

A SHORT HISTORY

of

VERNON CHAPTER NO. 560

on the occasion

of its

SILVER JUBILEE

CONCLAVE

on

17th November, 1989

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JUBILEE HISTORY

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During the year 1963, an eminent Kidderminster mason, E.Comp. F.C.Perrett, P.G.St.B., and a P.Z. of the Chapter of Hope and Charity, No.377, began to feel concerned that there was not adequate provision for the needs of those local masons who might wish to complete their third degrees, bearing in mind that, at that time, the Chapter of Hope and Charity was the only Royal Arch Chapter in the district. He felt that the time had come to consider the possibility of the foundation of a new Chapter. For this idea, he had strong support from three others of like will - E.Comp.H.R.Bewley, P.G.St.B., and a P.Z. of both the Chapter of Dudley, No.252 and the Chapter of Hope and Sincerity, No.377 - E.Comp.L.H.C.Batt, M.B.E., P.P.G.Reg. (Glos. & Herefords.) and a P.Z. of Cotteswold Chapter, No.592, - and E.Comp.D.W.Handley, J.P., P.P.G.D.C. and P.Z. of the Chapter of Hope and Charity, No.377. These four worthy masons are the founding fathers of this, the Vernon Chapter No.560 and I stress the word 'are' rather than 'were' because their influence is still with us.

During the ensuing months a number of meetings were held and, in all, ten Excellent Companions and twelve Companions wished to become founder members of the proposed Chapter. In addition, eight Brethren of the Craft were anxious to be exalted in another Chapter in order to become founders.

The following officers designate were agreed:-

E.Comp.L.H.C.Batt	.....Z.
E.Comp.D.W.Handley	.....H.
E.Comp.G.E.Chapman	.....J.
E.Comp.F.C.Perrett	.....I.P.Z.
Comp.R.J.Skinner	.....Scribe E.
Comp.T.C.Marsland	.....Scribe N.
E.Comp.L.J.D.Jackson	.....Treasurer
E.Comp.H.R.Bewley	.....D.C.
Comp.J.Rose	.....P.Sojr.
Comp.H.W.Windor	.....1st A.Sojr.
Comp.J.Geddie	.....2nd A.Sojr.
E.Comp.R.Crumpton	.....A.D.C.
Comp.G.F.Gittins	.....Organist
Comp.R.Hall	.....Steward
Comp.A.A.Hartley	.....Steward
Comp.O.A.L.Mills	.....Steward
Comp.P.W.Barker, P.P.G.Jan	.....Janitor

The Chapter of Stability, No.564, proved a tower of strength and at a Special Meeting exalted the eight brethren who wished to become founders of the new Chapter - Bros. Fletcher, Hingley, Tyers, Penney, Field, E.Buften, Austen and Slater.

Local masons rallied round and much of the furniture and Chapter regalia was made by masonic well-wishers, launching the new Chapter in a spirit of brotherly love and support that ensured a bright and successful future. The furniture which, because the Temple in Stourport is small, was made two-thirds of normal size and seems to integrate perfectly with its surroundings. The founders were and are grateful to all those who contributed their skills and did so much to assist in the birth of this Chapter; they were and are proud of the furniture and regalia which is still used.

Before the consecration, the untimely death of E.Comp. Leslie Jackson, the Treasurer-designate, was both a loss to the embryo Chapter and a sorrow to his fellow founders. Companion George Bowker stepped into the breach and undertook the duties of Treasurer which office he occupied for the first two years of the Chapter's existence.

At 3 p.m. on Saturday, 14th November, 1964, at the Masonic Hall, Dudley, the work of the founding fathers reached fruition when the Vernon Chapter No.560 was consecrated by E.Comp. F.H.Griffiths, D.St.J., M.E.Grand Superintendent in and over the Masonic Province of Worcestershire, assisted by E.Comp. L.B.Heynes, M.M., P.G.St.B., Second Grand Principal, as Haggai; E.Comp. L.W.Greenwood, M.A., P.A.G.Sojr., Third Grand Principal, as Joshua; E.Comp. Lt.Col.E.J.R.Mitchell, O.B.E., E.D., P.A.G.Sojr., Prov.G.S.E., as Scribe Ezra; E.Comp. K.F.Thompson, T.D., Prov.S.N., as Scribe Nehemiah; E.Comp. D.H.Wood, Prov.G.D.C., as Director of Ceremonies; E.Comp. W.F.L.Kirby, Prov.Dep.D.C., as Assistant Director of Ceremonies; and Comp. F.Simmons, Prov.G.Organist, as Organist. Founding Officers as listed above were installed or appointed and invested with the exception that Comp. George Bowker was appointed and invested as Treasurer and E.Comp. F.C.Perrett was unavoidably absent and could not be invested as I.P.Z.

This Consecration was memorable for a number of reasons, not least for a fine Oration given by the Provincial Grand Joshua, E.Comp. Leonard Greenwood, and for the fact that it was the first Chapter consecrated by the Most Excellent Grand Superintendent, E.Comp. F.H.Griffiths. The newly installed First and Second Principals of the new Chapter proposed and seconded, respectively, that E.Comps. F.H.Griffiths, L.B.Heynes, L.W.Greenwood, E.J.R.Mitchell and D.H.Wood be invited to become Honorary Members. In this, our Jubilee Year, only E.Comp. David Wood, now P.A.G.D.C., remains with us and we enjoy his continued membership and regular company.

E.Comp. Batt proposed and E.Comp. Handley seconded W.Bro. William Stringer as the Chapter's first candidate for exaltation and, on the Fourth Rising a reply to the letter of condolence which had been sent to the widow of E.Comp. L.T.D. Jackson was read.

In such a manner was Vernon Chapter born and of the Founder Members present on that occasion, four remain as members - E.Comps. Ron Skinner, Alf Hartley and Leslie Mills and Comp. John Austen.

On 15th January, 1965, Vernon Chapter took up residence in the premises which have become its permanent home, The Masonic Hall at Stourport-on-Severn. The First Regular Convocation of the new Chapter was opened by the E.Comps. who had officiated at the Consecration, The Grand Superintendent, E.Comp. F.H.Griffiths, as Z., E.Comp. L.B.Heynes as H. and E.Comp. L.W.Greenwood as J.. After the reading, confirmation and signing of the Minutes of the Consecration and Installation Meeting, the Provincial team vacated their chairs in favour of the new Vernon Principals, E.Comps. Batt, Handley and Chapman. The Most Excellent, The Grand Superintendent, then presented the Warrant of the Chapter to the M.E.Z. and, as the final act in the launching ceremony, if I do not mix my metaphors too much, E.Comp. Leslie Batt invested E.Comp. F.C.Perrett, P.G.St.B., as I.P.Z..

The stage was now set, the Vernon Chapter was in being and the future looked bright. W.Bro. Stringer was exalted into the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch. The Historical Lecture was given by J., E.Comp.Chapman, the Symbolical Lecture by H., E.Comp.Handley and the Mystical Lecture by the M.E.Z., E.Comp. Batt. A standard of work was set which all subsequent teams of Principals have sought to emulate. On the Fourth Rising, E.Comp. D.W.Handley, proposed Bro.Peter Poulsen as a candidate for exaltation and E.Comp.H.R.Bewley seconded that proposition. This proved a most significant proposition for Bro.Poulsen, exalted at the following convocation, in March, and now E.Comp. and P.P.G.S.N. has been a key figure in the history of the Chapter, and having served as Scribe E from 1980 to 1989, relinquished that Office at the last meeting prior to the Jubilee Convocation.

The Founding Principals established, not only a very high standard of ritual working to stimulate their successors but they also established a tradition of delivering all three lectures (Historical, Symbolical and Mystical) at every convocation. This continued for many years and, until the 50th meeting, only once was the Historical Lecture omitted and the Symbolical Lecture on only two occasions. Other traditions were established at the Festive Board. The tradition of the M.E.Z., under the direction of the D.C. and A.D.C. taking wine with all the the Companions present, in pairs, thus involving three on each occasion, and culminating with his taking wine with H. and J., thus involving, finally, the Three Principals themselves - a tradition which continues with us today. Also, a tradition which seems to have slipped into oblivion was that of passing the port decanter from left hand to left hand in an anti-clockwise direction without its touching the table. This tradition seems now to have been forgotten.

At the Third Convocation, Leslie Batt handed on the baton to Dennis Handley, whom he installed into the First Principal's Chair on 17th September, 1965. On that occasion the Companions were delighted to hear that the Provincial Second Grand Principal, the very well loved Lawrie Hemes, had been honoured by Supreme Grand Chapter by being appointed Past Grand Standard-Bearer and that delight was doubled some months later when E.Comp.Handley, whilst still M.E.Z. of Vernon Chapter, was honoured with the rank of P.A.G.Sojr.. The Seventh Convocation brought good news and bad news. The bad news was that the Founding Treasurer, Comp. George Bowker, who had relinquished the Treasurership to E.Comp. Leslie Batt, at the Installation Meeting had, for personal reasons, resigned from the Chapter. The good news was the exaltation of a Brother who, at a later date, as will be recorded, became an inspiration to us all. I refer to Bro.Arthur Hoare. The Eleventh Convocation, on 15th September, 1967, saw the installation of Comp. Tom Marsland into the First Principal's Chair. Next to the Four Founding Fathers, Tom probably contributed more than any other Companion to the ongoing success of Vernon Chapter with his honour, his integrity and his wide experience of Masonry in other parts of the world. Under his leadership the Chapter continued its high standard of work and its process of consolidation. Early in 1969, the Companions were dismayed and deeply saddened by the sudden and unexpected death of E.Comp. Bob Bewley. It was an event that left the Chapter vastly poorer both by the loss of his great expertise as well as that of his brotherhood and companionship. He was a man and a Mason of eminence; universally loved and respected.

The following month brought two more deaths: One, of profound regret to Masonry in general, was that of the Earl of Scarbrough, Grand Master and First Grand Principal. The other causing great sorrow particularly to Vernon Chapter and Severn Lodge, was that of Comp. George Slater, a man and a mason whom all regarded with affection. It is with sadness that we lose Companions whether through death or resignation but it is with joy that we receive new Companions in our midst and they are the ones who must point the way to that bright future we all wish for the Chapter. At the 20th Convocation Richard, the son of Arthur Hoare, mentioned earlier in this account, was the exalte. A candidate who was later to make his mark in both Chapter and Province.

During the course of this year our sympathies were with our neighbouring Province of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire in the death of their Grand Superintendent, the Honourable William Bathurst, who with E.Comp. Griffiths had produced the Midland Ritual of Royal Arch Masonry.

During the next couple of years the Chapter were proud and happy to hear of several important promotions. The promotion, in 1971, of our own Leslie Batt to Grand Rank in both Craft and Royal Arch - P.A.G.D.C. in the Craft and P.G.St.B. in the Royal Arch. In the following year 1972, the Grand Superintendent, E.Comp. F.H.Griffiths was promoted to P.G.St.B. in the Craft and later in the year, also in the Craft, Leslie Batt was appointed Asst.P.G.M.

There are some men and masons who, perhaps because of their innate humility, seem to command a level of affection and respect from those around them that, irrespective of rank or fortune, places them in a category of their own and on 15th September, 1972, such a Companion was installed as First Principal of Vernon Chapter. In the beginning it was a difficult task to persuade Ray Hall to accept a Principal's Chair but every Companion was delighted when he received the final accolade and all would agree that he filled the office with distinction. At the end of his year Ray installed E.Comp. Alf Hartley into the Z. Chair and he, in his turn, installed E.Comp. Leslie Mills. These latter two being, as mentioned earlier, two of the four remaining Founders. During these years, Companion Arthur Hoare, advanced through the offices of Principal Sojourner and Scribe N. although suffering the agonies of a progressive cancer and on 19th September, 1975, E.Comp. Peter Poulsen, having been installed at that meeting as M., then installed Arthur, in a wheelchair, into the Chair of Joshua. Before the next Convocation, Companion Arthur had passed to the Grand Chapter Above. It was a great joy to Arthur and to all the Companions that he was able, finally, to attain the Chair of Joshua. E.Companion Arthur is lost to us but his spirit remains in the person of his son, Richard. At his first Convocation as M.E.Z., E.Comp. Peter Poulsen exalted Bro. Downton, as a Serving Companion and since that time Comp. Downton has been doing sterling work for the Chapter.

On the occasion of the 50th Convocation, a non-member of Vernon Chapter, E.Comp. T.L. Hughes, undertook the office of J. (including the delivery of the Historical Lecture, at the exaltation of his son, Bro. R.M. Hughes and two meetings later at the 52nd Convocation our present M.E.Z., then Bro. J.C. Jones, was exalted by E.Comp. Philip Ruggles. On the 21st September, 1979, E.Comp. Brian Maund was installed as M.E.Z. by E.Comp. Harold Radcliffe, Brian being the son of Harry Maund, a member of The Chapter of Hope and Charity, No. 377, and, incidentally, Commanding Officer of T.S.S. Varsittart, the Kidderminster Sea Cadet Unit.

Of the four founding fathers of the Chapter only three now remained and none of them were in very good health. It was felt that it would be a joy to the Chapter to honour them in some way and it was agreed to offer them Honorary Membership which they were pleased to accept.

Changes were afoot in Royal Arch Masonry and on 21st November, 1980, for the first time in Vernon Chapter, the Historical Lecture was given in a catechismal form conducted by E.Comp. Darby and assisted by Comps. Boughton, Birch and Jones. This was the 64th Conclave and at the following meeting, the 65th, the Symbolical Lecture was delivered in a similar way; on this occasion conducted by E.Comp. Hoare assisted by Comps. Benton, Sheppard, Spencer-Jones, Hughes and Meers, thus setting a pattern which has been followed on several occasions since.

In 1981, E.Comp. Cyril Perrett passed to the Grand Chapter above, the second of our founding fathers to leave us. In September of that year, however, the Chapter experienced an upsurge of great joy when Arthur Hoare's son, Richard, was installed into the First Principal's Chair by E. Comp. Sanders. All were conscious of the pride that Arthur would have felt and, indeed, it would not be unreasonable to say that many felt his presence among us. March, 1982, brought the Chapter joy and sadness. Joy in the honouring of E.Comp. Tom Marsland, P.P.G.S.N., P.P.G.S.N. (Glos. & Herefords.) by electing him to be an Honorary Member; sadness in the loss of the third of our founding fathers in the death of E.Comp. Leslie Batt. 1982 was generally a sad year for Vernon Chapter bringing with it the deaths, not only of Leslie Batt, but also those of Ray Hall, Tom Marsland and Len Greenwood, who had been the consecrating Joshua and an Honorary Member.

In 1983, E.Comp. R.N. Hoare was honoured by being appointed Provincial Director of Ceremonies by the Grand Superintendent, E.Comp. F.H. Griffiths in his last list of appointments as Grand Superintendent before his resignation after occupying that high office for 20 years. In his place, E.Comp. E.F. Hanson, J.P., was installed as Most Excellent Grand Superintendent. E.Comp. F.H. Griffiths wrote to Scribe E on the occasion of the Chapter's Installation Convocation in September, 1983, apologizing for his absence and saying that it would be the first Vernon Installation Meeting that he had missed since the Consecration of the Chapter. Perhaps, we, in Vernon Chapter, are being presumptuous but we have always had the feeling that we occupied a special place in Freddie Griffiths's heart as indeed, he did in our's.

On 19th August, 1984, we bade farewell to the last of our founding fathers in the passing of E.Comp. Dennis Handley, that lovable man and mason who had done so much for masonry, for education and for Vernon Chapter in particular. His passing marked the end of an era.

E.Comps. Perrett, Bewley, Batt, and Handley were from this time no longer with us, but the Vernon Chapter continued to move from strength to strength, producing Principals and nurturing Companions who maintained that very high level, not only of work but of sincerity, integrity and, dare I say it, the basic masonry that their continuing influence demanded and demands. The Consecrating Zerrubabel, E.Comp. F.H. Griffiths, O.St.J., was called to the Grand Chapter Above in 1988 after a life dedicated to masonry and in that year the Chapter invited our present Grand Superintendent, E.Comp. E.F. Hanson, J.P., LL.D. (Hon.) to become an Honorary Member and were delighted when he accepted.

Every convocation of Vernon Chapter from the first to the ninety-seventh was a full ceremony either of Installation or Exaltation but on 17th March, 1987, for the first time, the Companions enjoyed the novelty of a Lecture in place of the more usual ritual. E.Comp. Arthur Gaunt, P.P.G.Reg., P.P.G.Reg. (Essex), P.Z. 3115, P.Z. 6205, P.Z. 6831 & P.Z. 5581, gave a lecture on Royal Aron Masonry, which was well received and greatly enjoyed by all. This was the 97th Convocation and at the 99th our present Principals were installed. They carry the torch and they must light the way ahead.

Those who carried the torch during the first twenty-five years are listed below:-

	Z.	H.	J.
1964/65	L.H.C. Batt, M.B.E.	D.W. Handley, J.P.	G.E. Chapman
1965/66	D.W. Handley, J.P.	G.E. Chapman	T.C. Marsland
1966/67	G.E. Chapman	T.C. Marsland	J. Rose
1967/68	T.C. Marsland	J. Rose	H.W. Windsor
1968/69	J. Rose	H.W. Windsor	R.J. Skinner
1969/70	H.W. Windsor	R.J. Skinner	J. Geddie
1970/71	R.J. Skinner	J. Geddie	R. Hall
1971/72	J. Geddie	R. Hall	A.A. Hartley
1972/73	R. Hall	A.A. Hartley	D.A.L. Mills
1973/74	A.A. Hartley	D.A.L. Mills	N.A. James
1974/75	D.A.L. Mills	N.A. James	C.P. Poulsen
1975/76	N.A. James	C.P. Poulsen	A.W. Hoare (A.A. Hartley)
1976/77	C.P. Poulsen	P.G. Ruggles	H.G. Radcliffe
1977/78	P.G. Ruggles	H.G. Radcliffe	B.W.G. Maund
1978/79	H.G. Radcliffe	B.W.G. Maund	J. Sanders
1979/80	B.W.G. Maund	J. Sanders	F.H. Hoare
1980/81	J. Sanders	R.N. Hoare	L.A. Darby
1981/82	R.N. Hoare	L.A. Darby	T.V. Ashcroft
1982/83	L.A. Darby	T.V. Ashcroft	M.M. Everett
1983/84	T.V. Ashcroft	M.M. Everett	F.A. Boughton
1984/85	M.M. Everett	F.A. Boughton	A. Spencer-Jones
1985/86	F.A. Boughton	A. Spencer-Jones	R.N. Hoare
1986/87	A. Spencer-Jones	K.G. Meers	D.R.J. Everton
1987/88	K.G. Meers	D.R.J. Everton	J.C. Jones
1988/89	D.R.J. Everton	J.C. Jones	J.A. Benton
1989/90	J.C. Jones	J.A. Benton	M.J. Bartels

This very inadequate history of Vernon Chapter No.560 has been compiled for three particular reasons. The first and most important reason is to honour the memory of those four Masons to whom the Chapter owes its very existence:

E.Comp. Cyril Perrett, P.G.St.B., P.Z.377

E.Comp. Bob Bewley, P.G.St.B., P.Z.252 & 377

E.Comp. Leslie Batt, M.B.E., P.G.St.B., P.Z.592 & 560

and E.Comp. Dennis Handley, J.P., P.A.G.Soj., P.Z.377

The second reason is to celebrate the Chapter's Silver Jubilee Meeting and the third reason is to provide a bridge between the days that were and the days that are yet to be.