringing was like a Newton in philosophy, a Ratcliff in physic, a Hardwick in wisdom and law, a Handel in music, a Shakespeare in writing and Garrick in acting. O rare Ben!’

This description is based on the account given in John Eisel’s book *Giants of the Exercise*, available from [Central Council Publications](#).