An Unassuming Genius

The Life and Times of

A. J. Pitman

by

Michael B. Davies
An Unassuming Genius:
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Acknowledgements

I was a learner member of the Aberavon band towards the end of the 1950’s along with Ruth Henderson (now James), Pitman’s granddaughter. I was a teenager and very much in awe of Mr Pitman who like most men of his generation in the belfry appeared to me to be a rather forbidding figure. At that time I had no idea about his achievements in ringing composition. Forty years later I decided to write his biography. I wish I’d started it earlier when more of his generation were still with us. I soon discovered that a major source of information about his life was that important repository of ringing history, *The Ringing World* (RW). My thanks go to all the editors of this journal for continuing to provide this resource from 1911 to the present day. Searching the RW over Pitman’s lifetime and beyond would have taken at least twice as long without the help of Dianne Martin of the Hereford Guild who thoroughly and thoughtfully searched about half the issues between 1911 and 1967 – i.e. 628 issues amounting to around 20,000 pages! Not only that but she helped with research in Aberavon and in the Llandaff and Monmouth Diocesan Association Library. She also critically read through the first draught of the book and first suggested the title, “An Unassuming Genius”, which was a term used to describe A.J. Pitman by Eric Critchley which she found in a report to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR) in *The Ringing World*. I would also like to thank Dorothy Hurn (Jack Pitman’s daughter), who put up with and cheerfully answered my countless questions about her father over many hours. Thanks also to Ruth James, who collected a veritable dossier of information, a deluge of photographs about her grandfather and acted as an intermediary with the whole family. I would also like to thank all the Pitman grandchildren, who provided me directly or indirectly with memories, photographs and artefacts: Josie Morris, Michael Pitman, Daisy Bickley, Dorothy Bowles, David Pitman, Pat Pitman, Sheila Pitman, Judith Pooley, Geoffrey Henderson, Russell Henderson and Joan Davies, who now lives in Australia but who furnished me with many details about life with Jack Pitman during his wife’s long illness. Many others have helped and contributed to this work and these I list below. I have tried to include everyone, but if I have forgotten you, please don’t think I am not grateful for your contribution.

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1. The Pitman Family Tree
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 m
 Emma Fry (1835-1873)

 Albert Edward Pitman (1866-1937) m
 Ellen Hooper (1880-1948)

 Albert John Pitman (1887-1966) m
 Sarah Ann Evelyn Vines (1888-1953)

 Eva Pitman (b1889) m (b1920)

 Sidney Pitman (1916-1972) m (1)
 Lillian McNeil m (2)
 Patricia Green

 Pat Pitman (1937-) m (1)
 Daphne m (2)
 Audrey

 Sheila Pitman (1938-) m Barry Smith

 Judith Pitman (1949-) m Robert pooley

 Ruth Henderson (1943-) m Denis James

 Geoffrey Henderson (1944-) m Vera Hare

 Russell Henderson (1946-) m (1)
 Jennifer Lewis m (2)
 Rhiannon Lewis

 Beatrice Pitman (1918-1999) m (1)
 Angus Henderson m (2)
 Noel Preston

 David Pitman (1936-) m (1)
 Daphne m (2)
 Audrey

 Pat Pitman (1937-) m (1)
 David Bacon m (2)
 Colin Richardson

 Sheila Pitman (1938-) m Barry Smith

 Judith Pitman (1949-) m Robert pooley

 Ruth Henderson (1943-) m Denis James

 Geoffrey Henderson (1944-) m Vera Hare

 Russell Henderson (1946-) m (1)
 Jennifer Lewis m (2)
 Rhiannon Lewis
Chapter 1

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

This is the story of an ordinary man who possessed an extraordinary talent, a bell ringer whose work made a major contribution to the pattern of ringing enjoyed by thousands of ringers at the beginning of the 21st Century. That man was Albert John Pitman. He had very little education, his formal schooling being completed by the age of 12. He didn’t go to Oxford or Cambridge or any other university, but worked for most of his life as a railwayman, often on shift work.

There is a small village in Somerset called Woolavington, not far from Weston-super-Mare. Census reports show that the surname Pitman is very common in that area. Among these was A.J. Pitman’s father, Albert Edward Pitman, born on 23rd January 1866. His middle name poses a rather curious unsolved riddle. There is no doubt that he was registered and baptised Albert Edward and his family still refer to him by that name. However, his gravestone records his name as Albert Edmund, presumably a rather enduring error!
2. The Grave Stone of Albert E. Pitman and his wife Ellen.

*Author’s Collection.*

He was one of 10 children, 7 boys and 3 girls and worked alongside his brothers on his father’s nine-acre farm at Woolavington. His father, John Pitman born in 1831, married Emma Fry, a local girl, in 1857 and died in 1885. His death shook the Pitman family to its very foundations. The farm passed to the eldest son, Walter James Pitman, who decided to sell it. As a result all the other sons were unemployed and had to find other work quickly. To do this they had to move away from Woolavington. Three of the brothers, including Jack’s father, travelled to Quebec in Canada to seek work and some time later one of their sisters, Fanny also went to live in Canada.

3. Jack Pitman’s father, Albert E. Pitman, front row left and brothers at about the time they emigrated to Canada.

*Pitman Family collection.*
However, Albert Edward returned after a short time to Britain, settling in Bridgend, South Wales, where he and his wife-to-be, Ellen Hooper, were married on 26th March 1887 at Bridgend Registry Office. Ellen was also from Somerset having been born in Chillington on 5 March 1869. On 22nd September 1887, the year of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee, Albert John Pitman was born in Cowbridge Road, Bridgend.

![Cowbridge Road Bridgend, Jack Pitman’s place of birth, c. 1913.](image)

The family remained in Bridgend for only a short time, during which Jack’s father worked as a gamekeeper at Cwrt Coleman, one of the estates belonging to the very prominent and wealthy Llewellyn family. The estate had been bought in 1837 by Hopkin and Catherine Llewellyn, but they were unable to occupy the property for quite a long time because of legal complications and by the time these were overcome in 1840, Hopkin Llewellyn had died. The family continued to live at Cwrt Coleman until Catherine’s death in 1848, when their son, William Llewellyn succeeded to the title. The Llewellyn family were to have a continuing influence on Jack Pitman’s life for many years to come.

Thus his childhood stretched throughout the remainder of the Victorian era. During this period, Britain was benefiting from the flowering of a wide range of arts and sciences. The country was experiencing an unprecedented period of rapid change which continued into the Edwardian era, only to come to a shuddering halt with the onset of the First World War in 1914. Jack would have believed, along with all Victorian little boys that Great Britain’s armies had never lost a battle; though the Boer War appeared to threaten this record – even if there had ever been any truth in it. He would have marvelled at the first motorcars, he would see at firsthand the increasing industrialisation and the grime and filth which this brought to the neighbouring town of Port Talbot. He would have been taught that he was lucky to have been born in the World’s greatest empire, The British Empire.
He was also able to benefit from earlier advances in education as the country moved to universal provision of schooling up to the age of 12.

Throughout his life, he was known to his close friends as “Jack”, formally referred to in ringing circles as “Pitman” and in peal publications as Albert J. Pitman. His name often appeared, and still does, in his published compositions as A.J. Pitman, while *The Ringing World* frequently referred to him as Mr A.J. Pitman of Port Talbot. However, throughout her life, his mother always called him John – and expected others to do the same!

Around 1889, Albert Edward and his family moved to the tiny village of Baglan, about 20 miles from Bridgend, where they lived at 2, Old Clay Mill Cottage. Here, their income was supplemented by taking in a “boarder”, M.H. Davies, listed as a charwoman from Cwmavon in the 1891 Census Return. Jack Pitman’s daughter Dorothy (Dolly) remembers clearly the large garden with a stream running through it and the fruit trees and vegetable patch. A Clay Mill Cottage survives to this day (5), though in a much altered form.

![Clay Mill Cottage, Baglan today.](Author’s Collection)

Until the early 20th Century, Baglan was a small farming village situated between Aberavon in the east and Briton Ferry in the west, about 2 miles from Port Talbot along what is now the A48 Cardiff to Swansea road. It grew up around a number of farms and country houses such as Baglan Hall, nestling beneath the hills that border the coastal plain of the Bristol Channel and which climb to about 800ft above Baglan Moors. A hundred years ago, the village, overlooking Baglan Bay, would have afforded wonderful views across these moors to the Bristol Channel and the Estuary of the River Neath. With very little traffic, a very small population and a largely farming community, this tranquil village was attractive to prosperous landowners who wanted their homes to be in the most beautiful settings. At the end of the 19th Century, young Jack Pitman and his friends had ample opportunity
to roam in the hills above Baglan exploring the beautiful countryside along the valley of Baglan Brook.

At the turn of the 20th Century, not only had Baglan Hall, the Llewellyn family’s mansion, been built here, but also Baglan House, seat of the Earls of Jersey. Baglan Lodge, owned by the Rev. Edward Thomas had been constructed early in the 19th Century as had the curiously named Baglan Cottage, which was in fact a large house, used as a “dower house” for the Llewellyn family. Sadly, all this was soon to change.

By the middle of the 20th Century all the magnificent great country houses in Baglan had been demolished and their beautiful grounds destroyed as large housing estates were constructed, sprawling up the hills to the north. Today the view from Baglan has been completely transformed; the formerly water-logged moors teeming with wildlife are covered with houses and the former wetlands beyond became occupied by a chemical plant. At the time of writing the chemical plant has been dismantled and replaced by a gas-fired power station and other industrial units.

Once more, Pitman senior was employed by the Llewellyn family, this time as a general labourer on the Baglan Hall Estate, owned by Griffith Llewellyn. Much later he became a road-sweeper, sweeping the road from Baglan to Port Talbot (about 1.5 miles) daily; out on one side and back on the other! A recent pictorial history of the village of Baglan has a photograph of the elder Pitman standing with his road brush at the Baglan end, showing the striking resemblance between father and son in later years.

6. Albert E. Pitman working as a road sweeper in the 1920’s. *Copyright Eben Jones, Baglan.*

On 30th July 1889 Jack’s sister Eva Emma was born at Purtington in Somerset, near Chillington, the village of Ellen’s birth. Possibly she went back to her parental home for support at the birth of the baby.
In 1844, Pant y Swan School had been set up in Baglan as a “National School” in a little house called Swan Cottage, with around 90 pupils who were all taught in one room. As a result of the 1870 Education Act, a new 900 square foot school with two classrooms was built in 1873. The smaller room was for infants and the larger, partitioned to provide two classrooms, for the older children. Once more the Llewellyn family touched the life of young Jack Pitman, when they invested the very large sum of £1,680 in Government Consolidated Stock, usually referred to as Consols, which yielded sufficient money each year to provide a useful income for day-to-day running costs of the school. The headmistress, Miss Mary A. Lewis had been appointed in 1882 and remained at the school until 1901. It was to this small school, catering for children up to the age of 12, that 4-year old Jack was sent, followed by his sister Eva two years later. The Pitman family
lived so near to the school that they would have been able to hear the bell in a small turret on the roof being rung before they set off for school. Jack remained at the school until he was 12. On the day he left, his teacher told him that there would be no point in him staying any longer, since he could teach him no more! An early indication, perhaps, of the intellect which was later to be applied to method composition and contributed so much to the development of peal ringing? The photograph, 9, with the school in the background, taken in 1891 shows little Jack Pitman with his other school companions, and Miss Lewis the headmistress.


The school building is still there and looks much the same, though it ceased to function as a school in 1951 and is now used as a second Church for the village, having been dedicated to St Baglan in 1959.

10. Jack Pitman’s school today. *Author’s Collection.*
We do not have any details about Jack Pitman’s experiences at school, but we can get some idea of what it was like to be a little boy at the Baglan Church School in the 1920’s from recent descriptions by Harry Barnsley, a well-known local author who attended the school. It is unlikely that life at the school had changed greatly in the intervening 30 years. In the early 1890’s children coming to the school for the first time at the age of about 4 would have immediately received a thorough inspection of their underclothes and hair before being allowed into their classroom. In class, when he learned to write, Jack and his fellow pupils would have used a slate pencil on a slate block. The Llewellyns of Baglan Hall not only donated money to the school, they also took a continuing interest in the day-to-day life of the school. For example, each afternoon, along with all the other children, Jack and Eva were each given a bun provided by Mrs Madelina Llewellyn. She paid frequent visits to inspect the work of the school, to decide suitable punishments for children who were caught, for example, “scrumping” apples from the grounds of Baglan Hall or to attend events such as concerts and plays and to present prizes at the end of the term. Boys and girls were taught together in the same classroom, but at playtime the sexes were rigorously separated by a fence across the playground and any boy found in the girls’ part of the yard was severely punished. The most common punishments were beatings of variable severity depending on the seriousness of the offence or humiliation such as making the guilty pupil stand on a chair in front of the whole class throughout a lesson. Toilet arrangements were primitive to say the least. Until 1923 the school had no piped water. The following description by Harry Barnsley illustrates the facilities “enjoyed” by Jack Pitman and his fellow pupils at the school:

The boys approached [the toilets] by descending a flight of stone steps into a sunken area well below the level of the school yard; there were two closets provided with half doors, with seats constructed in the form of wooden boxes, with a round hole in the top; beneath the seat was a galvanised bucket, the rear wall being provided with a small trap-door to facilitate its removal for emptying; a urinal was provided by the simple expedient of tarring one wall of the open space.

The school was suffocatingly hot in summer and desperately cold in winter. Despite all this, it is likely that Jack Pitman, like Harry Barnsley, would have had happy memories of his school years. It was very much a community school and more friendly and welcoming than many of the larger schools which grew up later.
After he left school at the age of 12 in 1899, the influence of the Llewellyn family continued when he worked alongside his father on the Llewellyns’ Baglan Hall Estate. There he remained for the next four years until he was 16.

In 1903 he began a life-long career on the railways, starting work at the Port Talbot Shunting Yards.

Throughout his working life, shift work was an inevitable feature of his employment. This was necessary to cover the full 24 hours which consisted of three 8-hour shifts, 2.00 pm to 10.00 pm, 10.00 pm to 6.00 am and 6.00 am to 2.00 pm. Typically, a worker could be on any one of these shifts for a period of time, followed by a rest period and then he would have a different shift pattern. Although many employees got used to this way of working, others found it gruelling and difficult to get used to. Nevertheless, Jack Pitman did well to get this job which would have been regarded as an excellent career move at the time. It promised, and was, a “job for life”. He was employed in a crucially important industry with a high reputation and working in shifts all his life did not appear to cause him many problems, though it sometimes limited his peal ringing.

He started work on the railways just two years after Queen Victoria’s funeral when they had played a major role in carrying her body from Portsmouth, where it had been brought by boat from the Isle of Wight, to London. What is more, he was joining the Great Western Railway, probably the most respected railway company in the country whose initials were often interpreted as meaning “God’s Wonderful Railway” because of its high standards. The Great Western Railway Company was originally set up in 1833 to provide a track between London and Bristol. This it did with input from the great civil engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who was appointed by the GWR at the tender age of 27. By 1855, the line had been extended into a network, which included Port Talbot, and which ran down to Milford Haven in South West Wales. A crucial improvement was the construction of The Severn Tunnel in 1886, a tremendous engineering feat, which passes under the River Severn avoiding a long diversion via Gloucester. Around Port Talbot the network included branch lines extending up into the South Wales Valleys, owned by a variety of different companies.

Until 1891, Baglan was not a parish, but part of the Parish of Aberavon and Baglan. During Jack’s childhood most of the small population of Baglan, would have been regular church-goers. The present church was preceded by a much older and smaller building holding about 50 people which was largely destroyed by fire in 1954. The ruins of this ancient building still exist though in a very sorry state, despite many attempts to find a way of preserving them for posterity.
The original church was dedicated to St Baglan and the earliest part of it, the west end, has a 12th century 2-bell bellcote, from which the bells have long since been removed. Legend has it that the earliest church on the site was built by St Baglan himself, a disciple of St Illtyd, making this a sacred area since the 6th century AD. With its elevated position tucked into the wooded hill above Baglan Brook, it must at one time have been a beautiful sight.

The church and churchyard appear to have attracted the interest of the Rev. Thomas Mason, a poet and friend of Thomas Gray (of Gray’s Elegy) (*The Story of Baglan*, A. Leslie Evans). Mason often visited the Rev. William Thomas, 1734-1799, Vicar of Baglan at Vernon House; another of the fine houses in Baglan. During one of these visits he is thought to have composed an elegy to St Baglan Church and Churchyard. A verse from the elegy distinguishes it by referring to St Baglan Church (which has no tower) and not the nearby Briton Ferry Church (which has a large embattled tower) is as follows:

> Deep in that dell the humble fane appears,  
> Where prayers of humble best to heaven aspire;  
> No tower embattled, no proud spire it rears,  
> A moss-grown corslet decks its lowly choir.

The growth of the village in the 19th century meant that St Baglan’s church became too small for the congregation. At this point the crucial role of the Llewellyn family in the future of local bellringing once more became
apparent when a new church was founded, funded by Griffith and Madelina Llewellyn. Building started in 1875 and was completed in 1882; Griffith Llewellyn having insisted it must be built in precisely 7 years! The cost was about £15,000 and it was dedicated to St Catharine of Alexandria (290-307 AD). This is the same Catharine who was tortured by a wheel with deadly spikes, then martyred and after whom the Catharine Wheel firework is named. The architect was John Pritchard (1817-86) and this is generally accepted as one of the finest examples of his work. The new church was built just a few yards down the hill from the St Baglan’s in a lovely setting alongside Baglan Brook. It is an excellent example of late 19th century church building and a worthy replacement for the old church. The following is a passage about St Catharine’s Church, Baglan from the “Faber Guide to Victorian Churches”:  

Above the spreading suburbia of Port Talbot rises the pinnacled spire - strong but elegant- of John Pritchard’s masterpiece and swan-song. Consecrated in 1882, it was paid for by his cousin Griffith Llewellyn of Baglan Hall. In Geometric Decorated style, the exterior is red stone with refined detailing. The interior, which has a passage-aisle on the North, is astonishingly rich and colourful....

It has a tower with a steeple and soon after its completion in 1882 it appears that two bells were installed by Taylors of Loughborough. In 1889, the smaller bell was recast as the treble and the other used as the tenor for the ring of six bells which are rung regularly today. Not surprisingly five of the bells have the name of Llewellyn on them and shows Llewellyn children playing around the new bells before they were installed.
The Llewellyn children with the newly cast bells.  
*Courtesy Andrew Vollans, Port Talbot Historical Society.*

Some time after this Jack’s father was called into service to ring, because of the need to build up a band for the new bells. It is difficult to discern how far Jack’s father progressed, but at that time it is unlikely that any more than Plain Bob and/or Grandsire Doubles would have been rung at St Catharine’s. Eventually he rang 6 peals in his lifetime frequently ringing the tenor to Doubles methods, usually Grandsire, though he also rang the tenor to at least one peal of Grandsire Triples.

It was against this background that young Jack Pitman learned to ring at St Catharine’s Church, Baglan in 1899 at the age of 12. It is very likely that his father taught him to ring, having himself learned to ring at Woolavington. In the late 19th century Woolavington Church had a ring of 5 bells, one was dated about 1400 and two were cast by the Salisbury Foundry, one by Sampson and the other by George Purdue, 1611. The other two dated 1691 were cast by Thomas Purdue. Today Woolavington Church has a ring of 8 bells. The five bells were augmented to six in 1953. The other two were installed by Whitechapel in 1986/7. Thus if Jack’s father had learned to ring at Woolavington, he would probably have only rung 5-bell methods before he moved to Baglan.

If young Jack Pitman had continued to ring exclusively at Baglan, he would have progressed no further than Grandsire Doubles and Minor methods. Little is known about the original first band that was started at Baglan. It is possible that its development was assisted by the ringers from nearby St Mary’s, Aberavon. At that time most bands would have been all-male, though soon the two well-known local ringers, the aptly named Mrs Bellringer and Lucy Thomas joined the Baglan band. Mr and Mrs Bellringer lived for many years in a cottage to across the road from the church.
In those days much was made of the camaraderie in the ringing chamber amongst the men and over the next 30 – 40 years significant opposition would arise in a section of the ringing fraternity to the whole idea of female ringers. Jack and the other young ringers would have been subjected to a very strict regime and their progression would be governed by objectives set by the tower captain. Mistakes in the ringing would have been treated intolerantly and pointed out very quickly and firmly by shouting from one or more of the other ringers. Young ringers would have to be “seen and not heard” and would be expected to join in a “touch” only if they were invited to do so by their elders.
Chapter 2

FOUNDATIONS

By the turn of the 20th Century, Aberavon, a small town on the west bank and close to the mouth of the river Afan was growing rapidly and becoming indistinguishable from Port Talbot, the new and expanding industrial settlement on the East bank named after the very rich and influential Talbot family who were great local benefactors. The village of Aberavon had been of some importance for centuries because it was at a strategically placed river-crossing. The ecclesiastical entity of the parish is believed to have come into existence in 1199 and parishioners held an 800th Year celebration of the formation of the parish in 1999. In 1921 the towns became one and the Borough of Port Talbot was born. At the end of the 20th Century a similar fate befell Port Talbot itself, when local government reorganisation merged it with the neighbouring town of Neath to become Neath Port Talbot.

By the age of 19 Jack Pitman, now a regular and dedicated ringer, had met Sarah Ann Evelyn Vines, also 19. They were married on 20th May 1907 at Holy Cross Church, Port Talbot. Evelyn was the daughter of an engine driver who had been killed in a railway accident in Port Talbot in 1901, aged 34. The family had moved to Port Talbot when Sarah was 5 years old. Interestingly there would have been no tower bells rung at Evelyn and Jack’s wedding since Holy Cross Church has neither bells nor tower.
14. Holy Cross Church Port Talbot, where Jack and Evelyn Pitman were married. *Author’s Collection.*

At the time of the wedding, his address was given as Rhodesia House, Baglan, but the happy couple moved into rooms in 5 Prior Street, Port Talbot, a very convenient walking distance for ringing at St Mary’s, Aberavon.

15. Prior Street, Aberavon, where Jack and Evelyn Pitman lived during the early years of their marriage. *Author’s Collection*

Evelyn (Selena) Vines, Jack’s mother-in-law, who had no “rank or profession” at the time of the marriage, lived at 20 Station Road, Port Talbot, the main shopping street and literally a stone’s throw from Prior Street. Mrs Vines later joined her daughter and son-in-law in their tiny house in Prior Street.
It is hard for us to appreciate that, for all our problems today, our lives are immeasurably easier than those of even our more recent ancestors. Death among the young through illness is today comparatively rare but at the beginning of the last century, this was far from true. Death in childhood was in a sense an expected event. So it was that in 1913 tragedy struck the Pitmans’ married life. Their first-born son Henry (Harry), born in 1907, died at the age of 6. It appears that his death was caused by “fever”, and it has been suggested that the most likely cause of death was measles or chickenpox. Jack and Evelyn went on to have a further 5 children, Selena (Nell), born two years after Henry, in 1909, died in 1967, Reginald, born 1911 died in 1952. the only currently surviving child, Dorothy Millicent (Dolly) was born on 2nd October 1914. Two years later, in 1916, Sidney was born and he died in 1972. Beatrice (Betty), the youngest, was born in 1918 and died only recently in 1999.

St Mary’s Church, Aberavon is within walking distance of Baglan and indeed as we have seen, up until 1891, Baglan was part of the Aberavon Parish. Young Baglan ringers wanting to expand their horizons by ringing on 8 bells were attracted to St Mary’s, an active tower with a fine ring of 8. There Jack Pitman learnt Grandsire and Stedman Triples which were by far the most commonly rung methods on 8 bells at the time. As he developed his interest and ringing skills, he spent more and more time ringing at St Mary’s, becoming a member of tower in 1909 and remaining a member for the rest of his life.

St Mary’s was consecrated in 1859 and the architects were Pritchard and Seddon, the same Pritchard who designed St Catharine’s Baglan. The previous 12th Century church was demolished in 1858 because of dilapidation enhanced by the ravages of frequent flooding from the nearby River Avon. The centre of Aberavon is only a mile or so from the sea and the river was prone to bursting its banks, particularly when there was a coincidence of very heavy rain, high tides and a following wind.11 12
The old church had only a small tower with 2 bells. When it was demolished, one bell, tied to a tree, was retained to call people to church. Thomas Bleddyn, a local man who watched the removal of the bell composed a poem about his thoughts as the it was removed and his memories about the bell as he listened to it being tolled when he was a boy. Eventually, when it was no longer needed, the bell was taken down from the tree and placed in the old vestry under a table. There it remained, until Willie Morris a local man helped his father, former verger and sexton of St Mary’s, to take it from the vestry to be melted down at a foundry at Aberavon docks, despite it being an ancient bell cast in 1414! 

The tower of the new church was completed in 1870 with a ring of 5 steel bells installed by Naylor and Vickers and Co. They were paid for by public subscription and dedicated to Dr Hopkin Llewellyn Prichard (a nephew of the Baglan Llewellyns) who died in 1870. The bells were replaced in 1893 by a 16 cwt ring of 8 cast by Taylor’s of Loughborough. It is recorded that the steel bells were “disposed of outside the district”. Unfortunately, only 5 years after installation in 1898, the new bells also had to be removed as the new tower began to develop a distinct list, probably due to subsidence. Subsequently major engineering work had to be carried out to deal with the problem. While building work was underway, the bells were stored in a building next to the church. Raymond Preece a long time member of St Mary’s Church, records that local lads discovered where the bells were kept and were caught throwing stones at them! Over the many years since they were finally installed, the bells have often been praised as a fine ring. At the time of writing, they are still in good condition, though they are no longer rung regularly, but are occasionally pealed and used as a venue for ringing meetings. The first peal on the bells, Grandsire Triples, was rung for the West Wales Association and conducted by James Hoare in January 1904. A marble plaque in the tower records the event.

17. St Mary’s Church Aberavon at the end of the 19th Century. 
_Courtesy Andrew Vollans, Port Talbot Historical Society._

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We have already seen that the Llewellyns of Baglan Hall were employers of two generations of the Pitman family and funded the construction of Baglan Church. Madelina Llewellyn was also patron of the living of Aberavon, donating an east window and reredos. She also funded a building specifically for services in Welsh, St Teilo’s, adjacent to St Mary’s. The Llewellyn family also had a significant financial input into the construction of St Mary’s, for example much of the stone came from a quarry which they owned.

At the end of the 19th Century during Jack Pitman’s childhood, the organisation of ringing in England and Wales saw rapid and far reaching changes. Perhaps the most important was the formation of “territorial associations and guilds” which have remained broadly the same for the last 100 years. Most have been based on dioceses, or occasionally county boundaries. Also it is not uncommon for an association or guild to encompass two or more dioceses. Perhaps inevitably, at the end of the 19th Century, the formation of the territorial societies triggered a debate about the formation of a “National Association”. While the idea attracted widespread support, there was little agreement about the exact nature of such an association.

Arthur Percival Heywood, distinguished ringer, composer, conductor, engineer and churchman, was involved in the discussions and had become frustrated by the lack of progress. In a letter to *The Bell News* of 2nd February 1889, he invited “the chief ringing officer” or their appointee of every County or Diocesan Association to a working dinner in Birmingham in honour of the 80th birthday of Henry Johnson, a famous Birmingham ringer and composer, who was born in 1809 and died 1890 (the dinner is still held by the St Martin’s, Birmingham, Guild). This turned out to be an extremely busy meeting to which Heywood put forward 5 resolutions, one of which was “…….. that great benefit would accrue to the Exercise if a committee, consisting of one or more selected members from each association, could meet from time-to-time to consider and decide such ringing matters as are the cause of perplexity.” This was agreed by all delegates and was also subsequently accepted by all guilds and associations.

Thus after further discussion, the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR) was born and met for the first time on Easter Tuesday 1891 at the Inns of Court Hotel in London. It is not surprising that Heywood was elected as the first president and F.E. Dawe was elected the first secretary. Since then the CCCBR has met annually, the only exceptions being 1916 and 1917 in the First World War and 1940 to 1944 in the Second World War. The meetings have been held in many parts of England, though the CCCBR has visited Wales three times Cardiff 1962, Caerleon 1993,
Llandudno 2003 and the Republic of Ireland, Dublin 1998 once. It held its Centenary Meeting in London in 1991. The CCCBR has performed an important role in the rules pertaining to the structure and validity of methods, the nature of a peal and hence on the composition of peals. It was to have an influence on Jack Pitman’s activities as a composer and he was a member for a significant portion of his ringing life.

Jack Pitman was born and lived for most of his life within the area covered by the Llandaff Diocesan Association of Church Bell Ringers (LDA). This organisation began, when, on 13th October 1893 a meeting of interested bell ringers called at Llandaff by Mr Evan Davies discussed the possibility of forming a society of local ringers. The outcome was the formation of the LDA. At the time the Llandaff Diocese largely consisted of the counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth. The first President of the LDA was the Bishop of Llandaff, the Master, Minor Canon Downing and the Secretary, Evan Davies, local schoolmaster, a very active South Wales’ ringer and founding inspirational pioneer of the LDA. Evan Davies was succeeded by John W. Jones, in the year that Jack Pitman learnt to ring, 1899. Davies was a prodigiously hard worker for the Association, remaining secretary for most of Pitman’s ringing life, retiring after 46 years in 1945! A rather curious arrangement operated from the formation of the LDA until 1915, in that Rev. L. Connop-Price was joint-secretary with J. W. Jones until the former became an army chaplain. As well being a very industrious and genial man, J.W. Jones was also a keen cricketer and played for his county. In 1921 he was said to have seen every test match (in England) over the previous 25 yrs.18 19

The first 15 years of peal ringing in the LDA saw a slow start e.g. by 1909 only 69 peals had been rung for the Association, mostly Grandsire Triples and Plain Bob Major. Over this period the Cardiff area was the main centre of ringing, though Bridgend, where Pitman was born, was developing a reputation for ringing peals of Minor. Jack Pitman became a member of the LDA in 1914, along with other members of the Aberavon Band and played a distinguished part in its work throughout his life. This followed the reported “re-joining” of Aberavon Tower itself at a LDA quarterly meeting, when the band was also congratulated for ringing their first peal.

In 1914 Pitman rang and conducted his first peal. This is a major achievement in the life of a ringer, and it is quite unusual for a person ringing his/her first peal to conduct it as well. The peal consisted of 5040 Grandsire Triples and was rung at Aberavon at about the average pace for the bells and completed after 2h 57min.
ABERAVON, GLAMORGANSHIRE
THE LLANDAFF DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION
On Saturday, June 13, 1914, in Two Hours and Fifty Seven Minutes
AT THE CHURCH OF ST MARY
A PEAL OF 5040 GRANDSIRE TRIPLES
PARKER’S SIX-PART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ernest Joachim</td>
<td>TREBLE</td>
<td>16 1/4 cwt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Frankom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter J. Nurton</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>David Frankom</td>
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<td>William Williams</td>
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<td>John Cox</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Albert J. Pitman</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Wetherby</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Conducted by Albert J. Pitman

This was the first peal for all the band. All the ringers except John Cox belong to the Aberavon Band.

Ernest Stitch who featured for many years as peal companion and steadfast friend of Jack Pitman until his death in 1963, was not a member of the 1914 band, as he did not move to Aberavon until 1915.

Jack Pitman was 26 when, on 4th August 1914, the First World War began. This event was to change Britain for ever and bell ringing was also to be deeply affected. At the start of the War, Britain, unique among European countries had no conscription policies, relying entirely on volunteers. This is not to say the Government was unconcerned about the issue. Immediately Lord Kitchener was appointed Secretary of State for War he issued recruiting posters with the famous slogan “Your King and Country Need You”, featuring Kitchener’s face and his finger pointing out from the poster at potential recruits. There was also considerable peer-pressure brought to bear on young men to join up. Popular tunes were designed to encourage volunteering, such as the song: We don’t want to lose you, but we think you ought to go. Until 1916, this policy was fairly successful and some 3 million recruits volunteered for the forces. Although in 1915 there were 700,000 volunteers, there were also many thousands of casualties and the numbers recruiting were insufficient to replenish losses.

There must have been unbearable pressure on those, like Jack Pitman who worked in jobs essential to the war effort, defined largely as those working in productive and essential service industries; including clergymen! Soon, however, volunteer numbers declined sharply to a mere trickle. The crisis was compounded by losses sustained by the British in battles outside Europe but in 1915, the Government still remained keen to maintain a voluntary system, relying on persuasion rather than coercion.

However, in an attempt to strengthen the persuasion process, a system of “attesting” men between 18 and 41 was set up. This meant that they would agree to enlist when required. Those excluded were men in “reserved” professions, viz. coal miners, munitions workers, merchant seamen, and public utility employees, including railway workers. However the Attesting
system was regarded by the public as a kind of moral blackmail and the initiative foundered. The Military Service Bill was introduced into the House of Commons on 5\textsuperscript{th} January 1916. This was not universally supported, resulted in the resignation of the Home Secretary and threatened resignation by several other ministers. Nevertheless, the bill was passed and compulsory military service became law. Conscription included all single men and childless widowers aged between 18 and 40. Amendments followed in April 1917 when men who had left the military because they were wounded in battle were medically re-examined and a satisfactory result would allow them to be re-conscripted. The Government also revised the reserved occupations list. 1918 saw further extension of the Act, providing the government with discretionary powers to review exemptions from military service for reserved occupations. By the end of the war conscription had been extended to men aged 17 to 51.

From the beginning of the war a campaign began, partly by young women belonging to a group called the “Order of the White Feather” aiming to shame men in the street wearing civilian clothes and not uniform and who were perceived not to have volunteered for military service. These women accosted such men and thrust white feathers into their hands as a mark of cowardice. As the war continued, this practice became much more common throughout the country. Many of those who found themselves victims of this phenomenon were conscientious objectors. These were men whose pacifist views would not allow them to volunteer or accept conscription into the forces and some of these openly relished the receipt of the feathers as a badge for sticking to their strongly held beliefs. Mistakes were often made and the insult resonated through families of victims over many, many years; men who were in the forces and wearing civilian clothes and those in reserved occupations were presented with white feathers, as happened to Jack Pitman. The railways were under government control throughout the war and played a crucial part in the war effort, so that railway workers were essential to provision of materials and supplies. Without them the war simply could not have been fought. Pitman, like many in his position was devastated by receiving white feathers – an event which has become part of Pitman family lore and still remembered and resented by his surviving daughter, some 85 years later. Eventually the government recognised the morale-sapping nature of this behaviour for those in essential industries and issued them with distinguishing badges with words “King and Country” on them.

The number of peals rung per year published in \textit{The Ringing World} has been used over the years as one of the tests of the health of ringing. In 1912 2329 peals were rung – a record year; in 1913 the number increased to 2359 and at the start of 1914 it looked as if the upward trend would continue. The
week before the declaration of war the peal columns contained around the average number of peals but in the following issue, a week later, there was only a handful. The peal total for 1914 was 1415, a decrease of around 1000 on 1913. Virtually all peal ringing ceased from August to December 1914. A small annual number of peals was maintained throughout the war. Unlike the Second World War, there was no government ringing ban, though there was an embargo on ringing bells after dusk. It is significant that there appears to have been an increase in the number of quarter peals, almost exclusively rung for Sunday Service. Views differed among ringers about the appropriate amount of ringing. At the beginning of the war there was a tendency among many to eschew all ringing, including practices and guild meetings. Because of this, *The Ringing World* called for the resumption of Sunday Service ringing. The mood gradually changed and although some towers didn’t ring, ringing for Sunday Services and at many ringing meetings resumed.

The reasons for the virtual cessation of peal ringing were probably complex, though no doubt in large part due to the increasing numbers of ringers called to military service. It was clear that ringers concluded that there would be no benefit to the war effort if ringing stopped altogether and in any case as the numbers of ringers declined, there was a need to hold practices for training ringers to support Sunday service ringing. There was also a feeling among people that the population’s morale could be maintained as news about the war got worse if everyday life could be kept as “normal” as possible and this was encouraged by the government. Many also felt that bells had a special role in the community, in that the sound of their music represented a message of hope at a time when hope was hard to come by.

Hitherto ringing had been a largely male occupation but as the war proceeded, as in other walks of life, women began to take over from the men who went to war. An example was at St. Peter, Portishead, where there was a band entirely made up of ladies (unheard of in those days). Indeed, in January 1914, these ladies rang a peal of Grandsire Triples for the Ladies’ Guild and The Bath and Wells Diocesan Association, the conductor, was Doris Coles, who was only 15 years old! It was the first peal ever by 8 ladies from the same tower. The peal was rung half-muffled in memory of Miss Margery F. Sampson, who had also been a ringer. Interestingly, in the LDA just before the War, Miss Ethel Pacey (who later became Mrs Fred Hannington) became the first lady to ring a peal for the Association; she rang the 5th to Grandsire Doubles in December 1913 at Rhymney. This phenomenon was to change the Exercise for ever and for the better.

On the other hand, sadly, we also read of the devastation of two churches in 1914, at Breadsall in Derbyshire and Wargrave in Berkshire, burnt down by
members of the suffragette movement. A photograph in *The Ringing World*
shows the bells at Breadsall lying forlornly on the ground where they had
fallen from the tower of the burnt out church. Meanwhile, ringers were
encouraged to contribute to the Prince of Wales Fund for the Relief of
Distress. At this time there were calls for the institution of a “Ringers’
Roll of Honour” for those who fell in the War. It still exists, updated to this
day and overseen with great care and dedication by a special committee of
the CCCBR.

Among those connected with bell ringing who were inevitably affected by
the War were the bell founders. There were many more founders in those
days than there are now. One of these was John Taylor and Company, now
called Taylor Eayre and Smith who, following a decline in demand for
bells, converted much of its effort and equipment to producing products for
the war effort, such as howitzer shells. The loss of young lives due to War
directly affected the Taylor family who themselves lost three sons and three
nephews in action. The heaviest of the bells in Loughborough Memorial
Carillon was cast in their memory and inscribed with their names. Despite
the concentration on war-work, the Foundry did in fact manage to cast a
number of bells during the First World War.

In 1914 and for much of 1915 the nation thought that it was most likely
that the war would be over quite soon and there was much talk of an early
victory. As 1915 progressed and casualties numbers mounted, optimism
waned and the nation braced itself for a much longer conflict; however,
there remained an unflinching belief in ultimate victory. The privations
visited on the population by the war became harsher and inevitably this was
also felt by the ringing community. Then, towards the end of 1917,
preparations were begun to celebrate victory in France by the ringing of
bells.

In 1917 there were suggestions in the press that travel should not be
undertaken unless it was absolutely necessary, so the AGM of the LDA in
Cardiff saw fewer members present than usual. Among poignant reminders
that ringers were among those fighting was a postcard read out at the
meeting from a prisoner of war, Mr J. Pricket of Chepstow, who
acknowledged receipt with gratitude of a parcel sent by the LDA from
subscriptions collected at a previous meeting at Pentre. Such contacts with
serving military personnel appeared from time to time in the ringing
literature and several articles such as one in 1917 on “Peals: Their Length
and Starting Point” were published having been sent by W.A. Cave who
wrote from “A dugout in France”!

However, although the war was continuing unabated in early 1917, *The
Ringing World* in February 1917 published preparations for celebration of
victory, though they could not have known that the end of the war was still

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more than a year away. Also in that year restrictions on ringing “after dusk” were modified, allowing ringing up to 9.00 pm. In practice, this now meant that in addition to Sunday Service ringing, ringing practice could occur at the normal time.

Another consequence of the World War was the fact that in the USA *The Ringing World* became, by order of the Censor, a banned publication! This news came as a letter from Dr Nichols of Boston, who wrote:

*We are unable to get “The Ringing World” now, owing to the action of the Censor who thinks the figures contained in it may be a dangerous vehicle for German spies.*

*The Ringing World* itself was badly affected by the war. It became increasingly difficult to obtain paper in war time and to find sufficient copy to fill the space vacated by the lost peals columns. However, increasing numbers of quarter peals and other “miscellaneous performances” started to take up more space and letters containing lots of good ringing anecdotes also helped. The issue price was doubled in 1917, from 1d to 2d as readership declined and costs increased.

At last at the beginning of 1918 there were signs that the war would soon be over. Various well-written editorials in *The Ringing World* began to address the consequences of peace for ringing and ringers. Some guilds and associations had effectively closed down during the war and there was concern that ringing leadership had been sorely neglected. The gender balance in many towers and associations had radically changed and the huge loss of men through death and injury was bound to affect the Exercise radically. There was a feeling that these issues had to be addressed and careful plans drawn up ready for peace. In a sense, much of this is encapsulated in a footnote and comments on a peal rung at Llanbradach, a small mining village near Caerphilly. The peal was Grandsire Triples conducted by J.W. Jones on 2nd February 1918 and the footnote reads: “Rung with the bells half muffled as a tribute of respect to the memory of upwards of 60 men of this Parish……..who have fallen in the war.” And the comment on the peal: “The band includes several ladies who have taken the place of those gone to war.”

The optimism turned out to have been justified; the war ended on 11th November 1918. Now the ringing community had to face up to the reality of the post-war world, such as “hardware” problems in many parts of the country arising from, for example bells which had not been rung during the war, the consequent deterioration of ropes and the effects of accumulation of dirt, dust, grime and grease in the belfry, on bell fittings and in ringing chambers. Nevertheless, on the first Monday, after the end of the war the bells rang out across the country proclaiming at last the message of peace.
In some areas of ringing, the end of the war resulted in quite slow progress. This was particularly the case in the recovery of guilds and associations. Those that had effectively ceased operations during the war were generally those which only slowly returned to their pre-war levels of activity. However, peal ringing proved to be quite resilient and began to recover very quickly, thus at the beginning of 1919 *The Ringing World* received sufficient peal reports to fill two complete issues!

As the War progressed, his peal ringing was curtailed and Pitman began to occupy his time by composing peals. His first published attempt at peal composition appeared in July 1915. It was a 9-part variation of Grandsire Triples. Also in 1915, in September, he published a composition for a 12-part peal of Grandsire Triples with 300 calls. A week later, the following letter from W. Matthews was published:

*A COMPOSITION CLAIMED*

To the Editor
Sir,-The twelve part peal of Grandsire Triples under the name of A.J. Pitman, Port Talbot, which appeared in “The Ringing World” on September 18th belongs to me. It has been rung now in several variations and is published both in Snowdon’s Grandsire and the Central Council Collection of peals. – Yours faithfully,
43, Cross Street, Macclesfield.
W. MATTHEWS.

As an inexperienced composer, this must have come as rather a shock to Pitman. However, he decided to mount a robust defence and in the 18th October issue of *The Ringing World*, the following letter appeared:

*MR PITMAN’S PEAL OF GRANDSIRE*

To the Editor.
Dear Sir, - I beg to state that I have examined W. Matthews’ 12-part peal of Grandsire Triples, as it appears in “Central Council Collection of Peals,” and fail to see on what ground he claims my peal which appeared in your columns on September 18th. In the first place the calls in the two peals are arranged in a different order, and on the other hand the part bells in the peals are worked out on a different plan.
For instance, you will notice that he has one bell, in this case the 6th, doing the three-lead course through every part, while my plan has been to get two bells doing the three-lead course work alternately, in this case 5th in the first part and 7th in second part, and so on.

While he has a three-lead course bell in his peal to be the part bell, the part bell in my peal is not a three-lead course bell. I may mention that I have not seen Mr Matthews’ peal before, as only today I had a copy of the “Central Council Collection of Peals” in my possession for the first time. Under the circumstances mentioned, I fail to see how it can possibly be the same peal or variation of same. – Yours faithfully, A.J. PITMAN
5, Prior Street, Port Talbot, October 3rd, 1915

Matthews was not prepared to give in, and he countered the following week with a strongly worded letter using language and accusations which probably would not be found in The Ringing World in the early 21st Century!

THE CLAIM TO A PEAL OF GRANDSIRE

To the Editor

Dear Sir, - Mr Pitman, in your last issue, says he fails to see on what grounds I claim the 12-part peal of Grandsire Triples given in “The Ringing World” on September 18th. He says the two peals are arranged in a different order, and that the part bells are worked on a different plan. But who does the calling of peals belong to? The peal is given in Grandsire reprint page 69, with the 6th as observation. This I sent, together with variations with the 3rd and 5th as observation bells, to the late Mr Snowdon.

It is well known that a twelve part peal of Grandsire Triples can be arranged in a large number of ways, and this bare-faced method of peal snatching – exposed years ago by one of our prominent composers – which by transposing and substituting a few Singles, results in claiming, as their own, peals by other composers, in the present state of the Exercise, to be placed in the background. – Yours faithfully, 43, Cross Street, Macclesfield
W. Matthews
The bold type is mine. This is strong stuff and Matthews has made a very serious accusation in no uncertain terms. As one might expect, Pitman did not take this lying down. However, it was some weeks before he replied on 26th November 1915 as follows:

GRANDSIRE COMPOSITION

To the Editor
Dear Sir, - In reply to Mr Matthews’ letter, claiming my peal of Grandsire, I beg to state that he has no right to accuse me of peal snatching, seeing that he has not made his case. He suggests that my peal was obtained from his by a transposition of a few singles, but surely he can see it would require something more than that to obtain it. Anyhow, I would not care to try to get the peal that way. Such a lot of transpositions of calls would be necessary that it would be easier to go in for a new peal. Further Mr Matthews has not replied to the remarks in my last letter with regard to the working of the part bells. Therefore, I object to his claim and resent his remarks as to peal snatching. – Yours faithfully, 5, Prior Street, Port Talbot. A.J. PITMAN

This letter suggests that Pitman remained quite confident about his case and was convinced that his peal is fundamentally different from Matthews’, who is equally convinced that he is correct and we find the following in the next issue:

GRANDSIRE COMPOSITION

To the Editor
Dear Sir, - In Mr Pitman’s letter last week he either does not, or does not want to, understand variation. The peal under discussion was first composed in 1893 in six-part formation. Then I found it would run in twelve parts. This peal contains the following structure: 15 leads which form the Bob and Single peal and five “B” Blocks, and as long as this structure remains 12-part form the peal is bound to be the same or a variation, no matter how it is arranged. For further information I refer Mr Pitman to Grandsire reprint. – Thanking you in anticipation, Sutton, Macclesfield W. Matthews.
This must have hit Pitman like a bombshell! He suddenly realised that his peal must indeed be a variation of Matthews’ and, like the honest man that he was, he says so:

GRANDSIRE COMPOSITION

To the Editor
Dear Sir, - In reply to Mr Matthews’ letter last week, I beg to state that I have now come to the conclusion that the 12-part peal of Grandsire, published for me on September 17th, is a variation of his peal. I beg to apologise to Mr Matthews for the trouble he has been caused through this matter, but I may say I made my claim in all good faith. I am afraid that I had formed the wrong impression of a variation, and thank him for his explanation of same. Thanking you in anticipation. – yours faithfully,

A.J. PITMAN December 5th 1915

This marks the end of the exchange and it is likely that Jack Pitman learned from the experience. Pitman did not behave dishonestly in publishing the peal in the first place, he genuinely thought that his composition was original. He probably did not have access to a wide range of ringing and it is likely that with a growing family he would have had to think long and hard about the money he spent on what was merely a hobby.

He was a doughty young man and he did not leave the matter there; in the next issue of The Ringing World, he rather cheekily published a letter entitled: “TWO PEALS OF GRANDSIRE TRIPLES”. One of these compositions was entitled “A Variation of W. Matthew’s (sic) Six-Part Composition”! The other was an original Pitman 12-Part. It says a great deal for his confidence and persistence that he was prepared to publish these two compositions following such a bruising encounter. In 1917 he published two more compositions of Grandsire Triples, a 4-part in August and a 5-part in September. 1918 saw the appearance of another 5-part peal and later that year two more, a 6-part and a 3-part of Grandsire Triples.

Pitman had begun to consolidate his early career in composition in what was to become a favourite method, Grandsire Triples. The first peal ever of this rung with 5040 unique changes was composed by John Garthon and was rung at the church of St Peter Mancroft, Norwich on 26th August 1718. Thus at the beginning of the 20th Century, the Grandsire family of methods, had become an important feature of peal ringing. From the very
start of method ringing there had been a need for people to compose, first of all “touches” and later, peals. It was in 1750 that three stalwarts of early ringing, John Holt, John Vicars and Edward Taylor laid the foundations.

After his first peal in 1914, Jack Pitman did not ring another until July 1919, this time for the West Wales Association. Once more it was Grandsire Triples at Aberavon. Six ringers were from the Aberavon Band and two, J. Arthur Hoare and Fredrick B. Stedman, were from elsewhere in South Wales. Ernest Stitch rang the 6th and Jack Pitman conducted from the 5th. The composition was published in August 1918 and rung “to commemorate the signing of Peace”. The following month there was a peal of Grandsire Triples at Bridgend, again with Pitman conductor and composer, using the composition published in March 1918, this time in memory of 3 Bridgend ringers who had recently died and were “a severe loss to the tower”. This was the last peal that Jack Pitman rang before his much more productive decade of the 1920’s.

The Aberavon band was becoming an increasingly active part of the South Wales ringing scene and there was a growing confidence in their ability to ring longer touches. Thus, we see them using the quarter peal as the vehicle for utilising their developing skills. It is indicative of the very gradual progress of ringing in South Wales at that time and lack of opportunities there had been for extended ringing in Aberavon, that Jack Pitman rang his first quarter peal of Stedman Triples, at the age of 27 in St Illtyd’s Church Bridgend on 4th July 1915. The conductor was D.R. James and it was “rung as a farewell to W. Smith on his joining the Royal Engineers, he making the fifth member of the band to join His Majesty’s Forces”. W. Smith rang the 5th. Of the three quarter peals rung by Jack Pitman in 1915, one was at Aberavon and two at Bridgend; the two quarter peals of Grandsire were conducted by Pitman. Just before the end of the war, two quarter peals were rung at St Mary’s in consecutive weeks. Both were Grandsire Triples and the first was on 14th July to celebrate “France’s Day”, when Ernie Stitch rang an inside bell to a quarter peal for the first time. The other, on 21st July was a celebration of “recent victories in France” and was one part of A.J. Pitman’s 4-part peal composition published on 10th August 1917.
18. Copy of the Register of St Mary, Aberavon’s Ringers for Sundays covering the last month of 1919 and the first two months of 1920.  
*St Mary’s Church Aberavon Archives.*
The last quarter peal which Jack Pitman rang and conducted in 1917 was, again Grandsire Triples, rung to mark yet another blow to the band in Bridgend, being rung “……as a farewell to C.H. Perry (5th) who is called up to service with the colours. This makes the 8th member of the band to join HM Forces.”

For many years attendance registers keeping a record of Sunday Service ringing were common in ringing chambers throughout the country and provide a valuable record of the band and their attendance record. They are occasionally used in some towers today. One of the reasons for keeping such registers was that ringers were often paid according to their Sunday Service ringing attendance, allotted on a points’ basis. This practice continued well into the late 1950’s and the early 1960’s. These registers show that from the December 1919 and January, February March 1920, that J. Pitman’s attendance was very good, but not perfect. No doubt his absence was often due to the nature of his work on the railways entailing shift work which limited his ability to attend, for example on Sundays. Overall attendance was quite good, though E. Roberts after a good start seems to have given up. He/she does not appear on later registers.

Throughout the period covered by this chapter it is inevitable that the dominant feature should be the First World War. It was to change the nation and the world for ever and inevitably bell ringing would share in this change. A major feature in this area of activity, as in many others, would be the losses in membership due largely to death, and injury of ringers who fought for their country. This can be seen today in ringing chambers up and down the country, where there are boards recording losses from guilds or associations during the two world wars. These often show very large numbers of ringers lost in the First World War and a glance at such lists makes one wonder how the ringing community coped with the catastrophic decrease in numbers.
Inevitably, the 1920’s began with the shadow of the First World War hanging over all aspects of life, including ringing. In 1921, there were concerns that although three years after the war, bellringing had recovered almost to where it had been before the war, there seemed to be a malaise affecting all aspects of the Exercise and in particular the standard of ringing.\textsuperscript{41} However, it was too early to judge whether this was the case, but with hindsight, the extent of the recovery in such a short time was quite astonishing, bearing in mind the trauma suffered by the nation and the huge number of casualties, touching virtually every family in the land.

Rejoicing after the end of the war was accompanied by high hopes that things would not just return to what they were before the war, but that they would get better. This feeling was enhanced by Lloyd George’s optimistic oratorical cry in 1918 “…..to make Britain a country fit for heroes to live in”.\textsuperscript{42} However, by the 1920’s a very different picture was emerging. Unemployment was rapidly increasing and industrial unrest, suspended before the war was now resumed. This culminated in the General Strike which began on Tuesday 4\textsuperscript{th} May 1926 when workers in key industries such as the mines, railways, utilities and iron and steel industries went on strike. Most of these industries resumed work after just over a week but the miners’ strike continued for over six months. At the end of the decade the situation for the country was made worse by the crash of the American Stock Market (The Wall Street Crash) in 1929, so that the misery for a large
section of the population continued into the 1930’s. All of this would have affected the Pitman family, particularly the General Strike. A crucial outcome of the political and financial situation was that unemployment steadily increased at a time when pay for those out of work was both meagre and subject to stringent requirements before it could be claimed. A stark reminder of the way in which these events affected individuals is to be found in the Minute Book of the Southern District of the Swansea and Brecon Diocesan Association (SBDG). In 1928 the following was recorded after an appeal which appeared in *The Ringing World* for a Mrs Bates who lost her husband through an accident and was left with three children and a Mr Morse of Sketty (Swansea) “could do with a little help as he has been out of work and had sickness and bereavement in the family”. The response to this as recorded in the minutes was:

> Mr Pitman then proposed and Mr Curtis seconded that the hat be taken around in the meeting for Mrs Bates’ fund and that an appeal be made to all towers for Mr Morse and the District Secretary was instructed to write to all towers at the same time and ask that the money collected should be sent to him (the Secretary) so that it could be sent to Mr Morse together, this was carried.

It is also recorded that 15/- (75p), quite a large sum, was raised for Mrs Bates.

The decade began with another tragedy for the Pitman family. Jack’s sister, Eva’s husband, Charlie Field died leaving her a widow with five young children to bring up. Charlie had joined the Royal Navy and served in the Dardenelles, where he was gassed in the trenches. Like so many who served in the First World War he left the navy with his health broken by war service which may have contributed to his subsequent death.

Until 1925, Jack Pitman and family continued to live in the small terraced rented house in Prior Street. In many ways, this had been a satisfactory arrangement, but in that year the family were suddenly faced with a crisis. The landlord decided to sell 5 Prior Street and indeed sold it while the Pitman family were still living there!
In imminent danger of being evicted from their home, the family were desperate to find somewhere else which they could afford. They didn’t have enough money to buy a house outright and indeed, it was hard to see how they could even raise the money for the mortgage deposit. It was at this point that Jack’s old friend and fellow ringer at St Mary’s, Ernie Stitch, offered a loan to cover the deposit on a house. The money was to be paid back “bit by bit over the years”. So, in 1925, Jack Pitman managed to purchase one of the new semidetached houses being built in the Taibach area of Port Talbot, 42 Caradog Street, about half a mile east of Prior Street. In those days it was quite unusual for working class people to buy their own house. The house at 42, Caradog Street is still there and appears to be little changed externally, although Ruth James, one of Pitman’s granddaughters has a very different memory picture of the house. The photograph shows that it was fairly large, significantly larger than the house in Prior Street.
It is sad to note that only three years after this generous gesture by the Stitch family, a notice appeared in *The Ringing World* announcing that Ernest’s wife Lily (Elizabeth Gertrude) had died in February 1928. This must have come as a very considerable shock to Jack Pitman as Stitch was only 44 years old. The sympathy of ringers was demonstrated by a peal of Grandsire Triples rung at St Illtyd’s, Bridgend on 7th March with Jack Pitman on the 6th with the footnote:

*Rung half muffled as a token of respect for the late Mrs E. Stitch, wife of E. Stitch, a much respected member of the Association, with whom much sympathy is felt.*

Dorothy Hurn (Dolly), Jack Pitman’s daughter, who was about 11 years old at this time, recalls that after the move to Caradog Street, one of her chores was to take the money for the mortgage repayments to the Council Offices. She remembers clearly that the amount was £1.19s.0d (£1.95). This was a quite a large amount of money in those days and it would certainly have placed a significant strain on the family budget.

Some years after this, as a teenager, Dolly started to learn to ring and had attended some practices at St Mary’s, Aberavon on Friday nights, but after having her first period on a Friday just before practice, the trauma of the event stopped her ever ringing again. However she did not forsake ringing completely and for some years she provided a great service to her father by checking his peals for falseness. In return, she received a silver thrupenny bit (a very small silver coin equivalent to three old pence. If we use the current price of one issue of *The Ringing World*, about £1, the thrupenny bit had an equivalent value of £1.50, since the RW in 1920 cost 2d, two old pence). All Pitman’s peals have been independently checked for falseness and none of them were ever found to be false – a rare occurrence in those days, when hardly a week went by when there wasn’t an apologetic letter in

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**20. 42 Caradog Street, the semi-detached house purchased by the Pitman family in 1925. The Pitmans’ house is on the right.**

*Pitman Family Collection.*
The Ringing World declaring such and such a peal had to be withdrawn because the composition was false. Nowadays it would be done by computer.

We have already seen that Ernie Stitch and Jack Pitman were firm friends and perhaps this is the point at which to say something about Stitch’s background. Ernest Stitch was born in Biddisham, Somerset about 15 miles from Woolavington, in 1884. Although his grandfather, father and brothers were all bell ringers he did not become a serious Sunday Service ringer until 1914 when he was about 30 years of age. The attrition rate for ringers was high in those days, as now, and none of his brothers continued ringing after learning. He was a man of great energy and an extremely active member, simultaneously, of the SBDG and the LDA. He was Master of the latter for the year 1938 and was Southern District Secretary of the former for 24 years between 1926 to 1950. He was an able conductor, particularly of Triples methods and frequently called the difficult Grandsire Triples peal composition called “Holt’s Original”.

In the first quarter of the 20th Century the majority of the public would have assumed the main function of church bell ringing was to ring before services, celebrate marriages or other happy occasions or to mourn the death of a member of the congregation or the parish. This was also the perception of many bell ringers. However as we have seen there is a recreational side to bellringing: peal ringing, which had been developing rapidly and continues to grow today. It began in the 18th Century and interest in it continued into the first quarter of the 20th century. In many ways it had become an indicator of the health of bell ringing. A decrease in the number or the quality of peals from year-to-year or over a sustained period was regarded by some as a matter of concern to the Exercise. During the 1920’s, trends show a fairly rapid recovery from the problems arising from the war years but there were significant dips in 1925/26 and 1928/29, perhaps this was not too surprising during these turbulent times. 1461 peals (tower and handbells) were rung in 1920, the largest number of peals rung in any year since 1913 when, as we have seen, the largest number (2329) had been rung since 1881.

In many ways, the world of bellringing at this time was much less complex than it is today. For example, if we examine peals rung in 1920, we find that the most rung methods on eight bells were Grandsire Triples, Treble Bob methods, Stedman Triples and various plain methods. This amounted to 756 peals i.e. around 50% of the total! Cambridge, London and Superlative Surprise and Double Norwich Court Bob Major were also popular methods. Triples methods were sometimes spliced, but overall, peals involving spliced methods were unusual. Inevitably composers tended
to focus on popular methods – they wanted people to ring their compositions.

In 1921 *The Ringing World* published an editorial plea to composers to focus on the more difficult task of composing for Surprise Methods and specifically Cambridge Surprise Major under the heading “A Field for New Composers”. This plea was originated by an article in *The Ringing World* by Mr Fred Dench who said that “unravelling Cambridge will be found more interesting than stringing together courses of Bob Major”. This is an early example of how, after only 10 years of publication, *The Ringing World* was playing a significant role in stimulating important ringing developments. The Editorial went on to say that “….there are still fields…….in which success will bring campanological fame equally with some of the masters who have gone before…”

It is not unreasonable to suggest that Jack Pitman on reading this took up the challenge and some three months later published a relatively simple composition of 1120 changes of Cambridge Surprise Major in the weekly article: “Useful Touches for Sunday Service Ringing”. This was an example of what was later to become a common reaction by him to specific challenges thrown down by editorials, readers’ letters and articles in *The Ringing World* and which would lead to some of his more spectacular successes in method composition. So, the 1920’s would see Pitman, now in his early 30’s, developing and extending his composing skills beyond Grandsire, Stedman and other Triples methods into what were regarded at the time as the “more difficult” methods such as Surprise Major.

Pitman rang the vast majority of his peals in Wales. Peal ringing in Wales had a slow start. A number of claims regarding the first peal on tower bells in Wales have been made. There is certainly a peal board in Wrexham regarding a “whole and Complete Peal of Grandsire Triples” dated Wednesday 26th July 1729 and this would appear to be the first peal in Wales. However, there was also a peal of Grandsire Caters in Wrexham on 27th July 1803, conducted by Richard Cross, which has also been claimed as the first in Wales. The conductor was a member of the Union Society (Shrewsbury) and presumably the peal is attributable to this organisation, which went into decline in the early part of the 19th Century and no longer exists. The next peal in Wales was not rung until six years later on 25th Sept. 1809, conducted by John Hints at Dolgellau. The following day Oxford Bob Triples was also rung in Dolgellau and then, Oxford Treble Bob Royal was rung on 17th Aug. 1818 in Wrexham. It would be many years before the next peal by a resident band in Wales was rung! The first extent of London Surprise Minor was not rung by a resident band in Wales until 1938, when it was rung in Neath, Glamorgan.
Thus, in South Wales peal ringing began slowly.\(^{51}\) Indeed, change ringing does not appear to have become part of the ringing culture in the South until quite late in the 19\(^{th}\) century, when Evan Davies of Caerleon started an enthusiastic band of change ringers and became very active in training bands around the area. Method ringing in Monmouth began to develop in earnest when E. Barnett from Crayford, Kent moved to the area and spread the message of change ringing. The first peal in South Wales appears to be Grandsire Triples, rung at Chepstow on 9\(^{th}\) January 1837 by the Union Youths of Bristol, conducted by William Ayres. The first peal in South Wales by resident ringers appears to be Grandsire Triples, rung on 1\(^{st}\) July 1886 at St Mary’s Monmouth, conducted by E. Barnett. The second, also Grandsire Triples, was at Caerleon, conducted by Evan Davies. There were also parallel developments in and around Cardiff and elsewhere at this time. For example, the band at Pentre became very accomplished and rang various Surprise methods. By 1939 over a hundred peals had been rung by the Bridgend band, Jack Pitman had rung in 46.\(^{52}\)

Pitman’s personal peal ringing during the 1920’s began when he conducted a peal of Grandsire Triples at Gorseinon in October 1920. This was the first peal of Triples ever rung in that tower and also a first peal for everyone in the band except him. In November, there followed a peal of Plain Bob Minor at Baglan when Jack Pitman rang the tenor. This was claimed as the first peal of Bob Minor in South Wales by a lady ringer - the aptly named Mrs E.G. Bellringer, who rang the treble. It was also her first peal. She moved on to ring the treble in her first peal of Grandsire Triples, at Aberavon in 1927. Pitman took his first step in ringing peals on more than eight bells, when he rang the 7\(^{th}\) at St. Woolos, Newport in May 1921, in a peal of Grandsire Caters. This, his first peal of Caters was conducted by Henry Cooper. Later that year, perhaps as a result of this experience, Pitman composed a peal of 5001 Stedman Caters.\(^{53}\) A further 10 years would elapse before he conducted his first peal of Caters, which he did from the 6\(^{th}\), again at St Woolos, in February 1931. He also rang a peal of Grandsire Caters at the very end of the decade in December 1929.

Pitman’s early emphasis on odd-bell methods is clearly illustrated by the fact that it was not until January 1922, aged 35, that he rang and conducted his first peal of major, 5056 of Plain Bob Major composed by J.R. Pritchard, it was also Ernie Stitch’s first peal of major. It wasn’t until 1928 that Jack Pitman took part in his first peal of Royal, when he rang the 3\(^{rd}\) to a peal of Plain Bob Royal at St Woolos Newport in December. In a sense, like Triples, Caters was a somewhat neglected area of ringing at this time, with very few methods available for peal ringing. Pitman bridged this gap a little by providing an original composition of spliced Erin and Stedman Caters (5133) in 1924.\(^{54}\) This was followed, in 1926 by Pitman’s
composition of 5096 spliced Plain Bob Major and Grandsire Triples, first rung at Bridgend in September 1926 for the LMDA as the first peal of spliced Triples and Major ever rung.

On 25th April 1925 a landmark peal for the Pitman family was rung. It was a peal of Grandsire Doubles rung in St Catharine’s, Baglan, conducted by Jack Pitman and having 4 first pealers and one first peal “inside”. One of the first pealers was Albert Edward Pitman, Jack’s father who was 59 years old at the time! He rang the tenor. Also among the first time peal ringers was Lucy Thomas, a well-known Port Talbot character who died comparatively recently at over 100 years of age. Towards the end of the decade, in April 1929, Jack Pitman’s father rang the tenor to a peal of Grandsire Triples, conducted by Ernie Stitch at St Mary’s Aberavon. It was rung for the SBDG and since A.E. Pitman was not a member of the Guild, he was proposed and elected as a member by the band in the tower before the peal, a common practice to this day when one or two members of the band are not members of the guild or association for which the peal is being rung.

<table>
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<th>SBDG</th>
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<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
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As we shall see, the great legacy of Jack Pitman to bellringing is generally acknowledged to be his compositions of Spliced Surprise Major, however he is in some ways even better known for what has become generally called “Pitman’s 240 of Grandsire Doubles”. This was published
in 1923 and was also frequently chosen for Sunday Service ringing and quarter peals of Doubles. It also became a favourite for ringing peals of Doubles and in 1928 three peals using Pitman’s 240’s were rung; at Bishop’s Cannings, at Lyonshall and at Broughton Astley. Although, as we shall see later, it was the subject of some controversy over the years, it has been recognised as a very clever composition in which “each of the six scores of which it is composed is true and complete but does not come round”. This arrangement allows the possibility of 24 variations, so that a peal of 5760 changes becomes possible. In the letter about the composition, Pitman said at the time that it:

\[
\text{will be found useful to conductors of peals etc. in this method who would like further variety in calling, as it is certainly monotonous, having only 10 120’s to call four times at least.}
\]

A further note on this topic by Pitman in 1926 followed a peal conducted by Ernest Stitch, which was the first in this composition, at St Catharine’s Baglan in February 1926 with Jack Pitman ringing the 2nd and his father the tenor. The treble was rung by E. George Bellringer, the husband of Mrs Bellringer.

At the CCCBR Meeting in 1929, a discussion on whether certain compositions of Cambridge Minor exceeding 720 changes were true or not spilled over into the related topic of Pitman’s 240 of Grandsire Doubles. This had arisen in a debate in the previous year on a revision of the Collection of Doubles and Minor Methods. The question arose as to whether compositions such as Morris’s and Pitman’s 240’s of Grandsire Doubles should be included in the collection and this introduced the issue of the definitions of 5- (and 6-) bell peals. The outcome of the meeting appears to have been that they should. However, in the 1929 meeting there was a heated discussion, in which some eminent members of the Council argued in favour of the inclusion of the 240’s, while many of the members, including the Editor of The Ringing World, John Goldsmith, argued against. This resulted in deadlock and a compromise allowing compositions to be included in an appendix. A flavour of the debate may be obtained from a quotation of William Wilson’s contribution which injected some humour into a somewhat technical discussion:

\[
\text{The moment you mix things up they become hopelessly false……If you take a pint of water and a pint of good beer and pour them into a quart jug, the highbrows will tell you that you have a quart. You have, and you can drink it for me. The water is pure and undefiled, the beer is good enough for anyone, but they are no good for anything once you mix them.}
\]
Further lengthy debates on this topic took place at the 1933 and 1934 meetings and eventually the Doubles’ compositions were accepted. Plain Bob Doubles and other Doubles methods which contained places having 4 blows by the same bell in one place were also frowned upon at this time becoming accepted much later. This has remained the pattern throughout the history of bell ringing. Some new aspect of ringing is suggested, it is immediately seized on by the more conservative ringers and condemned as being against the existing rules. Those who proposed it persist, sometimes for many years until at last they win round the opposition and it quickly becomes an acceptable part of ringing. In going through this process, ringing is progressing in a similar way to many other aspects of human endeavour.

The 1920’s was clearly a decade of rapid development in ringing. There were increased opportunities for ringing new methods, spliced methods and for the development of the theory and practice of composition, with Pitman moving to the forefront of this, where he remained over the next three decades. However, it is clear that new initiatives were only very slowly embraced by the large bulk of ringers and most new compositions continued to be rung by only a few highly specialised bands. This situation would remain for many years with new developments continuing to be taken forward by small numbers of capable enthusiasts. Gradually new ideas became embedded, so, by the end of the century ringing Surprise Methods and indeed Spliced Surprise became fairly commonplace and a feature of Sunday Service ringing in many areas. To its credit The Ringing World has played an important part in bringing new developments to all ringers through editorials and articles.

Today we are well used to collections of method compositions readily or even almost instantaneously available to ringers. This was far from the situation in the 1920’s. For many years composers produced compositions and sometimes didn’t even bother to publish or tell anybody about them. Like other composers, Pitman was occasionally caught out with devising peal compositions which had been produced previously by someone else, but not published or else were published in an obscure place. Thus, in July 1921, his composition of 5040 Stedman Triples, was published as having been first rung the previous April. Unfortunately, this peal, composed by J.W. Washbrook, had already been rung some 20 years previously. It had been published in the Oxford Diocesan Guild Peal Book a source to which Jack Pitman was unlikely to have had access. This situation was quite common at the beginning of the 20th Century and before, because there was no agreed method of registering compositions in order to avoid inadvertent duplication of effort.
Another incident involving Pitman compositions occurred in 1922 when there was a friendly dispute involving an article concerning “Another Odd and Even Bob Peal” of Stedman Triples which he published in April 1922 and which was based on an earlier peal published a month before by J. Carter.\(^{61}\) It was a clear example of Pitman deliberately producing a more difficult peal to challenge conductors. This was not quite how Carter saw it however. He considered that the new composition had the effect of spoiling his peal by having “so many courses with odd bobs only”. In what appears to have been a response to this, Pitman published a composition of a 6-part peal of Stedman Triples in July 1922, which he described thus:

> ...no doubt it will be found perhaps the most difficult peal of Stedman Triples yet obtained (with two singles only) to conduct, as it contains 585 calls and there is no fixed bell at each course end.\(^{62}\)

Perhaps this was borne out by the fact that it was many years before this peal was rung for the first time, on 20\(^{th}\) January 1938 at Bushey, Herts, conducted by Maurice Hibbert. It was described in “Peal Notes” at the time as “a short course odd and even bob irregular 6-part, with only two singles.”\(^{63,64}\)

He continued to produce compositions of Grandsire Triples, such as the one rung for the first time at Overseal in Derbyshire for the Midland Counties Association conducted by M. Swinfield in February 1926. Pitman felt that specific attractive qualities, never found in any other peal of Grandsire Triples, lay in the 120 46’s and 74’s at backstroke.\(^{65}\) It was his belief that there was a paucity of compositions for Triples peals and in March 1927 he published a composition for a peal of London Bob Triples, which had already been rung in Bridgend, conducted by C.H. Perry.\(^{66}\)

We will see later that from the 1920’s onwards Pitman’s major composing strength would be in splicing Surprise Major methods. However compositions for single Surprise Methods were not neglected. Pitman published a composition of 5760 Cambridge Surprise Major which could be reduced to 5312 in June 1923. He rang the treble to a peal of the 5312 version when this composition was rung for the first time at All Saints, Thurcaston, Leicestershire for the Midland Counties Association, conducted by Harold J. Poole. This composition was no mean achievement, since Cambridge Surprise Major is recognised as presenting difficult problems for conductors because of its tendency towards falseness and many peals of Cambridge before this time and since have been declared false. A peal of 5024 Superlative composed by Pitman was also rung for the first time at Loughborough for the Midlands Counties Association in August 1924, the composition being published in September. In May 1925 he published his composition of 5120 Real Superlative Surprise Major, rung for the first time
later in the month at the Loughborough Bell Foundry for the Midland Counties Association, conducted by Ernest Morris. A 5024 Cambridge Surprise Major Peal composed by Pitman was rung also at the Loughborough Bell Foundry in May 1925.\textsuperscript{67}

He had also become interested in unearthing unusual methods for which he composed peals. Thus, in 1929 he composed and conducted in Bridgend, the first peal of Forward Major, which was also a first for the band, the LM DA and Wales.\textsuperscript{68}

The events that characterised composition and method development at this time placed significant pressure on the CCCBR to ensure that its rules were observed, and/or that they were modified appropriately to accommodate new developments. An example is the contribution by Rev C.D.P. Davies, reported at the 1923 CCCBR Meeting stating that he had been asked if it was acceptable to have a peal consisting of say a quarter peal of, respectively, London, Bristol, Cambridge and Superlative Surprise Major, “coming round at backstroke and going off into the next method at hand”.\textsuperscript{69} This moved him to put forward the following motion to the CCCBR, seconded by the Rev E.S. Powell:

\begin{quote}
That in compositions of 5000 changes or upwards on seven or any higher number of bells in which the plan of splicing various methods is adopted it is essential that there should be no repetition of any row throughout – that is to say that the whole composition shall be “true” in the universally accepted sense of that word.
\end{quote}

He put forward this motion despite the fact that he was none too keen on the concept of splicing methods, but saying: “If they must have splicing, let them have it on eight or more bells, a true peal”! The motion was carried. Today it seems obvious that there should be such a requirement, but it was nevertheless essential that this should be laid down as a fundamental tenet of spliced method ringing. This issue became the subject of a subsequent \textit{Ringing World} editorial\textsuperscript{70} which strongly supported the CCCBR motion, but commented on the limited number of Surprise Major methods then available and lamenting that, at the end of the meeting, there was a suggestion that a peal with two major methods should not be recognised! There were still ringers who felt that Spliced Surprise Major was a step too far. A later editorial once more pleaded for a reference file of compositions.\textsuperscript{71}

Despite all the progress, it is surprising that as late into the development of method ringing as 1925, there had never been a peal containing more than one Triples method. Such a peal was rung in May 1925, when Pitman conducted his own composition of a peal of Spliced Union and Grandsire Triples\textsuperscript{72} for the LMDA at Bridgend. The footnote to the peal is enlightening:
Rung intermixed throughout the whole peal, without notification of the method by the conductor.

Later that year, this peal, became a topic of jocular debate in the annual CCCBR Meeting. The apparently verbatim report quotes Mr T.H. Beams, a Scotsman as saying in reference to the peal “I hae me doots” about it! This set the tone for the debate and the fairly light-hearted arguments centred around whether Union Triples was Grandsire with a fifth place bob and if so, spliced Union and Grandsire had been rung previously, when Grandsire was rung with a 5th place bob. Like some other debates in the CCCBR, this one did not reach any real conclusion.

Pitman continued his interest in splicing Triples methods and in February 1926 he published details of a composition allowing up to 6 Triples methods spliced into a peal. He provided an example of Spliced Single Oxford Bob and Grandsire Triples. This peal had been rung for the first time in the previous month. The composition had the advantage that there were no singles. He also gives a further detail that, instead of Grandsire, Double Court may be rung and also with the 7th in the hunt, Double Grandsire, St Clements or College Single could also be rung. The January peal was claimed as the “first peal of Triples ever rung without singles or Special Calls”.

Towards the end of the decade Jack Pitman began to focus some of his ingenuity on Spliced Plain Major and Spliced Treble Bob Major composition. At this time a peal of Treble Bob Major rung in July 1927, conducted by Ernest Morris at Earl Shilton, Leicestershire was published. Pitman continued to compose peals of Spliced Plain Major and in 1928 his peal of “Spliced Major in 6 Methods: Canterbury Pleasure, Plain Bob, Kent and Oxford Treble Bob, Little Bob and Little Canterbury”, was published. This was first rung at the Loughborough Bell Foundry in April 1928, conducted by Ernest Morris and is recorded as having been the first time in which 6 methods had been rung in a spliced major peal.

However, the future of composition lay largely in peals of Spliced Surprise Major and early in the 1920’s Pitman began to address this area of composition. A feature of his early peals of 5024 and 5408 Spliced Cambridge and Superlative published in September 1924 is that they consist largely of Cambridge and the splicing is used to allow Cambridge with the tenors together, difficult to achieve for Cambridge alone. There quickly followed a composition of 5056 Spliced Superlative and Cambridge Surprise Major. This, he claims in his letter, with 340 7-8’s, more than has been obtained previously for a peal of Spliced Cambridge and Superlative. Unusually, Pitman shows his sensitivity to possible confusion over priority by including in his letter the actual composition date, viz., 11th May 1924. Further compositions followed; another 5056 Cambridge and Superlative in
August 1924 and a 5120 in September 1925, containing 7-8’s and 8-6’s in nearly every course.\(^7\) Pitman also took the unusual step in 1926 of producing a peal of 5088 Spliced Double Norwich and Bristol Surprise Major, claimed as the first spliced peal of these methods.

In 1927 the world of peal ringing was suddenly given a wake-up call by the astonishing news that Rev. H. Law James had composed a peal in which 4 Surprise methods were spliced to yield London, Superlative, Cambridge and Bristol Surprise Major. This was different from any of the other Spliced Surprise Major compositions in that it changed method twice or even three times during any one of its 50 courses, having 100 leads of London, 25 each of Cambridge and Superlative and 19 of Bristol. It was first rung, at the second attempt, at Warnham in Sussex in June 1927. No other conductor had ever been required to make so many changes of method in a Surprise Major peal and the task faced by the conductor, A.H. Pulling, was a new and daunting experience.\(^8\)

It is interesting to pose the question as to why Pitman was not the first to compose such a multi-spliced peal. As we look at his achievements up to the time of this peal, perhaps we can get an idea of why he missed this opportunity. His efforts appeared to be directed to quite different goals. His love of Triples methods encouraged him to spend much of his composing genius on splicing Triples methods. Also he placed much emphasis on what he perceived to be the future of plain major methods. Finally, perhaps he felt that the challenging area for conductors lay in splicing different types of method, for example splicing Triples and major or Surprise with plain methods.

While Pitman was working on the spliced plain major and other peals, it is clear that he did not ignore the very important step forward made by E. Banks James and had clearly begun to work on Spliced Surprise Major in more than two methods. Suddenly, out of the blue, in March 1929 he published a composition for a peal of 5760 (which may be reduced to 5120) Spliced Surprise Major in 10 methods! The methods were Cambridge, Rutland, Superlative, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, London, Bristol, Gloucestershire (New Gloucester), Pudsey and Norfolk. The composition is flexible in the sense that it may be rung using from 5 to 10 methods. Gloucestershire (Gloucester) Surprise Major was a little-known method at the time and in response to a query, Pitman provided a copy of a lead of the method in that April’s *The Ringing World*; also in his gentlemanly-way he congratulated the Willesden Band on ringing Law James’ 4-Spliced Surprise Major peal.\(^9\)

In the meantime Law James had also not been idle, he produced a composition of Spliced Surprise Major in 6 methods, published in March 1929. This had been rung, after one unsuccessful attempt, at St Mary’s
Willesden for Middlesex County Association in the same month, conducted by William Pye. Then the Willesden Band once more made ringing history by ringing in August 1929, the first peal in 10 major methods, viz. Pitman’s Number 1 composition in 10 methods (5120), London, Rutland, Cambridge, Superlative, Lincolnshire, Pudsey, Yorkshire, Bristol, Norfolk and New Gloucester at St Mary’s Willesden, again for the Middlesex County Association and as a well-deserved birthday compliment to the conductor, the great William Pye.

A full report of the performance appeared in The Ringing World in August commenting on the achievement and also including another Pitman composition in 10 methods. The article described the composition and the ringing as “A great advance in the splicing of Major methods…..”. At the beginning of the 21st Century it is almost commonplace to ring peals of 10 or more methods and many hundreds of ringers have achieved this. However, when the above peal was rung, it was regarded as an immense achievement. It is worth quoting from the above report to get some perception of the difficulty of the enterprise:

Some idea of the mental activity involved will be gathered when it is pointed out that there are 129 changes from one method to another, and that no method is rung for more than two leads (64 changes) at any one time. Indeed, in by far the most cases, only one lead of the method is rung before a change to another method is called. Then again, the variety of methods, and the similarity of the work in some of them, makes it necessary for the ringer to keep wide awake so as not to forget, during the lead, which method is actually being rung. One ringer trying to ring Rutland whilst the others are ringing London is sure to bring disaster.

It is also suggested that “recent performances have once again proved William Pye to be the greatest all-round ringer that has ever lived.” In the following week, a letter from Jack Pitman appeared congratulating Mr W. Pye and his band on ringing the 10-methods peal. Pitman admits “….when I produced it, I was very doubtful if a band would ever be able to ring it” and that it was the most difficult peal ever rung on tower bells. The letter was followed by another peal composition: 5600 changes in 11 methods. The additional method was Norfolk in which a fourths place bob is required. As a footnote to the history of spliced peal ringing, it is worth noting that, also in 1929, a meeting of The Suffolk Guild passed a resolution “That the splicing of methods is theoretically unsound”, a notion which was robustly challenged by C.T. Coles at the time.
Later in 1925, Ernest Morris rang his 50th peal of the year by ringing a composition of 5077 changes of spliced Stedman and Grandire Caters. This was claimed as the first spliced peal in these methods. The writer of “Belfry Gossip”, in the same issue of The Ringing World describes this as a “unique performance” of “the ingenious composition” which “is the product of the fertile brain of Mr A.J. Pitman of Port Talbot”. The composition duly appeared the following week. It was also described by J.W. Parker in a subsequent letter as “a most ingenious blending of the two methods”. Nevertheless, he goes on to say that actually it is very simple to splice regular “Cater methods” and goes on to explain how it can be done! Pitman then responded a week later with a composition of 5073 Spliced Erin, Stedman and Grandire Caters, presumably as a direct result of a challenge laid down by Parker at the end of his letter. Pitman went on to ring his first peal of Erin Caters, his own composition at St John the Baptist’s Cardiff – this was his first peal of Caters as conductor, called from the 6th. It was also the first peal of Erin Caters ever to have been rung in Wales.

In addition to the challenge of ringing difficult methods and splicing them a further challenge to skilled ringers is to increase the total number of changes rung in a peal. This of course increases the ringing time, which is already well over three hours on fairly heavy bells. Thus, Pitman continued to demonstrate his versatility as a composer in 1924 when he composed a peal of 9120 changes of what was then described as "Spliced Treble Bob Major. "Treble Bob Major” was at this time thought of as a method in its own right and Kent and Oxford were regarded as variations of this “method”. The peal was rung as the Ilkeston Variation at the Loughborough Bell Foundry for the Midlands County Association, conducted by Ernest Morris in February 1924. It was the longest peal of spliced major yet rung. The following month Pitman published a peal of Spliced Treble Bob Major with 25,920 changes. He could be quick to respond to anything that he felt diminished an achievement of his. Thus, he wrote to the Editor of The Ringing World in 1926 a short note, published on page 231 pointing out that the peal of 17,440 Treble Bob Major published by E. Timbrell in the previous month was not the longest peal of Treble Bob Major ever produced, since he had published in 1924 a peal of 25,920 which could be extended to 26,000! The Editor wrote a note of apology, saying that he had overlooked Pitman’s composition.

A.J. Pitman is rightly famous for his peal compositions, including long lengths, but a little-known aspect of his output, is the large number of “Sunday Service” touches, which he composed. Throughout his life Jack was a dedicated ringer for Church Services. Touches of Sunday Service length were intended to challenge and extend the repertoire of the dedicated band and were often about quarter peal length. For example, he published a
1344 of Stedman Triples in June 1921 and he continued to produce and publish Service Touches right up to the year of his death.

Throughout his life Jack Pitman was convinced that a major feature of composition was to produce the best music. Indeed, he was very successful in doing this and his compositions have often been regarded as being amongst the most musical. The issue of the musical nature of bellringing was raised by a Leader in *The Times* newspaper on 1st February 1927, pointing out to its largely non-ringing readership, that what they hear being rung in their local church does not necessarily represent the musical nature of the composition, but is heavily influenced by the skill (or lack of it) of the ringers. This was a theme that was to be repeated many times in the next 70-odd years.

One assumes that it is likely that the bands which first rang Pitman’s compositions would have done them musical justice because they were skilled and experienced ringers. It is also clear that many of his compositions were specifically designed to challenge conductors (or to allow conductors to challenge themselves) because they were intrinsically difficult to call. Many conductors relished these challenges and raced to ring the more difficult compositions as soon as they could after receipt or publication. It is possible that part of Pitman’s reasoning in doing this was to ensure that the most skilled bands tackled his work. A policy commonly adopted by him was to send new compositions to well-known conductors with a covering letter, asking if they were interested in calling the composition. A frequent variation of this was to send the composition to two or more rival conductors, thus introducing an even greater element of competition! This appears to have been a successful technique and the time-scale was such that frequently the composition would not be published until after the peal had been rung.

Although Pitman is predominantly known for his compositions, he published the occasional new principle as well. One such, Quick Six Triples, was published in 1922 and the plain course is shown below:

Both versions require a Holt’s single to achieve a peal. This turned out to be essentially the same as one composed by J.W. Parker many years before, but not published and on receipt of the “Pitman Method” the “Parker Method” was also published. Very graciously Joseph Parker acknowledged that Pitman was the first to publish the method, congratulated him on composing a true extent of the method and challenged him to produce a peal with only Holt’s singles and also publish more details. Both conductors thought that the method was very worthy of the attention of ringers. Within a week, Pitman published a peal with Holt’s singles only and with the minimum possible number of calls: 46.
A positive result from this was an urgent call by *The Ringing World* for some sort of central reference system for both methods and peal compositions, perhaps operated by the CCCBR. Pitman also contributed to the debate by prefacing his next published composition, a peal of Stedman Triples in four-bob sets, with a note asking readers if anyone knew if it had been published before!\(^{94}\) For the next few years, the debate continued spasmodically and in 1923 *The Ringing World* Editorial summarised the position on the “invention of methods” with the statement:

> It is... ... a more or less recognised fact that an individual cannot actually be held to be the creator of a method, because all methods are the outcome of mathematical formulae.

Luke-warm if not cold water was also poured onto the generation of compositions. One wonders what their attitude would have been had they known that in some 70 years there would be the opportunity for compositions to be generated by computers? However composers will always be able to exercise ingenuity in composition design, using the computer to ensure that changes are not repeated, i.e. that the peal is “true”.

In a siren-call to the readers of *The Ringing World*, the eminent composer Joseph W. Parker drew attention to the reluctance of ringers to ring Triples methods and the absence of such methods for them to ring.\(^{95}\) He came to these conclusions because the peals columns over the years showed that
virtually all Triples peals were either Grandsire or Stedman. He responded by producing something called “Composite Triples” which consisted of a symmetrical block of Erin and Quick-six Triples to which he was happy to refer as a “method”. Pitman rapidly responded to the article and a fortnight later with congratulations on his composition of Spliced Quick-six and Erin Triples designed to be interesting to the ringers and to minimise the “monotony of the long slow work” at the same time, avoiding pairs of bobs and singles.  

Let us now turn from more general aspects of Jack Pitman’s contributions to the exercise in the 1920’s to his role in South Wales ringing. Don Clift, a well-known Welsh ringer, relates that in 1926, at the age of about 15 and not yet a bell ringer, he met Jack Pitman for the first time. The occasion was a peal of Grandsire Triples which Pitman was conducting and in which John W. Jones, the long-time Secretary of the LMDA, was also ringing. Since this was the first peal on the newly installed ring at Usk, a photograph of the ringers was to be taken for the local paper. Don Clift’s father was a professional photographer and was invited to come along at the end of the peal to record the event for posterity. He took his young son along with him, commenting, as many others have, that Mr Pitman was a very modest and shy man. The event throws a little light more light on Jack Pitman’s character, in that Clift remembered that Pitman was rather shy in that he “was reluctant to be photographed”. He was to meet Jack Pitman many times over the next 50 years and his original impressions of him were confirmed whenever they met. My own memories from the late 1950’s support Don Clift’s views on Pitman’s modesty and also, his description of “a tall alert figure wearing a flat cap, the traditional headwear of the day in South Wales”.

At St Mary’s Aberavon, the 1920’s was a period when the leadership of Jack Pitman, Ernie Stitch and others began to produce a flourishing band of ringers. The band started to grow and broaden their repertoire of methods, though Grandsire and Stedman were rung more than anything else. Thus, in 1923 senior members of Aberavon and Gorseinon towers met with the LMDA Secretary and others on a Saturday morning in Carmarthen to examine ways of stimulating ringing across the area. Towards the end of the 1920’s the Aberavon Band began weekly quarter peals attempts, usually on Sunday night for Evening Service. Perhaps ringing these quarters was designed to encourage members of the band to turn up to ring, with the additional incentive that more and more quarter peals were now published in *The Ringing World*. Often, the band would ring one of Pitman’s “Sunday Service Touches”, mentioned above. By the end of the decade the numbers of quarter peals attempted at St Mary’s had increased to one a month.
There was also more interest by many Aberavon ringers in peal ringing. Among the peals rung by them in the late 1920’s, was Grandsire Triples, conducted by A.J. Pitman in their home tower on 11th May 1928, which had a rather unusual footnote saying that it had been “arranged for the ringer of the 2nd, visiting judge of the SBDG Ringing Striking Competition”98, not, we hope an attempt to influence the outcome of the competition! Very often peals are rung to mark events in the lives of local ringers. A typical example was another peal of Grandsire Triples, rung at Aberavon in December 1928, conducted by Jack Pitman and especially arranged for the ringer of the third (William Williams), on the day before his 70th birthday, whose previous peal, had been 25 years before on 13th June 191499 - this had also been Jack Pitman’s first. Early in 1929, on 9th February, a peal of Bob Major was rung on the occasion of Jack Pitman and Ernie Stitch’s 50th peal together. Conducted by Stitch, it was the first of Major on the bells and was rung for the SBDG at St Mary’s, Swansea.100

As well as his actual ringing, Jack Pitman became active in the administration of South Wales ringing in both the Swansea and Brecon and Llandaff and Monmouth dioceses. The LDA began the decade in good form and their meeting at the beginning of 1920 was claimed to be the first time that ladies took part in ringing 8 bells. This was so unusual that it was reported that “the locals were very interested in seeing the two Rhymney ladies taking part in Triples.”101 A meeting later that year at Pontypridd was so crowded that it caused major problems with catering arrangements. A new Diocese of Monmouth was formed in 1921 and St Woolos Church, Newport was designated the Cathedral Church. This event was something of a challenge to the LDA and in 1921, an article outlining the problem was published, concluding that the LDA would have to split into two new associations or change its name to include Monmouth.102

After extensive consultation and discussion, it was decided that it would be desirable for it to stay as one association and its name changed to “The Llandaff and Monmouth Diocesan Association (LMDA) of Church Bell Ringers” and this is what it remains today. The proposal was put as a motion to the Annual Meeting chaired by the Rev Powell Davies in the “Waters Lane Mission Room” in Newport in December 1922. After discussion it was agreed unanimously. The Bishop’s letter sanctioning the change of title was read out by the Honorary Secretary at the first Annual General Meeting of the LMDA under the new name on Boxing Day, 26th December 1923. At the time of the discussions about the reorganisation, Harry Morgan of Newport was Master and John W. Jones the Secretary. As we have seen, the latter went on to become the longest serving secretary of the Association, having served from 1902 until 1945. He was presented with a gold watch in 1924 to acknowledge his 21 years of service as
secretary! In that year the Association voted to set up a “subcommittee” of 8 members to assist the secretary in his duties. Among the members elected was Mr A.J. Pitman of Aberavon. The LMDA continued in its role of helping individual towers, for example by providing several volunteers to help Skenfrith ringers to progress with change ringing, despite the fact that the church was several miles away from a railway station!

For much of his life Jack Pitman was also associated with the SBDG, which has a geographical border with the LMDA. Up until 1923 the only other association of ringers in South Wales, besides the LMDA, was the West Wales Association. Both these Associations were supported by Baglan and Aberavon ringers, for example members from Aberavon were recorded as being present at a meeting of the West Wales Association at Cadoxton in 1915. The SBDA was formed in 1923 and very soon after its formation an angry letter from a D.J. Williams was published in The Ringing World in November 1923, complaining that the West Wales Association had not “sanctioned” formation of the new guild and that there was little support for the move from them. A decision was taken at the earliest stage in the formation of the new Guild to adopt the rules of the Hereford Guild and an annual subscription of 2/6d (12p) was levied on members. The Guild was structured into two Districts, Northern and Southern. The first meeting of the new guild, took place on 26th April 1924 at Sketty, Swansea, including ringers from the LMDA. It was well attended and ringers from Aberavon were present, one of whom could well have been Jack Pitman. The methods rung on the 8 bells were Grandsire and Stedman Triples. The second meeting, in August 1925, took place in a field in Sketty, with the participants sitting under “some magnificent specimens of oak trees”!

Ernest Stitch and Mrs Bellringer were elected to the Committee. The SBDA initiated annual striking competitions and the second of these, in 1926 was held in St Catharine’s Church, Baglan and the lunch was held in Baglan School, which must have held many childhood memories for Jack Pitman. It was in this year at the Annual Meeting held in Brecon that he was elected Master of the SBDA, proposed by Mr Bellringer and seconded by the Treasurer, Mr Charles Powell. Jack Pitman held this post until 1930 when he was elected Vice-Master which he relinquished the following year. In 1929 Jack Pitman had:

......asked to be relieved of his duties (as Master) as it was,
in his opinion an honour which should be passed to some
other members, but he was prevailed upon to continue in
office on the proposition of Mr Charles Powell – seconded
by Mr D.J. Williams.

Ernest Stitch and Mrs Bellringer remained on the Committee. Jack Pitman was also elected to attend as the SBDA representative at the annual CCCBR
meetings, while Ernest Stitch was appointed as Secretary to the Southern District. Thus began Jack Pitman’s long association with the CCBR. Bearing in mind that this was a small guild, it is salutary to note that the above meeting, notwithstanding the travel difficulties of the day and in the same month as the General Strike, was attended by over a 100 members!

The end of the decade in February 1929 saw the death of Mr Evan Davies, who as discussed above, had a major influence on the early development of change ringing in South Wales. He was elected the Founding Master of the LDA in 1893 and also for both 1894 and 1895. He was a very distinguished member of the local community and had been headmaster of the William’s Endowed Schools, Caerleon, was an antiquarian of some note, an authority in ecclesiastical law and on the history of Caerleon. A half-muffled peal of Grandsire Triples was rung a few days after his death at his beloved tower, St Cadoc’s, Caerleon. The footnote associated with the peal summarises the loss which the South Wales ringers felt at his death:

*Half-muffled in respect and affection to the late Mr Evan Davies, to whose initiative this peal of bells was obtained: 40 years ago the first peal was rung on them and was the first peal by all the band taught by Mr Davies who conducted the peal. The ringer of the 4th took part in the first performance.*

Pitman for most of his working life was a railwayman and he became a member of the Railwaymen’s Guild of Ringers. First hints of the possible formation of such an organisation appeared in 1925, when C.T. Coles suggested in *The Ringing World* that a Railwaymen’s Guild of bell ringers should be formed. Furthermore, in that year, there was also a LMDA peal of Grandsire Caters which was termed “Railwaymen’s Peal” in St Woolos, Newport and included only those who were employees of the Great Western Railway Company. Also 1925 saw the “Railway Centenary Celebrations”. However, it was to be some years before this subject seriously arose again and a Railwaymen’s Guild was formed.

It is easy to get the impression that bell ringing consists only of ringing for services, practices and peals. However, one of the delightful aspects of bellringing is travelling around the country, ringing in several different towers in a day, a few days, or even over a week. This has been a feature of ringing for many years. Nowadays travel to towers is almost exclusively by car. In the 1920’s, of course, other forms of transport were used such as the bus or train. Jack Pitman, during his working life sometimes found such “outings” difficult to attend because of his shift-work. However, I can state from my own personal experience in the late 1950’s, that after he had retired, he continued to support and enjoy such outings.
An example of one of the many outings, reported in 1924 was the ambitious 180 mile “charabanc trip” made by the Bridgend ringers and “a few friends” to Gloucestershire which is described as “one of the best trips the Guild has ever had”.\textsuperscript{107} It is possible that Jack Pitman was included among the “few friends”. The first tower at Lydney was rather a disaster, because the long draft made things difficult for the Bridgend ringers used to the short draught in their own tower. They had a splendid dinner in Gloucester and having enjoyed the bells at Painswick, went on to Cheltenham, rung there and then returned to Bridgend, arriving back in the early hours of the next day! The following year they repeated the exercise with a 240 mile-round charabanc trip to Aberystwyth, again arriving home in the early hours of the following day. Also Jack Pitman and possibly his father almost certainly took part in an outing in September 1925 by ringers from neighbouring towers, Aberavon, Baglan, Neath, Cadoxton and Morriston, to Llandilo and Llanstephen. Sadly, at the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, travelling by bus on ringing outings is gradually dying out, but many ringers will remember with great pleasure outings by bus or coach.

There was an excellent exposition of what such outings are like in \textit{The Ringing World} in 1952. A few lines give a flavour of outings in those days:

“...it is the mixture of characters that gives a very special flavour to a ringers’ outing. ....the young bloods, who have banked on the back seat and who are hoping that it runs the width of the bus and will hold five or squeeze six. This all day will be the storm centre, the scene of practical jokes...”\textsuperscript{108}

Also in 1952, there appeared another snippet which threw light from the world outside ringing onto the world of ringing. It was entitled “The Bellringers by an Observant Layman”, published in “The Times” newspaper and here is a short excerpt from it:\textsuperscript{109}

\textit{And in the belfry, mute, motionless waiting, hang the bells. Old Grandfer Higgs, eighty last birthday trudges up the churchyard path with the great key of the tower door; and in ones and twos the bellringers gather in the cool, dim tower, and after “ringing up” stand by their ropes for the words ‘treble’s going – gone’, when one by one the great bells speak.....}

\textit{Twice on Sundays; at weekly practice; at weddings; when a king dies, a queen is crowned, or a prince is born; bellringers stand by their ropes and 60 feet up in the tower the bells ring loud and clear.}

This is the world that Jack Pitman loved.
In planning “ringing outings” nowadays, we take for granted the excellent compendium of world-wide towers with bells, known affectionately as “Dove’s Guide”. However, this useful book was not published until 1951, even though there was a proposal in a letter by E.O. Baker for a directory of towers and their ringing-times in an editorial in The Ringing World in January 1922. Inevitably, soon afterwards it was pointed out that there had already been “A Change Ringers Guide to Steeples of England” by J.E. and R.H.D. Acland-Troyte published in 1882. However, it is not clear how complete this was, and in any case, it only covered England. The debate on this continued over the next few weeks but the idea had to wait many years before it was finally taken up by Ronald Dove.

We have already seen that The Ringing World and its correspondents frequently put forward challenges for ringers. In the middle of 1925 an editorial appeared lamenting the lack of a comprehensive publication of “The History of Ringing”. This editorial had been inspired by an article by J. Armiger Trollope in the same issue. It seems likely that this encouraged Ernest Morris to write his famous book, “The History and Art of Change Ringing”, which is still read today.

In the early 1920’s, Radio (or the Wireless as it was called then) was very much in its infancy and the only radio station which broadcast in Britain was the predecessor of the BBC called 2LO. In August 1925, this station broadcast a number of live performances on bells such as bell ringing for Sunday Service, from a church in Aberdeen. In fact, the bells that the listeners heard were those of Buckfast Abbey in Devon! Later in the year there was even an international dimension, when the bells of Nottingham were heard via radio in Barcelona. The sound of bells on the radio became quite a common feature over the years and until fairly recently the sound of change ringing was often chosen to occupy gaps between programmes or before the start of the day’s broadcasting.

Over the years many reports in the ringing literature have raised issues presaging the end of bell ringing as we know it. So it was that, at the end of 1920, an editorial in The Ringing World described proposals put forward by the National Assembly of the Church of England which meant that Parochial Church Councils (PCC) would be given powers such that, in collaboration with incumbents, they would be able to “appoint and dismiss the organist, parish clerk, bellringers and sexton…..” At that time there was a CCCBR representative on the Church of England’s National Assembly and he urgently sought the views of ringers, so that he could bring them to the Assembly’s attention. Meanwhile The Ringing World felt that this was a matter of sufficient importance that it should be quickly considered by the CCCBR, perhaps by a special meeting of its Standing Committee, since the Council only meets once a year.
However, this threat eventually evaporated but was followed by an apparently graver threat in 1925, which began in no less an arena than Parliament. An organisation called “Society for the Prevention of Public Nuisances” signalled their intention to bring forward to Parliament a Bill entitled: “The Bell Ringing (Restriction) Bill”, which was aimed at the “suppression” of church bell ringing, with the promise of significant high-level support! The Ringing World’s editorial insisted that there was “nothing to go into hysterics about”. Nevertheless the Editor urged the strengthening of the CCCBR Press Committee in preparation for a “counterblast”. There follows in the same issue a rebuttal of the beliefs and the intentions of the Society for the Prevention of Public Nuisances. The issue does not appear to have surfaced again, either because of the actions of the CCCBR, or because the Society was never properly formed and existed only in the imagination of one Mr J.D. Lewis of Penarth.

As we have seen, there is no doubt that the 1920’s saw the coming-of-age of spliced-method ringing. Pitman was in the vanguard of these developments and showed a breadth of interest in this area which suited the times well. Even so, as we have seen he continued to focus much of his energy on spliced plain major and triples methods and at the end of the decade J. Armiger Trollope, who was a renowned and talented ringer and writer on ringing matters, suggested that in the future, “once an enterprising band has taken up ‘spliced’ ringing, a peal in any one method is a tame affair”. How prophetic! Inevitably, because of Pitman’s work in this decade, we have focussed on splicing 8-bell methods. However, throughout this time and for many years to come, great strides were made in the splicing of Surprise Minor methods and also on higher numbers of bells.
Chapter 4

SPLICING AND ALL THE WORK: The 1930’s

The 1930’s began with a continuation of industrial unrest and increasing political uncertainty and ended with the start of the Second World War. Memories of the 1914-1918 conflict remained strongly embedded in the minds of large sections of the population. Unemployment and poverty remained major problems as throughout much of the decade industrial activity declined in Britain. This particularly affected highly industrial areas like South Wales and there was a concomitant decline in railway freight business and many railway jobs were lost, though it still remained among the safest forms of employment. Between 1931 and 1934 average unemployment in Port Talbot was 46% and in 1937 a whole industry was closed down when the Rio Tinto Copper Works became a victim of the effects of the Spanish Civil War.\textsuperscript{114}

This must have been a continuing source of concern to the Pitman family as the children grew up and began to enter the job market, though throughout his whole working life Jack Pitman was never unemployed. However, industrial decline became less of a feature later in the decade as the country began to gear itself up in preparation for military action. Thus, while the Rio Tinto Copper Works was closing, a new ring of bells was installed in Ebbw Vale and there was a thanksgiving for the return of prosperity to the town. Soon after the installation, the bells were rung for one of the more unusual celebrations for which bells have been used, viz. “to celebrate the first blast furnace of Richard Thomas and Baldwin’s new plant was (\textit{sic}) ‘blown in’” in October 1937. A major contributor to the cost
of the bells was Richard Thomas and Baldwin and Co Ltd, owners of the steel plant. However, the first peal of Major on the bells would not be rung until after the war in 1946, when there was a peal of Double Norwich Court Bob Major.\textsuperscript{115}

One of the keys that can be used to unlock the doors to employment is education, particularly Higher Education. However the number of people going to university in the 1930’s was miniscule compared with today. Although there were many cultural and class pressures against 18 year olds attending university, a major factor was finance. Jack Pitman’s daughter, Dorothy (Dolly) went to grammar school in Port Talbot and showed a very considerable aptitude to mathematics. At the same time as she attempted her Higher School Certificate examinations she was entered for a further examination for what was called a State Scholarship. This was an examination which sought to identify the very brightest pupils. Few of these were offered, but they provided significant funding during the scholar’s time in university and all fees were waived. In 1933 Dorothy was awarded a State Scholarship in Mathematics and was accepted for a place at Aberystwyth, a constituent College of The University of Wales. The footnote of a peal of Grandsire Triples rung at St Illtyd’s, Bridgend includes the words:

...as a compliment to the ringer of the 6\textsuperscript{th}’s (Albert J. Pitman) daughter on having won a State Scholarship.

While Dolly was in university, the next stage in the development of Jack’s family began, when his first grandchild, Josie was born to Reginald and Olwen in 1935. Reginald had also gone to Aberystwyth University with a State Scholarship in 1929 to read mathematics, but with physics as well. He excelled in university and earned the nickname egghead. A photograph of his year shows a huge preponderance of men and very few women. Also in the mid 1930’s, Jack’s son Sidney and his wife Lilian presented Jack and Evelyn with three grandchildren, David (1936), Pat (1937) and Sheila (1938).

![Reginald Pitman when he went up to Aberystwyth University.](image)

\textit{Pitman Family Collection.}
The 1930’s was a politically turbulent decade. Increasing unemployment that began in the early 1920’s continued into the 1930s and deepened significantly into a depression. As we have seen it had its effect on Port Talbot, though it is fair to say that the variety of industry in the town and the surrounding areas went some way in protecting it from the worst consequences of the depression. The depressed state of the nation must have impacted on Jack Pitman and his family as the findings of the Macmillan Committee, set up to investigate the financial state of the country drew attention to the parlous state of the British gold reserves and the fact that the country was sliding towards imminent bankruptcy. The Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, Member of Parliament for Aberavon, resigned in August 1931. All this was occurring alongside the growing threat from Germany and the increasing power of Hitler, culminating in the Second World War in 1939.

For a while the mood lightened somewhat when in May 1935 the country celebrated the Silver Jubilee of King George V. Pitman was not involved in any successful peals for the Jubilee, but he had rung two years earlier to celebrate the “23rd anniversary of the Accession of HM George V” in May 1933. However, soon after the Silver Jubilee the nation was plunged into mourning for the death of King George V in January 1936. Pitman rang two peals, one in Bridgend (Erin Triples) and the other in Aberavon (Grandsire Triples), for the accession of the new King Edward VIII, who had visited the Rhondda Valley in 1932 and was well liked throughout Britain and especially in South Wales. He was king for just under a year, abdicating in December 1936 and George VI came to the throne and was crowned in May 1937.

Coronations have traditionally been occasions celebrated with bells and for the ringing community that provides the opportunity to ring peals. Many peals were rung in 1937 for the coronation but the celebration started badly for both Aberavon and Baglan. In the case of the former, the coronation peal of Grandsire Triples was lost quite near the end. Pitman was ringing the 7th and Ernie Stitch was conducting. At Baglan the peal didn’t even get started because one of the ringers didn’t turn up at the appointed time! Ernie Stitch did however ring a Coronation peal in Pontypridd at the end of May and both Pitman and Stitch were in a successful peal of Grandsire Triples at St Mary’s, Swansea, at the beginning of June. The following month the new King and Queen visited Cardiff and Jack Pitman rang in a peal of Grandsire Caters at St John the Baptist Church in Cardiff.

In ringing terms, the members of the band at St Mary’s Aberavon had developed rapidly and their first quarter peal of the decade in their home tower was a “Sunday Service Touch” of Grandsire Triples in February
1930. This was the first of 6 rung there that year, culminating in one for the birth of George Chappell’s daughter in December 1930. Conducting was shared throughout the year between Pitman and Stitch.

St Mary’s Attendance Registers for the years 1930 and 1931 show that in addition to the ringers in the above quarter peal, other members of the Tower were C. Jones and C. Hughes. In 1932 W. Williams died, and was remembered in silence at a Quarterly Meeting of the LMDA in April 1932. Meanwhile, V. Smith and Jack Pitman’s daughter Betty (Beatrice) had become members. By 1939 the membership was as shown (22).

22. St. Mary’s attendance register for 1939.

*St Mary’s Church Aberavon Archives.*

The tower membership is confirmed in a small piece in *The Ringing World* in 1931 about an unfortunate group of 15 Aberavon ringers and friends who had booked tables at a local café only to find, when they arrived at the allotted time, no food was available to them! They disconsolately returned home with empty stomachs, but a week or two later were able to consume
as a group an excellent supper at the Carlton Café. Perhaps inevitably, the
dinner began with a “short” address from the Vicar! The account gives
details of the ringers present, including their length of service with the St
Mary’s Band. The 10 ringers present represented a total of 179 years and
the longest serving had been a member for 46 years (W. Williams, joined
1885) and shortest service was G. Chappell (5 years, 1926), who continued
for many years after that. Jack Pitman had served for 22 years (1909). The
only absentee ringer was F.D Jones who was unable to attend through
illness. C.H. Perry had almost certainly been a member of the band in 1914,
but had since moved to Bridgend, where he returned after his military
service in the First World War. In 1932 he rang a peal of Grandsire Triples
at St Mary’s, Swansea, which Jack Pitman conducted and is described in the
footnote as “a wedding peal for C.H. Perry”.

A most important event for both the Aberavon Tower and its ringers was
a peal of Grandsire Triples there, conducted by A.J. Pitman, on 20\textsuperscript{th} March
1931, which was:

"......the first peal rung on the bells (installed in 1893) by all
Sunday Service ringers at Aberavon".\textsuperscript{117}

William Williams, ringing the 2\textsuperscript{nd}, also rang in the first peal on the bells in
1904.

In a sense, this was really the culmination of the hard work that Jack
Pitman and his fellow ringers, particularly Ernie Stitch, had put into ringing
at Aberavon since he joined the band in 1909 He must have felt very proud
of his achievements. Though he is justly famous for his brilliant work as a
composer, he cared greatly about ringing and ringers in his home tower.
What had been achieved by 1931 was to ensure another 3 decades of active
ringing at St Mary’s until and after he moved away in 1957.

The 1920’s had seen the early flowering of Pitman’s composing skills as
he shifted the emphasis from Triples, Plain Major and Treble Bob methods
to Surprise Major methods, extending to increasingly ambitious Spliced
Surprise Major compositions. Over the next 10 years he focussed more and
more on the intricacies of Spliced Surprise Major as his reputation as a
composer grew. The years before the Second World War were to be among
the most successful for Pitman in terms of the number, variety and
complexity of the compositions he produced.

1930 began with an article describing the eventually successful peal of his
latest composition, 5280 of 11-Spliced Surprise Major, rung at St Giles in
the Fields, Thursday 24\textsuperscript{th} July 1930.\textsuperscript{118} The original intention had been
to ring the peal at Willesden. At this tower 3 attempts were unsuccessful,
despite the ringers reaching over half way each time before failing. The
successful peal was conducted by William Pye. The methods were: London
(1600), Rutland (960), Cambridge (480), Superlative (320), Pudsey (320),
Lincolnshire (320), Yorkshire (320), Peterborough (320), Norfolk (320), Bristol (160) and New Gloucester (160). The figures in brackets are the changes rung in each method. It is an interesting comment on Pitman’s prodigious productivity that the author of the article strongly hints that Pitman had already composed a peal of 12 methods ready for an appropriate band to ring.

True to form, 3 weeks later, there was a letter from A.J. Pitman congratulating the band on ringing the 11-spliced peal, describing it as “another wonderful performance” and including a composition for a peal in any number of methods from 6 to 14, with at least 10 leads of each method, except when the method then referred to as Lindoff’s No 29 is included.\textsuperscript{121} At the end of 1930, Pitman produced yet another Spliced Surprise Major composition, this time for 5120 in 16 methods.\textsuperscript{122} The composition also allows from 7 to 16 methods to be rung.

In the articles on both the 14 and 16 method peals, Pitman acknowledges his correspondence with C.T. Coles and J. Armiger Trollope, providing valuable information on new Surprise Major methods which were available. A peal of 5120 changes in 12 Surprise Major methods, including the new methods Eastcote (Lindoff’s No. 10) and Wembley (Lindoff’s No. 30), was rung by the Middlesex County Association at Ealing on 1\textsuperscript{st} July 1931. A report on the peal, including the composition was later published.\textsuperscript{123 124} The new methods were rung in a peal for the first time. This was rapidly followed by the longest peal (5760 changes) of Spliced Surprise Major in a peal of 9-spliced also by the Middlesex band on 1\textsuperscript{st} December 1931.\textsuperscript{125 126}

The rush to ring the most Spliced Surprise Major methods in a peal tended to exclude intermediate numbers. Thus a 7-spliced Surprise Major peal (Pitman’s composition of 5088 changes of London, Cambridge, Rutland, Norfolk, New Gloucester, Bristol and Yorkshire) was not rung until 19\textsuperscript{th} April 1932, when it was rung by the Willesden Band for the Middlesex Association with William Pye on the tenor.\textsuperscript{127 128} A composition for an 8-spliced 5280 peal by Pitman swiftly followed on 1\textsuperscript{st} July that year\textsuperscript{129} and later a 2 to 5-spliced peal of 5120 changes in Superlative, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Cambridge and Pudsey\textsuperscript{130} and a 3, 4 or 5-spliced 5312 peal of Bristol, London, Rutland, Cambridge and Superlative.\textsuperscript{131 132} The “Cambridge group” 5120 used a 4-lead course with a bob before in every course.

The beginning of a long and distinguished history of Spliced Surprise Major ringing in the Chester Guild was inaugurated in January 1934 when the first spliced peal ever in the county was rung. It was also the first time that Pitman’s peal of 5120 changes of Cambridge and Rutland Surprise Major had been rung\textsuperscript{133 134} In that year, Pitman came up with what he described as “a few compositions I have not yet published” implying that he

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composed many peals and only sent a chosen few of them for publication. These peals were for Bristol, Cambridge, Superlative and London.\textsuperscript{135} Another composition involving the same methods appeared in July 1934. These peals were all on the “3-leads course” basis.

In many walks of life, progress in an enterprise occurs in a series of small incremental changes over a long period; sometimes, however a single event, small and apparently insignificant in itself, can bring about a sudden paradigm change. Such was the case in May 1935, when John Worth of the Chester Guild wrote a letter to \textit{The Ringing World} which was to have far-reaching effects on Spliced Surprise Major ringing for many years to come. It also contained a comment on a debate regarding Spliced Surprise Major which was to take place at the forthcoming CCCBR meeting. In view of its seminal influence on a whole branch of ringing, the letter is worth quoting in its entirety:\textsuperscript{136}

\textbf{PEALS IN “SPLICED” METHODS}

\textbf{THE DIFFICULTY OF DIFFERENTIATION}

\textit{To the Editor}

\textit{Dear Sir,}-I hope that Mr C.T. Coles and Mr E.C.S. Turner have given serious thought to the proposition which they have placed on the Central Council agenda re spliced and combined peals. I agree that peals running in long lengths in each method want a different title, and yet it is a ‘splice,’ and no one can get away from it.

To put the peals of minor in 35, 38, 39 and 40 methods on a lower plane than any Spliced Surprise Major peal is all wrong.

For example, take the 35 method peal; in each method either a full course or one or two leads more than a course are rung, and every bell rings all the work in each method rung. In Spliced Surprise Major, as for example, the Rev. Law James’ peal in four methods, the tenor and the seventh only ring two out of seven leads of London and Bristol and one lead each of Superlative and Cambridge, so there are, at any rate, two bells which never ring a full course in any of the methods. To my mind this robs Spliced Surprise Major of its value.

\textit{I hope some composer will some time be able get a spliced peal, either with the tenors together or otherwise – it should make no difference to the band where the tenors
are - in which every bell, at some part of the peal, rings all
the seven leads in each method.
As regards Kent and Oxford, if it is not ‘spliced,’ what is it?

JOHN WORTH

The key paragraphs are three and four. It is worth commenting on their
significance in relation to John Worth’s comments about the status of 6-bell
ringing, which was often (and still is) regarded by some as a rather lowly
pursuit compared with Surprise Major ringing. However, here was an
opportunity for Minor ringing to teach major ringing a thing or two! Indeed
it did! It presented a massive challenge to composers of Spliced Surprise
Major peals, including Pitman. It also provided him with the opportunity,
many years later, to produce perhaps his finest peal of Spliced Surprise
Major. Note that John Worth’s letter was published in May 1935. Pitman’s
first response in the form of a composition came very swiftly indeed. In the
following month he published one under the heading “Spliced Surprise
Major: A New Plan in a Four-Method Peal”. The methods were London,
Cambridge, Bristol and Superlative and the most important sentence in the
piece is “It is the first of Spliced Surprise Major in which the whole of the
work of three methods can be rung by every bell, including the tenors.” It
was a great achievement for him to have come up with this so swiftly.
Although he would no doubt have been disappointed that he could not
incorporate “all the work” for Cambridge, this peal points the way ahead in
the use of full courses of London and Bristol.

We have seen from the large number of compositions he produced in the
early 1930’s, that he was capable of producing compositions very rapidly.
However, it is possible that John Worth had contacted him before the letter
was sent to The Ringing World. It is also likely that although John Worth
took it upon himself to publish the letter, the matter had previously been
discussed among Spliced Surprise Major ringers and composers, including
Pitman. Despite John Worth’s comparative youth, he was born in
Macclesfield in 1904, he had achieved much in ringing and conducting in
the 1930’s. Although he did not ring his first peal until he was 25 years of
age, 5 years later he initiated, rang in and conducted Chester Guild spliced
peals with increasing numbers of Minor methods, reaching 84 methods in
1938. He also rang his 200th peal in that year. As we shall see, he was to go
on and ring in many of A.J. Pitman’s Spliced Surprise Major compositions

The issue of the nomenclature, nature and structure of Surprise Major was
already a significant talking point because of the CCCBR’s deliberations on
the topic in the previous year’s meeting. Nevertheless, Pitman must be
accorded the accolade of having produced the first peal with all the work in
3 methods. We shall see that he spent many years after this in an attempt to produce a peal with all the work in 4 methods with little success. The peal using Pitman’s composition was rung at St Mary’s Willesden on Tuesday, 8th October 1935 and in a piece referring to it, entitled “Spliced Surprise Major: New Composition Nearest Approach to Ideal”, was written:

“......Up to the present it has been found impossible to obtain a peal of London, Cambridge, Superlative and Bristol, with all the work of each method for each bell. As for full courses of each method so ardently wished for by a few well-meaning members of the Central Council, these seem to be as far off as ever, as this particular composition contains just two full courses throughout and these in the same method!

The peal was called by Mr E.C.S. Turner from a non-observation bell, a very big task, and this clever young conductor received hearty congratulations from his fellow ringers on completion of the peal.........”

Pitman continued to publish his series of “ordinary” Spliced Surprise Major peals with a six-part 5120 peal and a 5024 ten part peal, in 1936. However, after this he did not publish any more Spliced Surprise Major compositions for the remainder of the decade and therefore before the Second World War ringing ban. There are at least two possible reasons for this. One was that he felt that his best efforts should be directed towards seeking a way to produce “all the work” compositions. The other is that at this time his wife became increasingly unwell, as she suffered with rheumatoid arthritis.

It is slightly incongruous that while these major advances in Spliced Surprise Major were being achieved, some of those eminent in the world of ringing had been worrying for some time about the very nature of “splicing”. Much of this concerned the nomenclature of spliced method ringing but it was also felt that the term “spliced” itself should be redefined more precisely. At the CCCBR meeting in 1934, C.T. Coles gave notice that he would bring forward a motion to clarify the definition of a spliced peal at the next meeting. A complex amended motion was tabled at the meeting. The motion (which included a series of stipulations) was:

That in view of the extension of the practice of splicing methods, this Council resolves that the term “spliced” shall be applied only to those peals in which there are at least as many changes of method as there are courses in the peal subject to the following stipulations.

The “stipulations” are then listed and followed by the sentence:
Peals which contain more than one method, but which do not conform to the foregoing, shall be called “Combined” peals.

This in turn was followed by a special requirement to exclude “certain peals of Kent and Oxford Treble Bob.”

Here was a very radical change in the nature of the naming of peals of Spliced Surprise Major and there was a long, informed, thoughtful, but in the end spurious debate with a number of references to Pitman peals. However, there is little doubt that it served the purpose of clarifying the thinking of many on the nature of spliced peals. It was pointed out by C.T. Coles in proposing the motion that, among the peals composed by Pitman, with up to 16 methods, some “would not be known as spliced in future.” Later in the proposition, Pitman’s contribution to Spliced Surprise Major is referred to again, although part of the statement appears not to be strictly true:

“Mr Pitman had sent him a peal in which he found a way to put in nine consecutive leads of London. That was a very wonderful thing, which up to now had defied attempts of other composers. That opened the way for finding a spliced peal in four Surprise methods in which every bell did all the work of all the four methods. Mr Pitman had succeeded in doing that, and, further, he had spliced into the peal nine consecutive leads of London.”

The debate continued, introducing another form of splicing called “laminated”, but in the end, at 5.05 pm and with more business to transact, an amendment by S.H. Wood saved the day. This was:

“..... that, peals containing more than one method should be called spliced peals, but that reports of spliced peals should include a reference to the number of methods rung and the number of changes from one method to another in the peal.”

With, no doubt some heavy sighs of relief, the amendment was carried.

Although this was thought to be a temporary solution, it proved to be more durable than expected. The conclusion drawn by the Editor of The Ringing World after the meeting was that, ideally a spliced peal should ensure that “every bell should do all the work of all the methods.”

This stop-gap solution provided a respite from argument until the following year, in the weeks leading up to the 1936 CCCBR meeting, it all erupted again in letters to The Ringing World. In an amusing and trenchant article entitled “Reflections in Light and Shade, Comments of an Old Warrior” and Subtitled ‘W.W’. Takes Down His Battleaxe”, the question of splicing is briefly, but forcefully addressed to the Central Council by William Wilson as follows:
“Do they really think they can twist the English Language to suit their own twisted ideas? What is the meaning of the word ‘spliced’? The dictionary tells us ‘To join by interweaving’. Just so........... In fact – and this is a stone cold fact, and not an opinion – any peal in which more than one method is rung is ‘spliced,’ whether you join up at any lead end, part end or at rounds. And I challenge any argument to the contrary.”

However, at the meeting, it soon became clear that the protagonists had got together and come up with a compromise. A motion, not too different from the one in the previous meeting and echoing William Wilson’s thoughts on the subject, was agreed. Basically, if more than one method was used, then the peal was to be “spliced”, with the proviso that the lead, in the case of treble-dominated methods, or sixes in Stedman-type methods, remained intact. A reference to the number of methods and changes was also required. This rule held sway for a number of years, but eventually it too was breached and splicing with the treble at the back (i.e. at the half-lead) became allowed. This process is typical of the way in which the progress in the theory of ringing has taken place over the years.

One could be forgiven for thinking that only methods having the word “Surprise” in the title are worth splicing and/or ringing in spliced peals. While Jack Pitman spent much of his time composing peals of Spliced Surprise Major, he was one of the few composers who also excelled in producing compositions involving splicing non-Surprise methods (or principles), both throughout the 1920’s as we have seen and through the 1930’s. Stedman and Erin (Doubles, Triples or Caters) are in many ways rather similar to each other, and Jack composed spliced peals of these. An example was his composition No 2 of 5037 changes of Stedman and Erin Caters, published in December 1933. The structure of Erin Triples resembles that of Stedman, though it is not rung very often. Pitman rang it for the first time at St Mary’s Aberavon in April 1932, conducting from the 7th. Six of the eight ringers had never previously rung a peal of Erin. The following year, he composed, conducted and rang in a peal of spliced St Illtyd and Oxford Bob Triples, rung for the first time at Bridgend in February 1934. He also produced a composition of Spliced Grandsire Triples and the very closely related New Grandsire Triples. This was first rung at Bridgend in February 1937.

Throughout this decade, as in the 1920’s, Pitman continued to publish single-method peal compositions of Surprise Major. In 1932 there appeared a composition of 5056 of Warwickshire Surprise Major which was rung by the Warwickshire Guild in March 1932 at Nuneaton. Similarly, his composition of 5088 Wigston Surprise Major was first rung at Wigston
Magna, Leicestershire by the Midland Counties Association in June 1933. His 5152 of York Surprise Major was rung at Nuneaton by the Warwickshire Band in December 1933 being published by 1934, whilst his 5024 of Truro Surprise Major was rung at Hillingdon by the Middlesex County Association in May 1934.

Pitman also published a composition of 5056 Oxford Treble Bob Major in 1932. This has the merit that the second and the tenor are only together in 7.8 four times with 2.8.

He retained his interest in composing for Grandsire and Stedman Triples as single methods, as well as non-Surprise Major methods. A.J. Pitman’s Odd and Even Bob No. 3 composition of Stedman Triples was published in August 1931, having been rung for the first time in Long Eaton in Derbyshire by the Midland Counties Association. He rapidly followed this in September by a 4-part Odd and Even Bob Peal of Stedman Triples, rung at Measham in August 1931; conducted by Maurice Swinfield. This was the first composition of a 4-part odd and even bob peal of Stedman Triples. His 12-part odd and even bob No. 4 of Stedman was rung for the first time, again for the Midland Counties Association at Whitwick, in October of that year.

January 1932 saw Jack Pitman conducting from the 7th his composition in 20 parts of Stedman Triples. This composition is notable for having two singles and odd bobs in each course, but the second and seventh bells remain undisturbed throughout. This was not published until 1940.

In January 1933, Pitman’s Irregular 20 Part No 6 (twin bobs and singles) composition of Stedman Triples was rung for the first time at Long Eaton by the Midland Counties Association and his 6-part No 9 was also rung at Whitwick in April for the same Association. That year proved to be a good one for Pitman’s Stedman Triples’ compositions, when a number were rung for the first time. His Odd and Even 6-part No 12 was rung at Ilkeston in July and his 3-part No 8 in August at Rochester, Staffordshire and his Stedman Triples Odd and Even Bob and Single 4-Part No 12 was rung in September at Long Eaton, for the Midland Counties Association. Similarly, the following year Pitman’s Stedman Triples Odd and Even Bob 3-Part No 10 was rung for the same association at Greasely in May 1934.

There seems no doubt that he enjoyed producing compositions for these methods and there was a demand for them. There was some concern at the time that a gulf was opening between Surprise and other methods with some of the more skilled ringers focussing heavily on the former and neglecting what they regarded as more “elementary” methods.

While composing intricate peals of Spliced Surprise Major, Pitman continued to ring peals of the methods he rang most throughout his life, viz. Grandsire, Stedman and other Triples. His first peal of the decade was
Oxford Bob Triples, conducted by Ernie Stitch in March 1930 at Bridgend, which continued to be Jack Pitman’s “second ringing home”. His next was Grandsire Triples, rung in celebration of Queen Mary’s birthday in May and later in the year to celebrate the Golden Wedding of the Tower Captain of St John’s, Cardiff and his wife. Whenever possible he rang for special occasions involving his home parish of Aberavon. For example, the wedding of the Curate of St Paul’s, Aberavon which was in Cardiff on 3rd December was celebrated by a peal of Grandsire Triples in Bridgend, with three Aberavon ringers taking part. Similarly, Stedman Triples was the chosen method when Pitman conducted a peal for the consecration of the new Bishop of Llandaff, Rev Timothy Rees at St Asaph’s Cathedral in April 1931. He was also in a notable peal at St Mary’s Aberavon, Grandsire Triples, rung for the 75th anniversary of the building of the church, conducted by Ernie Stitch. In May 1935 a peal of Grandsire Triples was also rung, at St Mary’s, for one of those, sometimes contrived coincidences in ringing for which peals are rung, the 100th peal together of Jack Pitman and Ernie Stitch and the 50th peal of their good friend Gwyn Lewis of Neath. It was also the first peal on the bells since they were re-hung on ball bearings. The introduction of ball bearings meant that they became easier, more pleasant to ring and required less routine maintenance.

The first peal ever rung by Past Masters of the LMDA was Stedman Triples rung at St John-the-Baptist in Cardiff in January 1938, conducted by John Phillips. Pitman, Master in 1926, rang the 5th. The longest serving former Master was John W. Jones, who had had held the post 40 years previously (1898). Later in 1938 Ernie Stitch was also elected as Master of the LMDA.

The vast majority of Jack Pitman’s peals in the 1930’s were rung for either the LMDA or the SBDG, as shown in Table 2 (page 72), he rang a total of 79 peals.

The distribution of the methods he rang in the 1930’s is of interest. Surprisingly the record shows a near balance between his two favourites, Grandsire (31) and Stedman, (27), but the fact that immediately strikes one is the contrast between what he rang and what he composed. Not only is there no Spliced Surprise Major, there is no Surprise Major at all; this at a time when Surprise ringing was becoming increasingly popular. Indeed, he rang little other than Grandsire and Stedman, despite his undoubted familiarity with the structures of these methods for which he devised exquisite and beautiful compositions. In fact it is difficult to escape the conclusion that his ringing love affair was with Grandsire and Stedman. Significantly, his peal ringing shows a dearth of major methods, for example the peal of 5046 Oxford Treble Bob Major at Pentre in the Rhondda in 1932 was his first peal in the method.
Table 2
Peals rung by A.J. Pitman during the decade 1930 – 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>LMDA</th>
<th>SBDG</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grandsire Doubles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandsire Triples</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandsire Caters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stedman Triples</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stedman Caters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spliced Triples</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin Triples</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin Caters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Triples</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall number is modest, possibly because of the demands of his job on the railway and the consequent shift work. Most peals would have been rung on a Saturday and his shift pattern infrequently allowed a break at the weekend. Also, he was limited by the ambitions of his South Wales colleagues for both the frequency of ringing peals and their nature. He was also a dedicated family man who wished to maintain a balance between his home life and hobbies. His daughter Dorothy, remembers that he had two separate and clearly defined groups of friends; ringers and other friends. Furthermore, as we have seen, towards the end of the 1930’s, his wife was becoming increasingly infirm with rheumatoid arthritis, and, as we shall see later he began to carry an increasing burden of care. His time was also taken up with the phenomenal effort he put into peal composition. It is clear, however, that although he got great enjoyment out of ringing, he did not see himself as a dedicated peal ringer.

Pitman does not appear to have favoured six-bell ringing, despite his early years at Baglan, though we know that he had a soft-spot for Grandsire Doubles and there is his famous composition of 240 changes of Grandsire Doubles of which he was very proud. The peal of Grandsire Doubles rung at Baglan in October 1931 included his father Albert E. Pitman who rang the tenor, Jack the treble and Ernie Stitch conducted. It was characteristic of Jack Pitman that he included Harry Page in the band for whom it was his first peal. Jack’s father also rung in a peal of Grandsire Doubles the
following year, again conducted by Stitch to celebrate the Jubilee of St Catharine’s Church. In the immediate aftermath of the favourable CCCBR ruling on Pitman’s 240 of Grandsire Doubles, there was a spate of peals containing Pitman’s 240 in 1938. Intriguingly, in one of these, rung for the Kent County Association, the treble ringer was a W.E. Pitman. In the previous June and July an F.E. Pitman rang in two peals of Bob Major for the Kent County Association for the birthdays of his parents Mrs E. Pitman ad Mr H.J.T. Pitman. This group of Pitmans do not appear to be related to the A.J. Pitman family, though F.E. Pitman did compose peals, as illustrated by a letter containing a composition which he published in. In September 1930, Jack Pitman rang and conducted a peal of Spliced Treble Bob Minor, the first spliced peal in the SBDG, at Cadoxton in “honour of the appointment of the Archdeacon of Llandaff and a birthday compliment to A.J. Pitman”. A peal of Kent and Oxford Treble Bob Minor rung at St Thomas, Neath was jointly conducted by Jack Pitman (Kent) and Gwyn Lewis (Oxford) and was a combined birthday celebration for Mrs A.J. Pitman and Mrs E. Stitch.

We have seen the relatively large number of peals rung by Pitman for the LMDA and the SBDG and it was comparatively rare for him to ring peals outside these two organisations, or indeed outside Wales. However, in April 1936 he rang a peal of Grandsire Triples for the Gloucester and Bristol Diocesan Association at St Mary’s, Henbury, along with other Welsh ringers, J.W. Jones, C.H. Perry, Ernie Stitch and John Phillips. The peal was a compliment to “Mr Joseph Gould on his completing 54 years as a ringer at this church and 50 years as leader and conductor”. It seems unlikely that the Welsh ringers were substantive members of the Gloucester and Bristol Association, so they would have been elected as “Non-resident Life Member”. In July, 1932, the CCCBR met in Plymouth and during the Council weekend Pitman rang in a peal of Kent Treble Bob Major at the Emmanuel Church in Plymouth. Unfortunately, the peal report refers to him as Arthur J. Pitman, but we can safely assume it was Albert J. Pitman who rang!

A demonstration of Jack Pitman’s excellent listening skills is provided in a Ringing World article by Donald Clift published in 1991. Holt’s Original is known to be a difficult composition of Grandsire Triples to conduct. It was rung in 1931 at Bridgend with Donald Clift, just 20 years of age, conducting it, by invitation, from the 6th. We have seen that this was a tower where Pitman conducted many of the peals, particularly his Spliced Triples compositions. Indeed, he had been scheduled to ring in this peal, but was unable to because of difficulties with his shift pattern. However, he turned up in time to listen to the last part and at the end of the peal, he went up to the ringing chamber to congratulate the band and handed the
conductor a sheet of paper on which he had recorded, simply by listening to
the bells, the bobbed lead ends for the last part.

From time to time, there has been speculation about Pitman’s ringing and
bell handling ability. There are few descriptions of his ringing style during
peals, but Clift, who rang with him many times, has claimed that, while his
handling style was not particularly elegant, more importantly his striking
was good.

The vast majority of peals of which we read, hear about, or are recorded
in the archives of bell ringing are those successfully rung to completion,
that is they contain over 5000 changes, have started and finished in rounds
and none of the changes have been repeated. Unfortunately peal attempts
frequently fail. This happens for a variety of reasons, such as the conductor
has miscalled it, one or more of the ringers has made a mistake which is not
rapidly corrected, the conductor concludes that the ringing is not good
enough, a rope breaks or something else unforeseen happens to stop the
ringing. This happened in June 1930 when a peal of Grandsire Caters at St.
Johns, Cardiff “came to grief after two hours excellent ringing”. There
were Aberavon ringers in the peal attempt and it is likely that Pitman was
among them. Losing a peal, particularly if the ringing is good and it is near
completion is a sad and demoralising experience, but the loss is
compounded if the peal is being rung for a very special occasion. Such was
the case in the above peal which was being rung in honour of the marriage
of a stalwart of the LMDA, John Phillips. However, a peal of Stedman
Caters, with Pitman on the 5th, was completed in October at St John’s, this
time as a Golden Wedding compliment to a sidesman at St John’s.

In 1931, the CCCBR met in Liverpool and Pitman reported on it at the
Annual Festival of the SBDG in July 1932. These Festivals continued to be
rather grand affairs attended by large numbers of clergy. The 1932 Festival
was no exception. After a service held in St Lawrence Chapel of the
Cathedral Church of St John in Brecon, tea was served on the lawns of Ely
Tower, the official residence of the Bishop of Swansea and Brecon. The
meeting was chaired by the Bishop and was also attended by the Master of
the Herefordshire Guild and the Secretary of the LMDA. Pitman presented a
report on the previous CCCBR Meeting. However, he also announced that
he no longer wished to serve as the Central Council Representative for the
SBDG and asked to be relieved of his position. Mr George Popnell of
Llanelly was elected in his place. Perhaps it was just as well that Pitman
was not present at the 1933 meeting in London, since he would have had to
listen to a debate on whether the authorship of peal compositions should be
anonymous. Speaking against the motion, the Rev. E.S. Powell mentioned
Pitman’s compositions as examples, saying that the names of the authors of
peal compositions, including Mr A.J. Pitman, who had especially composed
peals for Powell’s book, would certainly be included and it would be improper to do otherwise. This was an opinion echoed by the Editor of *The Ringing World* at the time.\(^{173}\)

We have seen that the “striking competition” has been a feature of bell ringing for many years. It may take many forms, but the aim is for teams of ringers, often representing a band from a tower or a subsection, such as a district, of the Guild or Association, to compete with each other in ringing a short piece which is judged for the quality of ringing by an “adjudicator or judge” who is usually an impartial ringer from a neutral tower. The adjudicator is looking for such features as regularity of ringing, a good rhythm, absence of clashes between bells and the overall quality of the performance, generally characterised as “good striking”.

The SBDG\(^{174}\) organised such a competition at Llanelli in May, 1930 between 9 teams, adjudicated by Mr William H. Fussell of Slough. We have seen that the Guild had only been formed in the early 1920’s and a report of the proceedings shows that an excellent standard of ringing was being maintained in the Guild area, with Cadoxton, Neath being the winner for the second year running. All the teams received high scores. Although Jack Pitman did not take part in the competition, he was almost certainly present, shift-work allowing, and the winning team would have had his good friend the popular and formidable Gwyn Lewis as one of its members. A similar result was produced in the 1932 competition. The winning teams at these competitions were presented with a shield on which their names would have been engraved. At the end of the decade, in 1939, Jack Pitman was the adjudicator at the SBDG striking competition for that year. He commented on the high standard reached by the participants and declared once more that Cadoxton were the winners, Llanelli came second and Cefn Coed third.
23. A successful Cadoxton Band photographed after the Striking Competition.

Back row L to R: Gwyn I. Lewis, E.L. Bevan (Bishop of St David’s Brecon), William Fussell (Competition Judge), Idris Bowen, Cyril Lake.
Front Row L to R: Albert J. Pitman (Swansea and Brecon Diocesan Guild Master), David J. Lewis, Jack E. Bloxham, Ted Phillips.

Photograph courtesy of Alwyn Lewis of Cadoxton.

However, Cadoxton did not always win, when Jack Pitman was a judge in the 1928 competition, they still featured in the first 3, but this time they were third, 24.

The new Guild was determined to raise the standards of ringing and to move to ring more complex methods. At the Quarterly Meeting of the Southern District in 1934 the following extract from the minutes shows the way that they perceived these goals could be achieved:

The Secretary (Ernie Stitch) asked that every effort should be made to ring a peal of Stedman Triples in the Diocese and suggested that an attempt be made at Swansea, the Gorseinon ringers said they had enough ringers in their tower if Mr Pitman would go down and conduct a peal, Mr Pitman agreed to go down and try for a quarter first. It was finally left with Mr Pitman and the Secretary to arrange.

The move to ring more complex methods worked, since in the following year a course of Cambridge Surprise Minor was rung at a ringing meeting at Baglan which was “…the first occasion a Surprise method had been rung at a SBDG (Southern District)….”
24. The result for Cadoxton 1920 Striking Contest. Courtesy of Paul Johnson, Swansea and Brecon Diocesan Guild Collection.
The decade began for the LMDA with a quarterly meeting at Abergavenny in 1930 which was well attended with 73 members present at the tea. The Annual Meeting in January of the same year resolved that elections to the CCCBR should be held triennially rather than annually. Eventually, this became CCCBR policy. Up until 1937, the LMDA was, essentially, monolithic, though recognising in the name the two dioceses from which it was created. However, in April of that year, a proposal was put forward at the Annual General Meeting, that the Association should have a substructure by, for example, being divided into branches.\footnote{175}

St David’s Cathedral, Dyfed, dates from 1176. The bells are hung in an octagonal detached tower which is part of a 13\textsuperscript{th} Century gateway called Porth y Twr, where a new ring of 8 bells was installed in the early 1930’s. A group of South Wales’ ringers, including Jack Pitman and Ernie Stitch decided to attempt the first ever peal on the new bells on 28\textsuperscript{th} March 1932,\footnote{176} they came from Aberavon, Newport, Bridgend, Neath and Swansea to St David’s and the only viable way of travelling was by train. The nearest railway station to the cathedral was Haverfordwest, some 16 miles away. The peal was scheduled for 10.00 am and the only train that would get them there on time was the 2.00 am morning mail train from Newport. The ringers boarded the train at their respective stations, the Newport ringers having the earliest start i.e 2.00 am and the others not much later. They arrived safely at Haverfordwest at 6.30 am., having previously arranged for a special bus to take them to St David’s, where, after a “good breakfast” they started the peal on time. It was successfully conducted by Pitman, though it must have been a trying experience for them, since not only were they very tired, but the report in \textit{The Ringing World}, also alludes to the fact that “…the noise in the ringing chamber is very considerable owing to the close proximity of the bells”. Then, the same day, they had to face the return journey. The Newport ringers arrived home at about midnight, 22 hours after they had set out! It was reported that the peal was the first on the new ring and that “congratulations were showered on the band by the local ringers”.

The Pye family was extremely influential in ringing throughout the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} Centuries. A distinguished member of the family, William Pye died on 18\textsuperscript{th} March 1935 and was buried at Aldborough Hatch in London. Around the time of his death, Pitman wrote to Charles T. Coles, a fellow ringer with Pye in the record long length of 15,312 Cambridge Surprise Maximus which was rung in 1929, to express his condolences.
*Courtesy of the Pye Family Archive, based at the Guildhall Library, London.*

He wrote that William Pye “no doubt was the greatest ringer in the exercise”, an echo of a similar comment made by the editor of *The Ringing World* at the time of William Pye’s death. He also subscribed 5s 0d (25p) to the William Pye memorial Fund. This was a substantial sum at that time, and a significant proportion of the weekly wages of a railwayman who was bringing up a large family. The William Pye Memorial, appropriately, consisted of augmenting the 6 bells at St John’s Church, Leytonstone to 8 by adding two trebles, and a memorial tablet in the tower.\(^{177}\)

William Pye played an important role as a ringer in the development of Spliced Surprise Major, ringing many of Pitman’s peal compositions when they were first rung. He was a remarkable man, born on 14\(^{th}\) August 1870 at Chadwell Heath,\(^{178}\) he was particularly well known as a ringer of heavy bells and in this respect, perhaps his greatest feat was to ring, in September 1903, a peal of Stedman Caters in the morning at St Sidwell’s, Exeter, followed, in the afternoon, by another peal of Stedman Caters at Exeter Cathedral on the 72 cwt tenor. He was the first (of very few) to ring the Exeter Cathedral tenor bell to a peal single-handed. To do so without the morning peal would have in itself been remarkable! He also rang many “long lengths”, sometimes on very heavy bells such as 18,027 changes of
Stedman Caters on the 30 cwt tenor at All Saints, Loughborough. The peal lasted for 12 hours 18 minutes! This achievement was also notable for the fact that it was the first peal ever to have been rung “around the clock” without changing the ringers. Similarly, he rang a record length of Cambridge Surprise Maximus turning in the 26 cwt tenor at St Michael and All Angels, Ashton-under-Lyne, this time taking about 11 hours 30 minutes. Another of his records was to be the first person to conduct a thousand peals. When the era of Spliced Surprise Major dawned he was a member of the Middlesex County Association band and rang in every number of Spliced Surprise Major methods from 3 to 12. His last peal was Cambridge Surprise Major at St Michael and All Angels, Heavitree, Exeter on 22nd September 1934.

Many tales have been told about William Pye’s ringing. One was the occasion on which he was ringing the 7th and a young Ernest Morris was ringing the tenor to a peal of Stedman Triples at St Mary Matfelon, Whitechapel (no longer there, having been bombed in the Second World War). Every so often while they were ringing both the tenor and the seventh suddenly dropped and had to be heaved back up again! Apparently Pye knew about this and hadn’t told Morris, so that Morris had no idea what was happening and was practically a nervous wreck by the end of the peal. It was then that he was told that, because of a defect in the tower, every time an underground train passed by the resulting movement caused the two bells to drop!

There were some who criticised William Pye at the time because of his perceived reluctance to become involved in teaching beginners by ringing with them in peals of a more elementary nature and perhaps on lower numbers of bells (his peal record shows that he only rang 2 peals of Minor out of his total of 1966 peals and each of these was in 7 methods, so he never rang a peal of any single Minor method). This has been countered by arguing that such a great talent would be wasted on teaching beginners, especially when there were many other (lesser) ringers who were perfectly capable of ringing peals for beginners. He was also a hard task master. He would tolerate little short of perfection from the ringers who accompanied him on the many peal ringing tours (“No lame ducks on these excursions,”) which he organised throughout his life. Notwithstanding these comments, there is no doubt about the admiration and, indeed, awe that many ringers of the time held him in, as witnessed by the many pages of eulogies in The Ringing World at the time, including an in memoriam elegy by William Wilson.

Two years after the death of William Pye, on Christmas Eve 1937, Mr Joseph J. Parker died. As a fellow composer, Parker’s name would have been very familiar to Jack Pitman; it is also possible that they met and/or
exchanged correspondence. Jack rang and conducted “Parker’s twelve-part” peal of Grandsire Triples many times. It was, and indeed remains even today, a popular composition for this method. J.J. Parker, 84 when he died, was among a group of talented composers who set about the task of solving the problems associated with peal composition, so providing for Pitman the fundamentals of the art and science of composing. We have seen that virtually all of Pitman’s early composition work was associated with Triples methods and this was the area of composition on which J.J. Parker worked throughout his life.

The end of the decade was to find Britain once more at war with Germany. The declaration of war on 3rd September 1939 had a sudden, spontaneous and dramatic effect on bell ringing throughout the UK, resulting in an immediate and virtually complete voluntary cessation of peal ringing across the whole country. In The Ringing World of the week immediately after Declaration of War, only one peal was published. The following week there were none. The Editor sought to encourage towers to maintain at least a nucleus of ringers in belfries up and down the country and to continue training new recruits whilst the expected enlistment of ringers for war service gathered momentum. Particular emphasis was placed on the role of “the ladies who proved their worth in the belfry in the last war and would do so again….” There was also a fear that the bells would once more be silenced as in the First World War. Within days an Order in Council on controlling noise was issued, though it became clear that bells were specifically exempted, and it was accepted that it was likely that bells would in general only be rung for Sunday Services. It was felt that the danger of bells alerting the enemy in some way also diminished “the further westward one goes”. The overall feeling was also that the sound of the bells was likely to have a positive effect on morale. Moreover, possibly remembering the problems of the previous war, there was a concern that Association and Guild meetings would cease and that this could have a destructive effect when ringing was resumed after the war. The final issue of The Ringing World for the year 1939 was the 1500th in the 49-year history of the journal. In fact only once in that time had an issue been missed and that was during the General Strike of 1926!

Like all human activity, there is often a funny as well as a tragic side, even when under the shadow of an imminent World War. In a peal attempt towards the end of 1939, the ringer of the 4th found that he had some chewing gum stuck to his false teeth. After some valiant attempts at dislodging the gum, his false teeth and the gum shot out of his mouth and landed on the floor of the ringing chamber. With superb timing he quickly retrieved the teeth from the floor and placed them back into his mouth without disrupting the rhythm of the peal. The report in The Ringing World
also added that “…the sight of a grinning denture on the floor would have been most disturbing to the other ringers”. In another ringing chamber episode, at the beginning of the decade, in 1930, a certain H.G. Bird was ringing a peal of London Surprise Major and about 10 minutes into the peal he felt a sudden pain in his arm. At first he ignored it. However, a little later, the pain appeared again; this time in both arms. Once more he carried on without mentioning the problem to the other ringers. However after 40 minutes, he once more had a sudden pain shooting throughout his whole body, wisely, he immediately called stand. One of the ringers was an electrician and on investigating the cause, found that a light had been left on after the bearings had been oiled and snow had drifted into the belfry, soaked the floor and caused a short circuit, allowing electricity to flow down the rope of the 6th!
It was clear by 1940 that the country had to brace itself for a long and bloody war. In towns like Port Talbot, distant from London, the beginning of 1940 showed very little sign of the way in which the war was later on to impinge on the ordinary non-combat population. Although the country was on a war-footing, the major bombing raids had not yet begun. In fact, Port Talbot, despite being a heavily industrialised area did not attract anything like the destruction and loss of life to be found elsewhere, particularly in Swansea, only some 12 miles away, where much of the centre of the town, including the church of St Mary’s with its fine ring of 8 bells, was largely destroyed. It was not until 1958 that the bells were replaced. At the end of the war in 1945 there was a similar short-lived feeling of euphoria as there had been at the end of the First World War. This soon wore off and the post-war difficulties had to be faced. The country found itself in a very serious financial situation and the people of Port Talbot as in the rest of the country had to grapple with austerity and its most obvious manifestation: rationing continued into the 1950’s. There was an almost immediate general election rejecting Winston Churchill’s Conservative government, instead electing Clement Attlee’s Labour government.

During the late 1940’s the misery of food shortages and rationing was made much worse by very hard winters, notably the dreadful winter of 1947. Being on a south-facing coast, Port Talbot does not normally suffer from extremes of cold and heat, but in 1947, like the rest of the country it had snow several feet deep. Ice and snow produced additional professional
headaches for Jack as railway tracks became covered with snow and the points froze. All this added to the already difficult life of the Pitman family. To make things much worse, in May 1948 Jack’s Mother died in Penrhiwtywn Hospital, Neath, aged 82.

Before the war started, the Pitmans moved from 42 Caradog Street to live at “Heathmont School” at 40 Pentyla, on the main A48 London to Swansea road. It had been set up by his son, Reginald and later his daughter, Dorothy joined him as a mathematics teacher. The school was a private institution providing a secondary education for those who could afford it and for those who rejected the option of a Grammar School education. In the late 1940’s and early 1950’s the pupils, clad in grey and purple blazers were a common sight in Pentyla streaming out of school at 4.00 pm. The school soon became known locally as “Pitmans” and the name stuck so that even today it is referred to it by that name.

Possible reasons for the family’s move were that Caradog Street was very close to the industrial area, a potential target for heavy bombing and number 42 was fairly close to the blast furnaces in the steelworks. Another possibility is that Jack’s wife was becoming increasingly housebound by her illness and in constant need of nursing care. Perhaps this could more easily organised in Heathmont, since the School occupied a very large house which may have allowed significantly more space for the family. The original building no longer exists and it has been replaced by a similar one of roughly the same dimensions and housing a block of flats.

Jack and his wife remained at Heathmont until at least 1945, when he gave his address as “6 Glyndwr Street, Port Talbot”. The family later moved in with their eldest daughter, Selena Ellen Telford, in Oakwood Street. One of his grandchildren, Joan Davies (nee Telford), now living in Australia, remembers how he played the piano accordion for the children. The instrument was a very large heavy one which he used to retrieve from a black case. He was very proud of this cumbersome instrument, elaborately decorated with mother of pearl. He also played at various family gatherings or parties at neighbouring houses. Street parties were a feature of national celebrations in those days and he often played the accordion at these, sometimes accompanying singsongs. He also owned a zither which was kept in a cupboard upstairs and he taught the children to play it.

The 1940’s saw a rapid increase in Pitman grandchildren. We have already seen that Michael was born in 1940, but so also was Joan (Telford), then Daisy (Hurn) and Joyce (Telford) in 1942, followed by Dorothy (Hurn) and Ruth (Henderson) in 1943, Geoffrey (Henderson) in 1944, Russell (Henderson) in 1946 and the last grandchild, Judith was born to Sidney Pitman in 1949. Of course, all of these were at one time or another taken to

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visit their grandparents and no doubt this would have brought great cheer to them.

As we have seen, ringing composition in those days required intense concentration and writing row after row of figures. Joan Telford recalls that Jack Pitman used to sit quietly in the front room of the house writing numbers on large sheets of paper. By the time they moved to Oakwood Street Evelyn Pitman had become almost totally bedridden. She was able to get around a little in a wheelchair, but even this was restricted because of the intense pain she suffered when she was moved from her bed to the chair. Joan Telford only remembers two occasions when her grandmother was wheeled into the living room.

Jack Pitman was a calm, placid person, always quiet and patient with his grandchildren. He was of course a man of his time and he had clear views of the behaviour expected from his children. The Sabbath Day had to be kept, no clothes washing was done on that day and children were not allowed to play in the street. He was very regular and punctual at Sunday Service Ringing and Practice Nights. The family needed additional help and a district nurse came each day to wash and change Evelyn, since she was quite heavy due to her enforced inactivity. She was confined to the room which they called the “parlour”. Jack slept upstairs, ate his meals and spent most of his time in the parlour at his wife’s side. Latterly, the only time he spent outside that room was when he was sleeping, working and sometimes composing. Evelyn did not like being idle and while she was an invalid she spent a lot of time learning German from a book, using a large magnifying glass because of her poor eyesight. She also shared the family’s love of playing cards, particularly whist which she especially enjoyed playing with the children. She had many visitors, both friends and relatives. Jack’s daughter, Betty Henderson (Beatrice) lived within walking distance and visited regularly, taking the children, Ruth, Geoffrey and Russell with her. Evelyn also passed the time listening to the radio, but she was rather deaf and used headphones.

By this time Pitman’s daughter Dorothy Hurn had moved to Painswick, Gloucester and their family would spend some of their holidays at Oakwood Street, easing the burden on the Telfords and allowing them, in turn, to have a holiday. The “encouragement” system that had worked so well with his daughter for checking the truth of compositions moved on a generation to the grandchildren, and Jack Pitman would frequently pay Joan Telford, 6d (a small silver coin with a face value of 2.5p, but would be worth about 75p today) not for checking the truth of compositions but for sewing a button onto one of his rather old fashioned shirts, with their starched detachable collars.
Pitman’s wife was to remain an invalid for the rest of her life and, since he contributed in a major way to her nursing, his ringing and composing became somewhat limited. The strain of having to work in a vulnerable industry like the railways during a world war which threatened extensive bombing of industrial areas while he was caring for a desperately ill wife must have made this prolonged period a particularly difficult one for Jack.

By the late 1940’s, Pitman had become quite famous in the bell ringing world. He was frequently referred to as “a genius” when it came to method composition and although there was even more to come, he was certainly the leading composer of his day. However, apart from complimentary comments in the ringing press, there had never been much in the way of formal recognition of his contribution to the Exercise from the bell ringing establishment. However, in 1949 he was elected to membership of the Ancient Society of College Youths (Member 5710(AJP)), in the same year as Gwyn Lewis (Cadoxton), Alfred Hannington (Port Talbot), R.E. Coles (Cowbridge) and Arthur Hoare (Swansea).


_Pitman Family Collection_
This is one of the elite organisations of bell ringers (another being The Society of Royal Cumberland Youths) which in those days, indeed until comparatively recently was only open to male ringers. It was founded in 1637, providing ringers for St Paul’s Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. It has a chequered history, at one time admitting only members who were of high birth and was not always as respected as it has become in modern times. The College Youths has had many distinguished ringer members, including, in the 17th Century, Fabian Stedman, who was Master in 1682.\textsuperscript{187} Pitman was aged 62 when he was elected. It is something of a puzzle why he was not proposed for membership before this, bearing in mind his status within the ringing community. It may be that it was felt that he did not do sufficient ringing or ringing of the right kind to be put forward for election. Also, he was a very self-effacing person and maybe he simply did not want himself to be put forward for election.

At the start of 1940 there was some optimism that ringing, abruptly curtailed at the outbreak of war, would be continued, albeit in a somewhat reduced form.\textsuperscript{188} Some peals were rung over the Christmas period in 1939, suggesting a modest revival in peal ringing. Thus ringing did continue to some extent, despite concerns about the possibility of the sound of the bells drowning out the air-raid warnings and the disruption resulting from the cancellation of the 1940 Whitsun Bank Holiday, a traditional occasion for much bell ringing. A serious solution suggested for the problem of bells drowning the sound of air raid sirens was to post a ringer outside the tower to listen for air raid warnings who would rush inside and halt the ringing! However, it was not long before the Government took action against ringing and an Order in Council was issued in June 1940 prohibiting all church bell ringing except if required by the police and military, when it could be used as a warning of invasion.

Soon after its introduction, there came the first prosecution for contravention of the ban, when a baker’s labourer, William Metcalfe, aged 18, and a non-ringer was accused of ringing the bells at St Peter’s Church, Leicester. He was remanded for medical reports! Others followed. The Rector of Old Bolingbrooke, Lincolnshire, was prosecuted and later had his conviction quashed, while the Vicar of Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, was prosecuted and fined 5s (25p) for allowing a small boy to ring four blows on one of the bells at the Church of St John the Evangelist. There are still 5 bells at Waterbeach, but they are listed in Dove’s Guide as being unringable. Inevitably, actions such as the blanket ban gave rise to absurd situations and one of these was that the sound of Bow Bells, which had been used as an intermission signal on the radio were taken off air!
Questions continued to be asked about the real need for the ban on ringing, many thinking that it was an unreasonable imposition and there were very real fears whether *The Ringing World* would continue to be published if the ban went on for an extended period. Early attempts to have the ban removed, including support from the Archbishop of Canterbury, were of no avail. In the meantime a leaflet was issued clarifying the way in which church bells would be used in the event of an invasion. The key feature was that bells would not be rung all over the country, but would be used to provide a warning to local military personnel. The ban continued, apart from a small amendment to the “Control of Noises Order”, until June 1943 and its withdrawal was preceded by a persistent campaign for it to be lifted.

Among those to voice their opinion on the iniquity of the ban, was the author Dorothy L. Sayers, one of the first lady graduates of Oxford University who had a considerable interest in bell ringing, though she never learned to ring herself. In 1934, she wrote her famous book, “The Nine Tailors” which is a “whodunit” based around the subject of bell ringing in the Fens of East Anglia involving her famous detective Lord Peter Wimsey. She is quoted as saying that, in preparing for the book there were:

*Incalculable hours spent writing out sheets and sheets of changes until I could do any method accurately in my head. Also, I had to visualise from the pages of instructions to ringers, both what it looked like to handle a bell and to acquire “ropesight”.*

Dorothy Sayers was fascinated by bell ringing, though in this novel she does not always describe the bells themselves in a complimentary fashion, referring to them thus: “Bells are like cats and mirrors – they’re always queer, and it doesn’t do to think too much about them”. Nevertheless, she turned her interest in bellringing to good purpose when she wrote a very helpful letter to *The Ringing World*, published in February 1943 showing her empathy with ringing and her familiarity with the contents of that publication at that time. She wrote as follows:

**THE BAN ON RINGING**

*To the Editor*

Dear Sir - May I add a small footnote to your very sound and statesmanlike leader in “The Ringing World” of February 19\textsuperscript{th}? Before the war people were continually bursting into the newspaper columns passionately demanding in the name of their poor nerves, that church bells should be silenced. Since the prohibition of ringing, the papers are full of
equally passionate letters, angrily demanding that the bells should ring again. That is human nature: we never know how to value anything until it is taken away. (Oddly enough, I do not remember to have seen any letter or paragraph saying, ‘Well thank Hitler, that terrible noise has stopped!’)

The ringers can afford to smile and bide their time. Let them meanwhile carefully collect and preserve all published evidence that people like bells, want bells and are indignant at the silencing of bells. Then, when the ban is lifted, and all the drearies start up once more to protest that bellringing is useless, burdensome, dangerous and ought to be abolished, there will be an answer ready for them.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS
24, Newland Street, Witham, Essex.

Even Winston Churchill was moved to refer to church bells in one of his war time speeches:

*The day of Hitler’s downfall will be a bright one for our country and all mankind. The bells will clash their peals of victory and hope, and we will march forward together encouraged, invigorated and still, I trust, generally united upon our further journey.*

Perhaps the word “clash” could have been more carefully chosen! In fact, at the end of the day it became clear that there was no useful military purpose in having the ban and, following a House of Lords debate on the matter, Churchill himself in consultation with senior military figures confirmed that there was no realistic possibility that bells would have a useful defence role and the ban was lifted. Churchill was quoted at the time as saying “…the significance of invasion no longer attaches to ringing, what justification can there be for any restriction at all”.

The war had been having a drastic effect on ringing and ringers. A report in 27th August 1943 issue of *The Ringing World* provides a stark example when a Quarterly Meeting of the LMDA was informed that all ringing had ceased at St Cadoc’s Church, Caerleon because all of the ringers were engaged in some way with the national war effort and sadly, the Association agreed unanimously that ringing within its boundaries should be “discouraged except for special or national occasions until the end of the war”. The Editor in the next issue discussed the implications of this decision for national ringing and more specifically peal ringing. Broadly he took the view that this was a matter of individual conscience. However, right up to
the end of the war in 1945, there were some voices, either against any wartime peal ringing or allowing ringing for only special occasions.

The effects of ringing restrictions and wartime austerity were raised at an 
SBDG meeting in December 1939,

....the bells were raised about 3.30pm and kept going until
about 4.45pm when they were lowered in peal, on account
of the blackout there was no service held....It was pointed
out that by the next meeting there would be food rationing
and it was decided that each member should make his own
arrangements for tea.194

It is also recorded that:

A letter was read from the Secretary of Llanelly Tower, that
there had been no ringing since the war broke out and that
their band had broken up....

Early in 1941 bombing intensified and began to take its toll of churches
across the country and over the war years, many rings of bells were
destroyed. In South Wales, Swansea was heavily bombed and St Mary’s
Church, which is in the centre of the city was destroyed, including the tower
and the bells, soon afterwards Llandaff Cathedral was also badly damaged.
An incendiary bomb hit the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in September 1940,
severely damaging the roof, which had to be temporarily covered.195 There
were numerous near misses and there was a further hit on the roof of
another Foundry building in October 1940 and in March 1941 and there was
a fire in the roof of the “back room”. There was further damage to the back
room when a flying bomb exploded nearby. The Foundry and its workers
were particularly vulnerable during this period, situated as they were (and
still are) in Whitechapel Road, London. Work continued there under the
most difficult circumstances. Members of the Hughes Family bravely
remained at the foundry throughout the War under most dangerous and
frightening conditions. Inevitably, not many bells were cast during this
time, but in the immediate post war period business began to grow very
rapidly.

On 21st April 1944, a new Order was issued by the Government that “no
person shall in Great Britain sound any church bell except for the purpose
of summoning persons to worship on a Sunday, Christmas Day or Good
Friday”, in other words the ban was partially lifted. It took another month
for the Government to withdraw the new order and church bell ringing
could then be fully resumed. The ringing ban had been in place for 3 years
and during this time, only one tower-bell peal was rung and that was in
Ireland.196 The consensus was that, although it had been a painful time for
the Exercise, there had been little damage to bell ringing and even this
would soon be repaired, this was primarily because bell ringing was based
on firm foundations and had a coherent organisational structure. There was also evidence that the general public, war-weary as it was, welcomed the return of the quintessentially British sound of bells and even, perhaps enjoyed them rather more than they had before! The first tower bell peal to be published after the ban was Double Norwich Court Bob Major, rung for the Kent County Association at St Paulinus, Crayford on 5th June 1943. Jack Pitman’s first peal after the ban was Grandsire Triples at St Illtyd’s, Bridgend on 14th August 1943 to welcome the new vicar.

Some 18 months after the ban was lifted, the war ended. As you might expect there was an immediate avalanche of peals rung celebrating victory and the end of the war. So many peal reports were sent to The Ringing World that the Editor refused to accept any footnotes for peals unless the peal was rung half-muffled. This was partly a sensible move to avoid repetition, but also a prudent act to save paper, which in the latter years of the war was in desperately short supply. The Editor, however, commented that in general, “Victory Peals” consisted only of the simpler methods, with a notable absence of Surprise Methods. Both Jack Pitman and Ernie Stitch contributed to the celebratory peals by ringing Stedman Triples at Bridgend, conducted by Pitman in May 1945.

After the war, Jack Pitman resumed his peal ringing at a modest pace, ringing 3 peals in 1946, a half muffled peal of Grandsire Caters at St John’s, Cardiff, Stedman Triples at Penarth and the same method at Pentre, Rhondda, none of which were composed by him. However in the following year, he only rang one, Double Grandsire Triples at Bridgend. This was the first peal in the method for everyone in the band, on the bells and in Wales. However, this may not reflect accurately his peal ringing activity, as we have seen peals are often “lost” for one reason or another, though unforced errors are less likely in the ringing circles in which Jack Pitman rang. It is more likely that he didn’t attempt many peals that year because of the increasing burden of care for his wife, perhaps due to a major setback in the progress of her illness.

However, there was a small increase in his peal ringing in 1948, when he rang 4 peals, a reasonable number, bearing in mind his domestic responsibilities. One of these, 5120 Oxford and Kent Treble Bob Major was notable for two reasons, one was that 5 of the 8 ringers were ringing the methods for the first time and the other that it was rung for the appointment of the formidable Canon Lawrence Thomas as the Archdeacon of Margam.

In 1948 King George VI was still on the throne and an increased number of peals that year was undoubtedly influenced by the Silver Wedding of the King and Queen in April, when many were rung in celebration. A notable peal amongst these was a peal of Spliced Surprise Major in 12 methods, composed by Pitman.
Table 3

Peals rung by A.J. Pitman during the decade 1940 – 1949

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<th>SBDG</th>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Spliced Major</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
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</table>

St Mary’s Aberavon maintained its strength despite the onset of war. However, in 1943, Mr Walter J. Nurton, who had been a stalwart member of the Aberavon band since 1910 was forced to give up ringing due to failing health and just after the end of the war in December 1945 he died and was buried in St Mary’s Cemetery.201

The LMDA continued to function during the war by holding occasional meetings, but, of course no tower-bell ringing for 3 years. At the end of the war in 1945, J.W. Jones, who had been Secretary since 1899, finally retired from office. The task of taking over from him was taken on by Fredrick J. Hannington, a friend of Jack Pitman’s. He, too, served as Secretary for many years, from 1945 - 1962 despite the difficulty that he had lost one of his arms in a railway accident in 1921. Such accidents were not uncommon on the railways in those days. Brian Price, a composer and ringer in South Wales for many years, was told a “hair-raising” story about an express train running over an unsecured section of rail which a group of railwaymen had removed for weighing to check for wear. Just before the train appeared they put the rail back having time only to drop it back into the “chairs” which held it in place, before standing clear.202 Fred Hannington was a very adept ringer and his disability did not seem to adversely affect his ringing.

Immediately after he resigned as Secretary, J.W. Jones was elected Master of the Association, unusually for a second time. There is no doubt that John W. Jones made an enormous contribution to the LMDA over the many years of his membership, for example in initiating and helping with installation, restoration and augmentation of many rings of bells and also by giving so much of his time to instructing new ringers.

The LMDA continued to be active after the war, holding quarterly meetings, even in the dreadful winter of 1947 at Bonvilston in February.
is likely that there was heavy snow, in one of the coldest winters on record and a brave 20 souls attended; compared with over 50 in the following September meeting.

In an anonymous article entitled “A Peal of Stedman Triples: An Interesting Peal by Mr A.J. Pitman” the composition of a peal first rung on 9th Jan 1932 at Pentre Rhondda and conducted by Pitman was published and comparisons made with previous compositions of Stedman Triples, particularly that of John O. Lancashire, 1898, in which there are never more than two consecutive calls. Further, the author draws attention to the fact that the Pitman peal resembles the Lancashire one in that a single is made at the 7th whole pull behind, whether after a quick or a slow.

It was clear that as early as 1941, Pitman was feeling the strain of caring for his wife and shift work on the railway. In a letter congratulating J. W Parker on his recently published composition of Spliced Surprise Major in 5 methods “containing a full course of each method”, and responding to another letter from Ernest C.S. Turner about Pitman’s work in 1936 to produce a similar peal including 4 of the 5 methods in Parker’s peal, Pitman has the rather telling sentence: “I had not completed my investigations when other matters claimed my attention and through lack of time chiefly I have not since taken the matter up.” He followed this by saying that no doubt others will eventually do the same thing for 4 methods.

J.W. Parker followed this by further observations on the existing situation and was clearly working towards obtaining a composition. His efforts culminated in a peal of 5120 changes of Spliced Surprise Major consisting of 5 methods; London, Cambridge, Bristol, Rutland and Superlative with two complete courses of London, Bristol, Cambridge and Superlative. He was unable to produce a spliced peal with all the work using the 4 standard methods alone and he pondered whether a fifth method was always necessary. He hoped that Messrs Turner and Pitman would succeed where he had hitherto failed. However, it is worth noting that this 5-spliced peal by J.W. Parker points the way ahead for ultimately producing “all the work” 4-spliced peals.

As we have seen Pitman frequently sent unsolicited copies of his peal compositions to a wide variety of composers and conductors who he thought would be able to make helpful comments or would wish to ring the composition, usually he would also publish them, but sometimes he didn’t. Occasionally, this caused confusion, such as when C.T. Coles referred in an article to a peal composition in his possession which had been sent to him many years before by Jack Pitman and asked if it had been published. It had, as Pitman asserted in a letter the following week. There was also an anonymous article in the previous issue entitled “Spliced Surprise Major. A New Plan. Composition in Five-Lead Courses” in which a composition of
5056 Spliced Surprise Major in 4 methods attributed to Mr A.J. Pitman is given. Although not “all the work”, this peal established the format for future success.

Once more, in 1942, Pitman feels it is necessary to mention to his domestic situation and the tremendous pressure he was under because of it. He congratulates J.W. Parker for his latest composition of 5088 Spliced London, Bristol, Cambridge and Superlative, saying that he has been interested in the question of compositions with the tenors together for some time, though he again says “I have not been able to find the time for the last few years to go thoroughly into the question”. Nevertheless, early in 1943 he published another Spliced composition in these methods, claiming that it is the first such composition to yield over 1000 changes in each method (1280 Bristol, 1088 Cambridge, 1088 London and 1408 Superlative).

Pitman’s last contribution to peal compositions in 1945 was of Spliced Erin and Stedman Triples in which he commented on the work of J.W. Parker in this area, particularly in relation to “construction and divisions of Stedman and Erin Triples”.

J.W. Parker:

obtained from them a peal with the 120-46’s-67’s and 74’s at backstroke. The bobs being added singly and there are only four singles in the peal, perhaps someone can do better and get one with two singles. Further, if the Exercise care to splice Erin, Stedman and Quick Sixes, a peal in 20 parts is available, having only bobs in pairs and two singles with all the 67’s at backstroke.

He was clearly still active in composition, but focussing on his old favourites and harking back to his earlier work.

With the war over, peal ringing, slowly at first, began to flourish as never before. Composers fuelled the phenomenon with more and more intricate compositions. Competition is undoubtedly a powerful catalyst for progress in any endeavour and the low key competition for progress in Spliced Surprise Major composition was no exception. The race to produce a peal of 4-Spliced Surprise Major including all the work remained an apparently impossible goal until 1946 when Harold G. Cashmore published a composition for Spliced Surprise Major in the 4 standard methods, London, Bristol, Cambridge and Superlative with all the work. After the original Law James peal this is without doubt the most significant in the history of Spliced Surprise Major composition. The solution brings together all the building blocks previously used, 3Lead and 5Lead courses plus full courses of London and Bristol, into a single coherent composition which is technically elegant and functionally satisfying. It is probably true to say that almost all subsequent peals of Spliced Surprise Major with the tenors together stem from this composition. The Editor of The Ringing World
acknowledged this great achievement in a somewhat downbeat editorial in which he commented that in order to ensure that all the bells did all the work, Cashmore had to use “parts of incomplete natural courses to achieve his object.”\textsuperscript{216} This latter statement was soon challenged by Cashmore in a subsequent letter, which appeared soon after the editorial and which provoked a justification of the statement by the editor, in which, it is possible to detect evidence of some “back-tracking” by the editor!\textsuperscript{217}

Harold Cashmore was 25 years younger than Jack Pitman, having been born in Apsley End in Hertfordshire in 1904.\textsuperscript{218} Throughout his long life he distinguished himself in many aspects of ringing, being a talented tower-bell and hand-bell ringer, conductor and composer. His skills in the tower manifested themselves early on: his first peal was Superlative Surprise Major, rung at the age of 17 and only 3 years later he conducted his first peal, again Superlative. He was, like Jack Pitman, an ordinary working man, a fitter and turner. He also had a passionate interest in church organs and devoted the last 40 years of his life to this area of interest, ringing his last peal in 1953. He died, aged 93, in 1997.

We have no public record of Pitman’s immediate reaction to Cashmore’s composition, of which he would certainly have been aware, since he was in correspondence with Harold Cashmore at this time, despite his very difficult family circumstances which were becoming more and more pressing. However, later in 1946 he congratulated Cashmore publicly in a letter which, prefaced by the statement “having now found sufficient time to go a little further into the matter”, contained another composition of 5088 Spliced London, Bristol, Cambridge and Superlative. This composition came within a whisker of all the bells doing all the work of each of the methods, however the 6\textsuperscript{th} was missing two leads of Bristol.\textsuperscript{219} Cashmore’s composition to which Pitman’s congratulations referred, appeared 2 weeks later\textsuperscript{220}. It was rung at Lambeth on 19\textsuperscript{th} April 1947.

Four months after the publication of Cashmore’s all the work composition, in early April 1947 Pitman published a remarkable composition of 5152 Spliced London, Bristol, Cambridge and Superlative Surprise Major in which he wrote “In addition to all the bells having all the work of the four methods, there is actually a quarter peal of all four methods”. This combination of all the work and quarter peals was what he had been striving for.\textsuperscript{221} It was the only composition he published that year and, indeed, his only personal contribution to \textit{The Ringing World} in 1947. The composition was first rung for the Chester Guild at St Lawrence, Frodsham in July 1947, conducted by J.C.E. Simpson.\textsuperscript{222} It was the first peal of Spliced Surprise Major for everyone in the band except the conductor!
Soon after this peal the band, who enjoyed ringing it, invited Jack Pitman to ring a peal with them and he agreed to do so. When, as they usually do, the ringers were adjusting their ropes immediately before the peal “Mr Pitman took hold of the treble. Ralph Edwards immediately asked him if he would like to ring inside. He smiled and said ‘No thank you – I can string them all together but I can’t ring ‘em’.”

Generally throughout this book the inclusion of method compositions *per se* has been avoided. However, the one rung in the above peal is such a milestone in Jack Pitman’s ringing life that the letter and accompanying composition is included in full below for interest.

FRODSHAM, CHESHIRE.
THE CHESTER DIOCESAN GUILD
On Fri., July. 18, 1947, in 3 Hours and 13 Minutes,
AT THE CHURCH OF ST LAWRENCE.
A PEAL OF SPLICED BRISTOL, CAMBRIDGE, LONDON AND SUPERLATVE SURPRISE MAJOR, 5152 CHANGES
Tenor 12¼ cwt. in F
Oswald Claybrook Treble Cyril Valentine 5
*Ralph G. Edwards 2 Walter Allman 6
Norah M. Bibby 3 George H. Randles 7
John E. Bibby 4 *James C.E. Simpson Tenor
* 50th peal together. First peal of Spliced Surprise in the tower and by all the band except the conductor. The composition appeared in ‘The Ringing World’ on April 11th, 1947; the optional leads were rung as Cambridge.

Spliced Surprise Major

5,152 BY A.J. PITMAN
FURTHER ADVANCE IN COMPOSITION.

Dear Sir, - Following are the figures for my latest composition of London, Bristol, Cambridge and Superlative. In addition to all the bells having all the work of the four methods, there is actually a quarter-peal in each method for the first time.

A.J. PITMAN
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>LXLB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The various symbols provide instructions to the conductor who commits them to memory and provides appropriate calls resulting in various actions by the ringers throughout the peal. L = London, B = Bristol, C = Cambridge and S = Superlative, X = Superlative or Cambridge, _ = one bob, M = Middle, W = Wrong, B = Before and H = Home. A digit 2 or 3 under M, W, B or H gives the number of successive bobs at M, W, B or H

Bearing in mind the complexity of the composition, it is quite extraordinary that a band in which almost all had never rung Spliced Surprise Major before should have rung such a peal at the first attempt. One of these ringers Ralph G. Edwards explained in a letter to Pitman that

"...the composition was rung again at Frodsham a week later by a slightly modified band replacing Norah M Bibby, Oswald Claybrook, and George Randles by Margaret L."
In a letter of congratulation to the peal ringers, Pitman particularly mentioned that for most of those who rang, it was their first peal of Spliced Surprise Major and he ventures his opinion that the composition was amongst the most difficult of spliced peals in 4 methods. After this, it wasn’t too long before, out of the blue, he published, in November 1948, a peal of 5280 Spliced Surprise Major in 5 methods, London, Superlative, Bristol, Cambridge and Pudsey in which every bell does all the work of all the methods. A little time elapsed before this was rung for the first time, by The Yorkshire Association at Marsden In February 1949, the first peal of all the work Spliced Surprise Major in 5 methods. On the same day it was also rung by The Kent County Association at Lambeth. The peal at Marsden came round 20 minutes earlier than the Lambeth one, so they were able to claim to be the first band to ring the composition… …by 20 minutes! A report in The Ringing World at the time, referred to it as “Mr A.J. Pitman’s ingenious composition of Spliced Surprise Major in five methods…. ” It was to continue to be a popular choice for Spliced Surprise Major peal.

Meanwhile the numbers game in terms of the challenge of ringing more and more Surprise Major Methods in a peal continued. On 15th March 1947 a Lincoln Guild band rang a peal of 5120 16-Spliced Surprise Major at Harmston, conducted by J.A Freeman, the greatest number of methods yet rung to a peal. Once again this had been composed by Pitman who continued to squeeze more Surprise Methods into peals and to provide challenges to conductors and ringers. A letter was published in which he congratulated the band and their conductor for their “wonderful performance”. However, rather poignantly, in the concluding paragraph of the letter he says: “Perhaps later I will have time to tackle further methods”. His domestic pressures were clearly telling on him, though he did not want the pace of progress to be slowed and he concludes: “There is no doubt that here is a field for composers”.

In fact, he toiled on and soon composed a peal of 22 methods Spliced Surprise Major which was rung by the ringers of Lincoln Cathedral, conducted by John A. Freeman, once more at Harmston. The umpire who was present in the ringing chamber for the whole peal checked every lead end and also that all the methods were rung and in the right places. He confirmed that “The peal was a good one and, apart from two trips in the second part, only one which looked serious, a high standard of ringing was maintained throughout”. Pitman’s composition was published as part of the article describing the achievement. In this peal Pitman reverted to the “3
leads course” plan as well as his device of using Norfolk to give two “4-lead courses” In his usual courteous way, Jack Pitman sent a letter of congratulations to the band.231

It is a measure of Jack Pitman’s increasing fame from his compositions of Spliced Surprise Major and the increasing numbers of bands using them that he was accorded the unusual privilege of writing the Leading Article in The Ringing World, which, incidentally was the issue on the 70th anniversary of Cambridge University Guild.232 As always, it was entitled SPliced SURPRISE MAJOR By A.J. PITMAN. Essentially it was “a guidance (sic) in the way true touches (of Spliced Surprise Major) may be made up” It is typical of his self effacing nature that the only examples which he provides of “firsts” in the progress of Spliced Surprise Major are those of other composers. This article gives some insight into the way Pitman built up his Spliced Surprise Major compositions and how he avoided falseness.

One of the endearing features of Pitman the composer is the way in which he produced, from the early 1920’s, astonishingly original peals in complicated methods, rung in highly complex spliced peals and yet also continued to address the “other side of the market”, the “simpler methods”, including those which were his first love in ringing terms; Triples Methods. All his life he kept faith with the requirements of what he perceived as an important group of ringers, i.e. those who chose to ring Plain Triples and Major methods. However, closer inspection shows that almost all of his compositions rung today are either spliced or single Surprise Major Methods. An exception is his ubiquitous Grandsire Doubles 240’s and occasionally Stedman or Grandsire Triples. Peals using his compositions of the more unusual Triples Methods or Spliced Triples Methods or Spliced Triples and Major Methods etc. are very rare. However, after the war he continued to produce such compositions; presumably this was partly for the shear enjoyment of the challenge of designing the composition.

He composed the first peal in 4-spliced Triples methods which was rung by the Sussex County Association at Hastings in March 1948 conducted by C.A. Levett. The composition was published in May 1948.233 This peal resulted in some correspondence to The Ringing World initiated by a letter from J.W. Griffiths of Chester who wanted to know if it was possible to splice more than 4 Triples Methods into a peal.234 Pitman’s response, which appeared on the same page as the composition, was essentially “…that several methods may be spliced into one peal” and giving an example of how more than four could be introduced.235 Unfortunately he was “unable to give the figures” for the Hastings peal because they could no longer be found among his collection and asked, via the letter, if the conductor could provide these! An erratum to the composition appeared a little later.236 His final Triples composition of the decade was for a peal of 5040 Grandsire
and Double Grandsire Triples which was rung by the Southwell Diocesan Guild at St Mary’s, Greasely in July 1949.  

An issue which, practically caused an international incident, arose in a superficially harmless article entitled “First of Maximus in S. Wales” which appeared in April 1949. This was an account of a peal of Cambridge Surprise Maximus rung at Newport, Monmouthshire by a band from various parts of England, who felt they were “justified in claiming it as the first peal of Maximus in South Wales and provided the justification that “geographically and spiritually and certainly according to the application of the Sunday licensing regulations” it was. The issue turned out to be very contentious and strong feelings were held locally on both sides. In an argument about the matter a member of the band spoke so vehemently in favour of Newport being in Wales that “he shot out his dentures with most disastrous results to them”! It didn’t end there. For several weeks, letters with titles such as “England Claims Monmouth”, “Not an English County”, etc. appeared in The Ringing World. The rest is history!

An Editorial in The Ringing World in May 1949 on the possibility of a Ringers’ Guide elicited a response from a ringer in Leeds who wrote a piece about the information that he had been collecting from various sources about 6000 churches which he had been putting in alphabetical order. His name was Ronald H. Dove. Again the rest is history, but “Dove’s Guide” must have been one of, if not, the greatest services to ringers throughout the country and over many years. If there was a knighthood for services to ringing, surely he would have got it!  Dove’s Guide finally appeared in 1951 and it is worth quoting the reaction of the CCCBR, as described by George W. Fletcher, the Honorary Secretary of the Council:

*The incalculable degree of perseverance and industry required to ascertain and tabulate such a mass of detailed information about 5,489 peals of bells in Great Britain and Ireland is matched by the skill and ingenuity displayed in such a neat and attractive form of publication.*
CHAPTER 6

HIS MASTERPIECE AND BEYOND: The 1950’s

The war had been over for 5 years, but the country continued to be in a poor state and many goods were still rationed. Britain was involved in military conflicts throughout the decade in Malaya, Korea and the ill-judged Suez intervention. In 1951 the Festival of Britain, an attempt to thank the British people for their efforts during the war years and to celebrate British industrial, artistic and scientific achievements took place. It was also an attempt to raise the country’s morale and support British business. Throughout the country in every town and city there were celebratory street parties. On 6th February 1952, King George VI, who had been treated for lung cancer for some time and had already had one lung removed, died while Princess Elizabeth, heir to the throne was on a visit to Kenya. She and the Duke of Edinburgh returned to the UK immediately and Elizabeth was crowned in Westminster Abbey on 2nd June 1953. The death of the King resulted in an extended period of mourning and many half-muffled peals were rung.

Of course the Coronation was a time of great rejoicing and the bell ringing fraternity took the opportunity to ring a great many peals, filling the columns of The Ringing World with peal reports. An additional feature of this Coronation compared with the one in 1937 was that all of it was televised and, while television ownership was not as widespread, almost everyone in the country seemed to find a way to watch the proceedings or to listen on the radio. Concern was expressed that if any bell ringing took
place on the great day, it must not interfere with those listening to or watching the Coronation Broadcasts.\textsuperscript{239} In London the bells of Westminster Abbey were rung as the new Queen left the Abbey, and fired as she was actually crowned. There was then a peal attempt of Pitstow’s variation of Stedman Triples, by the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths which was rung while the Coronation Procession passed St Martin’s-in-the-Fields. Among the many peals rung for the Coronation was Stedman Triples at St Illtyd’s Bridgend on 6\textsuperscript{th} June, conducted by Pitman.\textsuperscript{240}

For Jack Pitman the 1950’s were to bring enormous life changes. For the country there would be a continuation of rationing until the middle of the decade. British young men and women would again be involved in wars. Pitman’s home town of Port Talbot would begin to see the changes which would totally alter its character and appearance. The burgeoning steel works and other industries needed more and more workers and this resulted in an enormous building programme resulting in the complete destruction of much of the moorland between the sea front and the town. Among the casualties was Aberavon Golf Course which was entirely lost to the building programme. Rather bizarrely the Golf Club building remained and continued to operate as a golf club for many years without a course. The town centre remained intact for the time being, but traffic jams continued to grow due to railway crossing gates at the busiest point in the town centre. Bell ringing at St Mary’s, Aberavon continued to prosper, partly as a result of the use by the church authorities of the small neglected church of St Teilo, a young people’s church. This acted as a useful reservoir of young ringers for Aberavon tower, including at least one of Jack Pitman’s grandchildren, Ruth Henderson who rang there in the middle to late 1950’s and who rang her first peal there.

Jack Pitman was 63 when he rang his first peal on an inside bell to Double Norwich Court Bob Major in Cowbridge in December 1950. However, a claim in the peal columns that in February 1951 he rang his first peal of Cambridge Surprise Major and first of Surprise Major in February 1950 was quickly corrected by Pitman, who pointed out that he had previously rung both Cambridge and Superlative Surprise Major!\textsuperscript{241}

The world of ringing continued to worry about the health of bell ringing. It was clear that doom-laden predictions about the effects of the war in general and the ban on ringing in particular were unfounded. Indeed, a national newspaper published an article entitled \textit{There really is a boom in bells} in 1950.\textsuperscript{242} It was suggested that young people were bored with going to the cinema and many more were opting for the bell tower. While it may have been a bad news day, nevertheless here was an indication that bell ringing was becoming more popular at a national level. Certainly this was reflected in the peal ringing trends, in terms of an increased interest in
ringing more complex methods and also in numbers of learners. National celebrations often give a boost to ringing and there was no shortage of these in the late 1940’s and the 1950’s, such as the birth of Prince Charles and Princess Anne and the Coronation of the young Queen Elizabeth II. Perhaps there was even a resurgence of interest from the clergy, since 1950 saw the first peal, at Llanfrechfa, in which 3 resident Monmouthshire clergy took part.

In 1950 a series of sad events for Jack Pitman occurred. The first of these was Ernie Stitch’s decision to move from South Wales to Wolverhampton. Jack and Ernie had been close friends and ringing partners for almost 40 years. Stitch took part in lowering the bells after Sunday Evening Service ringing at Aberavon for the last time on 14th April 1950. The loss would affect the tower, since Ernie was a very active ringer; he had held offices such as Tower Captain and taught many new Aberavon ringers as well as playing a major part in developing ringing in St Mary’s. Ernie Stitch had also worked hard at Aberavon and elsewhere in improving and caring for bells. It was also a blow for both the LMDA and the SBDG, where Ernie for many years was a leading light in administration and operation. In recognition of this the SBDG proposed that he should be presented with an illuminated address but at the end of 1950 there was still no sign of this address. In March 1951, the address had still not materialised, August came and went and Ernie still hadn’t been presented with the Illuminated Address and the Southern District Meeting carried a motion “…that if the Illuminated Address was not completed in three months it would be cancelled”! In August 1952 Ernie Stitch wrote a letter of appreciation to the Secretary of the SBDG “…expressing his delight with the Illuminated Address from the Guild...” which he had just received, almost three years after he left the area!

Just before his departure, at Aberavon he was given a hymn book and fountain pen in a presentation ceremony, by Jack Pitman. The hymn book was autographed by all the St Mary’s ringers, the Vicar and Church Wardens. Leonard Hughes was elected to the post of Tower Captain. Unfortunately, a farewell peal of Double Norwich Court Bob Major attempted at Cowbridge on the day of Ernie’s departure, was lost. A Quarter Peal of Stedman Triples was rung instead.

Later that year at a meeting of the Southern District of the SBDG, Ernie Stitch was elected as an Honorary Life Member, recognising his long service to the Guild. In Wolverhampton he soon resumed peal ringing, including, at the age of 70, his first of Surprise Major (Yorkshire) inside, at Wolverhampton, in February 1954! Over the next few years he periodically returned to South Wales, usually to ring peals and an interesting series of these was rung in May 1957, when he rang his 500th peal, Grandsire Triples,
in a band consisting of old friends, including Jack Pitman as conductor. Stitch rang the same bell as in his first peal in 1919, in the same tower and with the same conductor.

ABERAVON, GLAMORGAN.
THE LLANDAFF AND MONMOUTH DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION
On Fri, May 10, 1957, in 3 Hours and 4 Minutes,
AT THE CHURCH OF ST MARY.
A PEAL OF 5040 GRANDSIRE TRIPLES

Table 5
Peals rung by A.J. Pitman during the decade 1950 – 1959

<table>
<thead>
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<th>SBDG</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Grandsire Triples</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Stedman Triples</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
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In the early years of the decade, Jack Pitman continued to care for his wife. She was rapidly getting worse and quite soon was effectively paralysed. Then, in February, 1952 quite unexpectedly their son, Reginald
died at the early age 41. A minute’s silence was observed for him at the SBDG Meeting in March 1952. The loss must have been a tremendous blow to both Jack and Evelyn.

Quite soon after this in September, 1952, Jack Pitman retired at the compulsory retirement age of 65. A quarter peal of Grandsire Triples at Aberavon was rung in October 1952, with the footnote “To mark the retirement of Railway Inspector A. Pitman after nearly 50 years of service, with good wishes from the band”. A peal of Stedman Triples on 15th November 1952 was also rung at Aberavon “….as a compliment to Railway Inspector A.J. Pitman on his retirement at the age of 65 years”. The event was also marked by a small piece in The Ringing World by Trevor Roderick from the LMDA, who wrote:

*The writer knows that much of Mr Pitman’s composition and proofs of other composers’ peals have been done on his bedside table when it was thought that he was resting after work.*

Almost exactly a year after the death of her son, Evelyn Pitman died of toxic myocardial degeneration and rheumatoid arthritis on 18th February 1953. The death was registered by their daughter, Dorothy, then living in Wolverhampton, who was presumably summoned to Port Talbot to be with her mother when death was near. Members of the SBDG stood in silence “in sympathy….with Mr A.J. Pitman on the loss of his beloved wife”. She was buried in the graveyard of St Catharine’s Church, Baglan.

Some five years after Evelyn Pitman died, Jack married Gertrude Styles of Leamington Spa on 28th December 1957.

On the day of the wedding, a group of LMDA ringers rang a quarter peal of Grandsire Triples at Aberavon, which was published with the footnote: “A compliment to A.J. Pitman, married at Leamington this day”. The ringers were: Miss Jean Howell, T. Yeomans, J. Dale, E. Morris, T.M. Roderick, A. Hannington, G.I. Lewis (Conductor), J.A. Hoare. This was not entirely an Aberavon band, though there were Aberavon ringers in it, but rather, a band of his friends from the LMDA. A further quarter peal, this time of Grandsire Doubles, was rung a fortnight later in January 1958, with Jack Pitman conducting from the 4th and with his grand daughter, Ruth Henderson ringing her first quarter peal on the treble. The footnote to this Quarter peal reads: “A farewell to A.J. Pitman, who has removed to Leamington Spa after many years at this tower.” The band was essentially an Aberavon one: Ruth Henderson (First Quarter), Jean Howells, Betty Waters, A.J. Pitman (Conductor) R. Blick and W. Davies
27. Jack and Gertrude’s wedding at Leamington Spa.

Back row, L to R: George (Jack Pitman’s son-in-law), Gertrude’s daughter-in-law, Jack’s son, Sydney
Middle row, L to R: Josie (granddaughter), Dorothy (daughter), Pat (daughter-in-law)
Front row, L to R: Jack and Gertrude Pitman, Nell (Selena, daughter), Olwen (Jack’s daughter-in-law) and Betty (Beatrice, daughter).

Pitman Family Collection.

After the wedding Jack moved to 25 Taylor Avenue, Lillington, Leamington Spa to live with his new wife and where he remained until his death in 1966. He was a member of the band of ringers at All Saints’ Church, Leamington Spa.

Before 1784 the small village of Leamington Priors (“Laminstone” in Domesday Book) awoke to the fact that in its midst it had a mineral spring which had been known about since the Middle Ages. There was a developing interest in England for the perceived medicinal properties of such waters and the village began to exploit this natural resource by building a bathhouse around the springs. Large numbers of people came to “take the waters” and it was not long before it was decided to expand the facilities enormously, so the “Royal Pump Rooms and Baths” were opened in 1814. The result was that Leamington became an extremely popular spa town, obtaining its full name of “Royal Leamington Spa” after a visit by Queen Victoria. There was rapid population growth, even after the baths began to lose their popularity later in the 19th Century, as well to do people from the surrounding area chose to live there. As Leamington grew, the
villages of New Milverton and Lillington were subsumed and became part of the town. The house occupied by Jack and Gertrude Pitman is still there. It is a fairly large semi-detached property in what remains a leafy suburb of Leamington Spa, not far from the campus of Warwick University.

![Image of a house]

**28.** The house in Lillington, Leamington Spa where Jack and his second wife, Gertrude lived until his death in 1966. *Author’s Collection.*

Like St Mary’s Aberavon, the Parish Church of All Saints, Leamington Spa was built on the site of an earlier church in the 19th century. However, this is where the similarity ends, since All Saints is one of the largest parish churches in England, seating a congregation of up to 1000. Six bells, installed in a new tower in 1826 to augment the old 4 were later removed, temporarily hung in a wooden tower and then stored for a further 12 years in the crypt. Thereafter they were re-hung and a treble and tenor added to become the eight bells which are there today.254
29. The tower where Jack Pitman predominantly rang: All Saints Church, Leamington Spa.

Published by kind permission of Nigel Wilkins.

About a month after his move, Jack rang a quarter peal of Grandsire Triples for the Coventry Diocesan Guild at St Mary’s, Warwick, in memory of a former Master of the Guild and another, of Grandsire Caters, for Remembrance Sunday in November that year. These two quarter peals are a good example of one of the social benefits of ringing. Pitman had only been living in Leamington for a couple of months when he was asked to ring in a quarter peal and very soon he would have got to know a fairly large group of local people many of whom quickly became his friends. In September 1959 Ernie Stitch chose to make All Saints, Leamington Spa the 500th tower in which he had rung, when he visited Jack on a Sunday afternoon and took part in the ringing for the Evening Service. One of the ringers, Henry Allen wrote at the time that:

It was a great joy for the Leamington ringers to have Mr Stitch with them and some very good ringing was achieved. Courses of Stedman and interesting touches of Grandsire Triples called by Mr Pitman came round to a good rhythm.

The immediate effect on Aberavon Tower was, as expected, great sadness at losing its Tower Captain/Conductor of about 44 years and also one of the great ringers of his era. However, the long-term effect was even more profound. The ringers carried on more-or less as before, but their leader was gone, it became harder to recruit new ringers and, inevitably some of the existing ringers moved away. Of course there was, no doubt, a “Pitman effect” at a distance, since he was a frequent visitor to Aberavon, where much of his family remained, but the tower was never the same again.
Today and for many years past, ringing at St Mary’s, Aberavon has been almost exclusively carried out by visiting ringers, largely ringing peals, and the occasional Guild or Association Meetings and Practices. At the time of writing, the ringing chamber looks unused, neglected and untidy, waiting for some ringer to move to the town to start up ringing there again. However, it was recently announced on the SBDG Website that there will be henceforward joint practices on alternate weeks between Aberavon and Baglan.

In ringing terms for Pitman 1957 was not a particularly quiet year, he rang 7 peals, somewhat above his annual average. It was, however a lean year for compositions, he only published one, 5039 Grandsire Caters in February which he would have composed in January or even at the end of 1956.\textsuperscript{258} \textsuperscript{259} We do not know how, when or where Jack met his new wife, but the above suggests that something was distracting him from his composing activity and presumably he would have known her for a significant time, possibly up to a year, before the wedding in December. He continued to ring peals after the move, both in the Midlands and in South Wales. Also he now lived much closer to Ernie Stitch and in November 1957 he rang a peal of Grandsire Triples with him, for the Worcestershire and Districts Association at St Peter’s, Cradely.\textsuperscript{260}

He also returned to South Wales quite frequently and in November rang a peal of Grandsire Triples at Bridgend, while towards the end of the month he rang another, of Grandsire Triples at Aberavon.\textsuperscript{261} \textsuperscript{262} Similarly, in 1959 he returned once more, along with Ernie Stitch, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of St Mary’s Aberavon, ringing a peal of Parker’s 12-part composition of Grandsire Triples, conducted by Stitch.\textsuperscript{263} The following day, during the same visit, they both rang another landmark peal of Parker’s 12-part Grandsire Triples, the first peal on the new 8 bells at St Mary’s Swansea, which were installed in the re-built church destroyed by bombs in the Second World War. Gwyn I. Lewis was the conductor. Ernie Stitch and Jack Pitman had also rung in the last peal on the old bells in 1938.

The CCCBR consists, largely, of elected members from the various bell ringing societies and associations. However, each year it elects a small number of “Honorary Members”. These may be put forward because they have some particular skills which are of benefit to the Council, have served with distinction in Council activities, or achieved eminence in some aspects of ringing. It is into this last category that in the Council Meeting at Bournemouth in 1953:

\textit{Mr A. Hoare proposed Mr A.J. Pitman for election as an honorary member, Mr C. Roberts seconding said it was time the genius of Mr Pitman as a composer was recognised by the exercise. His work had been invaluable and possibly}
nobody had done more in the realm of composition.\textsuperscript{264} The election was agreed with acclamation.\textsuperscript{264}

Jack Pitman was aged 66 and had been composing for almost 40 years! An Editorial in The Ringing World commented that:

The recognition paid to Mr A.J. Pitman, of Port Talbot, in electing him to honorary membership was indeed timely, if not overdue. The way Mr Roberts sponsored his election was well said. Now that Mr Pitman has retired from business life he should be of particular use to the Exercise and the Council would be incomplete without him.\textsuperscript{265}

Welcome, but hardly effusive, with the possible implication that Pitman was not of much value to the Exercise while he was working! This suggestion was reversed in a later issue, when another editorial on “Reflections on Bournemouth”, the matter was once more addressed and this time the comment made was:

For a number of reasons outside his control, Mr Albert J. Pitman has been unable to take a prominent part in the counsels of the Exercise, but ringers owe him an immeasurable debt of gratitude, in particular for his pioneer work in many fields of spliced ringing. That his services have now been recognised by the Council will be welcomed by all.

Better, but not quite an overwhelming endorsement. The following year at the CCCBR Meeting at Leicester, Jack Pitman was presented to the President (of the CCCBR) as “….an outstanding figure in the Exercise”.

At the annual meeting of the LMDA held at Cardiff on Easter Monday 1953, it was decided that the Association should be divided into two “Branches”, the Llandaff Branch and the Monmouth Branch (\textit{vide infra}). “Mr A.J. Pitman” was elected as the first Master of the Llandaff Branch. The inaugural meeting of the former took place at Llantrisant on 4th July 1953 attended by 40 members. Among the methods rung were Cambridge Surprise and Double Norwich Court Bob Major “under the excellent management of the Ringing Master, Mr A.J. Pitman of Aberavon”.\textsuperscript{266} As we have seen, the question of creating two new branches had been raised in 1952, when a committee was set up to examine the situation \textit{vis à vis} the proposed new branches, to provide a new set of rules and to report back to the next AGM. The result was that 1952–1953 was a year of innovation for the LMDA, which coincided with the election of the first lady Master of the Association. Jacqueline Evans was unanimously elected at the AGM held at All Saints, Newport in April 1952.\textsuperscript{267} It is, perhaps surprising that in view of his increasing national profile as a famous composer it was not until Easter
Monday 1956 that, at the well-attended Annual Meeting of the LMDA, Jack was honoured with life membership “in appreciation of his service to ringing by his wonderful compositions”. It must have come as a shock when, the following year, in 1957, Jack Pitman announced that he was about to move from Aberavon to live in Leamington Spa. He had served the LMDA since he first joined in 1914. The published report of the Association AGM at Cardiff on Easter Monday 1957 does not mention that he intended to move, presumably they didn’t know, but at that meeting

Mr A.J. Pitman “………..was presented with a filing cabinet which had been subscribed for by members of the Association”. After the Rev. Ivor Richards and Mr T.M. Roderick had spoken of Mr Pitman’s great services to the Exercise and his outstanding genius as a composer, Mr J. Alsop on the behalf of the Association made the presentation, Mr Pitman suitably (sic) replied.”

We shall hear more of this filing cabinet later. When Jack finally left the area, the Association felt the loss as demonstrated in the Minutes of the Annual Meeting for 1958, which recorded that that “Mr A.J. Pitman had left the district to live in Leamington Spa” and also acknowledged that “his loss would be keenly felt”.

For the majority of the existence of the LMDA Mr John William Jones (usually known as J.W. Jones) was the secretary. This was for an amazing 46 years! He died in April 1956 having done a tremendous amount of work for ringing in South Wales and was described in his obituary as “undoubtedly the greatest pioneer of change ringing in South Wales”. Like Jack Pitman, he was a railwayman, but unlike him he also loved cricket. Also, unlike Jack, he was not actually born in Wales, having been born in Tidenham, Gloucestershire, near Chepstow close to the Welsh border, in 1865, but moved to Caerleon in 1869, where he was taught to ring in 1888 by another remarkable pioneer of ringing in South Wales, Mr Evan Davies. In the last three years of his life, he was confined through illness to his bedroom, however he must have been pleased to hear about a ringing meeting held at St Cattwg’s Church, Cadoxton, Neath, in December 1955, which was a historical combined gathering of three guilds, the Llandaff Branch of the LMDA, the Southern District of the SBDG and the South Wales District of the Ladies Guild. This year also saw the first meeting for 18 years of the LMDA at Llandaff Cathedral, which had been very badly damaged during an air raid in the Second World War and was still undergoing extensive repairs. Later, the bells were re-hung and Jack Pitman was one of a band of LMDA ringers who rang a quarter peal of Grandsire Caters in August 1954 which he conducted.
The fame of A.J. Pitman was such at this time that a band, spending a week touring Welsh towers and ringing peals, made special reference in their tour report that they visited Aberavon:

"...where, in addition to the attraction of a very nice ring of eight, we had the pleasure of meeting Mr A.J. Pitman, the famous composer of extents of Spliced Surprise..."  274

Less pleasant was that, towards the end of their tour, they lost a peal of Cambridge Surprise Royal at St John the Baptist, Cardiff after ringing for 3 hours 10 minutes, i.e very near the end and later were stuck in a lift between floors in their hotel in Ross-on-Wye!

The resurgence of ringing after the war, during the late 1940’s, continued into the 1950’s and Pitman’s peal compositions remained very popular, with the majority being peals of Spliced Surprise Major or single Surprise Major methods. There developed a trend for some bands to challenge themselves by ringing more methods and large numbers of changes of Spliced Surprise Major in “long lengths”. At the very end of 1949, in December, a Chester Diocesan Guild band rang 6496 changes of Spliced Surprise Major in 6 methods at Frodsham, conducted by James C.E. Wilson. Remarkably, this was the first peal involving Spliced Methods, viz. Bristol, Cambridge, Pudsey and Superlative, by everyone in the band. It was composed by A.J. Pitman and at that time was also the longest peal of Spliced in 6 methods.  275

In a letter to *The Ringing World*, Jack Pitman congratulated the band and described how he had been listening to the peal and following the composition outside the tower, “only leaving for a cup of tea”. His judgement on the striking was that it was “really grand” with a good beat. He had a copy of his composition with him and he checked the lead ends, commenting that they all “came up quite distinctly”.  276 The peal lasted for just over 4 hours and this gives an idea of the extent of the prolonged concentration which Jack Pitman would have needed to follow it all the way through. Frodsham is not far from Runcorn and he would have travelled there by train, presumably taking advantage of his free rail pass as a Railway employee. It would have been a journey of close on 200 miles from Aberavon and this illustrates the lengths he would go to listen to his own compositions being rung. The composition was published some time after the peal had been rung, in an article written by the conductor.  277 He said that “the members of the band were much impressed by the composition, which will always stand as a tribute to the composer’s ingenuity”.

It was not long before the Frodsham band achieved another record by ringing A.J. Pitman’s composition of 8032 Spliced Surprise Major in 8 methods in December 1950. Again this was the longest peal of Spliced Surprise Major.  278 279 Once more Jack Pitman listened to the whole peal, having travelled up in a blizzard all the way from South Wales specifically
to hear it. He listened throughout the peal, except for the final 20 minutes, when he had to dash for his train back to South Wales and was disappointed that this meant that he was unable to thank the band personally. He also thanked Mr and Mrs Bibby for their hospitality throughout his visit, suggesting that perhaps he stayed overnight with them. The peal was all the more remarkable, because at the last minute Mr F. Dunkerley stood in for John Bibby who was ill.

In 1959 Pitman composed an even longer length of Spliced Surprise Major, 9568, in 10 methods, London, Bristol, Kendal, Watford, Wembley, Ealing, Hanbury, Superlative, Cambridge, Pudsey, which was published by C. K. Lewis. This was rung at Over, Cheshire in June 1959 as the “longest length of Spliced Surprise Major ever rung”. Once more Jack Pitman was present and congratulated the band.

In February 1951 a peal of 5120 Spliced Surprise Major in 25 methods, the most methods ever rung to a peal, was achieved at Ss Peter and Paul, Dorchester Abbey in Oxfordshire for the Oxford Diocesan Guild. It was composed by A.J. Pitman, conducted by Walter F. Judge and in the band were Marie R. Cross, 1, Radley Berkshire; Victor J.F. Bennett, 2, Oxford; Margaret L. Tutt, 3, Oxford; Alan R. Pink, 4, Kennington, Oxford; Richard F.B. Speed, 5, Harrow; Wilfred F. Moreton, 6, Hereford; Frederick A.H. Wilkins, 7, Oxford; Walter F. Judge, 8, Ringing Master, Oxford Society. This was of course a different challenge from that achieved by the Frodsham band. It was a great intellectual feat, in that all the methods have to be learnt and each ringer has to know where they are in any method immediately when it is called. On the other hand, although the Frodsham ringers did not have to remember so many methods for the peal, there were many more changes of method and as time went by even after several hours they would have had to recall any method called instantaneously despite, by that time, feeling very tired.

By the middle of 1953 Pitman had extended his compositions of Spliced Surprise Major into an all encompassing composition which allowed a 5120 with any number from 7 to 30 methods. This also had the merit that it included a number of peals which had already been rung. The number of spliced methods was soon “topped” by Eric W. Critchley who composed a peal of 36 Spliced Surprise Major, which was rung at St Mary’s Handsworth in early 1954. Pitman’s 5120 Spliced Surprise Major in 30 methods was rung for the first time by the Chester Guild at Norbury (Hazel Grove) in May 1958. In June that year Pitman wrote to Ken Lewis:

*It gives me great pleasure to know that you have called my spliced in 30 methods and I must add my heartiest congratulations to you and to the band.*
He continued to produce Spliced Surprise Major Peals on lower numbers of methods, such as a 5376 of Superlative, Pudsey, London, Hereford, Bristol and Cambridge, “giving plenty of 86’s, 67’s and 78’s behind”, though not “all the work” compositions, published in February 1952.\(^{291}\) At the end of 1952 he demonstrated his intention of providing variety in the nature of his Spliced Surprise Major peals by publishing two compositions of 5280 and 5056 Spliced Surprise Major designed for those who wished to ring spliced methods, but who like “plenty of Bristol in the peals”. The 5280 peal has 2880 changes of Bristol and 1216 of London, with 960 changes of Superlative and Cambridge.\(^{292}\) In a letter in a subsequent issue giving a small correction to his composition, he pointed out that the 5056 peal could also be extended to the longest yet peal of Spliced Surprise Major in 4 methods with the tenors together.\(^{293}\)

It is a measure of the growing strength of bands in the Chester Guild in ringing Surprise Major methods that on the same day as the Frodsham peal, there was a peal of Cambridge Surprise Major rung for the Chester Guild at Hayfield, including a young C. Kenneth Lewis and also John Worth, who had posed the 1935 challenge of “all the work” compositions of Spliced Surprise Major so readily taken up by Pitman and which would soon result in his most famous classic peals of Spliced Surprise Major. Frodsham was also the venue for the first peal of 5280 Spliced Surprise Major in 6 methods with all the work, later that year in November. By 1955 Eric Critchley had conducted “all three of the compositions of Spliced Surprise Major by A.J. Pitman in 4, 5 and 6 methods, with the full work of each method for all the bells”.\(^{294}\) In reporting this, the author of the “Belfry Gossip” column wanted to know “any chance of some more in seven and eight, Mr Pitman?” Jack Pitman was not one to resist such a challenge. A few weeks later came his response, in August 1955, by incorporating the method called Dorchester Surprise Major, he devised a composition of 7 Surprise Major methods with all the work.\(^{295}\)

Soon afterwards, there was a congratulatory letter from L.W.G Morris of Bradford.\(^{296}\) This letter is worth quoting in its entirety, since it sums up the feelings of many ringers at the time about the nature of the achievement:

\[\text{Dear Sir, - May I be allowed to warmly congratulate Mr A.J. Pitman on producing yet another ‘masterpiece’ in the form of a Spliced Surprise Major composition in seven methods, retaining the standard four, wherein all the bells do all the work of each method. This achievement marks a new triumph in the advancement of this branch of the art, especially so as the number of methods that can be included on this plan is necessarily}\]
limited. Coupled with congratulations must also be thanks for the many hours of patient research that lie behind these highly commendable productions and I have the greatest possible pleasure in expressing my own.

Yours truly,

L.W.G. Morris. Bradford

It is astonishing how quickly after publication the Chester Diocesan Guild Band responded when they rang this 7-spliced Surprise Major all-the-work composition conducted by C. Kenneth Lewis and with John Worth on the 4th at Norbury in November, 1955.297

NORBURY (HAZEL GROVE), CHESHIRE.
THE CHESTER DIOCESAN GUILD
On Sat., Nov. 5, 1955, in 3 Hours and 4 Minutes,
AT THE CHURCH OF ST THOMAS.
A PEAL OF 5280 SPliced SURPRISE MAJOR
In seven methods, being 960 London, 928 Watford, 896 Bristol, 672 Cambridge, 608 Dorchester, 640 Superlative and 576 Pudsey with all the work of each method for every bell.
125 changes of method.
Tenor 14 cwt. 1 qr. 22 lb in F
Composed by A.J. Pitman
 Conducted by C. Kenneth Lewis.
This composition is now rung for the first time.
(As published in R.W. 12th August 1955)

The “Belfry News” column commented: “This is a week of ringing history. Mr A.J. Pitman’s peal in 7-Spliced Surprise Major has been rung…. “ 298

Eric Critchley’s Yorkshire Band rang the composition again within a couple of weeks. In the majority of these peal attempts of complex methods, the ringers are drawn from a variety of towers, often quite widely spread across the country. Thus it was a matter of interest that in 1959 a band consisting entirely of Sunday Service ringers derived from a single tower, All Souls, Halifax, claimed to be the first Sunday Service band to ring a peal of Pitman’s 5152 Spliced Surprise Major in 4 methods in July 1959.299 300 However, this was soon challenged in October by the band from All Saints, Allesley, who claimed to have rung a peal of 6-Spliced Surprise.301

Pitman’s next move was to add another method, Lincoln, to yield a 5280 8-Spliced Surprise Major, all the work composition, which was published
the day before the attempt on the 7-spliced composition. The letter containing the composition had a slightly apologetic tone. Pitman said that he had looked at the possibility of adding one of several methods before he settled on Lincoln. He pointed out that Lincoln had rather a lot of Pudsey in it. However, it was later pointed out by L.W.G. Morris in another congratulatory letter that “Mr Pitman need make no apology for introducing Lincoln – a method containing leads and places made wrong with attendant backward hunting – rendering it a much more difficult method than Pudsey, whose content is no more in evidence in Lincoln than it is in Dorchester”.

A peal of this composition was rung for the first time in November 1955, by the Chester Guild, once more with Ken Lewis as conductor, but with a slightly different band. This item was treated by The Ringing World as what we would call today “Breaking News”!

MACCLESFIELD, CHESHIRE.

THE CHESTER DIOCESAN GUILD
On Fri., Nov. 25, 1955, in 3 Hours and 7 Minutes,
AT THE CHURCH OF ST PETER.
A PEAL OF 5280 SPLICED SURPRISE MAJOR
In eight methods, being 960 London, 928 Watford, 896 Bristol, 672 Cambridge, 512 Dorchester, 448 Pudsey, 448 Superlative, and 416 Lincoln with all the work of each method for every bell. 121 changes of method.
Tenor 7 cwt. 2 qr. 22 lb in B flat.

Peter Laflin
Fred Dunkerley 2
Basil Jones 3
Robin G. Taylor 4
Composed by Albert J. Pitman

Treble
C. Kenneth Lewis 5
Leslie Boumphrey 6
Edward Jenkins 7
Joseph W. Whittaker Tenor

Conducted by C. Kenneth Lewis.

A 21st Birthday compliment to Dennis Heapy, a local ringer, and a birthday compliment to the ringer of the second.
This composition is now rung for the first time.
(R.W. Nov. 4 1955.)

In races there are winners and losers and the Middlesex ringers also set out to be the first to ring Pitman’s 8-spliced, all the work, on the night before the above peal at St Mary’s, Willesden. From the start, the ringing went well, but after about an hour’s ringing, the conductor miscalled it and at that point the race was lost!

It was the middle of the following year, 1956, that Pitman published a composition of 5472 or 5408 changes, containing 9-Spliced Surprise Major methods with all the work. The additional method included was Cassiobury. The methods were London, Bristol, Watford, Cambridge, Dorchester, Pudsey, Cassiobury, Superlative and Lincoln. Only 6 days after its publication this composition was rung in the 5472 changes version by the
Middlesex County Association at Willesden, conducted by R.F.B. Speed, who commented that it was “an excellent composition”.

Pitman continued to produce Spliced Surprise Major compositions with all the work, but he did not, or was not able to extend the number beyond nine. He also composed for Spliced Surprise Major without all the work and in 1959 he produced a 5- or 6-spliced composition in which “more Yorkshire than usual can be rung” and later in the year a 4-spliced composition giving more London and Cambridge than is usual in 3-lead course peals.

Although the concept of “all the work” in Spliced Surprise Major peals suddenly changed the direction of thinking of composers and peal ringers, the urge to more and more methods in a peal, whether or not they were “all the work” continued and Pitman still provided them, so that for instance, at the end of 1957 a band from the Chester Guild rang the first peal of 25-Spliced Surprise Major for the Guild.

The top conductors were (and still are) constantly looking for new challenges and the increasing number of spliced methods and the concept of “all the work” in spliced compositions continued to yield such challenges. However these are not the only way in which a conductor can display his or her expertise. Eric Critchley (who died only recently) in searching for new ways to exercise his skills, bearing in mind his love for Pitman’s “all the work” 4-spliced composition, not only rang the composition often, but did so while conducting it from a different bell each time, including the treble. This at the time was a unique and remarkable achievement. A further attempt to make a difficult achievement even more difficult was signalled by a notice drawing attention to the fact that “on Whit Monday, at St. Saviour’s Church, Oxton, Wirral, Cheshire, an attempt will be made by members of the Central Council to ring (silent) a peal of Spliced Surprise Major in four methods”. The composition was by A.J. Pitman and consisted of 1280 Cambridge, 1280 Superlative, 1280 London and 1312 Bristol. It was duly rung at Dore, Derbyshire in June 1959, Eric Critchley, being one of the ringers.
DORE, DERBYSHIRE.

THE YORKSHIRE ASSOCIATION.

On Sat., June. 6, 1959, in 3 Hours and 6 Minutes,
AT THE CHRIST CHURCH.

A PEAL OF 5152 SPliced SURPRISE MAJOR

Tenor 11¼ cwt. in G.

In four methods, being 1312 Bristol and 1280 each of London, Cambridge and Superlative, with 112 changes of method and all the work of each method for every bell.

Howard Scott  
W. Eric Critchley 2  
C. Kenneth Lewis 3  
Walter Allman 4  
John Freeman 5  
Wilfred F. Moreton 6  
Leslie W.G. Morris 7  
Philip A. Corby  

Composed by Albert J. Pitman

Rung strictly silent and non-conducted.

Two years later, in May 1961, a similar peal, this time 5280 Spliced Surprise Major in 5 methods, composed by Pitman, was rung silent and non-conducted at St Luke’s Silverdale, Newcastle under Lyme, by another CCCBR band, involving 5 of the above ringers (2, 5, 6, 7, and 8). The first band to ring a peal in 6 Spliced Surprise Major methods with all the work silent and non-conducted did so at St Leonard’s, Turner’s Hill, in Sussex. Jack Pitman was again the composer and it was rung while he was still recovering from illness so it must have given him much pleasure to hear about it.

It is arguable that Pitman’s 5152 Spliced Surprise Major in 4 methods, with all the work, has been the most popular of his Spliced Surprise Major peals and it continues to be rung frequently. Indeed, it became a favourite quite soon after he composed it, so that in one year, 1957, 10 years after it was first rung, there were 8 peals of the composition.

The art of change ringing is practised much less in Scotland than in England or Wales because of the small number of towers with bells hung for change ringing, 18 if we include one tower with a ring of 4 bells, compared with 5685 in England and 190 in Wales. As a result it is inevitable that ringing more advanced methods in Scotland developed more slowly than elsewhere in the UK. In 1954 a band of English ringers, including John Worth, set off to Scotland to attempt to ring the first peal of Spliced Surprise Major in Scotland. They flew from Manchester Airport to Renfrew and after an uncomfortable flight and a pre-arranged lunch, they rang a peal of 4-Spliced Surprise Major at St James’ U.F. Church, Paisley. It was decided that that they would ring a peal of “real” Spliced Surprise Major, by which they meant one in which all the bells rang all the work of all the methods. They settled on what they referred to as “Pitman’s masterpiece in four methods”, some having rung the same composition in Eire about two months earlier. On that occasion they were also able to claim
to be the first complete ringing band to travel by air to a peal. They achieved the first peal of Spliced Surprise Major in Scotland without difficulty and with good striking.\[317\]

Pitman continued to publish single-method compositions such as 5152 Overseale Surprise Major published in December 1959 and rung at Overseale in July to celebrate the enthronement of the Bishop of Derby, conducted by D.P Jones.\[318\]\[319\]

Despite his undoubted devotion to Surprise Major composition, Pitman did not forget that many in the world of ringing had interests elsewhere. Even before the 6496 composition discussed earlier was published there appeared his composition of 5248 Spliced Plain and Kent Treble Bob Major and later 5472 Stedfast Major, a plain major method, which is not rung very much these days.\[320\] Pitman found it very difficult to resist a challenge in composition and when a Mr Hibbert asked about the feasibility of producing a peal of Scientific Triples in parts with the 7th undisturbed he responded rapidly and it was published in June 1951.\[321\] In July 1958 he devised a further composition of Scientific Triples which was rung at Hampton, Middlesex by the Middlesex County Association and the London Diocesan Guild conducted by R.G. Leale.\[322\]

HAMPTON, MIDDLESEX.
THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY ASSN. AND LONDON DIO. GUILD.
On Sat., July 5, 1958, in 2 Hours and 55 Minutes,
AT THE CHURCH OF ST MARY.
A PEAL OF 5040 SCIENTIFIC TRIPLES
Tenor 12 cwt. 2 qr. 4 lb in F sharp.

David A.S. Hawkins  Treble  John M. Jelley  5
Alan J. Frost  2  Michael P. Moreton  6
Brian Blaydon  3  Robin G. Leale  7
William S. Deason  4  Frederick R. Scott  Tenor
Composed by Albert J. Pitman  Conducted by Robin G. Leale.
This is the first peal in the method, and was rung at the first attempt.

In a sense Jack Pitman departed from his normal criteria for peal composition in that, as was pointed out at the time by Pat Cannon, he was to be “congratulated on producing an easier” composition than John Carter’s published in 1908.\[323\]

Jack Pitman, like many of his contemporaries engaged in an extensive exchange of letters, rather like e-mail among ringers today. These, too, were often destroyed immediately or soon after receipt. However some have survived and in some cases passed on to relatives or other ringers. Unfortunately, in the case of relatives, particularly those not interested in ringing, many of these letters have also been destroyed. Among those that
still exist some were part of correspondence between Jack Pitman and Cliff Skidmore, which, on the latter’s death were passed on and are retained by Martin D. Fellows. As we have often seen, throughout his life it is clear that Pitman loved ringing Triples methods. This is shown both in his peal record and in his frequent exhortations for more Triples peals. Although not many of his personal communications on this topic survive, he often expressed his opinions about Triples ringing through personal correspondence. An example of this is one of his letters, written in 1957 to Clifford Skidmore and reproduced below (30):

Some key phrases are:

.....I have been trying to get Spliced Triples going around here (i.e. South Wales in general and Aberavon in particular), but not quite able to get sufficient ringers interested, in fact seldom get anything except Grandsire, by the way we rang Parkers last Saturday here, good peal but very slow. I do not see many young ringers taking the same interest as we used to get, and as the oldies drop out they are difficult to replace.

We now know that he was fighting a losing battle and it was his Spliced Surprise Major compositions which were to be increasingly in demand over the rest of the century and into the next. Cliff Skidmore was also the recipient of some of the compositions which Pitman sent to various conductors throughout the country in the hope that they would use them in peals (31). An example is shown below, where Pitman says:

I have managed to produce a 5 method which remains in regular 6 part, a good feature for the conductor. You can add by ringing Double Grandsire courses in lieu of Grandsire or ring say 2nd in hunt throughout as Hereward.

He also adds that an additional advantage of the composition is that it is more difficult to ring because there are more changes of method!

When a Wolverhampton band rang the first peal of Spliced Triples in 6 methods, Jack congratulated the band and the conductor, Mr Clifford Skidmore. He commented that he had enjoyed ringing with the band at Kingswinford while he was visiting Wolverhampton (presumably to spend time with Ernie Stitch) and once more rather wistfully wondered why more peals of Spliced Triples were not rung. Jack Pitman also conveyed his congratulations via a personal letter to Clifford Skidmore (32).
23 October 1957
Post Tabbet
March 26, 1957

Dear Mr. Skidmore,

In reply to your welcome letter regarding the goods
calling the 6 parts in some order of the methods, you be
guessed right and in order that you would see how I have in
the methods of plan and tools, I send you examples of thankful
change over by those tools at a time in St. Thomas and
South Oxford. The same idea also used in changing to
Bert's college. But one cannot use tools which are
so they will produce different following tools.

I was pleased to see another pair of Upheld Tapes at
Bill's hill. I have been trying to get Upheld Tapes
going around here, but not quite able to get sufficient
operators interested, in fact, seldom get anything begun
on, by the way, we very poorly last Saturday
good peal but very slow. I do not see many of the gui
operators taking the same interest as we used to get, and
the older ones drop out they are difficult to replace.
I hope to come to Wolverhampton some time this month
and get a bit of ringing with & English coven. I will not
come with you.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]


Courtesy of Martin D. Fellows.
I want congratulate you in your trend on ringing a pair of Triples on your methods. As regards composition to include further "measured" changes worked out for you and as you will find, I managed to produce a 6 method which remains in regular 6 part form, a good feature for the conductor. You can add by ringing Double Grandmas courses in view of grandmas or may say 2 nd or 3rd throughout as Notework. Of course the plan gives additional charge of motion which adds to the difficulty of ringing it. The key to the variation of methods will be seen in the following examples. Once this complete the variation.

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You will get the idea from abovefigures. Best wishes.

31. Letter from Jack Pitman to Clifford Skidmore about Spliced Triples compositions that he had worked on.

*Courtesy of Martin D. Fellows.*
Dear Mr. Skidmore,

Heartiest congratulations on the Spliced Triples in 6 methods, with wishes for further success.

I have just had time to look over your suggested additional methods and I don’t think I can improve on this. I must point out that the holes in reverse Grandson are shown to be made with the triple behind, how shall we deal with this.

I may also add that Double Oxford as well as Double can be substituted for Interchange in the 5 lead course, thus making it up to 13, which includes all the Triples Methods as shown in C.A. Collection, Pure Triples.

When I have time I will see if I can make any further suggestions.

In the meantime, wishing you every success and hope that I will see the near future.

Yours sincerely

Jack Pitman

23 Oakwood St
Port Talbot Nov 20th 1953

32. Letter of congratulations from Jack Pitman to Clifford Skidmore on achieving a peal of Spliced Triples in 6 methods.

Courtesy of Martin D. Fellows.
Skidmore composed a peal with additional methods and sent this to Jack Pitman for comment. He did not think that he could improve on the composition but gave additional technical advice, so that 11 methods could be produced. He returned to this theme the following year after a letter from Gordon Halls in *The Ringing World* discussed the question of music in methods and compositions. He contended that the principles, Erin Caters and Duffield Major had especially attractive musical qualities.

Once more Pitman wondered, in print, why these were not rung more. True to his long held views on what makes a composition of interest to conductors, he published a composition of spliced Erin and Stedman Caters which combined attractive music with a more difficult calling. Later, in 1954, he published another peal of Spliced Erin and Stedman, this time of Triples, in 8 parts with rather fewer calls (208) than usual which were called alternately throughout the peal. Pitman’s 5040 Spliced Triples No 2 in 5 methods, 1260 College Bob, 1260 London Bob, 588 Double Oxford, 1092 St Clements and 840 Double Grandire appeared in May 1959 and was rung for the first time by a band from the Worcestershire and Districts Association at St Michael’s, Brierley Hill in November 1958. It was claimed as “the first peal of Spliced Triples rung with changes of method at both plain and bobbed leads”.

The theme of ringing Triples was taken up again in 1959 by a writer calling him, or herself D.A.B who wrote a short account of a great ringing conductor, William H. Barber, who was an expert at ringing that very difficult composition of Stedman Triples, called Carter’s Odd Bob peal. Conducting this demands a very considerable feat of memory and concentration on the positions of all the bells throughout the peal. In 1908, Barber conducted the Carter’s Odd Bob peal at St. Mary’s Gateshead on a non-observation bell while he was blindfolded. It was considered 50 years later, in 1958, as one of the greatest feats in ringing on tower bells.

We have seen how the range of composition which Jack Pitman espoused spanned methods from Doubles to Royal, that is methods on 5 to 10 bells, it is notable that he does not appear to have composed anything for Minor or Maximus methods. He remains well known for his 240 of Grandire Doubles, still very widely rung today and we are already aware of the battle in the 1920’s and 1930’s over the legitimacy of Pitman’s 240 of Grandire Doubles. It appears that out of the blue Pitman came up with a “method” which he referred to as “Double Grandire Doubles”. This was described as “Twelve-scores (i.e. 240’s)……… in which each change is rung hand and back with all calls at the lead end in Grandire Doubles”. 19 variations of this were rung as a peal at St Thomas’, Neath in July 1958. Gwyn Lewis retained a hand-written letter, reproduced below, in which Jack provides the composition of Double Grandire Doubles. The letter reads as follows:
14 Oakwood Street
Port Talbot
May 20th
Dear Gwyn

In reference to our conversation about 240’s of Double
Grandsire and the figures which I gave you, they are not
quite correct. I think I put one of the singles in the wrong
place so will send amended figure not to mislead you if will
think of trying it
Yours sincerely                    AJ Pitman

And after the figures:
_Above are 3 different 240’s which may be called from any
lead making many variations._
_Each change comes once at hand and once at back in a 240._
_Bobs and singles made as in Grandsire Doubles_334

It was clear that this needed CCCBR approval, as had Pitman’s 240 of
Grandsire Doubles. This time however, Pitman was not only a Member of
the CCCBR, but was also a stalwart member of its Peals Collection
Committee, which dealt with such matters as the legitimacy of peals.

At the 1959 meeting, the Double Grandsire Doubles peal came before
Council in the form of the following motion proposed by A.J. Pitman, even
though he personally believed that it contravened CCCBR rules and the
ringers had rung the peal at their own risk. It was seconded by G.I. Lewis:

_That although true six-scores of Double Grandsire Doubles
cannot be obtained without calls when the treble is behind
as well as when it is on the front, in view of the fact that
twelve scores on the same principle as Pitman’s twelve
scores of Grandsire Doubles have been obtained, Double
Grandsire Doubles consisting of such twelve-scores shall be
recognised by the Council._335

Pitman defended his motion on the rather feeble basis of encouraging
young ringers to have something interesting instead of Grandsire Doubles,
particularly as he had developed compositions which were not “…troubled
with the call of the treble behind.” C. Kenneth Lewis’s opinion was sought
and he concluded that “because of conditions of peals of Doubles in 3(a) we
have 12-scores known as Morris’ and Pitman’s”. He submitted that “it is
superfluous as we are bound by a previous decision”.

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33. Letter from Jack Pitman to Gwyn I. Lewis about 240’s of Double Grandsire Doubles.  

*Courtesy Alwyn Lewis.*

The Council accepted this view. A positive feature of the Committee’s deliberations during Pitman’s membership was the long-term project of
collecting together suitable Stedman Caters’ and Cinques’ compositions for publication as a book.\textsuperscript{336}

It is unusual for a series of peal attempts by experienced bands to be lost over many years. In the middle of the 1950’s, this was the case at St John the Baptist Church in Cardiff, where despite many attempts, not a single peal of any Major Method had been successfully accomplished since 1904! On Easter Monday 1955 Jack Pitman and others, with some trepidation, decided to attempt a peal of Plain Bob Major at that church. All went well until, towards the end of the peal, the rope on the tenor bell began to unravel in the section below the sally! In any peal this would have caused consternation among the ringers, but this was particularly the case when they were tantalisingly close to completing the peal in this apparently jinxed tower. Inevitably the incident had a deleterious effect on the ringers’ concentration. Gradually the unravelling got worse and worse. Wispy pieces of rope began to break off and float into the air - then suddenly, the rope snapped! But it did so in the very last pull of the peal just as “rounds” was achieved and the peal was completed.\textsuperscript{337} The jinx was no more.

At the time of writing, among the more popular methods, particularly for those at a relatively early stage of learning methods is Plain Bob Triples and it is frequently rung as a peal. However, in 1905, the 14-year old CCCBR decided that peals of Plain Bob Triples, Caters or Cinques, should not be included in the peals analysis, so that they could not be not recognised as peals. This restriction remained in place for the next half century until, at the CCCBR Meeting of 1955, it was proposed that “the 1905 decision be withdrawn and all such peals recognised”. How strange it seems at the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century that peals of such a popular method as Plain Bob Triples should have been effectively banned for half the previous century. Nevertheless, the Editor of The Ringing World in his Editorial dealing with what he recognised was a revolutionary Council Meeting, was moved to comment that “the latitude now given to peal ringers is amazing”!

Towards the end of 1951 a group of like-minded railwaymen got together to ring a railway centenary peal. There were several calls for volunteers resulting in a barrage of responses drawing attention to various railwaymen’s peals and peal attempts that had taken place in previous years, including the peal of Grandsire Caters in which Jack Pitman rang in 1922 at St Woolos, Newport. However, it was not until 1956 that a groundswell of support began to accumulate for the formation of a Railwaymen’s Bell Ringing Guild. Pitman appears to have been very supportive of the suggestion and he is featured in a list of names of those interested in the idea floated in a letter to The Ringing World in March 1956.\textsuperscript{338} W. Frank Stenson, a retired locomotive inspector, the author of the letter, had his own reservations about the formation of such an organisation because he was
worried that it might “cut across” the existing territorial structure which had served the Exercise for so many years. Nevertheless he was a broad supporter of the idea and was among the first to propose it. Indeed he eventually became Acting General Secretary of the new Guild. Later that year at a railwaymen’s meeting at Christchurch Parochial Buildings in Crewe, organised by Stenson, and Sydney Foskett, an engine driver, it was formally proposed that a “Railwaymen’s Guild of Ringers” be formed. It came into being in June 1956.\(^{339}\) Jack Pitman was among those present at that meeting and in the photograph of “Pioneers of the Railwaymen’s Ringer’s Guild” taken immediately after the meeting. He can be seen standing third from the right in the second row from the back in 34. The same day he also rang in what was described at the time as a “first class” peal of Grandsire Caters at Christ Church, Crewe, the first peal rung by the Railwaymen’s Guild of Ringers. A list of around 40 “founder members”, including A.J. Pitman, appeared in The Ringing World at the end of the year headed: Christmas Greetings to All Readers: Railwaymen’s Guild, illustrating that there was indeed a very significant level of support for the new Guild.\(^{340}\)

Reproduced with permission from The Ringing World.

Pitman was present at the Autumn Meeting in October 1958 and also in some subsequent meetings. He was almost certainly included in a peal of Stedman Caters at Crewe at the end of November 1958 to celebrate Frank Stenson’s 70th birthday (there was a ringer from Leamington Spa there). Unfortunately the peal collapsed after they had been ringing for just over an hour.\(^{341}\) A subsequent quarter peal attempt also came to grief – as so often happens! He continued to attend Railwaymen’s Guild meetings such as the Autumn Meeting in 1959 at Newport.\(^{342}\) We have seen that Pitman travelled to peals by train, the railways of his day are often said to have been much
more reliable than they are today. However, even in those days things sometimes went wrong. So it was that, in November 1959, he was scheduled to ring in a Railwaymen’s Guild Peal of Grandsire Triples at Nantwich, Cheshire. Unfortunately he failed to arrive - due to his being “adrift on British Railways”. The “young energetic 6-bell tower Ringing Master of the Crewe Branch of the Chester Guild”, Mr Frank Morton, an apprentice fitter and turner working for British Rail, who had been working nights, was dragged from his bed and at 20 minutes notice found himself taking Jack Pitman’s place in his first peal of Grandsire Triples. Having failed the attempt in the previous year, the ringers must have been relieved when the peal came round. It was dedicated to Frank Stenson’s 71st birthday!

The year 1955 also saw the formation of a “College of Campanology”. It was announced that

Mr Wilfred Moreton has accepted the office of Vice-Principal of the College of Campanology and .......... The Ringing World hopes to serialise the Manual of Instruction of the College of Campanology.

The original idea was the brainchild of Albert York-Bramble. The initiative soon began to take on a momentum of its own and the names of the Governors of the College of Campanology were announced as

J.T. Dyke (Hon. Examiner), A.J. Pitman (who will be contributing to the section on composition in the Manual), R.B. Speed, and Dr E.S.J. Hatcher (Hon. Examiner).

These were all eminent names in the world of ringing at the time and the development was taken very seriously with much space being allocated in The Ringing World, not only to the Manual of Instruction, but also a large number of letters proclaiming for or against the initiative. Many letters were against! By September that year it was claimed that “over 30 members have been enrolled in The College of Campanology, 10 of whom are members of the Central Council”.

Soon the Manual began to appear in instalments in The Ringing World and it became clear that the authors must have put an enormous amount of work into their production. They included lots of detail resulting in a verbose and turgid text. One feature of criticism was that the College was not being developed under the auspices of the CCCBR and as such was not recognised by it. C.H. Kippin, in refusing to take part in the activities of the College wrote:

I was invited ‘as an eminent ringer’ to become ‘Tutor I (Hon.) and Ringer VI (Hon.) of the College, with a place on the Board of Governors, subject to payment of the requisite fee (2/6d). The signature of my parent or guardian was not required because I was over 21!”
On rejecting the opportunity, he received a somewhat pompous response which began,

.....the advancement of mankind is of course, marked by controversy and criticism, and pioneers have to be prepared for...

It continued in a similar vein. At the end of 1956 under the heading “A Christmas Frolic”, there appeared a spoof article about the College of Campanology entitled “Manual for Ringing Training of the Farm of Tintinnabulation”.348

The College continued for a number of years finally disappearing in 1966. The initiative seems to have invited some ridicule if only because of the language used and the pretentious certificates of various kinds which they issued. An example of Jack Pitman’s certificate issued on 7th August 1956 acknowledging that he had been “duly enrolled as a member of the College of Campanology……” in “The Ancient Art of Change Ringing and has been registered accordingly as Correspondent and Examiner” is reproduced on the following pages:
*Pitman Family Collection.*
An event occurred (or rather didn’t quite occur) in 1954 which deserves the attention of readers of this book. Indeed, Jack Pitman must have watched developments with great interest. On 7 bells, the maximum
possible number of unique changes which may be rung is 5040 and we have seen that this has become the standard for a peal and therefore has been rung many thousands of times. However, on 8 bells, the maximum number of changes which may be rung is 40,320 i.e. 8 times the number on 7 bells. If we assume that the average peal takes about 3 hours, then to ring 40,320 could be expected to take about 24 hours. The possibility of ringing the “extent on eight” has always fascinated sections of the ringing community and various attempts had been made, for example with relays of ringers. However in 1954 no single band had achieved this on tower bells. It is obvious that it would be sensible to attempt the feat using light bells. This reduces the demands on the ringer because it would require less physical effort and furthermore, the peal would take less time.

In 1954 a band decided to make an attempt to ring the extent on 8 and they chose the very light ring of bells at the Loughborough Bell Foundry. This would be among the greatest ever ringing achievements. When the attempt was announced, it became a matter of national interest and during the attempt BBC radio broadcast periodic bulletins tracking the progress of the peal. The chosen method was Plain Bob Major. The ringing began at around 4.00am on Saturday morning and 9 hours later, just after 2.00pm, the conductor called “stand”. He realised that he had omitted a bob or a single! The disappointment (and maybe for some, relief) of the band must have been enormous. It would be another 10 years before there was a successful attempt. As a consolation, the following morning, 6 of the band rang in a successful peal of Cambridge Surprise Major on the bells, taking 2 hours 30 minutes!
Every decade seems to have been given an epithet purporting to summarise life during that period. The 1960’s is a prime example. It is still often referred to as the “swinging 60’s”, though many who lived through that era find themselves wondering why it was not like that for them! Whether bell ringing was immune from the heightened atmosphere of the time is a moot point, but the number of peals rung continued to rise rapidly, though spasmodically. From the UK point of view, a major feature of the first half of the decade was the continuing rapid dismantling of the Empire; a process which would have been unthinkable for many before the Second World War. This had little or no effect on bell ringing, except that bell ringing became a sort of enduring “footprint” of Empire, remaining after it had been dismantled. A glance at a list of ringable towers throughout the world today shows that virtually every country which was once a British colony has one or more churches (usually Anglican) with a ring of bells. Another partial consequence of decolonisation was the abandoning of conscription to military service of 18 year old men in 1960. This affected the bell ringing world, since ringers were no longer “conscripted” for 18 months at the age of 18 when they were most needed by their towers.

In 1962, Pitman, like most people in the British Isles would have been filled with anxiety during the Cuban Missile crisis, when the USSR refused a demand by the West to withdraw missiles with atomic warheads, from Cuba, only 90 miles from the USA, and a war involving nuclear weapons loomed large. The World held its breath as the crisis seemed to reach the point of no return and sighed a huge individual and collective sigh of relief.
when it was over! In 1963, he would also have been concerned, and probably deeply saddened by the efforts of Dr Richard Beeching, who developed a plan to “rationalise” the railways in the UK. Without covering the politics of the situation, suffice it to say that in an effort to save money there were massive cuts in the railways, hundreds of lines were closed and around 68,000 railway staff were dispensed with. The Pitmans would also have been shocked and saddened along with the rest of the country by the assassination of the young American President, John F. Kennedy in November that year.

Jack Pitman, now in his early 70’s, could look back at the previous decade with very mixed feelings. The death of Evelyn, when she was relatively young, after many years of pain and creeping paralysis and the loss of their son made the first half of the decade a time of immense sadness for him. His retirement in 1952 would have had an invigorating effect on him. For someone who had spent his life trying to fit a time-consuming hobby around a demanding job reaching retirement often has a liberating effect. It appears that this, coupled with his marriage to Gertrude, meant that the second half of the 1950’s appears to have been a happy time. He had the opportunity and time to travel, not to mention the valuable benefit of free travel on the railway! His health had also remained relatively robust. It is notable that in the minutes of some meetings and the accounts of various events it is recorded that Gertrude often accompanied him, though there was no evidence that she was, or ever had been, a ringer. In September 1960 Jack Pitman was 73.

His grand-daughter, Joyce Telford married Norman Perks in October 1965 and appropriately Pitman’s peal of Spliced Surprise Major in 5-methods, London, Cambridge, Superlative, Bristol and Pudsey with all the work was rung at St Mary’s Aberavon, conducted by Peter Border. It so happened that Jack Pryor, who was at that time Secretary of the LMDA, got to hear about this peal, rung during a peal-ringing tour of South Wales. He told the band that Pitman would probably be listening to it. Indeed the great man sat outside the tower throughout the whole peal and greeted Peter Border at the end of the peal, saying that he had recognised the composition and had written out the figures as it was being rung, a considerable achievement, bearing in mind his age and the rather old-fashioned hearing aid which he had been wearing for some years! As we have seen, this was not a “one off”, many have told stories of Jack Pitman’s keen listening skills for bell ringing. On another occasion, this time at Baglan Church, Pitman listened to a peal conducted by Brian Woodruffe, who at the time was a student at Swansea University. As he listened, he wrote out the figures for the method and on meeting the ringers after the peal he told Brian that he had the figures, but did not recognise the method. It was a newly-composed
method, St Werbergs Surprise Minor, which the band was ringing to “complete that alphabet” of Surprise Minor methods.

An appreciation and short biography of A.J. Pitman was published in The Ringing World in 1960 in the series “Servants of the Exercise” accompanied by a photograph. This shows him, as always, in a dark suit, though he now sported a soft attached collar. No more the starched detached collar of earlier photographs, perhaps the influence of his new wife? The article is curiously low key about his achievements, although describing him as having a very high reputation in the field of spliced ringing and describing his compositions as “brilliant”, it begins with the rather less complimentary “Mr A.J. Pitman’s contribution has been most useful and timely”. It emphasises his love of ringing Grandsire and Stedman Triples, “blaming” this on the fact that “opportunities for ringing the advanced methods were not as frequent at the time he lived in Aberavon”. Perhaps, in this article we have a clue about the general low key attitude of some in the Exercise regarding Pitman’s reputation and the fact that recognition at the highest level did not come until very late in his life. This article in juxtapositioning his composition activity, ringing range and activity shows that his reputation suffered from not ringing (or rather, wanting to ring?) “advanced methods” and ringing “only” something over 200 peals.

1961 was Golden Jubilee Year for that remarkable journal The Ringing World. It had been started, running in parallel with its rival Bell News, in 1911, and it continued through two World Wars, virtually without interruption for over 50 years. It had been, throughout those years, a most valuable source of all sorts of information about ringing. Over the years there have been frequent criticisms of it. These have often been periodic, reflecting the attitudes of each different generation towards its contents. The most consistent complaint has been about the price of the journal, whether it cost 2d (less than 1p in today’s money) or £1. It “saw off” its rival, discontinued in 1915, and at the time of writing, with its centenary only 5 years away it continues to be loved and complained about by its readers, whether they have bought a copy or not! One of the suggestions taken up for The Ringing World Jubilee was about what were the most significant advancements in ringing over the previous 50 years. One of those proposed was entitled “Albert J. Pitman” and it is worth quoting in its entirety:

Albert J. Pitman

That remarkable and versatile composer Mr Albert J. Pitman, deserves consideration for the credit of providing the best contribution to the advancement of ringing. From one aspect alone, Spliced Surprise ringing, Mr Pitman has
contributed material which, I have not the slightest doubt, has influenced many an ordinary ringer into becoming a much better ringer. To be able to ring Spliced is a refreshing experience, it adds interest, it encourages advancement in the knowledge of the art and it produces better conductors. But Mr Pitman has also provided scores of compositions for those who do not care for surprise ringing, and which still can be regarded as advancement. And fancy producing a 5040 Scientific Triples for the Exercise to accomplish!

T.J. Lock

There were of course other suggestions, including the increasing participation of women ringers, ball bearings for bells and rather more controversially the War-Time ban on ringing, because of its encouragement of hand-bell ringing, which produced a significant section of ringers who learnt from scratch to ring 2 bells and see methods from that point of view. Among the enthusiastic handbell ringers during the war was Harold Cashmore. He and those who rang with him helped to keep up the profile of ringing during the war. Jack Pitman obviously liked the Golden Jubilee Issue which he referred to in a letter as “A splendid production – congratulations to all concerned.”

Although, Pitman’s ringing activities continued, we see a decline in both the frequency of his ringing and his composing activity. In 1961, he did however adjudicate at the SBDG’s revived striking competition in St David’s Church, Brecon, where he said nice things about the ringing and adjudged that Porthcawl had won. He also said that he was “always willing to oblige on such occasions”. This was no empty promise, bearing in mind that he had travelled all the way from Leamington Spa for the occasion. Indeed, it was in danger of becoming something of an annual task, since the following year he once more judged the striking competition held at Cefn Coed, when St Paul’s Church, Sketty, Swansea was the winner.

He continued to be active in the Coventry Diocesan Guild by ringing the treble in his only peal during 1960, Double Norwich Court Bob Major at St Nicholas, Warwick. The following year, for the first time over many years he did not ring any peals. In August there appeared a small piece in “Belfry Gossip” stating that:

The well known composer of Spliced Surprise and other peals, Mr A.J. Pitman, of 29(sic) Taylor Avenue, Lillington, near Leamington Spa, has been ordered by his doctor to give active ringing a rest for a while. We are sure the
Exercise at large will join local ringers in wishing Mr Pitman a speedy recovery to full health again.\textsuperscript{358}

There is no indication what was wrong with him, but this appears to be the only time during his long life that he had an illness which was sufficiently serious to curtail his work in ringing. However, having said that, he didn’t seem to heed the doctor’s warning because 3 weeks later in August he published a brief article entitled “Short Course of Caters”.\textsuperscript{359} He was also in correspondence with Gwyn Lewis of Cadoxton about his bobs-only composition of Spliced Grandsire and Oxford Bob Triples which he had just found. His original letter is reproduced as \textsuperscript{36}.

Nevertheless, it turned out that the above peal of Double Norwich was to be his last. He did not ring any successful peals in subsequent years, though it is possible that he was involved in an unsuccessful peal attempt at Penn for Ernie Stitch’s 78\textsuperscript{th} birthday in August 1962 but it is unlikely, since the peal was rescheduled for September and he did not ring.

Whatever his health problems were, they continued, though appeared to be intermittent. He was unable to attend the Railwaymen’s Guild meeting at Taunton in 1962 and at the meeting a Mr Bassett asked that the Secretary should “write Mr Jack Pitman, expressing the best wishes of members of the Guild for a ‘get well’ (sic) and strong enough to be with us next year”. Again, in 1963 the Master of the Railwaymen’s Guild wrote a letter of good wishes to him after he had sent his apologies saying that he was unable to make the journey.\textsuperscript{360} However, he was able to attend, with his wife, the 1964 Meeting in Crewe and also, the LMDA Meeting in Newport. The following year he was elected a Vice President of the LMDA, in recognition of “the credit brought on the Association”.\textsuperscript{361}

His major accomplishment for 1961 was the publication of 2 compositions, numbers 1 and 2, of 13440 Spliced Surprise Major in 6 methods as another challenge for those who wished to pit their wits and push their bodies even further in ringing long lengths of Spliced Surprise Major. These compositions also had the merit of representing the extent in 6 methods of the 60 courses with the tenors together and of being very musical.\textsuperscript{362} As usual, he had sent out copies of his composition, one of which went to C. Kenneth Lewis of the Chester Guild and in May, the band at Norbury completed the peal for the Chester Guild as the longest length of Spliced Surprise Major yet achieved.\textsuperscript{363}
36. Letter from Jack Pitman to Gwyn Lewis about Spliced Grandsire and Oxford Bob Triples.

*Courtesy Alwyn Lewis.*

140
NORBURY (HAZEL GROVE), CHESHIRE.

THE CHESTER DIOCESAN GUILD

On Sat., May. 20, 1961, in 7 Hours and 11 Minutes,
AT THE CHURCH OF ST THOMAS.

A PEAL OF 13440 SPLICED SURPRISE MAJOR

In six methods, being 3,840 Watford, 3,168 each of Rutland and Wembley, 1,920 Ealing and 672 each Belgrave and Belvedere with 381 changes of method.

Tenor 14 cwt. 1 qr. 22 lb in F

Edward Jenkins  Treble  C. Kenneth Lewis  5
A. Peter Whitehead  2  John Worth  6
Bernard F.L. Groves  3  Robert B. Smith  7
Basil Jones  4  Brian Harris  Tenor


Umpire: Peter Laflin

The extent of Spliced Surprise Major with the tenors together.
The longest length of Spliced Surprise Major yet rung.

This was of course a major feat, not only of endurance, but also of concentration and continuous intellectual application. However, the Holy Grail of long-length ringing remained elusive. In 1961 another band of young ringers set out to ring the “extent on 8”, i.e. 40,320 changes, irrespective of the method. In attempting this, a decision has to be made as to whether it is better to use a complex method that requires continuous concentration and risk shear intellectual exhaustion, or to ring a fairly simple method and risk loss of concentration due to boredom. The latter route was chosen and the selected method was again Plain Bob Major and C. K. Lewis devised a suitable composition. In June 1961 at the Loughborough Bell Foundry the band set out to ring the extent on 8. They rang 32,704 changes before they were forced to bring the peal around. This was the longest length peal ever rung by any single band.

It was not until 27th /28th July 1963 that “……the greatest number of changes ever to be rung to a peal”, the so-called extent on eight was achieved. The method was again Plain Bob Major, the composer, once more C. Kenneth Lewis and the conductor Robert B. Smith of Marple. It was rung on the Loughborough Bell Foundry Campanile for the Leicester Diocesan Guild and took 17 hours and 58.5 minutes to complete. To ensure that all was well, there were 4 umpires present and 4 witnesses. In no small measure, the success of the venture was helped by the very carefully and cleverly devised composition by Ken Lewis. One small sentence from the article written at the time by Robert B. Smith, who rang the tenor, describing how he felt after 25,000 changes had been rung shows how much the ringers had to go through to achieve this record: “My arms started to bleed at about this point, but this seemed to stop the chafing a little bit.”

The news of the achievement became a national feature. We do not know
what Jack Pitman’s reaction to the news would have been, but we can be reasonably sure that he would have taken a close interest as the drama unfolded and he would have been delighted with the outcome. Jack Pitman and Ken Lewis corresponded over many years, knew each other quite well and may even have discussed the composition before or after the peal. Needless to say no-one has yet attempted the feat again on tower bells! Nevertheless many ringing challenges have been taken up since then, but nothing has captured the imagination of ringers and the general public in quite the same way.

Pitman continued to produce compositions and in October 1962 he published one for a peal of Spliced Surprise Royal featuring 4 methods, London, Cambridge, Yorkshire and Rochester with all the work for each method. However, the next peal composition he published proved to be his last, 5120 Spliced Surprise Royal in 5 methods in May 1963. The methods were Rochester, London No 1, Cambridge, Yorkshire and York. This was rung for the first time at Bradford Cathedral in the same month, conducted by W.G. Morris. It is notable that Pitman had begun to take an interest in Spliced Surprise Royal composition and it shows that despite his advancing age and illness, he still recognised trends and fashions in ringing. This is illustrated by “A Review of Recent Compositions” in The Ringing World in August 1964, in which P.G.K. Davies comments that “Several bands have reopened vast territories in Spliced Surprise Royal and Maximus (which are) hardly touched by the composer”.

After the publication of his last peal composition he began to devise (or maybe had already devised) and publish compositions for short touches such as 7 musical touches of Stedman Triples which appeared in April 1965. Finally, in November his last compositions to appear in his lifetime were published. His letter summarises many of the qualities which he was seeking in his compositions, of whatever length and is worth quoting in full, though it also illustrates Jack Pitman’s usual brevity.

Dear Sir, - You have kindly published seven touches of Stedman in “The Ringing World” of April 9th, which I trust were appreciated by conductors having a liking for musical changes with 74 and 46 behind. I have now a further two in which I have given preference to ringers who like even bobs. I have not seen any published with those qualities on this plan.-Yours faithfully,

A.J. Pitman
Leamington Spa.
His last letter to *The Ringing World* appeared in January 1966 in which he expressed his regrets at not being able to attend, as he had hoped, the memorial to the late J.W. Jones at All Saints, Newport. He said that he had been taken ill and was confined to his bed for “a couple of weeks”. He was clearly grateful for JWJ’s friendship and reading between the lines of this short letter, it appears that he and J.W. Jones had been in correspondence and over many years had discussed Pitman’s work and the compositions which stemmed from it. His final remark was that “ringing would be out of the question for a while”.

Ernie Stitch had been living in the Midlands for 12 years in 1962, when he decided to return to live in South Wales. It is a measure of the esteem in which he was held by the Archdeaconry of Stafford Society that in their 1962 Annual Dinner they mentioned him among absent friends during the “after-dinner speech”. This was in November 1962. He was welcomed to the Annual Meeting of the Southern District of the SBDG the following month and spoke emotionally about his return to South Wales. Stitch and Gwyn I. Lewis (a friend of both Stitch and Pitman), rang their 100th peal together at Newton Nottage, which was now Ernie Stitch’s home tower in January 1963. Two months later on 10th March 1963 Ernie Stitch quite suddenly died at his home in Nottage, near Porthcawl. This was undoubtedly a very considerable shock to Jack Pitman. They had been close friends for nearly 50 years and had rung their first peal together 44 years before. Both were life-long railway employees and both were greatly loved and respected by their ringing contemporaries. There is no evidence that Jack was able to attend the funeral, presumably because of his own failing health. This must have been a matter of great distress to him. However, he did publish a short appreciation of Ernie Stitch, in which he expressed his shock at Stitch’s sudden death and pointed out that they had been ringing friends for very many years. The LMADA Annual Meeting also expressed its sadness with a silence and described him as “….one of the Association’s most ‘noble sons’”. Similar sentiments were voiced by the Archdeaconry of Stafford where he spent most of the previous 12 years. He rang a total of 564 peals. Most of these were Doubles, Minor, Triples or Plain Major, with Superlative and Yorkshire being the only Surprise Methods, but what shines out of what can be gleaned about his life was his sheer love of ringing peals, ringing generally and helping learners.

Pitman continued with his work as a member of the Peals Collection Committee of the CCCBR. His main task was checking the proof of peal compositions which were to be included in a “Collection of Stedman Caters and Cinques”, which was due to be published. He carried out this work with another colleague on the committee and because of the number of
compositions and the complexity of the task it was a particularly time-consuming area of the committee’s work.\textsuperscript{374}

It had to happen sooner or later! In 1965 another Grandsire Doubles controversy flared up. The touch-paper was lit by F.R. Moreton concerning a peal 5,100 Grandsire Doubles rung at St Michael’s, Marbury, Cheshire in November 1964. He withdrew the peal because “….peals of Doubles must be rung in multiples of 120’s throughout, therefore a 60 invalidated the performance”.\textsuperscript{375} There followed a number of letters which mainly pointed out the inconsistency which was inherent in the definitions of Doubles peals drawn up to accommodate Pitman’s and Morris’s 240, by giving these a “special status”. In this case, however it was the 60 changes at the end which caused the problem. It was pointed out, for instance, that it may have been possible for the band legitimately to claim a peal of 5040 Grandsire Doubles, which they undoubtedly did ring, but continued on to ring a further 60 changes – for whatever reason! However, the discussion was inevitably extended to encompass a potentially controversial 240 of Grandsire Doubles which was devised by Brian D. Price and there appeared no logical reason why this should not also be acceptable. It was at this point that Jack Pitman waded in by supporting wholeheartedly Brian Price’s 240’s saying “I consider that Mr Price’s 240’s are quite as good and I am at a loss to know why they are not included”. For the time being, this is where the arguments rested…..

A small paragraph of “Late News” published in \textit{The Ringing World} of 26\textsuperscript{th} August 1966 announced with regret the death of “Mr Albert J. Pitman, the eminent composer of Lillington, Leamington, Warwicks, on Monday, August 15\textsuperscript{th}” and that the funeral had taken place at Baglan Church, near Port Talbot on Saturday, August 20\textsuperscript{th}. There was also a service conducted by the Curate of Baglan, the Rev. E.L. Hough, at Jack’s former home in Oakwood Street.\textsuperscript{376} He was buried with his first wife, Evelyn and also Phyllis Field, who was the Mother-in-Law of his sister Eva and wife of Isaac Field.\textsuperscript{377}

The funeral, as well as being reported by the Port Talbot newspapers, also appeared in “The Leamington Courier”. It was attended by a large number of family and friends, including, of course, his second wife, Gertrude and his step daughters. There were “official” representatives from the LMDA and the Coventry Diocesan Guild of Church Bellringers, as well as local ringers, particularly from St Mary’s Aberavon and St Illtyd’s, Bridgend. Among the many ringers who had come from outside these associations was C. Kenneth Lewis who had rung in so many of Pitman’s all the work and other peals.
Despite Pitman’s national reputation, there was no representation from any national ringing body. In a letter from the Honorary Secretary of the LMDA, Jack Pryor, addressed to Mrs Pitman and sent soon after he heard of Pitman’s death, he drew attention to Pitman’s work as a composer of compositions “of the highest standard” which had been rung all over the country. In a prescient sentence, he also said “His memory will live for ever amongst ringers who for generations to come will ring peals of his composition.”

Jack Pryor also wrote an excellent obituary for *The Ringing World* which focussed on the ringing aspects of his life. It was felt appropriate that a further “technical obituary” should be written, outlining Pitman’s achievements as a composer, particularly in the area of Spliced Surprise Major composition. This appeared in September 1966, about a month after Pitman’s death. It was written by C. Kenneth Lewis, who as we have seen has rung in and called many of Pitman’s compositions. This gives a concise and highly readable account of many of Pitman’s achievements. Even so, his overall assessment of Pitman’s work is neatly encapsulated in the last paragraph of the piece:

> This brief summary of (Pitman’s) work cannot give even the slightest idea of the extent of his genius, his capacity for taking pains, his extensive knowledge of composition, but with it all his great modesty and shy disposition.

To this we may add some lines from “An Appreciation” by Giles B. Thompson, which accompanied Jack Pryor’s piece:
With the death of Albert J. Pitman the Exercise has lost its greatest living composer and perhaps the greatest of all time. He was ranked with such as John Reeves and Joseph W. Parker………..we exchanged a brief correspondence (recently) which ended in the words: ‘Shall be pleased to hear further from you.’ Alas I had been meaning to write again, but it is now too late…

Jack Pitman produced an enormous number of compositions. Many were published, but many were not. He worked meticulously with pencil and paper and some of these originals still exist, in part or in full and some examples have been illustrated in this work. However something of a mystery surrounds the bulk of his papers. The following tiny paragraph in The Ringing World appeared soon after Pitman’s death:380

The Late Mr A.J. Pitman’s Papers

Mr Trevor Roderick informs us that that the papers of the late Mr A.J. Pitman are being dispatched to him and he will keep them safely until the Central Council decides who is to inspect them. Before Mr Pitman’s departure from South Wales, the Llandaff and Monmouth Diocesan Association presented him with a filing cabinet in which to keep his papers.

At the CCCBR Meeting in 1967, The Peals Collection Committee convener was given the job of examining Pitman’s papers and reported the following to Council:381

The convener was assigned the task of examining the books and papers of the late Mr A.J. Pitman. He looked through all of them and found that much of the material was disappointingly of little value, though his figures provided some insight into the methods by which Mr Pitman worked on Spliced Surprise Major. A large part consisted of largely disconnected jottings, and illustrated the very many types of composition in which he was interested, ranging from Spliced Doubles to Surprise Maximus. Scattered throughout the books were found worked-out sets of false lead-ends between various Surprise Major Methods. It was surprising to note that Mr Pitman apparently had not realised that he could have almost halved his work by reversing such tables; for instance a whole page of figures on “Pudsey against Yorkshire” is followed a few pages later by “Yorkshire against Pudsey”. Despite the fact that the convener prefers to use false course ends, he was pleased to
see a correlation between his and Mr Pitman’s figures in all the popular methods used for splicing. As these useful figures are so scattered in amongst others not so valuable, one possibility might be for them to be abstracted; books number 20 in all.

The committee wish to place on record their appreciation of the work which Mr Pitman had done for the Central Council since he became a member of the Peals Collection Committee. Whenever work was in progress on a new collection he was always very willing to undertake a large part of the proving of any kind of composition and together with Mr W. Barton, shared almost the whole of the proof of the collection of Stedman Caters and Cinques published in 1961. As regards Surprise Major, his compositions, particularly the “all the work” peals of spliced, will stand for ever as a fitting memorial to an unassuming genius.

W.E. Critchley

Thus, the committee had access, not only to papers, but some 20 books which are no longer available. However, the missing papers mystery took another turn when it was reported by a relative of Pitman that the wooden filing cabinet, presented to him by the LMDA, mentioned previously and which remained in his family home after he died was later destroyed after the death of his second wife by burning, after the family discovered it was riddled with woodworm. Some of Pitman’s remaining papers were inside, but, it seems not those inspected by the CCCBR Committee.

A further development was the article on Pitman in 1991 by Donald G. Clift. In this he describes his anticipation in first seeing some of Pitman’s papers:

Opening the large cardboard box containing his papers proved something of an anticlimax. I had anticipated seeing all his original compositions in their original form set out in orderly fashion, as that was the sort of person he was. Instead my eyes met dozens of sheets of paper on which were written different leads of many Surprise methods. He wrote down the blank columns of newspapers, even on the blank pages of his son’s homework books, which suggests that he often wrote at random as different ideas occurred to him.

Clift believed that what he was seeing was the process leading to the all the work Spliced Surprise Major compositions, though there was no guidance to
the reader about how these figures were put together to yield the final composition. He was, however convinced that there was no doubt that “….the papers could prove a valuable treasure trove for the expert researcher”.

The papers examined by Don Clift could have been those seen by the CCCBR members and which now seem to have disappeared. All efforts to trace them have drawn a blank. If they are not found it would be a significant loss to ringing and ringing historians.

The way in which bell ringers mark the death of a ringing colleague is to ring a peal or quarter peal for him or her. Often such peals are rung “half-muffled”. Muffles are leather “pouches” which are strapped to one side of the clapper of each bell, so that when that side of the clapper strikes the bell, the sound is muffled, so that alternate strikes are loud and muffled. As would be expected a number of peals and quarter peals were rung for Jack Pitman. The first of these was rung immediately after the funeral at St Catharine’s, Baglan.

THE LLANDAFF AND MONMOUTH DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION
BAGLAN, Glamorgan. – at the Church of St Catherine

On Sat., Aug. 20, 1966, in 2 Hours and 49 Minutes.

A PEAL OF 5040 GRANDSIRE DOUBLES

Being one 240 and 40 six-scores.
Christine Brett Treble
Thomas E. Hiddins 2
William T. Petty 3

Conducted by William T. Petty.

Rung half-muffled in respected memory of Albert J. Pitman, following the funeral at this church this day.

It will be noted that most of the peal consisted of a series of groups of 120 changes (six-scores). However, it also contains one set of 240 changes. It is virtually certain that the 240 changes would have been “Pitman’s 240”, which was discussed earlier and which was obviously a very appropriate salute to Jack Pitman’s life devoted to ringing composition. The ringers were from the band at St Illtyd’s, Bridgend with whom Jack Pitman so often rang and who he counted among his many friends. Bridgend was also of course the town where Pitman was born. The Peal Board recording the event still hangs in Baglan Church and was made by the conductor Mr W.T. Petty.
10th December 1966

Rev. D. Islwyn Lewis, B.A.,
The Vicarage,
Baglan.

Dear Mr Lewis,

As you are aware, the funeral of Mr A. J. Pitman, the eminent ringer and composer, took place at Baglan on 20th August last; the band from St Illyd’s, Bridgend rang an in memoriam peal immediately afterwards.

Mr W. T. Petty of Bridgend, who conducted the peal, has prepared a board giving details of the occasion. If you will give your kind permission, we will place the board in the belfry at Baglan as a memorial to Mr Pitman.

Yours sincerely,

D. R. L. Jones

38. Letter from D.R.L. Jones to the Vicar of Baglan proposing a peal board for the peal rung at St Catharine’s Baglan after the funeral. Pitman Family Collection.
39. Peal Board for the peal rung in memoriam of Albert J. Pitman immediately after the funeral.

*Courtesy Bob Hardy.*

It was also particularly appropriate that a peal should be rung at Aberavon tower where Pitman rang for over 40 years.

**THE LLANDAFF AND MONMOUTH DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION**

**ABERAVON, Glamorgan. – At the Church of St Mary**

*On Sat., Sept. 3, 1966, in 3 Hours and 4 Minutes.*

**A PEAL OF 5040 GRANDSIRE TRIPLES**

Tenor 16 cwt. in F.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treble</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tr>
<td>M. Jack Pryor</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nicholas W.H. Simon</td>
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<th>7</th>
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<tr>
<td>David J. Llewellyn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geoffrey J.B. Stickland</td>
<td>10</td>
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Composed by Albert J. Pitman  Conducted by Nicholas W.H. Simon.

Rung half-muffled in memory of the composer, vice-president of the Association and for many years leader of the ringers at this tower.
Other peals rung in memory of Jack Pitman were:
The Yorkshire Association, Sprotbrough, Yorkshire, 20 August 1966, Spliced Surprise Major in four methods with all the work of each method, Conducted by W. Eric Critchley, composed by A.J. Pitman.
Llandaff and Monmouth Diocesan Association, Newport, Monmouthshire, 28 August 1966, Yorkshire Surprise Maximus, conducted by Basil Jones.
The Guildford Diocesan Guild, Shalford, Surrey, 9 Sept. 1966, Spliced Surprise Major in 4 methods with all the work of each method, conducted by Derek E. Sibson, composed by A.J. Pitman.

THE LLANDAFF AND MONMOUTH DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION
ABERAVON, Glamorgan. – At the Church of St Mary
On Sat., Sept. 17, 1966, in 2 Hours and 55 Minutes,
A PEAL OF 5040 GRANDSIRE TRIPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parker’s 12-Part</th>
<th>Tenor 16 cwt.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William T. Petty (24)</td>
<td>Treble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.R.Lynn Jones (2)</td>
<td>Paul M. Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Yeomans (14)</td>
<td>†M. Jack Pryor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor M. Roderick (35)</td>
<td>Gwyn I. Lewis (47)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conducted by Gwyn I. Lewis.

* First peal on eight bells. † 50th peal.
Rung in memoriam Albert J. Pitman, born September 22nd 1888, remembered by some who rang with him. (The figures in parenthesis denote the number of peals rung with him). Note that the date of birth quoted in the footnote is incorrect, and should read September 22nd 1887.

This peal was another particularly touching gesture. It was rung mainly by a group of his old ringing friends who had got together to honour his memory and mark his passing in the way that they knew best, by giving several hours of their time to the pastime that Jack Pitman loved and to which he made such a remarkable contribution.

Although there had been significant growth in quarter peal ringing over the years, in 1966 the overall numbers were a fraction of what are rung today. However, two of these were 1260 each of Stedman Triples at Llandaff

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Cathedral, conducted by Nicholas Simon and Grandsire Triples by members of the Railwaymen’s Guild at All Saints, Nottingham. At the College Youths’ Dinner, “The Company stood while the following who had died…..were remembered (including) Albert J. Pitman, Port Talbot” and in parenthesis, 1949, the year he was elected.

Jack Pitman had made a will in 1960, which is still in existence, but no doubt was superseded by a later will, appointing his son, Sidney as his sole executor. He left all the money in the bank to his wife, including any residual money owed by a friend who had borrowed £200 in 1956 as a deposit on a house. He also left small amounts of money in a Post Office Savings Account to one of his daughters and the remainder in the account to another. The will was witnessed by his former neighbours in Oakwood Street.

There is one abiding theme which goes through the life of Jack Pitman. It is to be found occasionally in the columns of The Ringing World throughout his ringing lifetime, in the obituaries, in the assessments of his life published since, in the words of his daughter and his grandchildren, in the words of many who knew him and are still with us today and in his correspondence and that is - of a gentle man who was self effacing, generous in his praise and recognition of the achievements of others. Many of these features are to be found in a letter written nearly 40 years after Pitman’s death by Robin Brown who, as a young lad, was befriended by Pitman during his holiday visits to Leamington Spa in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. Referring to these encounters with Jack Pitman, he wrote:

“…..the first being in September 1959, when I rang at All Saints for evening service. As a 20-year-old still wrestling with basic methods, I received a very warm welcome from both the tower captain (a Mr Birt, I think) and especially from AJP.

The following year, I visited the tower again, and Mr Pitman greeted me like an old friend. At the end of the evening, he persuaded me to meet him the following Tuesday to go to practice night at Warwick St Nicholas. He was altogether quiet and retiring, and his modesty and gentleness were exemplary. At the practice (2nd August 1960,) there were other visitors present, some of whom joined us in the local afterwards. There, realisation dawned that one of the visitors was none other than J. Henry Fielden, who had been conducting Pitman’s peals of spliced for his Sunday Service band at Haley Hill, All Souls. What a moment it was when composer and conductor thus totally unexpectedly came together!
Some of their conversation was above my newly graduated head. I remember Mr Pitman playing down any suggestion of genius, though he did admit that he had burnt an unconscionable amount of midnight oil. One particular moment I shall never forget:

**Henry Fielden**  How remarkably clever of you to put them all together!

**Jack Pitman**  No – how remarkably clever of you to call and ring them!

That short exchange typifies both men. I subsequently saw quite a lot of Henry, and indeed rang a half a dozen peals with him. I went the following evening with Mr Pitman to practice at St Mary’s after which I never saw him again. A short acquaintance of a dear and truly great man.”

This reminiscence is one of the few verbatim accounts of Jack Pitman’s time at Leamington. Despite his sojourn at All Saints, it was not until June 1986, almost 20 years after his death that his “much loved” composition of Spliced Bristol, Cambridge, London and Superlative, with all the work was rung at what had become his home tower.388

Very soon after his death, the number of Surprise Major Methods with all the work which could be included in a peal increased from 9 to 12, though unusual and carefully chosen methods had to be introduced to achieve this. Then quite suddenly, in the same year as Pitman’s death, there was a major breakthrough by Norman Smith in method-splicing and before very long, the maximum total of 23 methods with all the work would be squeezed into a normal peal length. In December 1966 the first peal of 23-Spliced Surprise Major with all the work was rung.389 It would have been interesting to see Jack Pitman’s reaction! It was only just over a year later that a peal of 23-Spliced Surprise Major was rung silent and non-conducted in February 1968.

Jack Pitman was quintessentially a family man. He had 6 children, one of whom died in childhood and all the rest all married at least once, so that he had 13 grandchildren, eventually 28 great grandchildren and so far 30 great, great grandchildren! In 2004 his last remaining daughter, Dorothy Hurn was 90 years old on 2nd October. She was living near her daughter, Dorothy Bowles, who contacted the Tower Captain at Abbots Leigh, who lived close by, about arranging a peal for Dorothy’s birthday. This was duly agreed and just before a family birthday party nearby, a peal of Spliced Surprise Major in 4-methods was rung at Bristol Cathedral. This attracted significant local publicity and the peal report was accompanied by a photograph of the band, together with Dorothy Bowles, taken in the Ringing Chamber.
40. The band that rang the peal of 4-Spliced Surprise Major, all the work composed by A.J. Pitman to celebrate 90th birthday of Dorothy (Dolly) Bowles on 2nd October 2004. L to R: Mick Hobbs, Peter Bridle, Rebecca Cox, Dorothy Bowles (Jack Pitman’s Granddaughter), Tony Cox, Liz Bowden, Matthew Tosh, Teresa Dunstone and Christine Andrew.

Reproduced with permission from The Ringing World.

THE GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION
Bristol at the Cathedral Church of The Holy and Undivided Trinity
On Sat., Oct. 2, 2004, in 3 Hours and 12 Minutes,
A PEAL OF SPLICED SURPRISE MAJOR
(4 Methods: Bristol 1280, Cambridge, 1248, Superlative, 1216, London 107. All the Work)
Tenor 21 cwt. in E♭.

Elizabeth A.G. Bowden  Treble  Michael J. Hobbs  5
Christine Andrew  2  Rebecca J. Cox  6
Matthew J. Tosh  3  Anthony J. Cox  7
Teresa J. Dunstone  4  Peter Bridle  Tenor
Composed by Albert J. Pitman  Conducted by Anthony J. Cox.
Rung at the request of Dorothy Bowles, Albert Pitman’s granddaughter, as a 90th birthday compliment to his daughter, Dorothy Hurn.

There followed a party at which nearly all the grandchildren and great grandchildren celebrated her birthday and reminisced about the past and about Dorothy’s father.
It is perhaps surprising that although Jack Pitman lived in South Wales for most of his long life the ringing of his Spliced Surprise Major there was entirely confined to visiting and mixed bands. It was not until 1971 before that first peal of Pitman’s all the work Spliced Surprise Major was rung by a band of resident members of the LMDA, when it was conducted by Tudor Edwards. Even more time was to elapse when, between 1974 and 1976, the other compositions containing between 5- and 8-methods were rung for the association, conducted by Ian Holland.

What is his legacy to the world of ringing? Pick up a few current copies of *The Ringing World*, look at the peal pages and more likely than not, you will find at least one peal composed by him. For example during 2003, 37 years after his death, the total number of peals composed by Pitman which were rung was 69. Of these, 47 were Spliced Surprise Major. There were 2 peals of his famous Scientific Triples. 13 peals of single method Surprise Major (of which two were Cambridge) were rung, as well as two of Delight Major, only one each of Grandsire Triples and Surprise Royal and three peals of Grandsire Doubles incorporating Pitman’s 240.

If you are a method ringer, there is a very good chance that you will have rung a touch of “Pitman’s 240” of Grandsire Doubles and may even have rung it in a peal. If you are a Spliced Surprise Major ringer you may have
rung one or more of his compositions and enjoyed ringing his famous 4-Spliced composition with all the work. There is little doubt that his untiring work in the 20’s, 30’s, 40’s and 50’s moved ringing forward, making a major contribution to the huge diversity of Surprise ringing which we have today. Although his contributions to Spliced Triples Methods have not had such an impact, nevertheless, these are still rung today, as are his compositions of single Triples Methods and individual Surprise Major Methods.

The bell ringing scene today is very different from that which was experienced by Jack Pitman. Of course the process had begun during his lifetime. If we use the numbers of peals rung each year as some sort of guide to the health of ringing, we see that through the lifetime of Jack Pitman there is a very mixed picture:

42. Distribution of the number of peals rung annually during A.J. Pitman’s lifetime.

From 1880 to 1913 there was a fairly uniform annual increase in peals. Then the country was engulfed in war and the numbers collapsed to almost nothing. During the two traumatic decades of the 1920’s and 1930’s they never quite recovered and remained almost constant. There was no tower-bell ringing over three years of World War II and we see a rapid recovery to above pre-war levels and somewhat erratic behaviour during the 1960’s. It may be of interest to see the annual variation in Jack Pitman’s peal ringing during his life, 43.

Clearly the majority of his peals are to be found during the 1920’s and 1930’s. After the Second World War there was a slow recovery during the years of Evelyn’s illness continuing erratically at a comparatively low level.
43. Number of peals rung by Albert J. Pitman during his peal ringing lifetime.

Another changing feature of bell ringing over Pitman’s lifetime is, as we have seen, the way in which the two World Wars accelerated the participation of women ringers. Perhaps he would be surprised to find that the Ancient Society of College Youths not only now admits women, but that they have already elected their first woman Master, Stephanie Warboys. He would also be surprised to see that half the winning band who won the recent (2006) 12-bell Striking Competition were women. He would be interested in the way in young people are taught ringing these days and no doubt would have been a staunch supporter of the creation of ringing centres and other teaching initiatives. There is no question that in his time he was a very good teacher of novices, including the author and he also welcomed the presence of young people in the ringing chamber – unlike some of his contemporaries! He would have been ambivalent about the fact that he would no longer he be able to travel easily by train to ringing meetings, particularly when held in the many small towns and villages which have lost their stations. He would however, have been excited about the innovations in composition which have occurred in recent times. Maybe he would not have been very keen on computers being involved in composition, but I’m sure he would have been delighted to have been able to use computers to ensure the truth of compositions.

It is instructive, at the very beginning of the 21st Century, both to look back over the last century of ringing and to consider the compositional possibilities for the future. Through the trail-blazing of Jack Pitman and his contemporaries the science of Spliced Surprise has now been thoroughly developed over the last 50 years. There will always be further development
but for normal practical ringing requirements the range of compositions is probably adequate. Similarly in Triples methods there is now a large number of compositions available in Grandsire and Stedman with contemporary composers producing new peals as required. A field where so far only a limited amount of effort has been expended over the last 10 years is in the splicing of odd-bell and even-bell methods. It is tempting to think that had Jack Pitman been composing today he would have been an ardent proponent of this approach – as he was in the 1920’s and 1930’s!

Wales remains proud of its most famous ringing composer and in the mid-1980’s the Welsh equivalent of Channel 4 Television, S4C, predominantly a Welsh language television channel, made a documentary about bell ringing which was strongly focussed towards the Exercise in Wales, entitled Cân y Clychau. It covered most areas of bell ringing, including bell-casting and social aspects. For instance it televised some of the work carried out in the Loughborough Bell Foundry. It also explored aspects of change ringing and showed various shots of ringing in Welsh churches, including St Woolos Cathedral, Newport. Having introduced the name Fabian Stedman, the programme proceeded to a piece on Pitman. The following is an excerpt from a translation of the script:

But at St Catherine’s (sic) Church, Baglan, at the turn of this century, a twelve year old boy began to interest himself in the bells. His name was Albert John Pitman. Following his Father’s example, and studying the art intensively, he developed as nothing less than a genius as a composer for the bells – especially as a pioneer of the difficult method of Spliced Surprise Major. The Major indicates that eight bells are used, the Spliced that more than one method of changes is rung, and the Surprise comes from the exceedingly complicated weave of different methods. The lad was trained at Baglan. He matured in a nearby tower.

There follows more shots of bell ringers in action.

Towards the end it makes a connection between bell ringers and pubs in the following paragraph:

From pulling a bell to pulling a pint. There has been a close connection between bellringers (sic) and pubs throughout the centuries – causing strain between them and the church authorities from time to time. But who could deny a little relaxation for this group after hours of intense concentration? Like similar groups throughout the land
their enthusiasm is sustaining one of the most civilised activities of mankind.

Not many bell ringers quarrel with these sentiments!

Pitman’s name lives on in Wales through *The Pitman Trophy*, an eight-bell change ringing striking competition which continues to this day. In 2005, the winning band was Llandaff and they went on to represent the Llandaff and Monmouth Association in the All Wales Competition and won the eight-bell section of that as well. The North Wales Association won the competition overall.

By today’s standards, Pitman did not ring many peals and most of these were of Triples and Plain Major. He rang around 230 peals over the period of his ringing lifetime. This was not a bad total, bearing in mind World Wars, raising his large family, shift work, nursing a desperately ill wife for many years and composing hundreds of peals, some of which remain among the best ever composed! There have however been comments about his ringing ability but taking a sort of consensus of some of those who are still around and rang with him, it is clear that he was certainly an idiosyncratic ringer with a curious style and like many ringers of his time, sometimes eccentric ringing-chamber behaviour. For example, it has been said by a number of people who rang with him that he shouted calls loudly when the ringing was not so good, and quietly when it was good. Also, although he dedicated a major part of his life to ringing and ringing-related subjects, it was not his only interest. He loved music, played the accordion, took part in aspects of Church life and had many non-ringing friends. Most important of all our *Unassuming Genius* was a thoroughly decent man, loved and respected by his family and all who knew him.
Cwrt is the Welsh word for Court.


1891 Census for Baglan, Extract No. RG 12/4460.

The Story of Baglan, A. Leslie Evans.

H. Barnsley, Baglan Revisited.


8 The name of the village comes from its geographical position at the mouth of the river Afan. Aberafan means “mouth of the Afan”. For many years the influence of the English language and spelling caused the town and river to be called Aberavon and Avon respectively. More recently there has been a move to revert of the original Welsh spelling, where appropriate, for geographical names in Wales. In Pitman’s lifetime the English spelling was used, Throughout this work, for continuity, the English spelling will be used when referring to the town and the river. The pronunciation remains roughly the same, since in Welsh a single ‘f’ is pronounced rather like an English ‘v’.


12 Llandaff and Monmouth Branch Newsletter, Sept 1983.


14 There appears to be no record as to why, though that it was possibly because the acoustics of steel bells are often less pleasing to the listener than the more traditional bronze bells.


18 Note that throughout these footnotes, RA refers to The Ringing World.


20 Website: www.First World War.Com.


23 Ringers and the War, RW, 14 Aug. 1914, p97.


25 Devastated Churches, RW, 3 July 1914, p9.


29 “Ringing World” Banned by Censor, RW, 6 July 1917, p212.


31 Grandsire Triples, RW, 17 Sept 1915, p123.

32 A 4-Part Peal of Grandsire Triples, RW, 10 Aug. 1917, p255.


One of the useful features developed at an early stage for compositions of Grandsire Triples was that of “building blocks” such as a “P Block” consisting of 70 changes and a “B Block” of 70 changes. A composer may then compose a peal of 5040 changes by using say 72 P Blocks or 120 B Blocks. Thus John Holt’s famous masterpiece composition of Grandsire Triples; “Holt’s Original” which was first rung at St Margaret’s, Westminster for the Union Society on 7th July 1751 uses B blocks, while his famous “Holt’s 10-part” composition uses P-blocks and incidentally uses a device called a Holt’s Single. Vicars and Taylor also used B Blocks in a somewhat simpler way to produce what are known as “three-lead course peals. These were the foundations which were laid for the work of such composers as the Rev. C.D.P. Davies, J.J. Parker and the Rev. E. Bankes James at the end of the 19th to you Century. One can follow Pitman’s increasing skill and confidence in composition by those peal compositions referred to above which were produced in 1915-1918. The “9-part” composition was described as a “variation” and the “12-part”, which was the subject of the dispute with William Matthews followed the simple “3-Lead course” plan. The “4-part”, composed in 1917 uses a “modern” B-block plan, whereas it was immediately followed by the 5-part composition which harks back to the 18th Century using P Blocks and Holt’s singles. We get some insight into Pitman’s thinking in regard to his approach to compositions when we note that the 1918 4-part (with its Holt’s singles) was immediately followed by 6- and 3-part peals in the same year which were “modern” B-block peals.
Compositions of the Pitman era which, were all “odd-bob and single”, published in the 1999 edition CCCBR Collection of Stedman and Erin. Of the 4 compositions attributed to Pitman, 3 are Stedman and the other, a classic, is the only genuine peal of Spliced Stedman and Erin Triples in the Collection. As a composer of Stedman, Pitman ranks as one of the finest and his compositions have stood the test of time and changing ringing fashions.

The 5760 of Cambridge Surprise Major rung in 1923 was a 5-part with “split tenors” for 20 courses, whereas the 1925 composition is a very fine 1-part with only 2 courses with split tenors. The latter demonstrates again the strides that Pitman had made in his compositional abilities over this period.

For those interested in the technical aspects of peal composition Pitman’s peals of spliced Superlative (S) and Cambridge (C) Surprise used a so-called “fixed course” involving “long” courses consisting of seven leads called SCSSSCS and “short” courses (with a bob before) of four leads called SCCS.

This contrasts with a new approach introduced by Rev. H. Law James, sometimes disparagingly known as OXO today, in which every course is called London, “X” London, where X is either Cambridge or Superlative, then introducing the repeating lead ends of Bristol Surprise where appropriate.

This composition is based on the latter’s “3-leads course” approach of London X London. An innovation however is the use of Bristol as well as Rutland as a substitute for London and with X being Cambridge, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Superlative or Gloucestershire as the extending leads of method. This results in a peal which is an irregular 10 part and Norfolk Surprise is used to bring up the part-ends in the second 5-parts.

Spliced Surprise Major, RW, 29 March 1929, p198.

Spliced Surprise Major, A Peal Rung in Ten Methods, RW, 23 Aug. 1929, p537.


Belfry Gossip, RW, 6 Nov. 1925, p712.


In the Ilkeston variation each course is rung as Kent, except Oxford is rung for one lead to prevent the tenors “going into the hunt”.


The vast majority of the pieces which are rung are called “methods”. This means that the treble does not carry out the work of the method but for example Plain or Treble Bob runs
throughout. In a “principle”, such as Stedman or Erin Triples all the bells which are ringing the piece do exactly the same work. For musical reasons, it is usual for the tenor to keep the beat by ringing last behind all the bells in odd-bell pieces (e.g. 5, 7, 9 and 11) and takes no part in the work of the method (such as Grandsire Triples) or principle (such as Erin Triples).

95 Splicing of Odd-Bell Methods, A New Departure for Triples, Caters and Cinques, RW, 28 March, 1924, p201.
96 Spliced Quick Six and Erin Triples, RW, 11 April, 1924, p230.
97 One of those I sometime knew, Donald G. Clift, RW, 16 Aug 1991, p788.
99 Peal Reports, RW, 11 Jan 1929, p19.
100 Peal Reports, RW, 15 Feb 1929, p100.
102 Future of the Llandaff Association. Effect of Division of Diocese to be Discussed, RW, 14 Oct 1921, p625.
104 SBDG Minute Book, 1923.
105 SBDG Minute Book, 1929.
106 Railway Centenary Celebrations, RW, 12 June 1925, p375.
107 Bridgend Ringers in Gloucester: Charabanc Trip of 180 Miles, RW, 12 Sept 1924, p583.
109 Quotation from The Times Newspaper, 30 July 1952, by Mr Kirkland Bridge entitled “Pillars of the Parish Church”, RW, 15 Aug 1952, p524.
111 Proposed Powers of Church Councils, RW, 10 Dec 1920, p597.
113 Splicing, RW, 5 April, 1929, p209.
114 The History of Port Talbot, Sally Roberts Jones, Gold Leaf Publishing, Port Talbot, 1991, p75.
115 Problems in Composition, RW, 18 Jan 1946, p25.
118 Spliced Surprise Major: A Peal in Eleven Methods, RW, 1 Aug. 1930, p 495.
119 Peal report RW, 1 Aug. 1930, p 488.
120 This composition shows clear evidence of innovation despite being again based on the “LXL” 3-leads course. Norfolk Surprise Major is used to produce a 7-lead course by ringing London, Pudsey, Norfolk, Yorkshire, Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Rutland.
121 Spliced Surprise Major: A Peal in Fourteen Methods, RW, 22 Aug. 1930, p 544.
123 Spliced Surprise Major: A Peal Rung in Twelve Methods, RW, 10 July, 1931, p444.
124 Again the 7-lead long course using Norfolk was employed.
125 New Spliced Surprise Major Record. RW, 11 Dec 1931, p795.
126 These peals were all on the “3-leads course” basis.
129 Spliced Surprise Major in Eight Methods, RW, 1 July, 1932, p438.
130 Spliced Surprise Major, 5,120 Changes. A peal in two to five methods, RW, 12 Aug., 1932, p536.
131 Spliced Surprise Major, A.J. Pitman, RW, 4 Nov. 1932, p726.
With the exception of the 5120 2- to 5-spliced peal, all used the “LXL” format as their basis.

137 This peal still uses mainly “LXL” courses.
142 5088 Wigston Surprise Major, \textit{RW}, 1933, p420.
143 Peal of 5088 Wigston Surprise Major, \textit{RW}, 1933, 418.
144 York Surprise Major, \textit{RW}, 1933, p804 and 1934, p12.
146 Truro Surprise Major, \textit{RW}, 13 July 1934, p436.
147 Peal Reports, \textit{RW}, 8 July 1934, p356.
152 Peal of Stedman Triples, \textit{RW}, 8 June 1934, p356.


If the Worst Befall, *RW*, 1 Sept. 1939, p553.


The Ban on Ringing: To the Editor, *RW*, 26 Feb 1943, p94.


SBDG Southern District Meeting, 2 Dec 1939.


Peal Report, *RW*, 11 June 1943, p244.


Death of Mr W.J. Murton (sic), *RW*, 14 Dec 1945, p508.


This peal is No. 48 (designated as Pitman’s No. 13) in the CCCBR 1999 Collection of Compositions of Stedman and Erin Triples.


Spliced Surprise Major: Composition with Full Courses, J.W. Parker, *RW*, 18 June 1941, p344.

The 5 lead course SSSCR appears with full courses of Cambridge, Bristol and London.


It combined 5-lead courses (LXXXX and XXXXL) with 3-lead courses, but is lacking in full courses of London and Bristol.


Letter dated 26 March 1957, A.J. Pitman to Clifford Skidmore provided by Martin D. Fellows.

Undated letter sent of Clifford Skidmore by A.J. Pitman.


Copy of original hand-written letter from A.J. Pitman to Mr Skidmore dated 20 Nov 1953 provided by Martin D. Fellows, 7 March 2002.


Peal Reports, RW, 12 Dec 1958, p804.

William H. Barber, D.A.B., RW, 28 Feb 1958, p133.

Double Grandshire Doubles, RW, 1 Aug 1958, p499.

No year is included in Pitman’s letter. It was unlikely to be May 1958, since by that time he was living in Leamington Spa, not Oakwood Street, so it was probably May 1957.


See for example Peals Collection Committee Report, RW, 13 June 1958, p385.


Railwaymen Form Their Guild: Inaugural Meeting at Crewe, RW, 6 July 1956, p425.


The Extent of Major is Possible: Full Story of Loughborough Record Attempt, R.F. Lowings, RW, 10 Dec 1954, p793.


Letter from M. Jack Pryor, 6 Feb 2002.


Advancement in 50 Years, RW, 24 March, 1961, p197.

To these We Accord our Sincere Thanks, RW, 7 April 1961, p238.


Longest Peal by one Set of Ringers, RW, 4 Aug 1961, p525.


522 Undated Letter from Jack Pryor to Mrs Gertrude Pitman.
523 RW ref of J Pryor’s obituary
524 The Late Mr A.J. Pitman’s Papers, *RW*, 16 Sept. 1966, p608.
533 This was based on the fact that a course of major has 7 leads and thus a 7-part composition
is possible. For a 5152, each part has 23 leads and thus for that length of peal a 23-method “all
the work” composition is possible. This approach “parts the tenors”.
535 History of the (Llandaff and Monmouth Diocesan) Association – The First Hundred Years,
Jack Pryor and Peter Bennett. 1993.
536 Quotation from the script from an S4C Video. The Author acknowledges with gratitude the
receipt of a copy of the video from S4C, a copy of a translation of the script from Mrs Ruth
James of Bridgend and the help of The National Library of Wales in locating the video.