



Obituary

Charles J. Reede

4th October 1925-26th August 2015

Charlie Reede was an omnipresent, all-knowing and indispensable part of Saint Patrick's Cathedral for many, many years. He was small in stature but had a great effect on those he met through generation after generation.

Charles John Reede was a prime mover in promoting change ringing in Dublin from the 1950s, and through the following decades, ringing up to only weeks before he died just short of his ninetieth birthday.



When Charlie came back from war service in the Royal Navy he joined the band of ringers at Saint Patrick's Cathedral where a few years earlier he had been a boy chorister. As the earlier

generation of ringers were gradually called home he stepped into the breach and began to train new, young ringers. These were recruited from the then all-male school but along came sisters and sisters' friends. I first met him when I was learning to ring in Christ Church Cathedral. The number of people he trained through many decades is legion: young ladies in particular seemed to appreciate his skilful tutoring. Certainly, the number of grandmothers, for that is how long he was with us as a ringer, who are grateful to have been instructed by him, whether as young teenagers or as university students, is considerable.

Charlie was a sort of Saint Paul of bell ringing. He ranged far and wide, especially after retiring from business, helping ringers in places as far apart as Drogheda and Wexford town. Blessington, Arklow and Kilkenny benefited from his visits too and he was tireless. Bell ringing tours in England with Dublin University's guild, largely organised by him, were exhausting affairs: Charlie did not do "leisurely"- it was at least four towers in the morning and four in the afternoon, and then probably join local ringers at their evening practice session. Remember, he was at least twenty years older than anyone else on those trips.

Charlie spent a great deal of time ferrying ringers from place to place. He did maintenance work on the magnificent peal of bells, physical work of a kind that belied his size and apparent strength and certainly did not chime with his professional status. (To allow him to run the belfry he had given up his position as Ship's Purser and taken a shore job with regular hours).

Charlie was a man of many parts: he was a skilled researcher, indefatigable in his discovery of information especially pertaining to Saint Patrick's Cathedral and its historic significance. He also

searched sources for references to bells and bell ringing, and his house was full of files of works in progress.

As a youth, Charlie was in the first group at the Cathedral School to take Irish language State examinations. He thought this a notable achievement but, cutting turf in The Emergency, before he enlisted, he tried to engage some older men from the West in a cúpla focal: they laughed and told him to get away with his Radio Éireann Irish. Nevertheless, we can agree, *ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis*.

Charlie belonged to a generation to whose suffering and quiet, steadfast endurance we in Europe and abroad owe so much: our freedom to live without fear of arbitrary arrest and incarceration is thanks to those like him who volunteered to face down Nazism and Fascism, risking death to do so. He was a radio operator on the corvette HMS Dianthus, having upped his age a year or two (not for the first time) to join up under-age. He never spoke about the horrors of war but what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder surfaced when there was a lot of publicity about the Titanic film remake. He was having terrible nightmares and waking up on the floor. On inquiry, he told me that his Flower-class corvette had collided with another ship and, to save it, bulkheads and hatches had been sealed with sailors inside. Fifty years later, Charlie could hear the screams of those young men as the water rose to drown their cries for help.

He sailed the world, even going to Murmansk and Archangel – terrible voyages under constant attack from the air and enduring awful weather. It was hard to extract this information: all that he would volunteer was that he was seasick for three years. Delivering materiel to Russian allies was so important that after the Cold War the Russian government struck medals for award to the allied sailors, many of whom had died. Charlie never claimed his. If it ever arrives it would look good on the belfry wall.

In recent years our dear friend and mentor Charlie experienced frustration and difficulty in scaling down his activities. He'd been so long at the helm and he refused to accept that there are limits to human endurance – so it seemed to those around him who had known and admired him for so long.

Charlie was a kind and loving person to the end: a man who loved, used and enhanced his cathedral, his worldwide circle of ringers, Dublin, his home and his Christian faith. This affection was felt and returned by the many people whose lives he had touched in his long, long journey.

DHTT

On Saturday, 3rd October 2015, members of the Irish Association of Change Ringers rang a peal in St. Patrick's Cathedral as a thanksgiving for the life and work of Charles J. Reede, mentor and friend.

The following appreciation of Charlie was originally printed in Close News, the newsletter of St Patrick's Cathedral:

About a year ago I managed to persuade Mr Reede to tell me how long he had been associated with his beloved Saint Patrick's Collegiate Church. He amazed me by telling me he had joined the choir in 1936. I say amazed me because at the time he had been there almost as long as I have been alive; which was then 83 years. So, for almost as long as I have lived he was serving in Saint Patrick's – to me a staggering achievement. It occurred to me he must have been a probationer under the direction of Dr Hewson, Master of the Choristers, way back in the times when the choristers sang the Sunday services in Trinity College Chapel and then walked or cycled to this venerable establishment and sang morning service all over again and then Evensong – what a record.

I have known Charles Reede at sight since I began to attend the Cathedral irregularly in 1948 but very much more closely after the Flower Festival 1996 and the establishment of the original volunteers under Dean Stewart. I used to tell new volunteers to make his acquaintance as soon as they decently could and then to keep their peace and just listen to everything he had to say.

Charles Reede was a remarkable man. He saw several years at sea in WWII, then went through Trinity College, became an enthusiastic Purser on the Dublin-Liverpool services of the old B & I company. He was a notable archivist at Saint Patrick's. A man who could guide Deans and official architects, and anyone who had anything to do with the physical condition of the building; a man who knew the lie of the land from the chairs, to the most obscure detail; the gutters, the downpipes; the underground passage dating from the Guinness era and the most interesting life of the monuments; the Order of the Knights; the bells; the old ring of eight, some of which were given or loaned to C of I parishes which had no bells - Saint Bartholomew's in Belfast, I recollect hearing about and when Killorgan in Kerry was replaced a few years ago he was reputed to have brought back one of the old ring of eight from there in his own car.

On several occasions I asked him to make available to me the script of a talk given by him on Saint Patrick's topics only to be told there was no script! I recall an impromptu lecture given by him to the Friends ten or twelve years ago about all the ringing towers of the Greater Dublin area – again no script!

He managed to repair, with Mr Julian Cosby, the carillon machine in the tower; obtained from the Diocesan Cathedral; it was fettled by that pair unbelievably at no cost or expense to this Cathedral. Then there is Saint Patrick's clock! One could have held an intensely interesting conversation with Mr Reede, in the midst of which, he could unobtrusively direct his attention momentarily (when the clock rang the hour) to glance at his wristwatch to check if the clock was accurately on time. I can visualise that is happening in heavenly places where he could be walking with Saint Patrick himself and an email being sent off to the Dean, should the clock be a second or two out.

One of God's gentlemen – may his shadow never grow less and may his Maker rest him well, long to hear his beloved ring of twelve in Dublin.

Bill Magowan,
Sometime convener of the St Patrick's Cathedral Volunteers