



Obituary

Cyril Galbraith

1923 - 2021

Cyril Galbraith, former ringer at Christ Church Taney, departed this life on the 4th December 2021. At 98 he was Ireland's oldest campanologist having started his bell ringing career in Limerick as a 15-year-old boy in 1939 when he wandered into Limerick cathedral to work out how the bells there tolled. It immediately became a passion, one which was to last for more than 80 years. He told the Irish Times in 2019, in an article celebrating 80 years of his ringing, that "there wasn't a lot to do in Limerick back then, to be honest, so it was good to have a distraction, a hobby".

After almost 30 years ringing in Limerick, Cyril's job with the pharmaceutical company Wellcome



brought him to Dublin in 1968. Limerick's loss was Dublin's gain and he soon found himself in a position ringing the bells in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. He continued to ring in St Patrick's until the stairs started to prove tricky for him.

Cyril was elected President of the IACR in 1984, serving in the office until 1989.

In the 1990's Cyril's local tower, Taney rescued the bells from the recently closed St George's Church in Dublin's Temple Street and secured them until Cyril and a small team got the money together to install them in his local church just in time to ring in the new millennium.

As part of the celebration of Cyril's 80 years of ringing, Cyril attended a civic reception with the Lord Mayor in the Mansion House followed soon after with an invitation to afternoon tea with the President of Ireland at Aras an Uachtarain.

Cyril's son Robert gave the eulogy at his father's funeral at Christ Church Taney on 6th December 2021 - Cyril met his wife Ann in Limerick and after a short courtship they married in 1951. They had six children together.

Robert recalled his father's love of sport with his involvement as an athlete and later as a hockey player, rower and fisherman. But bell ringing was a big part of his life. Robert recollected the celebration of his father's 80 years ringing and also in 2017 when his father was videoed on Christmas Day ringing at the age of 93 as part of an 8 person change ringing team.

Cyril sustained a bad fall in his 90's while gardening resulting in a broken shoulder. Robert recalled the bone not setting after 8 weeks so his father was given 3 choices: Live with it, operate to pin it or a new shoulder and upper arm. Cyril said that as he was only 92 he would go with the third option. He left hospital 3 days after the operation and returned to bell ringing not long after.

Cyril's son David continues the family bell ringing tradition.

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Different people see the same place differently. And a church building itself is no different in this respect. You might look at the stained-glass windows or be amazed by the sheer size of the place. I might look at the sanctuary and someone else might look at the pulpit. A bellringer, however, will look at the tower and say instinctively: I wonder what they are like ... or: It is great to be back ringing here. Let's go up and get going.

And so, it is with that God-given and humanly lived combination of grief and gladness that family members, fellow parishioners, members of the wider community and bell ringers from throughout Ireland come to mourn and to honour Cyril Galbraith today: bellringer extraordinaire. And we are joined by many, many others who are not able to be with us physically but are with us virtually. Just a few years back, I was invited to visit his tower here in this church. It was indeed a delight I have never forgotten and will always cherish. He was so very much at home; in the words of today's Gospel Reading, it was his mansion.

In my father's house are many mansions; were it not so, I should have told you. (St John 14.2)

Aged 15, Cyril Galbraith heard the bells of St Mary's Cathedral, Limerick and wanted to know how they worked. Not only did their sound draw him in but he had the curiosity to want to understand their workings. And so, a lifetime's romance with bells began, first in Limerick and then in Dublin, where his work with The Wellcome Institute relocated him; he rang both in St Patrick's Cathedral and in Christ Church Taney. It could well be said that, were it not for him, there might indeed not be bells in this church. Towards the end of the twentieth century, St George's Parish Church in Hardwick Place was finally closed. The bells needed a new home. Cyril, along with others, found the money to bring them here. They suddenly had a whole new life and a whole new topography and a whole new population to awaken and enliven to the fact that God is here. We are all indebted to Cyril for this initiative and this inventiveness, undertaken by him without fuss or favour. It just was a good thing to do, and it needed to be done. He was practical at heart. Summoning is what bells do; people are summoned by bells since time immemorial. The atmosphere that I experienced in the bell tower here in Taney on the day when I was invited to share a significant day with Cyril there taught me how four things interconnect:

welcome,
discipline,
work,
delight.

As an outsider to ringing, I was welcomed into the tower; as an observer of ringers on the day, I saw discipline as the key to their delivery and their performance, with a tolerance of age and expertise along with the strengths and limitations of both; I saw also the motive force of hard work in getting a result, an outcome, a sound that did justice to the name given to any particular peal of bells; and, last but not least, I saw the delight on the faces of those who had done what they set out to do. It was an object lesson in life itself.

It is said that humans become like their dogs, in the best of all possible senses. Perhaps humans also become like their hobbies. Welcome, discipline, work and delight were characteristics I associated with Cyril from that day onwards and I assumed that they had motivated him his life through. Not only did he derive such pleasure from ringing; he also enabled others to derive such pleasure from this art also. His curiosity about how things work first led him into the intricate world of bellringing. That same sense of curiosity will have inspired and sustained him in his professional work from day to day in The Wellcome Institute: how things work and how it is possible to enable such things to make a positive difference for other people in their lives. Cyril was a very coherent person; the various parts of his life knit together; life was for living; life was for sharing and life was for ringing.

In my father's house are many mansions; were it not so, I should have told you. (St John 14.2)

The time when we let go of someone we love, someone we have come to expect to *just being there* is hard; its impact on us is incalculable; Covid-19 times have made grief even more impenetrable and inexplicable. In St John chapter 14, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his own departure to the father, right in the heartbeat of the busy working life of service, leadership, mission, and discipleship that they had built up as a body, as a team, as a tower – if I may stretch the picture to our gathering today. Jesus is concerned from the outset to say that this gift and this future is for all, not only for him. Were you not to be included, he says to them, I'd have told you that a long, long time ago. And so, the stage is set for us as we say: Farewell to Cyril in December 2021 to set our grieving in the carefully woven basket that Jesus offered to his disciples in which to lay their grief for him and for his impending departure to the father. We are part of a longer and of a wider picture. It was Cyril Galbraith himself who said in an interview with The Irish Times a while back that these bells have rung out for many weddings and for many funerals. And, now and fittingly, they ring out for his own funeral today, St Nicholas' Day. How could it be otherwise?

We stand with his family; we care for them; we love them in their loss and in their own active and ebullient lives which will continue as a tribute to him. We stand with people who have been bereaved during this time of Covid-19 when loss has been accentuated by the deprivations of the natural and instinctive human responses. We stand with generations of people for whom bells have rung out to summon them and us to The House of God and to mark significant national events. Comfort, on a day of emotional raw exposure like today, may be in short supply but we have God's assurance that we are not left comfortless. We leave Cyril Galbraith in God's keeping and in God's comfort after a life lived long, fulfilled, and generous with his bells ringing in our ears.

St John 14.27: Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest and banish your fears.

**Archbishop Michael Jackson
6th December 2021**