

# St Albans District Newsletter

Volume 16 Issue 2 – March 2011

## Geoff Dodds 1925-2011



### Memorial Service

Ringers from as far afield as Wales and Norwich were among the 150-strong congregation who gathered in the Lady Chapel on a bright Friday afternoon on 11 March to remember Geoff Dodds.

Joining Geoff's wife Joyce, daughters Frances and Helen, his grandchildren and other members of the family, those present from the ringing fraternity included the Herts County Association president, Tony Crowther and Harold Rogers (whose wife Olive had taught Geoff to ring some 75 years ago).

The recently installed Abbey bells are not yet ringing and it is a great sadness that Geoff never got to ring the new bells, however he would have enjoyed the well-struck handbells rung during the service by Roger and Kath Baldwin, John Southee and Bob Hardy. The service was officiated by Dean Jeffrey John with Stephen Penney and Frances Dodds giving tributes to Geoff as a ringer, father and much else – railway enthusiast, canoeist, and missile designer, although not everyone appreciated his taste in summer

clothes or in Wartburg cars. Much was familiar to many in the congregation: his eagerness to teach, and to drive young learners to practices around the county, his role in bell-restorations (not least at Lemsford, South Mimms, Sandridge and the Abbey), and his delight in discovering new methods. But he was also the first person to compose a peal using a computer, and the precision of his engineering drawings was remarkable. Not everyone could keep up with his exposition of complicated campanological mathematics, but, as Stephen said, that didn't matter to Geoff, for he would happily go through it again on another occasion. Following the service Geoff's ashes were buried in the North Churchyard, beneath the Abbey tower within the sound of the new bells for which he had worked for so long.

Light refreshments were later served in the crypt, offering a chance for many old friends to catch up and continue sharing memories. A collection was held on the day in support of Meningitis UK, and any further donations would be greatly welcomed.

By A Smith & V Nutton

## Obituary by Stephen Penny

**Geoffrey Dodds** was a well-known and respected church bell-ringer in St Albans. He had been a member of the St Albans Abbey Ringers since 1953 where he continued to climb the 160 steps each Sunday and practice night until the bells stopped ringing for the new bells to be hung. Geoff also regularly rang at St Peters, St Michaels, St Stephens (all in St Albans), Sandridge and Lemsford.

Some might say Geoff was quite eccentric with his tweed jacket with the top pocket full of pens and of course the small metal ruler with which he would stir his tea, using the end with the hole in it. In the summer the tweed jacket would be accompanied by shorts, socks and sandals.

Geoff was born on the 31st October 1925 in Isleworth where he lived as a child. His father Eric Dodds worked as a scientist in the Petrochemical Industry and his mother Mabel Dodds was a Montessori trained Governess. He had an elder brother Eric (known as Tommy).

### **Joyce, Frances and Helen**

He met his wife Joyce Lewis through the Universities Association of Bell ringers and they married in 1952. They have two daughters, Frances (born 1952) and Helen (born 1956) and also two granddaughters, Sue and Tina.

Geoff initially went to private preparatory school then moved to a council primary school and later went to Isleworth County Grammar School. Whilst at school he had a job fire watching during the London Blitz in WW2. The V2 rockets were to be a pointer to his later career.

### **Rockets, Rapier and the RAF**

He then joined the RAF who sponsored him to go to Emmanuel College, Cambridge studying Natural Sciences and working in the famous Cavendish Laboratory undertaking nuclear experiments. Whilst in the RAF he trained to be a wireless operator and navigator, although did not see active service. Whilst doing his national service with the RAF at the end of the war, the RAF education unit paid him a shilling an hour to run a course on bell-ringing for 'bored erks'.

From his days as a student at Cambridge University he worked on composing new bell methods (tunes) and touches of methods. These were complex mathematical calculations. As home computers became available, he pioneered their use in this field. He continued this throughout his life.

Geoff's physics and mathematical educational background were bought to the fore during his professional career. During his apprenticeship at Napier's in Acton he worked on developing heat resistant tiles for Deltic locomotives. He later transferred into the Rocket Development Department at Luton airfield to undertake research on the Thunderbird guided weapon. He then moved to De Havilland to work upon engine testing, including the Blue Streak ballistic missile, where he focused on the design of the fuel valve system and also worked upon computerised missile guidance systems. It was during his early stage in his rocket development career that he was encouraged to practise using computers which of course led to his computerised method compositions. In later years he spent hours in the front room at home which would be covered in acres of paper with his workings out, and the occasional chocolate wrapper in amongst the drawings and numbers. When working on his computer projects he was on a different plane, his head was in the clouds, totally absorbed by what he was doing.

Later in his professional career he transferred to British Aerospace, Stevenage as technical analyst, working on Rapier anti-aircraft weapons and writing Fortran computer programmes.

### **Geoff's Peals and Towers**

Geoff was a gentle person with his thoughts often on a higher plane than most of us. He could be a very practical person with woodwork and metal work with every piece precisely in position, obviously his engineering apprenticeship was coming into the fore.

He was always very supportive of family choices and would offer help whenever he could.

Geoff had rung a total of 438 peals, 319 on tower bells and 119 on handbells. He had conducted 60%. One of his earliest peals was 5,184 Plain Bob Major on handbells, composed and conducted by him, on 3rd January 1950. His last peal was of Yorkshire Surprise Major at Codicote in November 2010.



**Society of Royal Cumberland Youths****Codicote, Herts**

St Giles

Saturday, 20 November 2010 in 2:47 (10 cwt)

**5058 Yorkshire Surprise Major**

Composed: Donald F Morrison (#3562)

- 1 Geoffrey Dodds
- 2 Margaret M Horritt
- 3 Charles F Pocock
- 4 John R Peverett
- 5 Geoffrey T Horritt
- 6 Stephen J Crawley
- 7 Richard Sales
- 8 Graham A Duke (c)

Charles said recently – Geoff only missed one dodge!

He was relentlessly involved with the training of new ringers and bands and also worked on projects to get bells ringable at **Brentford, South Mymms, Studham, Caddington, Lemsford** and very recently **Sandridge**.

**Brentford and South Mymms**

Between 1950 and 1952, Geoff was working for D Napier & Sons Ltd in Acton and was ringing regularly at Isleworth. He found the ring of six at Brentford in a much neglected state as there had been no ringers there for many years. He taught a group of youngsters to ring and improved the louvres to minimise the noise levels but eventually the ringing gradually declined and the church was declared redundant soon after Geoff moved to St Albans. He joined the Abbey and started helping the ringers at St Giles, South Mymms. The bells there were also in a poor state and he remembered that Brentford bells were of a similar weight and the same key so Geoff applied for permission to split up the Brentford bells and arranged for three of them to be installed at St Giles.

**Lemsford Bells**

Geoff Dodds was the primary instigator in the installation of the light ring of six at Lemsford.

In September 1975, Geoff found that a 4 cwt ring of four bells at Hatford in Oxfordshire was in a redundant Victorian church which was at that time being converted to a private house. Geoff suggested a value to the owner and by the following morning he had persuaded the vicar and churchwardens of Lemsford to put in an offer by post.. Geoff arranged the transport and had the bells dismantled and moved to Lemsford.

To offset the cost of casting two new bells (and the recasting of one of the Hatford bells which had a hairline crack) he then acquired some bell metal from the redundant Christ Church, St Albans and a small factory bell from the old Ballito stocking factory in Hatfield Road St Albans.

He was about to order the timber for the ringing chamber floor when he learnt that following the removal of the bells from a fire damaged church in Upper Clapton, London, a perfectly good floor was going begging so he gained permission and Geoff was amongst the volunteers who dismantled the floor the day before the demolition contractors were due. Local police were a little surprised to find shadowy figures and two estate cars transferring timber at 1.15 am but fortunately the local church warden was on hand to reassure the officer on duty.

Geoff and other members of the St Albans District put in many hundreds of hours of voluntary work to complete the installation of the bells. Finally in December 1977, a new ring of six was dedicated by the Right Rev Robert Runcie, Bishop of St Albans. Geoff continued to support Lemsford for the rest of his life.



Geoff, Gerald Penny and Bob Hardy ringing at Ridge in 1977 for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first 'peal' -----

**Geoff – the helper**

Geoff did so much for so many - he never missed a Lemsford Monday night practice and was always there waiting for me to open up well before 7.30 pm!

**Judith Titmus**

My memories of Geoff were always of how helpful he was. In 2000 District Meeting at Welwyn – we had only been ringing since September 1998 and I was feeling discouraged about my lack of progress but Geoff told me not to worry as he had been ringing since October 1937 - before I was born!

**Mary Gregory**

A few years ago I was asked to call a quarter of Bob Minor at Ridge and about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way through it, I missed a Bob and so it came to grief. Geoff who was ringing the 5<sup>th</sup> next to me just said quite cheerfully 'Never mind Rob' – we'll just ring it again! He somehow had the charm to persuade the other members of the band that it did not matter at all and so we rang it all over again.

**Rob Goss**

On Sunday mornings Geoff used to teach handbells with great patience and skill and I learnt a lot from him. **Shane Saunders**.

**Geoff and Computers**

In 1980, the Bishop of St Albans (the Rt Rev Robert Runcie) left St Albans to be come Archbishop of Canterbury and at a ringers dinner, Bishop Runcie thanked his hosts for the peal of Yorkshire Surprise but pointed out to them that as he came from the other side of the Pennines a Liverpool Bob might have been more suitable. Geoff took it upon himself to compose a new method for the Bishop on his home computer. Remember in 1980 personal computers were still very much the 'new technology' with a memory size of 32 or 64 kb (!) There were no application programs and so you had to program everything in yourself in machine code – no small undertaking! Unfortunately the first attempt of Liverpool Bob Major at St. Michael's St Albans came to grief after about two hours but they did ring it at Harpenden at a later date.

**Retirement – no not really!**

In his retirement he wrote a new edition of the Church Bells of Hertfordshire which involved travelling around the county looking at all the church bells in the county and meticulously recording their details. His second publication was Hertfordshire Bellfounders.

He was a member of the Hertford County Association of Church Bellringers and a representative on the Central Council of Church Bellringers for many years. He also belonged to many other bell-ringing associations including the Cumberland Youths.

Aside from his lifelong passion for bellringing, Geoff's other interests included steam locomotives and canal boats. He was also a member of the Local History Society, Beds & Herts Historic Churches Trust and the Hertfordshire branch of the Locomotive Club of Great Britain, where he frequently chaired their meetings.

Geoff will be greatly missed by us, his family, by his friends and by ringers everywhere.

**PEALS rung in the memory of Geoff Dodds**

**Hertford County Association**

**Sandridge, Hertfordshire**

St. Leonard

Sunday, 6 February 2011 in 2h27 (6)

**5040 Surprise Minor (3m)**

2 extents each: Beverley, Surfleet; 3 extents Cambridge.

1 Dominic Holroyd

2 Richard Sales

3 Vivian Nutton

4 Stephen W Penney

5 Brian C Watson

6 Robert J Crocker (C)

Rung in memory of Geoffrey Dodds.

First peal: 1.

**Lemsford, Hertfordshire**

St. John the Evangelist

Thursday, 10 February 2011 in 2h16 (3)

**5040 Doubles (5m)**

5 extents each: Grandsire, Reverse Canterbury; 10 extents each St. Simons, St. Martins; 12 extents Plain Bob.

1 Judith E Titmus

2 Roger D R Brown

3 Robert J Crocker (C)

4 Keith D Waples

5 Alan G G Smith

6 Ron E Titmus

Rung in memory of Geoffrey Dodds.

The peal at Sandridge included ringers representing Sandridge, Lemsford, the Abbey and St. Peter's. This was Dominic's first peal, something that would have delighted Geoff enormously.

**LEMSFORD, Hertfordshire, St John the Evangelist**

Sunday February 13, 2011 in 2h29 (3cwt)

**5040 Spliced Surprise Minor (41m)**

(41m: 3600 Carlisle, Northumberland, Sandiacre, Whitley, Wooler, Chester, Munden, Alnwick, Newcastle, Canterbury, Morpeth, Cambridge, Ipswich, Bourne, Primrose, Norfolk, Hull, Beverley, Surfleet, Durham, Berwick, Hexham, York, London, Wells, Lincoln, Coldstream, Kelso, Cunecastre, Bacup, Norwich, Rossendale, Stamford, Bamborough, Netherseale, Lightfoot, Wearmouth, Westminster, Allendale; 1440 Norwich, Warkworth, Rossendale, Annables London, Cambridge, Beverley).

Composition: P A B Saddleton & P G C Ellis

1. Richard J Chandler

2. John J Ford

3. Guy W Morton

4. Shirley E McGill

5. Andrew M Reeve

6. Ian R Fielding (C)

In memory of Geoffrey Dodds.

Most methods: 3, 5.

**Aldbury, Herts**

St John the Baptist

Saturday, 26 February 2011 in 2h28 (7)

**5040 Minor**

Single Oxford, Double Oxford, St. Clements, Plain Bob, Norwich Surprise and two extents of Cambridge Surprise

1 Christopher W Hoare

2 Nicky J Smith

3 Liz Middleton

4 David Burbidge

5 Brian C Watson

6 Stephen J Crawley (C)

In celebration of the lives of Brian Barker and Geoffrey Dodds

## QUARTERS

### Hertford County Association

#### **Essendon, Herts**

St Mary the Virgin

Saturday, 5 February 2011 in 48 mins (15-0-13)

#### **1312 Belfast Surprise Major**

1 Janet L Penney

2 Alan M Shepherd

3 Ann Evans

4 Bjørn E Bradstock

5 Claire C Nicholson

6 Alan GG Smith

7 Stephen W Penney

8 Richard Sales (C)

First in method, 3.

Rung to celebrate the life of Geoff Dodds.

#### **Sandridge, Herts**

St Leonard

Sunday, 13 February 2011 in 42 min (6)

#### **1260 Plain Bob Doubles**

1 Julia Pentelow (1<sup>st</sup> Q)

2 Roger Brown

3 A. Trevor Hawkins

4 Christine Harris

5 Vivian Nutton (C)

6 Richard Hayes

Rung in memory of Geoff Dodds, a regular ringer at Sandridge for 50 years, and the moving spirit behind the rehanging of the bells.

Last ringing on the bells before they were taken down on 14 February.

#### **St Albans, Herts**

St Peter

Friday, 11 March 2011 in 54 minutes (24-0-3)

#### **1295 Grandsire Caters**

Composed: H V Frost

1 Cynthia Warrilow

2 Judith A Mack

3 Katherine P M Butler

4 Deborah M E Butler

5 Rosemary E Sales

6 Nicholas P W Butler

7 Jennifer V Johnson (C)

8 Richard W Butler

9 Edward R Mack

10 Barry D Mack

By the St Peter's Society, remembering Geoff Dodds on the day of his memorial service at St Albans Cathedral.

#### **Kimpton, Herts**

SS Peter & Paul

Sunday, 6 February 2011 in 43 mins (10-2-15)

#### **1280 Belfast Surprise Major**

1 Judith Titmus

2 Keith Lewin

3 Barbara Beard

4 Richard Sales

5 Richard Horne

6 Stephen Penney

7 Roger Kendrick

8 Alan Smith (C)

Dedicated to Geoff Dodds who passed away last week. He taught the conductor to ring.

#### **Lemsford, Herts**

St. John the Evangelist

Wednesday, 16 February 2011 (3)

#### **1320 Plain Bob Doubles**

1 Eleanore K E Titmus

2 Roger D R Brown

3 Judith E Titmus

4 Dominic Holroyd

5 Robert J Crocker (C)

6 Ron E Titmus

Rung in memory of Geoffrey Dodds

#### **Dunstable, Bedfordshire.**

Priory Church of St Peter

1 Feb 2011,

1280 Northumberland Surprise Major:

1 Bjørn E Bradstock 1,

2 Alan M Shepherd (C)

3 Alan G G Smith

4 Ann Evans

5 Edward R Mack

6 Claire C Nicholson

7 Richard A Horne

8 Richard Sales

Rung in thanksgiving for the life of Geoff Dodds

**Westmill, Hertfordshire.**

St Mary the Virgin  
11 Mar 2011  
1320 Woodhead Surprise Minor

- 1 Andrew F Case
- 2 John M Kemp
- 3 David S Harris
- 4 Roy Hornby
- 5 Bjørn E Bradstock (C)
- 6 Claire C Nicholson

Rung in celebration of the life of Geoff Dodds on the day of his memorial service at St Albans Abbey

**South Mymms, Herts**

St Giles  
Saturday, 12 March 2011 in 46 minutes

**1260 Plain Bob Doubles**

- 1 Joan Badger
- 2 Laurence Bourton
- 3 Jennifer V Johnson (C)
- 4 Andrew King
- 5 Vince Emery
- 6 Nicholas P W Butler

By a mostly South Mymms band in memory of Geoff Dodds.

**Ridge, Herts**

St Margaret  
Sunday, 20 March 2011 in 43 minutes (11-0-24)

**1260 Plain Bob Doubles**

- 1 Joan Badger
- 2 Laurence Bourton
- 3 Andrew King
- 4 Vince Emery
- 5 Jennifer V Johnson (C)
- 6 Kerry Harwood

In memory of Geoff Dodds

**Hitchin, Herts**

St Mary  
Sunday, 20 March 2011 in 52mins (29cwt)

**1296 Plain Bob Caters**

- 1 Elizabeth J Cranfield
- 2 Christine A Williams
- 3 Keith D Waples
- 4 Anna Gawley
- 5 John N McCutcheon
- 6 Graham Poole
- 7 Trevor W Groom
- 8 Russell A Brown
- 9 David Kemp (C)
- 10 Nicholas D Brown

Rung in memory of Geoff Dodds

**St Albans, Herts**

St Stephen  
Sunday, 13 March 2011  
1296 Cambridge Surprise Minor

- 1 Dorothea M Mayne
- 2 John H W Beardwell
- 3 Evelyn J Normile
- 4 David Hodgskin
- 5 Frederick W Ellis (C)
- 6 Hilary P Heine

Rung in memory of Geoff Dodds, a staunch supporter of this tower

***My thanks to all those who contributed and helped with this Newsletter***

**Rob Goss**  
**31 March 2011**