

Alistair Donaldson

I learnt to ring at Winchester College (6, 11cwt) in 1967, ringing my first Quarter Peal later that same year, and my first Peal in April 1968. I was pleased to be able to ring a Peal at St. Mary Peterborough on the 50th anniversary with a special method and ringers including the conductor of that first Peal.

In 1971 I moved back home to Thames Ditton, Surrey just by Hampton Court, while studying at Kings College, London University. In 1976 I married local girl Janet at St. Nicholas Church Thames Ditton (6, 8cwt) and became Tower Captain leading a largely teenage band.

1978 saw us move to Crewe as I worked for the Railways and we joined St Mary's Church, Wistaston Cheshire (6, 5cwt – now an 8). I became a member of the Nantwich band (8, 14cwt) extending my ringing repertoire into Major.

In 1984 we moved again to Hethersett (8, 9cwt) just outside Norwich, Norfolk where the back 2 bells were unringable due to frame problems. So I joined the band at St Giles in Norwich (8, 13cwt) where I first ventured into ringing the Standard 8 Surprise Major.

Railway work required another move in 1986 to Kelvedon Essex (then 6, 21cwt) near Colchester where we were to stay until 2010 while our 4 children went to local schools. I joined the Essex Association and during that time I served terms as Secretary, Treasurer, Ringing Master and Master of the Northern District. In 1998 I assisted Brian Meads to set up a Branch Ringing School to train new Millennium Ringers from scratch as well as develop other ringers. This School ran every Saturday morning at Coggeshall / Wethersfield / Felsted on simulators for 15 years! Soon after we added Intermediate and Advanced practices to help our new recruits develop which I ran and tutored for many years. In 2006 I set up a joint Surprise Major practice with the adjacent North West District which ran for many years. The latter two practices are still running!

Janet was appointed Vicar of St James, Deeping St James in Lincolnshire (6, 16cwt) in 2011 so we moved again and I joined the Lincoln Guild. In time I became Branch representative to the Guild Committee and led one of the four Working Groups under the Guild's Strategic Review specifically looking at how to develop the Branch & Guild organisation to better support ringers and ringing in Lincolnshire. I also joined the Peterborough Guild as we could see the Cathedral from the Deepings, ringing at Glington and the Cathedral. It was at the Cathedral that Robin Rogers took me in hand, introducing me to Mike Maughan. My Peal total when I arrived in 2011 was just 30. In 2012 alone I rang 30 Peals, the majority with Mike – I was hooked! I also called my First Peal that year.

On the other hand I thought my striking wasn't too bad when I arrived: Mike ensured I rapidly raised my game, even though I still fall short of his exacting standards. My Peal total is now over 300.

The Peterborough Diocese beckoned and in 2013 Janet was appointed Vicar at Welford, Sibbertoft and Marston Trussell, so I became a resident member of the PDG, this time in Guilsborough Branch. During this time I served the Branch as Ringing Master and Chairman, amongst other things promoting development of ringers with regular QP days. I am a great believer in the development of ringing through Quarter Peals – I have rung nearly 1,500 now.

In 2018 Janet retired, and we moved to Market Harborough, from where I support ringing in the Maidwell group of parishes south of the border while also ringing at Market Harborough area towers.

I was honoured to be nominated by Derek Sibson and elected to the Cumberlands in 2015.

I have been Ringing Master of the Golden Oldies mid-week Surprise Major Group for 3 years.

During my ringing career I have been a resident member of 7 Guilds: Guildford, Chester, Norwich, Essex, Peterborough, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, moving 9 times! Our moving days are over we hope.

To support recruitment I have an 8-bell portable Mini-Ring by Matthew Higby stored in my garage.

Finally I am a great believer in the National 3/4 day Ringing Courses, ever since I helped at Coggeshall on the Essex Ringing Course. Since 2001 I have attended as a Student then Helper and lately Tutor on the Sparsholt / Wantage / Bradfield Ringing Courses. More recently I have also helped on the Hereford Course. There is a great social atmosphere on these courses, especially the residential ones, but the concentrated study of methods and practice with good bands enormously benefits the students. As the National courses are significantly oversubscribed I am pleased that some Guilds such as Leicester are now running their own long weekend courses.

