DAVID L. GULLICK  
1919 - 2007

President of the Hertford County Association of Change Ringers, Secretary and President of the Guild of Medical Ringers, and a semi-finalist on “Brain of Britain”

On Monday 5th March, 2007, family and friends gathered at Harwood Park Crematorium, Stevenage, for the funeral of David L. Gullick. His grandson, Mathew Gullick, read a sensitive and reflective tribute.

One could never forget David’s distinguishing stiff wooden walk, brought about by painful and debilitating arthritis of the knees and knuckles during the mid-1950s, which marked a tall elegant figure with a fresh complexion, and belied his rugby and cricket achievements. Rugby and cricket were to remain passions throughout his life.

William Lawrence taught him to handle a bell on the newly augmented eight bells at St Nicholas’s Church, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, soon after he moved to the town in the late 1940’s as a doctor in general practice. His advanced method ringing, however, was learnt with Frank W. Croft of Great Wymondley and he rang his first peal at St Ippolyts on 12th January 1952. It was during a ringing outing at this time that a near fatal accident happened. His foot was slightly protruding over the edge of the ringing box on which he was standing and the rope caught it resulting in him being thrown violently across the ringing chamber landing heavily on the floor. In typical self-governing fashion he declared he had dislocated his shoulder and, resisting all assistance, drove himself to Abbots Langley to have it reset at the house of his friend, Dr Poole.

When I joined the band at St Nicholas’s Church as a learner in the early 1960s David, whilst not tower captain, was, in the natural order of things, the driving force behind the band in developing more advanced methods. His interest in conducting triples methods was brought about by the ability of the local available ringers, which at the time may be considered as an elderly country band still recovering from the loss of ringers after WWII, like many towers throughout the country. Sunday service ringing often saw him conducting Stedman, Grandsire and Oxford Bob Triples.

Although not a prolific peal ringer on account of his arthritic condition he did conduct peals of Surprise Major and was committed to helping other ringers on practice nights within the Northern District. In my youth I recall being taken by him to towers such as Barkway, Rushden and Benington to help learners on bleak winter
evenings. I was equally pleased to have him arrange and conduct my first peal (Oxford Treble Bob Major) at Stevenage on December 27th 1968, which included his son Stephen. These were to become known as the “Gullick Boxing Day Peals”.

The Smiths of The Bury, a large Victorian farmhouse adjacent to St Nicholas’s church, hosted each New Year, up until 1973, a bell ringers’ party before ringing in the New Year. David will always be remembered for arranging the handbell ringing of Christmas tunes and telling stories around the log fire.

His commitment and contribution to the Northern District by organising peals, quarter peals and attending meetings was rewarded with the Presidency of the Hertford County Association of Change Ringers in 1968. As a gifted administrator, his major contribution as President was to overhaul the association’s rules. He was a loyal member of the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths, particularly when he worked in London, and promoted this Society not only in the Northern District, where he proposed several new members, but as far away as Australia where he introduced Pam Brock (nee Gough). He was a founder member of the Guild of Medical Ringers along with Dr Neal Smith of Twickenham and supported this association throughout his life, being its Secretary for over 20 years and later President. He rang in the Guild’s first peal in June 1955 and for its 25th anniversary in 1980, which proved to be his last. For those members who joined the Guild as students he was a tower of strength and enthusiasm. In 1991 he wrote an Article on Bellringing Injuries that was published in the British Medical Journal. It was a prospective survey of the incidence of significant injury arising in the course of church bell ringing. Pragmatically he concluded that bellringing is potentially dangerous but probably no more dangerous than many other pursuits.

During the 1970’s David meticulously organised annual ringing tours, primarily for the Northern District. Visits were centred on such diverse areas as Church Stretton, Shipham, Littledean, Derbyshire, Marshfield, Appletreewick, Glastonbury, Yorkshire and Newbury. These tours were legendary and I know there will be many ringers reading this with warm personal memories.

The Universities Association also featured in his life. He introduced members from the Northern District including Margaret and Geoff Horritt who are still active within the association organising ringing tours. David’s prowess at reciting poetry included performances of “Albert” and “The Horse’s Head Handle” as part of the weekend’s entertainment.
Whilst he did not suffer fools gladly or enter freely into small talk there was a depth of Christian kindness second to none. When William Lawrence, the Tower Captain of Stevenage, was admitted to the old Lister Hospital, Hitchin, for the last remaining days of his life, David made regular visits. And I shall always remember him surreptitiously slipping Will, then in his 90’s, a packet of twenty cigarettes on which to puff happily and, no doubt, at the mortification of the nurses. He never abandoned those close to him.

David Lionel Gullick was born 7th August 1919, the second of three children of Lionel and Isabel Gullick. The family had a coal business in Bristol and when it ran into difficulties in the 1920s they moved to Butcombe, Somerset. His singing ability won him a place at Wells Cathedral School and when his voice broke he move to Taunton School, where he excelled both academically and on the sports field, not only in rugby but cricket too. In his final year he became Captain of Rugby and Head Boy. From Taunton he went up to Guy’s Hospital where he continued to play rugby for Guy’s Hospital team.

We were informed during the tribute reading that he met Evelyn Joyce Norton, a nurse, when their eyes met over a wartime operating theatre table. They were married in Southwark Catherdal in 1943 and their loving partnership was to last for six decades. Their first son Michael was born in 1945 and their second, Stephen, in 1948.

Briefly, after the War, the family moved to Stow-on-the-Wold so David might work as a General Practitioner. They then moved to Stevenage Old Town where he joined a four-man GP practice. This is when he started to learn to ring, through his active involment with the Church as a PCC member. He was an energetic member of the Old Stevenage community for the burgeoning New Town had not, at this time, encroached upon the established regime. He helped to found Stevenage Rugby Club and qualified as a referee, and officiated on most Saturdays. He also was associated with the Toc-H Charity.

During his early thirties his painful arthritis started to set in and was to remain with him for the rest of his life. He was forced to give up the games he loved and with increased difficulty in mobility it was clear he could no longer continue as a GP so he resigned and joined the secretariat of the British Medical Association commuting daily to London for the next thirty years.
At the BMA he was Secretary to the General Medical Services Committee in the 1960s and in time he and its Chairman, Sir James Cameron, successfully negotiated with the Government to improve the conditions of GPs and their families, together with nurses’ pay. He was also secretary to the joint committee with the legal profession on medical evidence. As a member of the overseas committee he had the opportunity of travelling all over world on BMA business, thereby further extending his learning.

History was of great interest to him, as well as music and literature, and he had a breadth and depth of knowledge that stayed with him to the end, as did working through the Times crossword and Sudoku. His exceptional memory and intellect came into its own when, in the mid 1960s, he was a semi-finalist on “Brain of Britain”.

With determined doggedness he was not going to give in to his illness and it seemed that bell ringing helped in easing his joints. It provided mental agility with physical exertion. He also took to rug making certainly to assist in freeing the knuckles in his hands. An example of his craft may be seen in front of the north chapel altar at St Nicholas’s Church, a carpet displaying three different bell ringing methods – yet to be identified.

By the mid 1970s David had risen to be Deputy Secretary of the BMA and in 1977 his career took him to BUPA as Company Secretary and Executive Medical Advisor where he remained until his retirement in 1985.

David and Eve moved from Mount View, Weston Road, which had been their home for over a quarter of a century, to a more manageable house in Welwyn. Now supporting himself on crutches and never complaining, a personality trait of which he wholly disapproved, he fiercely insisted on his independence and continued to drive a motor car well into his 80s. Following Eve’s death in 2003 David typically rose to the challenge of adapting to life on his own with assistance from close family and friends.

David was a man of real ability and wisdom who was extremely modest about his achievements and was highly respected. His kindness and generosity of spirit was equally unfailing and I will always be greatly appreciative for his sponsorship in my early life.
His sons Michael, an historian and calligrapher, and Stephen survive him as do Stephen’s sons, Mathew and Daniel. Stephen, a Judge at Bradford Crown Court in Yorkshire, continues to ring church bells.

*Full thirty years my tone I lost*
*Been broke and tumbled down*
*In shape so neat I am recast*
*By Briant of Hertford Town*

Inscription (taken from the old six) now on the Tenor at St Nicholas’s Church, Stevenage

I am grateful to the family and ringing friends for providing background details.