

Biographical Record

Cyril Kenneth LEWIS, MBE (1913 - 2002)

Represented the Chester Diocesan Guild on the Central Council from 1948 to 1950, Honorary Member 1950 to 1993, Life member 1993 to 2002 and attended 55 meetings

Ken Lewis was born at Brabyns Hall Estate, near Marple Bridge on 23 August 1913, the eldest of the three sons of Thomas and Mary Lewis. Ken, the star of the village school, refused to sit the entrance exam for the Grammar School although he demonstrated he could pass it! However, he survived a very serious bout of pneumonia when he was thirteen and never attended school again.

At fifteen he got a job in the office of the Vice Consul of Uruguay. Hard work combined with night school and his study of Spanish made Ken proficient in the spoken and written word. This made him valuable in accounting and commercial subjects and he rose rapidly through the office staff. With his knowledge of Spanish his job changed to the control of exports to Uruguay and the Argentine, particularly of fabrics and cloth.

About 1932 Ken moved with his parents to Marple village where he learned to ring at All Saints, taught by Arthur Whiting. Norbury was not too far away and had a strong influence on his development so Ken was soon immersed in multi-Minor ringing.

His peal ringing career only staggered into existence after thirteen unsuccessful peal attempts! Success came with a peal of three Minor methods at Knutsford on 5 May 1934, conducted by Sidney Hough. His first peal as conductor was in nine Minor methods on 6 November 1935.

He now began to progress rapidly as a peal ringer and also in his conducting abilities. He and John Worth of Macclesfield became good friends and in the late 1930s when the Lincolnshire and Cheshire bands were competing to see who could ring the most Minor methods to a peal, the Cheshire band concentrated on treble-dodging methods whilst the Lincolnshire band included Plain and Alliance methods. John Worth called most of the Cheshire peals but when they rang the last peal in the series, one in 73 methods, as they were going up the stairs he told Ken to call it since he knew the composition so well.

On joining the forces in 1940 Ken was stationed at Preston until June 1942 when he was sent to Meerut in India. In the two years he was at Preston he met Cyril Crossthwaite and they rang handbell peals in up to thirteen Minor methods. After demobilisation he took advantage of the Government's Emergency Training Scheme for Teachers and, taking mathematics as his special subject, spent the next year at Padgate College in Warrington. His first teaching post was at St Mary's Church of England Primary School in Stockport.

In 1948 Ken married Mary Elkins, a member of a well-known ringing family, at St Mary, Bowdon. They set up home in Altrincham where they remained for the whole of their married lives. Ken later became head teacher at St Margaret's School, Altrincham and when the town's three Primary Church of England Schools amalgamated in 1968 he was the obvious choice as head, a post he retained until he retired in 1978.

Ken gave unstintingly of his spare time to his church, St Mary's, Dunham Massey, where at various times he was churchwarden, treasurer and secretary to the PCC. He acted as both Secretary and President of the Cheshire Association of Head Teachers, his professional association, and as trustee to various local charities. After retirement he acted as a room steward and fund raiser for the National Trust. He did much work at St Margaret's, Altrincham. In 1974 he was responsible for rehangng the ten bells, though the scheme to add more bells and make a lighter octave did not come to fruition.

As a ringer his service ringing was exemplary; he was elected tower captain in 1958 and taught countless people to ring. His peal-ringing career was once casually described as "round the world on the 5th" as this was the bell from which he usually conducted peals!

Of his many fine performances notable ones include: 21,000 Bristol Surprise Major at Over, Cheshire in 1950, conducted by John Worth; 15,840 Cambridge Surprise Royal at Worsley in 1951; 13440 Spliced Surprise Major in six methods at Hazel Grove in 1961; a silent peal of Pitman's Four Spliced Surprise Major and a series of Spliced Surprise Maximus in up to 110 methods from 1966 to 1970. He took part in nearly all Cheshire Band Peal Tours and in 1953 conducted the first peal of Spliced Surprise to be rung in Ireland. He was also a member of the team in the first Maximus Tour, ringing in eight Maximus attempts in eight days. His final peal totals were tower bells 1370, conducted 636 and handbells 655, conducted 408, totals 2025 (1044).

Ken was first elected to the Central Council in 1948 and served on it until his death in 2002, being honoured as a life member in 1993. He never missed any of the 54 meetings. While on the Council he served on the Methods Committee from 1948 to 1975 and from 1981 to 2002. He held many posts in the Chester Guild, from Branch Secretary to Master, and he and Mary produced the Guild Annual report together.

Ken's excellent work as a composer dates from the early thirties when he contacted A G Driver and used his tables to increase the number of methods spliced into a 720 of Minor. One of the first 'modern' peals of London Surprise Royal was his, and is frequently used. He composed the very simple extent of Plain Bob Major that was used when the extent was first rung by a eight ringers in July 1963. He had a constant flow of correspondence from ringers asking for compositions, and would always try to help promptly. In 1977 he was awarded an MBE for services to the Exercise and to the community.

Ken died in hospital after a short illness on 20 November, 2002, aged 89, survived by his wife, Mary, daughter Kathleen and two grandchildren, Philip and Helen.

His funeral was on Friday 29 November 2002 at St Margaret's, Dunham Massey and was attended by many friends and ringers from all over the country. Hand bells were rung during the service to Ken's favourite method in hand, Oxford Treble Bob.

[Sources include David Adams & Bill Butler]



Tributes appeared in The Ringing World 2003 on pages 6, 12,20,36,77,1229.