Eric Edward Webster, 1932-2017

During the inaugural meeting of the South African Guild, and realised that the bells needed urgent restoration. Two years later the Guild adopted, as its first project, a scheme to rehang Grahamstown’s octave in a new frame. Although Rhodes University supported the scheme and was able to offer tax incentives to certain donors, it was extremely difficult to raise the necessary money. At that time of unrest and uncertainty many potential donors feared that South Africa would soon descend into chaos and would become just another ‘Africained’ country.

One of the by-products of the successful Grahamstown scheme was a Master’s thesis by a gifted physics student at Rhodes University that necessitated casting bells locally, at Xmeco Engineering in Port Elizabeth. This venture resulted in the formation of a ring of six bells at an Anglican Benedictine Monastery near Grahamstown. The parish priest of Fourways Gardens, Johannesburg, attended a retreat at the monastery, heard the bells, and decided that his church should also have a ring of six! Subsequently another ring of six was installed in the chapel of a school in Paulshof, near Fourways. This chapel had been used for services while the church in Fourways was being constructed.

Before the first peal of Royal was rung in South Africa, at Greyville in 1991, Eric arranged for The Mayor of Durban, two survivors of the British artillery forces that supported the South Africans at the Battle of Delville Wood seventy five years previously, the ringers and the local incumbent to participate in a short memorial service on the pavement outside the church. The Last Post and Reveille were played by a bugler.

The tower at Greyville was built as a memorial to the 324 men of that parish who lost their lives in the First World War, 274 of them fell at Delville Wood. The bells carry names associated with that War, although they were given in memory of his mother by Sir Charles Smith, a sugar magnate. Jane Webster worked for the sugar company that developed from Sir Charles’ enterprise.

Eric Webster was basically a tenor-man, but left his mark indelibly on the South African ringing scene. From his first marriage he leaves two sons and a daughter. In South Africa, in effect, he leaves one ring of ten and three rings of six. May he rest in peace. The ringing community extends its sympathies to Jane, whom Eric married in 1989, and who now lives in a home in Bath.

Colin A. Lewis

The online Dove's Guide for Church Bell Ringers can be found at:
dove.cccbr.org.uk/home.php
Updates to your tower's information (such as change of practice night) are really helpful to potential visitors.

Also - do please supply full details of your bells and frame if not already shown.

The Plain Bob Triples peal band, St Paul’s, Durban, 24.11.1990 (l-r): Dai Herbert, Eric Webster, Brandon Semple, Peter Fisher, Alan Regin (conductor), Jill Leggitt, Andrew Bolton and Jane Webster