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THE CENTENARY OF FREEMASONRY IN
STOURPORT.

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A Short Historical Review.

We meet to-day to celebrate an occasion which to all of us should be one of grateful thanks to those Brethren of the past, and sincere congratulations to those who are still with us.

While ~~we~~ today ^{we} look towards the future with hopeful anticipation, we must at times pause for review of the past.

Our Ceremonies are steeped in ~~past~~ History and without these ancient mysteries Masonry would have very little appeal, but today we do not propose to deal with the ethics of Masonry or with its glorious achievements, but to deal in a small way with a fragment of its History which is never^{the}less of great interest to us locally.

Short address by Prov. G. M. who look at Chair

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Dear W.Master,

At your request I have pleasure to present a short Historical Review of Freemasonry in Stourport from 1866 to the present day.

VERNON, the Mother Lodge of Stourport celebrated its Centenary in 1949 having been consecrated as the CLIVE LODGE at Bromsgrove on the 11th. June 1849 by the Deputy Provl. Grand Master W.Bro. W.Roden a Founder Past Master of the Royal Standard Lodge which was Consecrated in Kidderminster in 1844 before moving to Dudley. W.Bro. Roden was distinguished in public life in Kidderminster for he was elected Mayor on four occasions. The founders of the Clive Lodge were mostly members of the St. John's Lodge of Leicester and followed the occupation of Coach Builders. They were without doubt employed at the Railway Carriage Works at Bromsgrove and it is recorded that they had been attending Lodge meetings at Worcester. After a few years the Founders seemed to drop out having no doubt been obliged to move to other parts of the country on the closure of the Carriage Works. By 1855 interest had declined to such an extent that the Lodge was faced with the prospect of either returning its Warrant to Grand Lodge or permitting its removal to Dudley which course was adopted in 1856 and the Lodge was then renamed VERNON 819 (after the then Prov. G.Master, Rt.W.Bro. H.C.Vernon). The Vernon sojourn in Dudley lasted just 10 years during which time the Lodge moved from the Old Town Hall to the Wesleyan Schools and finally to the Freemasons Tavern by which time membership had declined to such an extent that they were again faced with closure. The Lodge was again saved by six brethren of the Worcester Lodge No. 280 who became joining members with the intention of removing the Lodge to Stourport. Rt W.Bro. H.C.Vernon the Prov. Grand Master gave sanction to its removal. A Lodge of emergency was held at Stourport on the 17th. May 1865 with W.Bro. Geo. Pitt in the Chair the main business being the appointment of a new Master and proposed Officers.

A further meeting was held at the Swan Hotel on the 3rd. October when Mr. Thomas Wheeldon, Bookseller of Stourport was balloted for and Initiated. Interleaved in the old minute book are letters from the Prov. G. Master and the Grand Secretary regarding the authenticity of the move from Dudley. It appears that Grand Lodge sanction had not been given. In consequence Two Meetings were held in Dudley, one on the 16th. February 1866 and the other on the 16th. March when the correct procedure was carried out according to the book of Constitutions. Approval of Grand Lodge having been obtained at the first official meeting of Vernon Lodge was held at the Swan Hotel, Stourport on the 3rd. May 1866 when Mr. Thomas Wheeldon was again balloted for and Initiated. It is worthy of mention that the Brethren who brought Vernon Lodge to Stourport were:-

Bro. George Baldwin (Ironmaster)	}	These Brethren were Initiated in the Worcester Lodge 208 on 3rd. December, 1863.
" Stanley Baldwin "		
" Alfred Baldwin "		
" Enoch Baldwin "	}	Initiated in Worcester Lodge 280 in January 1864.
" Edward Lewty "		
" Thomas Bond Worth Spinner)	Initiated in Worcester Lodge in 1864.

Let us for a few moments follow the progress of these worthy Brethren - Bro. Geo Baldwin was the first Junior Warden at Stourport. From that Office he went into the W.M.'s chair in 1867. He afterwards occupied most offices of the Lodge, conducted several Installation Ceremonies and explained the Tracing Boards.

Bro. Stanley was first Secretary and occupied the Chair in 1868 and 1869.

Bro. Enoch Baldwin was the first Treasurer and occupied the chair

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headed the Office of

in 1870. Brother Alfred Baldwin was first J. Warden but did not advance any further in office but took an active interest in the Lodge for many years. He was the last to pass to the Grand Lodge above in 1908. Politics was his great interest and when he retired as M.P. for Bewdley, he was followed in that constituency by his son Stanley who became Prime Minister and afterwards the first Earl of Baldwin of Bewdley. The Brethren I am sure will be interested to know that Mrs. Alfred Baldwin was sister to Mrs. Kipling (Mother of Rudyard Kipling) whose Centenary we also celebrate this year).

Edward Lawty was appointed Junior Warden in December 1867 but passed away during his year of office.

Bro. T. Bond Worth never took active office in the Lodge and after a few years resigned membership.

The worthy Brethren I have mentioned owing perhaps to advancing years seemed to become less active during the 70's and 80's and we find that quite a number of brethren from Hope and Charity Lodge 377 of Kidderminster became joining members and occupied the Vernon Chair. This was obviously a revival of Masonry in Stourport.

The names we see on both the Boards of Hope and Charity and Vernon are:

	W.M. 560	W.M. 377
W. Bro. Lea Fawcett	1872	1865
" " G. W. Grosvenor	1873	1874
" " Geo. Taylor	1872	1877
	(Prov. G. Sec from 1861 to 1895)	
" " Arthur Comber	1884	1881
" " J.W. Consterdine Chadwick	1890	1884

The Brethren of Vernon in those days I am sure were very grateful to these worthy Brethren for their great help during what was obviously a very difficult period.

Looking down the list of Past Masters we notice the name Thomas Vale who occupied the chair in 1883. We have a great deal to thank the family of Vale for, not only for the revival which their enthusiasm for masonry engendered but for their continued interest in Stourport Masonry for the past 80 years. W. Bro. Thomas Vale occupied many offices in the Lodge but also introduced members of his family into our Lodge. I name particularly -

W. Bro. C. D. Eaton who was initiated into the Lechmere Volunteer Lodge and became a joining member of Vernon. He occupied the Chair at the 50 Jubilee in 1899 and afterward honoured by Grand Lodge with the Rank of Past Grand Deacon. He also became a member of the Board of General Purposes. Many were his high Offices in other degrees and his many jewels which are exhibited in our Lodge and our wonderful Library were proof of his great regard for Vernon. Many of the little differences in our ceremonies were introduced by him and even at the end of his active Masonic life he was always ready mildly to reprimand an officer for even the slightest error. A son of Stourport's best known schoolmaster William Eaton, and a brother-in-law of W. Bro. Fred Vale he always considered Stourport his true home. During his year of

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Senior Deacon he gave the Charge at the initiation of his brother-in-law Fred Vale, whom himself occupied the chair in 1903. Other members of the Vale family followed close behind for we see on our board the names of E. Cookson (son-in-law of Thomas Vale) who was in the chair in 1905, of the other sons of Thomas Vale:

W. Bro. T. E. Vale in the chair in 1909

W. Bro. W. V. Vale in the chair in 1917. He was a member until his death last year at the age of 92.

W. Bro. Henry Vale in the chair in 1921. (Past Grand Deacon)

W. Bro. R. P. Vale in the chair in 1922, and who we are most happy to say is still with us and we earnestly trust will be with us for many more years.

At one time in our history six members of the Vale family occupied the principal offices in our Lodge.

The 50th. Jubilee took place in the New Masonic Hall in Lichfield Street. The uncertainty of the accomodation at the Swan Hotel was the result of this adventurous move in which the end proved a Godsend and over the years has given Stourport Masons an independence which only we can appreciate.

For 34 years Lichfield Street saw great progress, but before long a great increase in numbers made a change necessary. The Lodge Room was heated by coal fires and I am told that candidates often mistook the heat from these fires to be part of the Ritual. Before leaving Lichfield Street I feel that I must mention the name of W. Bro. Edward Collins, he was in the Chair on 3 occasions 1892, 1893 and 1896 and was Prov. Grand Secretary from 1899 until 1910. He was a regular attendee at our Lodge Meetings and his guidance of Masonic matters were of great help. In May 1938 Lodge Minutes mention the necessity for the Lodge to move to larger premises and it was later decided to purchase the land on which our Temple stands for the sum of £134 and we find that W. Bro. W. H. Goodwin was intrusted with the task of preparing plans which were later approved. The building was carried out by Messrs. T. Vale & Sons Ltd. and the charge made was Cost plus 5%, the total cost was £2,530. The five sons of W. Bro. Thomas Vale donated £100 each towards the cost of the building in memory of their father. Many whose names are not mentioned in the records were the donors of Lodge furniture. The first ceremony in our new Temple took place on the 17th. November 1931.

Rapid progress especially as regards membership took place after our new venture and in the Autumn it was resolved to form a Lodge of Mark Master Masons. With the assistance of Bretheren from Kidderminster the Lodge was concecrated on the 9th. October 1933, by R.W. Bro. W. T. Page, Prov G. Mark Master. R.W. Bro. J. E. Grosvenor who occupied the chair of Vernon Lodge in 1873.

The summer of 1935 saw another move in advancement of Masonry in the town. Vernon Lodge was now nearing membership of 80 and it became necessary to form a new Lodge. The feelings of the Bretheren had been obtained and the petition was duly forwarded to Grand Lodge.

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The 19 petitioners of the New Lodge however were very disappointed at hearing from Grand Lodge that the Lodge could not be called "The Vale Lodge". It was the unanimous wish of all the founders that the name of Vale should be perpetuated in Stourport Masonry. It was eventually decided to adopt the name Severn, and this was approved and the number given 5583. The Severn Lodge was consecrated on the 31st. January 1936 by R. W. Bro. Gen. Sir Francis J. Davies, K.C.B., K.C.M.G. K.C.V.O., D.L. Deputy Grand Master and the Founders consisted of 17 members of Vernon Lodge.

Despite the extra revenue received from these new Lodges, Vernon found it difficult to pay for the upkeep of the building and pay the interest on £1,600 mortgage to the Building Society in 1942 W. Bro. Parker headed a small committee which ultimately collected from the Brethren £581 as gifts and £970 in interest free loans. The Lodge was at last free from debts.

During the war years the Lodges were carried on as usual despite the shortages and it is rather interesting to note the Tylers Book that our Lodges were visited by many visitors from H.M. Forces, Scottish, Irish and varied American signs were used in our Lodges and D.C.s were kept rather busy "Proving" the Brethren.

On the cessation of hostilities membership again was on the increase and we find that the Mark Lodge wished to extend their activities. A Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners was therefore consecrated on the 25th. May 1948 by Rt. W. Bro. R. M. Hadley, the first Wor. Commander being W. Bro J. E. Grovener.

The centenary of Vernon Lodge took place on the 4th. April 1949 and attended by Rt. W. Bro. Ben Marsh J.P., Prov. Grand Master and many officers of Grand Lodge and Prov Grand Lodge. *During the centenary year a petition for the founding of a new Lodge was signed & a new Lodge was consecrated in 1950 by the PGM.*
During 1949 and 1950 Brethren who had kindly made loans to the Building Fund offered to cancel such loans and we were soon happy to know that the Lodge was again free of financial obligations. Lodge Finances were now looked after by the Vernon Masonic Club and in order to have representation from all Lodges it was again re-organised early in 1958, the first meeting taking place on the 10th. February 1958. A new electric Organ (the property of the Club) had the previous year been purchased by subscriptions from members of all Lodges.

1960 saw another increase in our number of Lodges at Stourport. A number of Brethren of Bewdley and District were desirous of forming a Bewdley Lodge, but unfortunately no suitable accomodation was available in that town. It was ultimately decided to make the home of the new Lodge at Stourport and to name the Lodge Ribbesford. The Lodge was consecrated on 7th. May 1960 by Rt. W. Bro. E. L. Bunting M.B., Prov. Grand Master, the first master being W. Bro. H. W. Windsor J.P., a past master of Severn Lodge. During the 100 years of Masonry in Stourport no R.A. Chapter had been formed although several attempts had been made to do so, the main obstacle being expense. Most of our members were members of the Hope & Charity Chapter of Kidderminster. 29 R.A. Masons signed a petition for the formation of a *Royal* Vernon *ROYAL* Ark Chapter and it was consecrated at Dudley on the 14th. November 1960 by the Ex. Comp F. H. Griffiths O.ST. J., the most excellent Grand Superintendent. It is interesting to note that the first W.M. of Stourport Masonry (W. Bro. G. Pitt) was exalted into the Chapter of Dudley exactly 100 years prior to the first regular meeting of Vernon

Chapter in January 1961. The first principal Officers were Ex. Comp L. H. C. Batt M.B.E. 1st. Princ; Ex. Comp D. W. Handley J.P. 2nd. Princ; and Ex. Comp G. E. Chapman 3rd. Princ.

Ladies Festivals were started in 1947 and it was always felt that the accomodation at the Masonic Hall was not adequate for such occasions and for large Installation Gatherings it was therefore decided to enlarge the premises. W.Bro. W. H. Goodwin's kind offices were again sought and plans were approved by the Masonic Club for extensions which were to cost £1,873. The money for this project was found by the Club, the various Lodges, and not to be forgotten, our Senior Past Master W. Bro. Robert Vale. The extensions were completed by 1963.

Many Brethren visiting our Temple have commented on the beautiful paneling in the Lodge Room. Over the years this had been installed by W. Bro. J. P. Vale and W. Bro. H. N. Frost and I am sure we all appreciate the great kindness of these very worthy Brethren, of course not forgetting W. Bro. W. H. Goodwin who has over the years looked after the building and its contents.

Before ending this Historical Review I would like to draw the attention of the Brethren to some of the Masonic possessions not already mentioned.

The Breeches Bible - This was obviously obtained by the Founders and during the many removals at Dudley became lost. It was eventually discovered and purchased at a Bookshop in London by V.W.Bro. A.F.A.Woodford Past Grand Chaplain who not only restored it, but had it re-bound, cut down, and furnished with silver clasps a proceeding which Bibliophiles would not commend.

Most of the Brethren between 1874 and 1950 were obligated on this Antient V.S.I., but owing to its poor state of preservation is now in the Lodge Library. One particular feature of particular interest to the Brethren are the fine Wood-cuts depicting the Tabernacle and the various views of K.Ss Temple. The Pillars being in correct proportion. Of the numerous editions of this Puritan Bible I am sure the 1594 edition is the finest and should be of particular interest to the Masonic Student.

Provincial Grand Lodge was held under the Banner of Vernon Lodge at Stourport in 1879, 1889 and 1906. At the P.G. Meeting in 1889 the V.S.L. was carried in procession to the Town Hall by a Lewis then a 12 year old schoolboy now a 90 year old (W.Bro. R.P.Vale P.G.St. B.) He was presented with a fine Bible by the Prov. G.Master Rt. W.Bro. Sir E.A.H. Lechmore Bart. M.P. This Bible is now the possession of the Vernon Chapter, and it is on this bible Candidates are Obligated.

W.Master- Our ceremonies are steeped in History and without these Antient Mysteries Masonry would have very little appeal, but I have not dealt with the ethics of Masonry or with its glorious achievements, but dealt in a small way with fragments of its history which I hope will be of great interest to Stourport Masons.

Yours sincerely & fraternally,

A. G. Perrett