

2010/07

## Some memories of Worshipful Brother Geoff Knowles

Severn Lodge No 5583

In December 1936 at the age of 14 years I left school, as was the norm at that time. I finished at the end of the term nearest to my birthday which was January 14<sup>th</sup>. An apprenticeship had been arranged for me with Thomas Vale and Sons in the Joinery department. My Grandfather and Father had served their apprenticeship there and were now fully qualified members of the staff and it was expected of me to follow in their footsteps.

Each apprentice was attached to a qualified joiner and my mentor was to be Mr William Hardwick. What do I remember of this gentleman? A well-dressed smart gentleman he arrived each day dressed in a long overcoat, homburg hat and beautifully polished shoes carrying a case with his lunch inside. He looked not unlike a well-dressed commercial traveller or some professional person such as a doctor. I was to find him an excellent tutor and methodical in all his work. He instilled this in his teaching of me, nothing shoddy or ill prepared passed him by. I quickly learned that hurrying a job was bound to bring his wrath upon my head.

Soon after I arrived Mr Hardwick received a special project to make large prism. On each of the faces of this prism was to be painted the All Seeing Eye. This was a project commissioned by Mr Robert Vale who was one of the local Masonic Fraternity. I was given the task of making the three dimensional prism as part of my apprenticeship and night school course. This was a piece of work requiring great geometrical precision and not an easy task. However, using the tools and skills acquired from Mr Hardwick I completed the prism. A sign writer was then employed to paint the All Seeing Eye on each face.

Earlier in the 1930s the Masons had met in a large house in Lichfield Street but managed to buy a plot of land in Severn Road. The Contract to build a Masonic Lodge on this plot was given, of course, to Thomas Vales. This was to be called the Vernon Lodge and stands there to this day. My Father and my Grandfather were responsible for the whole of the carpentry throughout the lodge including the wonderful oak panelling in the Temple.

Mr Robert Vale wished to set up a daughter lodge to be called Severn Lodge. He was eager that the Lodge should be in good condition for the installation night. He therefore sent Mr Hardwick and myself to make sure that it was so. Some of the panelling in the Temple was in need of repair due to the wood drying out and this was to be repaired. Each panel had to be removed glued back into position and replaced on the wall.

We also had instructions to put a hook in the centre of the ceiling and to suspend the eye made in the workshop from this hook. This became our first task; from then we turned our efforts to making a good job of repairing the panels. At 1 o'clock Mr Hardwick called a halt for lunch time and I sat myself down in the largest chair in the room. Mr Hardwick took the chair nearest to him and began eating his sandwiches. Normally he would sit quietly in one place while eating but to-day he moved from one chair to another grumbling to himself at each move. At last, he barked at me to take his apron, climb up

the ladder and place the apron over the eye in the ceiling. I did this and he then settled down to enjoy his lunch. At the end of our break Mr Robert (Vale) came in to the temple and immediately asked the reason for the apron being draped over the eye. Mr Hardwick said, "The bloody thing followed me where ever I moved, glaring at me. I couldn't get away from it and enjoy my food."

"That" said Mr Robert, "is the All Seeing Eye of course it follows you everywhere. Remove that apron at once and don't cover it again."

I soon fetched the apron down. Mr Hardwick and I returned to our work under the All Seeing Eye. The next day we finished our task and I picked up my tools and left the building never expecting to enter it again.

My life continued its allotted course. At the age of 18 I was called up to serve in the Scots Guards. When I had finished my initial training I was suddenly removed from the Army and sent to the Navy. Here I had to take a trade test which I passed and found myself employed as a shipwright. I served in the D-day landings where I was wounded and after a fairly long spell in hospital I returned to my ship and was sent out east to Burma still on landing craft. I was deployed to the Combined Operational Forces which later became the 42<sup>nd</sup> Marine Commandoes and fought through the jungles of Malaya ending up in Singapore just as the 2 nuclear bombs put an end to the war.

After I was demobbed I returned to Vales for a while but wanted more in life and through study and work in different firms became a contracts manager for Carpets International. Being married and with 2 boys I had little time for much else, although I often thought of joining the Masons. This was due mainly to the fact that my wife had an uncle, William Brentnall, who was an ardent and active member of the brotherhood and quite high ranking in office in the province of Derbyshire.

Years passed away and the Masonic Lodge was far from my mind. However, in 1980, I asked my neighbour, W.Bro. Anthony Watt if he would propose me into his lodge - Severn Lodge. He did so and his proposal was seconded by W.Bro Leslie Mills. I was initiated on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1982.

My first thought on entering the Lodge was the All Seeing Eye that had made such an impression on me as a younger man. Much to my surprise it was no longer there. I enquired as to when it was taken down and its whereabouts. No-one appeared to have any knowledge of its existence. As far as I am aware it is still a complete mystery. I would really love to know what has happened to it.

However, as I sit in the Lodge Room, I am able to look with a certain amount of pride and pleasure at the panelling which we repaired all those years ago and at the same time be reminded of my Grandfather's and Father's work which is all around me. I also remember myself as a young man starting out in a trade which stays with me until this day.

W.Bro. G.T. Knowles P.Prov.G.Std.B (Worcs)  
Initiated into Severn Lodge No 5583                      26<sup>th</sup> March 1982  
Master of Severn Lodge No 5583                              1999

*G.T. Knowles*  
4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2010