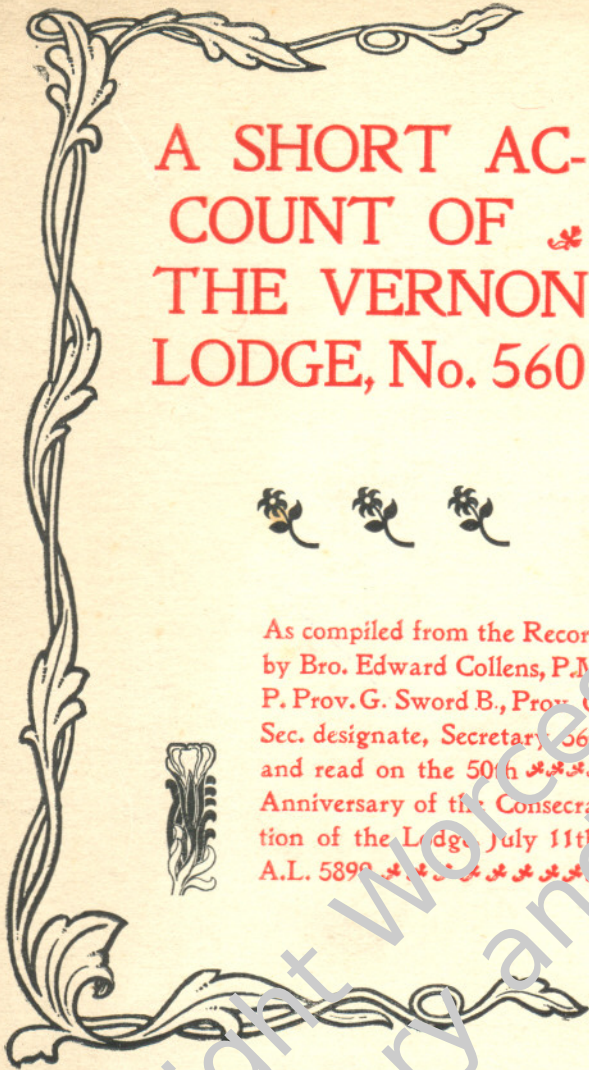


1042/E4

1042/26 E4



A SHORT AC-  
COUNT OF  
THE VERNON  
LODGE, No. 560



As compiled from the Records  
by Bro. Edward Collens, P.M.  
P. Prov. G. Sword B., Prov. G.  
Sec. designate, Secretary 560,  
and read on the 50th  
Anniversary of the Consecra-  
tion of the Lodge July 11th,  
A.L. 5890



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Price 2/6.

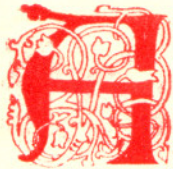
1042

With the fraternal greetings of the  
Officers and Brethren of the Vernon  
 Lodge.

To W. Bro. W. J. Page  
Deputy Prov. Grand Master



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SHORT  
ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
VERNON  
LODGE,  
No. 560.



As compiled from the Records  
by Bro. Edward Collens, P.M.,  
P. Prov. G. Sword B., Prov. G.  
Sec. designate, Secretary, 560,  
and read on the 50th Anniversary  
of the Consecration of the Lodge,  
July 11th, A.L. 5899.



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THE short history of the Lodge whose fiftieth birthday we are met to celebrate to-day, which by your desire Worshipful Sir, I undertook to compile, has been rendered a difficult task by reason of the very brief, and often I fear, incorrect minutes which my earlier predecessors kept, and induced the Lodge to confirm. You have had an example of this in the bald account just read from the Chair of that ceremony which must be of surpassing interest to every member of the Lodge for all time. A ceremony which we cannot hope to throw much light on after a lapse of fifty years, beyond the glimmer afforded us by the Minute Book.

This brevity may sometimes have been excusable on the score of the Scribe having nothing to record, but it was not always so, for in one instance the fact that a new W.M. had been installed appeared to have escaped his recollection until he had chronicled the close of the Lodge, when he added the information in a postscript, indicating by asterisks where it should be read.

Another fact in the history of the Lodge has probably added to the difficulties of the historian: on two occasions there has been a complete break with the past; the roll of its members has changed to a man, its traditions—short-lived if you will, still traditions—broken; twice it has become a new Lodge in everything but its charter. We have no Past Masters still in their green old age, whose memories can take us back to the fifties, tell us what manner of men Kimber and Johnson and Harcourt-Oldman were, and how the ceremonies were worked in those days. No! the Lodge in its early years was most unfortunate.

Our Warrant is dated Jan. 13th 1849 and bears the autograph signatures of Grand Master the Earl of Zetland and Deputy Grand Master the Earl of Yarborough. It is therein called the Clive Lodge, No. 819, and is to be held at the Town Hall, Bromsgrove. The seven Brethren<sup>1</sup> named in the constitution were, according to the old Register, members of No. 348—no name, only the Lodge number being given. In my earlier investigations, I rather loosely

<sup>1</sup> They were—Thos. W. Kinder S.W. of 348 (St. John's Lodge, Leicester), W.M.; K. N. Paszkowich, 533 (Filde Union Lodge, Fletwood. Erased from the roll of Lodges in 1850), S.W.; R. W. Johnson, 348, J.W.; Thos. H. Wheeler, P.M., 348; Wm. Fattice, W.M., 348; W. J. Windram, J.W., 348; Arthur Kinder, 348. Only the first and third became Masters of this Lodge.

assumed that No. 348 was that of the Mother Lodge of the province, now 280, but the earlier number of 280 was 349, consequently 348 must, if still in existence, be 279, and this to my great surprise I found to be St. John's Lodge, Leicester. How a group of Leicester Masons came to found a Lodge in Bromsgrove, remains a mystery. I have written to the Secretary of St. John's to enquire whether his books can throw any light on the matter, but up to the time of writing have not received an answer.<sup>2</sup> A courteous letter from the Grand Secretary confirms the fact that the subscribing members were, with one exception, Brethren of 348, and he, the S.W. designate, was of 533. He further adds—what I was most desirous of discovering—that the petition was recommended by Joseph Bennett, F. N. Gosling, and Thos. Clutterbuck, the W.M., S.W., and J.W. respectively, of "Semper Fidelis"; and A. Dobie, Prov.G. Registrar, who was at that time acting Prov. G.M.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Recent correspondence with Bro. Topott (to whose kindness in searching his records I am much indebted) proves that most of the Leicester Brethren were Coachbuilders. Probably the establishment of Railway Carriage Works at Bromsgrove was the first link in the chain of events which brought us together on our Jubilee day.

<sup>3</sup> I find that John Dent, M.P., was appointed G.M. of the Province in 1792; he died in 1826, but the vacancy was not filled until 1850, when R.W. Bro. Vernon was appointed. It was near the end of the interregnum of 26 years that this Lodge was constituted.

Of the 26 members who go to form the roll of the Lodge during the first year of its existence, only five give their addresses as in Bromsgrove, eleven lived in that town or the immediate neighbourhood, whilst of the remainder, four hailed from London, three from Leicester, and two each from Birmingham, Shrewsbury, and Worcester.

A Lodge with the majority of its members thus widely scattered, could only hope to succeed by dint of the most determined enthusiasm and *esprit du corps*, and these essentials were not more evident in this than is usual in Lodges. Small attendances are noticeable from the first: the second meeting of the Lodge was attended by but six members and two visitors, although candidates were initiated and passed. Rapid promotions followed as a matter of course, and I notice that the Rev. Harcourt-Oldham, Vicar of Stoke Prior, who was initiated on Oct. 10th, 1849, was elected to the Master's Chair on Nov. 12th, 1851, just two years after receiving the light of Masonry. Bro. Oldham may have been a very admirable Mason, but with so short an apprenticeship he could hardly have qualified himself for the duties of Master of his Lodge.

With such adverse influences at work, it is not surprising that our Bromsgrove

Brethren lost heart; having first tried the effect of quarterly meetings in place of monthly ones (a most unfortunate step I think), we read under date Nov. 26th, 1855, that the following resolution was passed—

“That owing to want of Members and short attendances at Lodge, this Clive Lodge be dissolved, its warrant returned to Grand Lodge, and its furniture sold. Any surplus funds to be given to the Masonic Charities.”

Another meeting did not take place for seven months; possibly negotiations were pending which rendered an earlier assembly unadvisable; at all events that resolution was never confirmed; on the contrary 14 Brethren,<sup>4</sup> all residents of Dudley, were proposed as joining members, and elected on June 30th, 1856. Resolutions affirming the expediency of removing the Lodge to Dudley, altering the name from *Clive* to *Vernon*, and dealing with its surplus revenues were also passed, and another meeting held on Aug. 27th, 1856, at the Golden Cross Hotel, to confirm the resolutions, closed the Bromsgrove record.

<sup>4</sup> They were—Bro. the Rev. A. G. Davies, W.M., 730 (Royal Standard); Geo. H. Deesay, P.M., 838 (Perseverance; then a Dudley Lodge); Elliott Hillier, P.M., 313 (Harmonic); Sam. H. Blackwell, 730; James Worley, 313; G. B. Lowe, 838; Thos. Wright, Sec., 838; William Wigginton, Sec., 313; Henry Roper, 98 (probably a Staffordshire Lodge); William Timmins, 838; B. Bagley, 838; William Holland, 313; and Zachariah Round, 313.



During those six or seven years, I can find but two records of any interest to us of to-day.

On May 5th, 1852, Bro. Edmund Anthony Harley Lechmere, P.S.G.D.; W.M. Semper Fidelis Lodge; P.Sec. of the Apollo Lodge, Oxford, was proposed as a joining member by Bro. R. W. Johnson, P.M., and seconded by Bro. Houseman, S.W. That he was also balloted for and elected is evident, but the Minutes contain no record of it.

On June 15th, 1852, Provincial Grand Lodge was held under the Banner of Clive, at the Golden Cross Hotel, Bro. Henry Charles Vernon, R.W.P.G.M. presiding. A Church Parade with band of music, bell-ringing, and other accessories usual in those days, was organised and presumably was very successful, for the Vicar of Bromsgrove and his Curate became candidates, thus adding two to the already large proportion of clerical members of the Lodge.

The evening, we are further told, was spent in the utmost harmony, and true Masonic principles were kept in view.

The second era in the history of our Lodge now opened, and with every prospect of success—it numbered some thirty members, most of them resident in Dudley, and all

within the immediate neighbourhood; a few experienced and ardent brethren guided its destinies, and the R.W. Prov. G.M., who had permitted it to take his name, evinced a warm interest in it. The predominant note of the re-organised Lodge was *Discipline*—severe discipline. One can see that a high ideal influenced these early Dudley leaders: Masonry was followed for Masonry's sake; the seductions of the Hotel smoking-room were unknown, the ameliorative influences of the Fourth Degree were kept in stern subjection. All officers absent from Lodge without good excuse were remorselessly fined, and private Lodge certificates from joining members a *sine qua non*. Listen to the following, penned by one of Worcestershire's Masonic worthies:—

“Dudley, Oct. 29, 1856.

I do hereby certify that Bros. A. G. Davies, W. Wigginton, E. Hollies, W. Finch, and S. H. Blackwell are regular registered Master Masons in Lodge No. 730, and during their stay amongst us have behaved as true and worthy Brethren, that they are still members, and their dues all paid.

(Signed)

W. MASEFIELD, W.M. 730.”

Another Brother—one at that time holding a most exalted position in the Borough of Dudley—was not so fortunate. He was, it appears, a member of the Ionic

Lodge in London, and Vernon wanted proofs. Secretary of Ionic treated Vernon's letters with contempt, but 819 persevered. Secretary then said that he had never been asked for, or given, such certificates, and wasn't going to begin. Unofficial members of Ionic testified that the Brother had been a member for twenty years, though not a keen Mason, and Grand Lodge had a registered Brother of that name. But all this was of no avail, Vernon took its stand on the Constitutions, and, backed up by the Provincial G.M. (who highly complimented the Brethren on the position they had taken), after over twelve months wrangle, an appeal to the Board of General Purposes was lodged. It is much to be regretted that the decision of the Board is not recorded in the minutes, it could, no doubt, be obtained from Grand Lodge, whose business organization is, according to the writer's experience, excellent; but time does not permit. Suffice it to say that it resulted in the withdrawal of the candidate.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Grand Secretary has since furnished me with a copy of the resolution of the Board, as follows:—Grand Secretary's Office, 16th June 1888. Sir and Brother,—I have the honour to inform you that the subject of your complaint was laid before the Board of General Purposes at the meeting held yesterday, the 15th instant. I am directed to inform you that the Board are of opinion that they are precluded from entertaining the complaint—not from any question of its merits, but because it is requisite that a complaint should be made by the person aggrieved, and not by any third party. I remain &c., W. G. CLARKE, G.S. To the W.M. Lodge, 19, Dudley

Another resolution passed in open Lodge, November 18th, 1857, will, I am sure, evoke an approving response from our W.M. It reads :—

“That, whereas it is necessary that the intermediate meetings shall be regularly attended by the officers of the Lodge—with a view more especially to the attainment of proper and correct working—all officers not so attending, or not sending a written notice of their inability to do so, shall be fined as follows :— . . . . . The amount of such fines to be placed to the Library Fund.”

It is much to be regretted that certain large-sized photographs of these early Masters which were paid for out of the Lodge funds have not descended to us at Stourport ; they were good men and true Masons, and we would wish to have a better acquaintance with them.

But with all their Spartan determination, a little incident which occurred at the first Installation meeting shews us that they were human, and that we, the Brethren of 560 of to-day, are their lineal descendants. We read that the “Right Wor. Prov. G.M., having arrived at the time appointed, and finding the Lodge room not fully prepared for his reception, nor even at a later period (owing to the misunderstanding of the Tyler) left in anger.” It is, however, gratifying to

know that an ample apology put matters right. I fear that punctuality has never been one of the Vernon virtues.

The Masonic enthusiasm displayed by the leaders found a poor response amongst the rank and file, and, although a large measure of success in the way of work rewarded the early efforts of the Dudley Lodge, the attendance was execrable throughout. Uncomfortable rooms probably had much to do with this. Their quarters in the Old Town Hall were frequently invaded, and their meetings perforce held elsewhere. Worse followed, for in the Spring of 1866, the building being required for other purposes, a migration to the Wesleyan Schools at Rose Hill was decided on, and one can readily make out that the room which cost 5s. per night (inclusive of coal, gas, and cleaning, and the right to erect a cupboard therein), was not at all a suitable place for a Masonic Lodge.

Slackness followed. The Lodge, which had hitherto met twelve times a year, now decided to meet nine times, and a further reduction to seven times was afterwards agreed to. Dissolution began to be talked about—dissolution or a change of residence, and when, on November 16th, 1864, the

Brethren found that their Lodge-room had been captured and was held in force by the Sisters of a Dorcas Society, it is no wonder that more vigorous steps were taken, and, at the adjourned meeting, a committee was appointed to ascertain on what terms Brother Roberts of the Freemasons' Tavern would open his doors to them. This, from a Lodge which five years previously had solemnly recorded its conviction "That this Lodge does not consider it expedient to extend the Tavern system in connection with Masonry, under any circumstances," is a clear proof that circumstances alter cases.<sup>6</sup>

But this change from the Wesleyan Schools to the Freemasons' Tavern came too late. Although several candidates were proposed for initiation, the removal of the Lodge—which had evidently been the policy of some of the Brethren for many months previously—came with a rush. On March 15th, 1865, Brother Poole gave notice that, at a Lodge of Emergency, he should propose "That the Lodge be removed from Dudley to Stourport, and that the necessary arrangements be made therefor." On March 31st this proposition was carried by a majority,

<sup>6</sup> One of the replies to questions submitted to the fraternity by the Board of General Purposes, having reference to the disposal of the Grand Lodge property in Great Queen Street. Circular dated Jan. 10th. 1859.

and, at the next Regular Lodge, Brothers George Baldwin, Stanley Baldwin, Alfred Baldwin, Enoch Baldwin, Thomas Bond Worth, and E. Russell Lewty, all of No. 280 Lodge, were admitted joining members, and Brother Masefield appointed valuer of the effects.

The Lodge was now about to enter upon the third period of its existence. Bro. Royds was designated first Master, Bro. Edward Winnington S.W., and Bro. George Baldwin J.W., and a long list of influential Brethren testified, as joining members, their approval of the new venture. But at the outset a strange mistake, for a body of experienced Masons, was made. Two Lodges were held in the new quarters, at both of which business of importance, including the initiation of a candidate, was transacted, when the Grand Secretary intervened with a desire to know what brought the Vernon Lodge from Dudley to Stourport. The approval of the R.W. Prov. G.M. to the change had been sought and obtained, but the necessary confirmation by Grand Lodge had been ignored; and, presumably, Grand Lodge did not like being ignored. At all events, a whole year's delay resulted. Bro. Royds, who was to have been first W.M., had in the interval become P.G.M., and he did his best to propitiate the

wounded feelings of the Great Queen Street authorities. It ended in the Lodge having to go back to Dudley, pass a formal resolution of removal, meet again a month afterwards to confirm the same, and obtain the consent of the authorities thereto. The previous meetings at Stourport being illegal, the candidate who had already been initiated was again balloted for and initiated.

I do not propose, Brethren, to take you through the minutes of the succeeding thirty years, page by page; it would be very unprofitable, and there are Brethren now living who were active workers in Vernon at the period we have now reached. One—only one!—of the survivors still keeps his name on the roll of the Lodge they were jointly instrumental in bringing here. Brethren of Vernon know that he bears the honoured name of Alfred Baldwin. Would that he could be induced to resume his long-discarded badge, and occasionally join us in our ceremonies!

Judging from the names of the men who backed the Lodge in its new venture, and from the long list of distinguished guests who frequently honoured it by their presence, it is not an uncharitable assumption that the somewhat Puritanical sternness which marked



its Dudley sojourn found no favour in Stourport. Let us hope that, profiting by the past, we now "observe that due medium between avarice and profusion," which every Mason is enjoined to seek.

Glancing through the big volume of minutes in which the business of the Lodge has been recorded in these latter years, I notice that Provincial G. L. was held under the Banner of Vernon in 1869, 1879, and 1889.

In 1874 a "Breeches Bible" came into the hands of V.W. Bro. the Rev. Adolphus F. A. Woodford, Past G. Chaplain, which from certain notes therein, appeared to have been the property of this Lodge. Bro. Woodford not only restored the volume to the Lodge, but had it rebound, put down, and furnished with silver clasps before doing so—a proceeding which Booklovers would not commend. For his courtesy and liberality Bro. Woodford was elected an hon. member of the Lodge.

In 1877 a much more important recovery of Lodge property was made—the old minute book, and other books, which had somehow got lost, were restored. Bro. George Baldwin was Secretary during these years—1874 and 1877—and we, no doubt, owe the recovery of our property to his untiring zeal. In

conducting the ceremonies of the Lodge from the Master's chair, or when attending to his duties in the less exalted position of Secretary, the true welfare of the Vernon Lodge was evidently the first consideration of Bro. Geo. Baldwin.

In this same year (1877) the Banner which now hangs above the Master's chair was presented to the Lodge by Right Wor. Bro. Vernon; he had long retired from the active work of Masonry, and his kindly letter shows him to be a very old man in feeble health. The hope he expressed, that he might once more be able to visit his old Lodge, was not permitted to be realised.

Towards the end of 1878 a schism occurred, which went far towards wrecking the Lodge. A great deal might be written about it, but I prefer to say very little—a Brother thought he had claims on the Master's chair, which the Brethren refused to give effect to. He and his sympathisers seceded, and that at a time when the local tide of Masonry ebbed low; but sympathisers rallied round us, the difficulties disappeared, and the Lodge stood undoubtedly firmer and better for the ordeal.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The happy ending of this regrettable business was largely due to the able and tactful handling of it by our late Bro. Meredith (then W.M.), so lovingly remembered by those whose privilege it was to know him.

The last professional work of an unusually active life was his report on the best means of heating our new Lodge-room. This was found on his blotting-pad when Death had claimed the writer.

In 1882 the Chair of the Lodge was filled by Bro. Geo. Taylor, whose zeal for Masonry in general, and for the welfare of this province in particular, the older Brethren present will bear glad testimony to ; and it was during this time that he became Prov. G. Sec.

The only recent event I need refer to is the step we have now completed, and the consecration of which (if I may be allowed to use that word), we effect on this our consecration day. I refer to the bold step we took when we decided to start a house of our own for this our Lodge. The Swan Hotel which had sheltered us for 30 years, became, on the retirement of our esteemed Past Master and Charity Steward, Bro. Vale, P.P.S.G.W., a tied house and most of us considered that the altered circumstances made a change advisable. The Town Hall was tried, and a fine, large Lodge-room resulted, but it was cold, too large for our numbers, and the secondary accommodation very bad.

This house was void, and we braved the venture. The financial difficulty may, and probably will be, formidable to a Lodge that can never be a large one; but we believe that in acting as we have, the best interests of Masonry will be promoted.

Nothing now remains, Brethren, but to bring these imperfect memoirs to a close with the expression of the hope—aye, and the conviction—that the chronicler of another fifty years may be able to look back on more bright spots, fewer dark ones, than have fallen to me ; that, as time rolls on, the principles and tenets of our profession become better understood, more honestly followed, by the Brethren of Vernon ; that they, as erring men, *have* done their best to transmit those principles, pure and unpolluted, through this Lodge from generation to generation !



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**List of Brethren  
who have served the Office of Master.**

The Clive Lodge, No. 819, holden at  
Bromsgrove.

Bro. Thos. W. Kinder	-	-	-	1849-50
„ Thos. W. Kinder	-	-	-	1850-1
„ R. W. Johnson	-	-	-	1851-2
„ Revd. Harcourt Oldham	-	-	-	1852-3
„ J. H. Iles	-	-	-	1853-4
„ T. Housman	-	-	-	1854-5
„ J. H. Iles	-	-	-	1855-6

Removed to Dudley, and renamed the  
Vernon Lodge.

Bro. Revd. Alex. G. Davies	-	-	-	1856-7
„ G. L. Deley	-	-	-	1857-8
„ Elmett Hollier	-	-	-	1858-9
„ Z. B. Smith	-	-	-	1859-60
„ Thos. Wright	-	-	-	1860-1
„ Edwin Poole	-	-	-	1861-2
„ Isaac Fince	-	-	-	1862-3

Number altered to 560.

Bro. John Cecil Westley	-	-	-	1863-4
„ George Pitt	-	-	-	1864-5

## Removed to Stourport.

Bro. George Pitt	-	-	-	-	1866
„ George Baldwin	-	-	-	-	1867
„ Stanley Baldwin	-	-	-	-	1868
„ Stanley Baldwin	-	-	-	-	1869
„ Enoch Baldwin	-	-	-	-	1870
„ John Blundell	-	-	-	-	1871
„ W. Lea Fawcett	-	-	-	-	1872
„ G. W. Grosvenor	-	-	-	-	1873
„ E. A. Broome	-	-	-	-	1874
„ James Morton	-	-	-	-	1875
„ Charles Jecks Dixon	-	-	-	-	1876
„ J. T. Bedford	-	-	-	-	1877
„ J. T. Meredith	-	-	-	-	1878
„ J. T. Meredith	-	-	-	-	1879
„ G. W. Naylor	-	-	-	-	1880
„ R. S. Blundell	-	-	-	-	1881
„ George Taylor	-	-	-	-	1882
„ Thomas Vale	-	-	-	-	1883
„ Arthur Comber	-	-	-	-	1884
„ Charles Mytton	-	-	-	-	1885
„ George Lees	-	-	-	-	1886
„ Edward Lay	-	-	-	-	1887
„ William Dorsett	-	-	-	-	1888
„ T. Fred Hoult	-	-	-	-	1889
„ J. W. Constance-Chadwick	-	-	-	-	1890
„ H. E. G. Morrison	-	-	-	-	1891
„ Edward Collens	-	-	-	-	1892
„ Edward Collens	-	-	-	-	1893
„ Donald Cargill Martin, M.A., M.D,	-	-	-	-	1894
„ Wm. Geo. Page	-	-	-	-	1895
„ Edward Collens	-	-	-	-	1896
„ Robert Rhodes	-	-	-	-	1897
„ Charles Mytton	-	-	-	-	1898
„ C. D. Eaton	-	-	-	-	1899

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List of Members, July 11th, 1899.

With Date of Joining or Initiation.

Bro. Alfred Baldwin, M.P.	-	-	-	1866
„ Robt. S. Blundell	-	-	-	1874
„ Arthur Comber	-	-	-	1874
„ Thos. Vale	-	-	-	1879
„ Chas. Mytton	-	-	-	1879
„ Geo. Lees	-	-	-	1880
„ Wm. Dorsett	-	-	-	1880
„ T. Fred Hoult	-	-	-	1881
„ Joseph Fawcett	-	-	-	1883
„ H. E. G. Morrison	-	-	-	1885
„ Joseph Ward	-	-	-	1886
„ Edward Collens	-	-	-	1886
„ Alf. J. P. Whitaker	-	-	-	1887
„ Alfred Johnson	-	-	-	1887
„ Donald C. Martin, M.A., M.D.	-	-	-	1889
„ Robt. Surgies, B.A.	-	-	-	1889
„ William Burrow	-	-	-	1890
„ Geo. T. Watts	-	-	-	1890
„ Wm. Geo. Pate	-	-	-	1890
„ John W. Stanton	-	-	-	1891
„ H. E. Smith	-	-	-	1891
„ Geo. Burrow	-	-	-	1891
„ J. Irving Glover	-	-	-	1892
„ Ernest W. Hopewell, B.A.	-	-	-	1892
„ Robert Rhodes	-	-	-	1893
„ Charlie D. Eaton	-	-	-	1893

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## LIST OF MEMBERS (Continued).

Bro. Henry C. Gardner	-	-	-	1893
„ S. C. Baylis	-	-	-	1894
„ Frederick Vale	-	-	-	1895
„ H. Chumbley	-	-	-	1896
„ Oswald A. Moore, M.A.	-	-	-	1896
„ Emanuel Cookson	-	-	-	1896
„ Albert E. Smith	-	-	-	1896
„ Joseph Felton	-	-	-	1897
„ A. Wadham Gabriel	-	-	-	1897
„ George Jackson	-	-	-	1897
„ Joseph Pritchard	-	-	-	1898
„ Henry C. Crauford	-	-	-	1899
„ James Hartland	-	-	-	Tyler



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