

# Mr. George Preston

"Christchurch Times" Staff Reporter 1948



If being born within the sound of Bow Bells makes one a true Cockney, it might similarly be said that George Preston is one of the true sons of Christchurch, for he was born within the sound of the Priory bells.

What is more, he has lived for 79 years within the sound of those bells and have played no small part in his life.

To George Preston church bells are something much more than a means of calling people to worship. To him they have been a lifetime study and so long as he can climb the steps to the belfry he will be there each Sunday to lead the ringers at the Priory Church.

It was at the age of 17 when apprenticed to the tailoring trade that George Preston first became interested in bell-ringing and joined the ringers at the Priory Church. "There were only eight bells there then and there was no such thing as change ringing," he told me. The

bells increased their fascination for him and he began to study the art of campanology from textbooks.

## MORE BELLS ADDED

In 1885 a frame for ten bells was put in the belfry, but it was not until 1903 that the two extra bells were added. "We had started change ringing by then," said Mr. Preston, who went on to speak in an authoritative way of the technicalities of Grandsire Triples, Bob Majors and the like. He recalled that in 1932 two more bells were added to the frame in the Priory belfry.

Amongst the bell-ringing fraternity, Mr. Preston is known throughout the country, and he has rung bells in more than 200 churches. "I've even rung the famous Bow Bells," he said. In his home are numerous gifts and certificates which he has received in recognition of his service to bell-ringing.

For forty years he was secretary of the Christchurch District of the Winchester Diocesan Guild of Ringers, of which he is now an honorary life member. He also holds life membership of the Salisbury Guild, the Surrey Association, and the guilds at Oxford, Guildford, and the College Youth, London.

## MANY MEMORABLE OCCASIONS

He has led the ringing at the Priory Church on many memorable occasions, including Queen Victoria's Jubilee. One notable achievement by the Priory ringers under his leadership was the ringing of 5,280 changes of Bob Maximus. "I composed this peal, which was intended for King George V's Silver Wedding, but we could not practice it in time so I saved it for my 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the Priory 11 years ago last month," he said.

Bell-ringing has not been Mr. Preston's only pastime. In his younger days he was a keen footballer, in spite of having seriously injured his spine when 11 years old. Doctors described him as a "walking miracle." Nevertheless he was in the Christchurch football team when they won the Hants Junior Cup for the first time. He has done a good deal of rowing and shooting, and has served on the Christchurch Regatta Committee since its inauguration until last year. Mr. Preston started work at the age of 9, and eventually set up a tailoring business with the late Mr. Henry Tizzard.

They had premises at Purewell at first, but moved to Bridge Street in 1894, where Mr. Preston has lived ever since and where from his workroom he can look out on the Priory Church tower.