

## **Exeter Colleges Guild: In the beginning**

### ***Forward***

The idea of setting down my memories of the early days of the E.C.G. came when I read Tom Longridge's obituary of his father. I realised that Sue and the boys may not know how John began the splendid institution that is the E.C.G. Even John's brother Chris had not yet appeared on the Exeter scene in the heady, exciting days of the late 60s.

When you hear the phrase "Forty Years Ago" and realise you were there, it brings it home to you that you may be getting on a bit. Memories may have faded, so I have enlisted the help of Marlene and Jim. Even so, we are ready to be corrected, bearing in mind the adage that if you can remember the 60s, you weren't there!

### ***A personal account by Linda Cull***

I started at Rolle College, Exmouth in September 1967. There was no student ringing society there so I joined Withycombe Raleigh tower, where Frank Mack was captain. He was pleased to have a new member and to welcome my non-ringing room-mate, Marlene Button (now Flint), as a learner.

One practice night, a few weeks into term, two visitors arrived. John Longridge and Gordon Baldam had travelled from Exeter (on Gordon's motorbike and side-car, I think). They explained that they were at St. Luke's and hoped to start a ringing society for all students at colleges in the area, including the University; St Luke's Teacher Training College; Rolle Teacher Training College in Exmouth; Seale Hayne Agricultural College in Newton Abbot; and St Loye's College of Occupational Therapy. Frank's foreboding that he was about to lose the undivided loyalty of his two new members was well-founded!

We four were joined by Angela Hughes (now Johnson) from the University. Other early members were David Atkins, Malcolm Turner, Dave Thorne, Stephen Dando, Christine Abbot, John Anderson, Tom Griffith-Jones, Peter Henry, Jim Wilkinson, Kevin Hughes, Richard Wilsher, Chris Ricketts and Maureen Gardner.

John Longridge was instigator of the venture and was a quiet, unassuming natural leader. So quickly did we form a happy group, enjoying visits to local practices and ringing Q.P.s, that by Christmas 1967 we were talking of having a Proper Dinner, with speeches and all, as a seal of respectability on our new society.

Marlene and I lived in Dunsinane, a hall of residence for female students, in Exmouth. In those days the college was *in loco parentis* and the warden, Miss Bell,

a retired missionary, made sure we were all in by 10.00 or, as an extra concession, 10.30 at the latest.

We wanted to be out much later on the occasion of the first E.C.G. Dinner, so we hit upon the idea of inviting a clergyman as speaker, thinking that Miss Bell would deem it a religious event and us to be in respectable company, instead of just enjoying an evening out with a bunch of fellow students. We dropped the names of several ringing clergy, such as John Scott and John Longridge's uncles: it worked. We were successful in staying out later than had ever been known during Miss Bell's tenure, as we invited a Bishop to speak at the first Dinner in February 1968, at the Chevalier Restaurant, Fore Street, Exeter. This Dinner was at the end of February and I think we changed subsequent Dinners to the beginning of February in order to join in the Cathedral ringing at the start of the month.

Early Dinner venues included Gissons; the Rougemont Hotel; the Imperial Hotel; and Reed Hall. Of course we felt it our duty to spend an evening drinking at several venues before deciding on one. We also discussed their shortcomings afterwards in an attempt to find the perfect one for next time.

During the three years I was at Rolle, the E.C.G. developed into a close-knit, happy group, always welcoming new members. Thanks to John Longridge, we had an amiable co-existence with local ringers.

Fred Wreford, captain of the Cathedral band, always made us welcome and was an entertaining speaker at several Dinners. His kindness and sense of fun helped many 1960s and 70s students who weren't as sure of themselves as they liked to appear.

Apart from E.C.G. practice night at St. Mark's, we joined in other local ringing. As our practice began early, some of us would go to Heavitree afterwards, joining them part-way through theirs. Tony Osborne, who taught Chemistry at the University, was a member of the band. The captain, Charlie Yates, welcomed us and we went to the Horse and Groom with the band after practice.

The other memorable Heavitree pub, the Windsor Castle, was the haunt of Fred Wreford and his (non-ringing) friends where they played Euchre and also drank with E.C.G. members. On Sunday evenings Fred and his friends also used the Seven Stars at Alphington for this purpose. John, who always entered into everything whole-heartedly, learned Euchre and frequently had to be reminded by Fred "Tis only a game, John!". This became an oft-quoted catchphrase. The Mount Pleasant was our 'after St. Mark's' pub.

We had weekly forays into remote parts of Devon for Q.P.s and on outings. Marlene's powder-blue Lambretta, John's Honda 50 and my Morris Minor helped with transport. We were grateful to Gerald Smerdon, a popular and friendly lecturer at St Luke's, for taking us about in his V.W. camper-van

Later we hired mini-buses for outings. Also, we joined forces with Southampton University Ringing Society for coach trips, notably to the Isle of Wight in 1970.

At Easter 1969 we enjoyed a camping and cycling tour of Somerset, based on Gordon Baldam's family home. Some of the young teenaged ringers from my home tower, Bishopstoke in Hampshire, joined us. Who would have thought that two of them, John Colliss and Roy LeMarechal, would become so well-known in ringing circles! John Longridge's younger brother, Chris, was also one of the party (this was before he started at St. Luke's). On a later occasion, he memorably appeared at the door of an Exeter pub where we had all gathered after a practice, enquiring nervously "I'm looking for my brother John", which Fred often quoted afterwards.

Apart from ringing, we were fond of picnics at places such as such as Dawlish Warren and on Dartmoor. Marlene reminds me that Jim always brought an unusual cheese that no-one had heard of and I always took the damp flannel in a plastic bag. We enjoyed cream teas almost anywhere but often at Ide.

Skittles matches were popular, at pubs such as Jack In The Green, Rockbeare, and at Thorverton. We were sustained by quantities of hot pasties as well as beer.

After practice and pub we usually went to John's room at Rowancroft, St Luke's, for coffee. John took on the role of house-parent at the Royal West of England School for the Deaf while still a student and we trekked up the dark, creaking stairs of the old building (now demolished) as quietly as possible so as not to wake the children.

On Sundays we rang at as many towers in Exeter as possible, spending the intervening hours on the University estate in the rooms of various members and in the wonderful grounds. We drank coffee and listened to the comedy programme "I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again" on the radio, catch-phrases from which live on to this day! We also gathered in one of the common rooms to watch the original series of Monty Python, only just getting to see the Dead Parrot sketch as a noble engineering student battled to keep the T.V. going.

Although "student in the 60s" evokes an idea of wild living of various kinds, the extended family of the early E.C.G. provided support, stability and a great deal of fun for youngsters away from home. We lived a happy round of ringing, in Exeter and the wonderful countryside beyond, founding friendships and relationships which still endure.

I believe it was John Longridge's quiet leadership, tremendous sense of fun and talent for making things happen which we can thank for all this.

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