

W.Bro. Ian Cuerden PPrJGW

Celebrating 50 Years in Craft Masonry

A very good evening to you all Brethren. For those of you who don't know me I am the cleverly disguised, and much younger looking Keith Kemp. Unfortunately, Keith could not be here tonight due to another commitment but sends his very best wishes to our celebrant this evening.

At the start of a new Masonic season I look back to the many 50ths, 60ths and even a 70th I have been honoured to already attend as an APGM. Each one never fails to amaze me at the varied lives these brethren have led and what they have achieved, not only in their Freemasonry but their home and work lives, so once again it is my great pleasure and privilege to be invited to preside over this celebration meeting in your lodge for a respected brother's fiftieth.

50 years years of commitment to anything in life shows a great deal of loyalty and a genuine love and affection for whatever that cause or vocation may be.

Looking back to the beginning of our celebrant's story it was certainly a different time, when a person's word was his bond and a trusted handshake was confirmation of that bond.

Doors were generally left open and community was about supporting each other, pulling together in difficult times and in most cases living on a make do and mend existence. They were times when life was probably a lot more straight forward than it is today, technology was limited to using the A and B buttons in the local phone box and communication came over the radio or across the garden fence or down at the pub. You worked hard to earn a living and anything you bought had to be saved up for, which made the appreciation of what you had bought even greater.

I better not ramble on Brethren as our celebrant asked me to keep it short so that everyone could get to the bar and have a drink and a chat.

Strangely that's the usual request when people know I'm speaking, you know me too well Ian!

Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies Barry Fitzgerald would you please place our celebrant in a comfortable seat before me.

Ian, I hope you are nicely settled as I reminisce for just a few minutes about your life story?

It all began after the 2nd World War had concluded, it was 1947, the year the coal industry was nationalised, the Polaroid land camera was first demonstrated, Elton John and Arnold Schwarzenegger were born and in the 'Peoples Republic of Preston' the tiny but significant feet of one Ian Cuerden came into the world. Feet, both his and others, as you will discover brethren, will play a prominent part in his life.

Mum and Dad were Celia and Fred Cuerden, both lifelong Prestonians. Celia was an Office Clerk at Ribble Motors and Fred was a joiner come undertaker as his role during the war had been to after American Airmen killed in the conflict and helping to repatriate to their families.

Your sister Ann was born two years later and joined you at the family home in New Hall Lane. It was humble beginnings as your parents certainly weren't wealthy but lived by the principles I mentioned at the outset, make do and mend but with a sense of community with those around them. There were some notable neighbours in New Hall Lane, the parents of Eddie Calvert, the man with the golden trumpet had a shop there, Ronnie Clayton who was to become England Football Captain lived there and also a certain Stan Rigby but we'll move swiftly on.

First schooldays were at St. Matthews C of E Primary. You joined the Boys Brigade and remember the Whit walks that always took place and the separate start times for Protestant and Catholic walks as New Hall Lane was almost equally divided. From St. Matthews you proudly moved up to Preston Grammar School with the continual love and support of your parents who were always there for you, encouraging you to succeed.

Feet again played a major part in your sporting interests as you enjoyed middle distance running, the 800 yards as it was then and cross country representing the school on many occasions. Training for this was done whilst delivering milk in the morning and newspapers in the evening for pocket money. You had a musical ear and good singing voice, joining the School and Church choirs. Further hobbies included camping, hiking and fishing and the extreme sports of potholing and old time and ballroom dancing. Definitely not two left feet when it came to the latter.

Ballroom dancing an extreme sport you may be thinking – well as a teenager there could I'm sure be a little ribbing involved but Ian fortunately did a bit of boxing as well – very handy at times no doubt.

It takes two to tango as they say and perhaps the attraction of taking to the floor with some attractive young ladies did have its appeal. Now anyone brought up (or dragged up) with our aforementioned Stan Rigby would have an eye for the ladies and particularly shop keeper's daughters I understand. I believe that the now often used early warning systems of businesses ringing one another to warn of miscreants or other unwelcome characters possibly first took rise In New Hall Lane. The shopkeepers there would contact each other to tell them to lock up their daughters, twinkle toes Ian Cuerden was on the prowl!

Your education continued at Preston Grammar, successfully passing eight O levels and studying sciences but I'm not sure whether it was a fascination with feet but once again they came firmly forward in your career move.

Your next door neighbour was Bill Calderback who guess what, was a chiropodist. He was also brethren, as some may remember, a Freemason and one time Secretary of Setantia Lodge for many years as well as the one who stimulated your father's interest in Masonry.

You discovered there was an opportunity to leave school at 17 and go to Salford Royal Tech to study chiropody rather than continue another year to complete your A levels. A great opportunity to be a year ahead in your career and in potential future earnings, which you gratefully accepted.

You had some work experience with Peter Matthews on Wood Street in St Annes and just three days before qualifying you set up your own practice renting a place in the centre of Preston for 30 bob a week. You became a member of the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists and a State Registered Chiropodist.

Your time in the centre of Preston was a short one though as the new Preston Ring Road was coming through your location in six months time.

From there you moved to rented premises in Plungington in Preston, which stood you in very good stead as your business became established. It was hand to mouth at first with hardly any funds but your commitment was 100 per cent, working very long hours.

After three years you decided it was time to buy your own place rather than rent – a tough decision but an essential one looking at the long term future of the business.

Over the years in practice, several associates joined including Alan Kirk who sadly passed away at just 58. As anyone working for themselves knows, there is one important factor in keeping that business going and that is good health. The business was you and as you told me, you were fortunate to be blessed with good health throughout your working life – it must have been all that dancing keeping you fit Ian, or perhaps inherited genes from Mum and Dad who both lived into their 90's.

In 2007 you decide to retire although the practice does continue today.

Now during the years of your studying at Salford you continued with your great love of dancing, partnering several ladies and progressing further through local, regional and even national levels. Indeed, it was whilst you were at the British Dancing Championships at the Winter Gardens in Blackpool in 1968 that you were to meet the girl who was not only to become your dance partner but your partner in life, that of course was Doreen.

Hailing from Liverpool she worked as an insurance clerk at the Head Office of the Royal Insurance in Liverpool. Not only did your dancing

blossom but love too and in 1971 you waltzed down the aisle together at St Helens Parish Church in Sefton.

Your partnership to say the least has been a hugely successful one not only in dance terms but in your life together. Commitment and love in both has been exemplary.

Whilst you were working hard establishing your business, Doreen would make her daily journey to her job in Liverpool. You still managed though to travel hundreds of miles for dance lessons as you reached the pinnacle of your dancing careers. You would go to Slough and Long Eaton for lessons and even down to London, often returning via different locations around the country to participate in dance competitions which meant many a night sleeping in the car.

Butlins Holiday Camps were great centres for dance competitions with a grand final held at the Royal Albert Hall. Dancing before 5,000 people in what was then the largest dance competition in the world, meant you had to be nerveless and you were, winning all the major trophies. Indeed, the Butlins Veleta Trophy, which you held for 12 months, recently appeared on the Antiques Roadshow and the estimate to replace it would cost £50,000 – pity you had to return it Ian.

Contemporaries of your day some may recognise from Strictly when I mention judges Len Goodman and Shirley Ballas. Mind you Ian ‘Come Dancing’ may be a bit of a sore point with Doreen. Having been selected to appear on the BBC programme in 1970 – you declined – because it was the night of your third degree! Has Doreen ever forgiven you Ian, fortunately you had become a Freemason before getting married?

Together you became the top couple in the country and even turned professional for a time. The love though was for competition and demonstrations rather than teaching and with your business growing and the news that you were about to become parents meant it was time to hang up the sequins – Doreen’s of course. You still keep in touch with the dancing, going to the World Championships each year in Blackpool and Doreen keeps up to date each month with the dancing magazines.

Whilst all this was going on in your life, in 1973 you bought the house you still live in. To say the least, it needed some work doing on it and for 12 months, whilst still living in the flat above the business you spent every possible moment refurbishing the property. Eventually, it was ready, just before that very special event you were expecting – the birth of your daughter Nikki. She has been a joy to you both and developed into a very good musician and became a primary school teacher. She now lives in Cambridge, married to Dr Tim Cutts, Head of Scientific Computing at the Sanger Institute for Genetic Research. They have their own family, a daughter and your granddaughter Olivia who is 8 and is also taking after her mother and granddad when it comes to musical talents. Regular trips to Cambridge to see the family are always on the calendar.

With your business, family and varied hobbies it is a wonder you had the time for Freemasonry Ian. As I mentioned earlier your father was a Freemason and a member of the now sadly defunct St Leonards Lodge. He enjoyed his Masonry but never aspired to the chair, he was you said, a quiet, self-effacing man.

It was then down to two friends of your parents who would propose and second you, Fred Wakefield, the local funeral director – rumoured always to get his man and Jack Dunderdale from the County Architects Dept. New Hall Lane was something of a hotbed for Freemasonry it would seem in those days – that name Stan Rigby seems to crop up again.

You were the youngest of three candidates to be interviewed for Preston Priory Lodge No 6027 and therefore kept to the last to be initiated. The year was 1969 – a memorable year and not only because Ian Cuerden was putting his left foot forward to become Brother Ian Cuerden.

Major events included the first Jumbo jet to go into service, Robin Knox Johnson sailed single handed around the world and of course the first moon landing took place - and a Freemason stepped onto its surface. Neil Armstrong's father was a Grand Officer but Buzz Aldrin was an active Mason, a member of Clear Lake Lodge No 1417 in Seabrook, Texas. There were many connections with Freemasonry – no conspiracy theories

please brethren, including Vice President Lyndon B Johnson who was a Mason and a great advocate of space travel. There was even a Masonic authority assigned to hold lodges on the moon, the Grand Lodge of Texas.

Your Initiation took place at Saul Street in Preston even though Priory Lodge was part of the Leyland and Chorley Group. I would now like to invite the Lodge Secretary to read a précis of that meeting.

Having progressed through your second and third degree - with Doreen's kind thoughts ringing in your ears no doubt, you then moved through all the Lodge Offices until in 1981 you became Worshipful Master. Priory Lodge was a very vibrant Lodge and there were ceremonies at nearly every meeting. During your year you became Secretary of the extensive Preston Masters circle, an active group which meant attending Ladies Evenings and Socials nearly every weekend. Sometimes it was two different events on the same night, if you were asked to sing at one then Doreen would go to the other and you would join her later. The group also raised considerable sums for charity during the year. Your vocal renditions of the Masters song and Ladies and Roses songs were in great demand although on one occasion you were led astray by a drunken DC and ended up serenading the wrong lady much to your great embarrassment. You also became well known for the rendition of the 'Gendarmes Duet' at Installation Social boards with a master frequently ending up in handcuffs!

You were the first Master to hold a Ladies to Dine night in Preston at your Christmas meeting and over 206 attended your Ladies Night at Broughton Park, oh how we wish for those numbers today brethren.

Following your year as Immediate Past Master you joined Setantia Lodge of Installed Masters and became Priory Lodge Secretary in 1983, a position you held until 1990.

In 1995 you became a joining member of Lodge Amounderness, a lodge you had connections with since your early days in Masonry in 1973 through your singing. You took on the position of Assistant Secretary until 1998 then you became Secretary, a position you held until 2013.

Your mother lodge began to struggle for members during this time and despite the efforts of yourself and other senior members it eventually amalgamated with Ribbleton Lodge.

Amounderness itself was going through difficult times with declining membership and it was decided to move from Preston to Garstang to reduce costs for four meetings a year and hopefully to encourage new membership. This has proved successful with increased numbers to the present 35 plus membership and it was a period you greatly enjoyed in playing a part to revive the fortunes of the Lodge.

Your work was recognised by the Province when you were appointed to PrGStwd in 1987 after which you joined Quingenti Lodge until 2012 when it became increasingly difficult to attend. You thoroughly enjoyed your time as a Provincial Steward and I am sure every brother who has been privileged to hold that rank will testify to that too.

In 1991 you received promotion to the rank of PPrSGD and this was followed in 2000 by further recognition to the high rank you now hold of PPrJGW.

You have spent many years in your Secretarial roles and times certainly have changed. In the early days you and Doreen would spend many hours collating all the summons on the dining table ready for posting out to the brethren. Technology has made that somewhat easier now with computerisation and emails but you certainly earned your spurs in those formative years as I am sure many old secretaries would attest to.

In 2011 the Lodge reached its Diamond Jubilee and you produced the history of the Lodge from its consecration in 1951. The Lodge have honoured you by the invitation to become its Master in this your Golden Jubilee year of which you are very proud.

Your Royal Arch journey began in April 1971 when you were exalted into Penwortham Chapter No 5874 becoming First Principal in 1986. You were their Scribe E from 1988-91 and DC from 1991 to 1994. Provincial

recognition soon came with the double of not only Craft but now Royal Arch appointment as a PrGStwd.

Promotion to PPrPGSoj followed in 1994 and then came the letter in 2000 confirming you to be the Millennium Nehemiah of the Province, what an honour, another proud moment and a year to live long in the memory. Grand Rank followed in 2005 when you received the rank of PGStdB.

In 2014 you received a telephone call from the Grand Superintendent inviting you to take up the position of Assistant to the Provincial Grand Principals for the Preston, Wigan, and Leigh Groups, a post you held until 2018. I am delighted to say I had the pleasure of working with you during that time in what I would like to think was a very productive period in introducing some new initiatives and certainly a greater awareness of the Royal Arch in the Province, we had a good team!

During that period you were promoted in 2016 by Supreme Grand Chapter to the very high rank of PAGSoj.

Of many proud moments though being elected an honorary member of Corinthian Chapter 2350 in the Wigan Group in 2018 was near the top.

You also joined Setantia Chapter of Installed Principals No 7755 becoming MEZ in 2014 and you are a member of the Provincial Stewards Chapter 8516. Your great ambition for the future in Royal Arch is to stay healthy enough to reach your 50th in 2021 when you have been invited again to take the First Principals Chair for your Jubilee year.

Not content with your extensive achievements in both Craft and Royal Arch you are a member of Knight Templar and you were installed as Eminent Preceptor in 1990. You were Provincial Vice Chancellor from 2001 – 2006 and subsequently received Grand Rank rising to PGtAdmiral in 2015.

In Group you have been Preston Group Treasurer from 1998-2006, Organiser of the Preston Group Carol Service 2003 – 2016, Vice Chairman of the Preston Masonic Study Circle from 2013 to date, compiler and editor of the Royal Arch in Preston 1803 – 2012 and even keeper of the

Provincial Clock from 2015 to date. Wow Ian, I am exhausted just reading that and in admiration of your time commitment to masonry.

Your list of memorable moments and characters are too extensive to mention them all but certainly Dr David Davies and Teddy Dickson PAPGMs, Canon Tony Schofield who ordained our own Provincial Grand Chaplain Godfrey Hirst and Sir Knowles Edge come to the fore. Frank Cowburn, Peter Walker, Peter Saunders, Mike Cashman and of course Tom Blackburn and Bill Huck who are still members here. You have memories of how the Lodge was once celebrated throughout the Province for the quality of reading the ritual, now thankfully consigned to history. Eddie Caulfield and his blood pressure that he long remembered and spoke about after attending a Lodge Amounderness Installation meeting and Steven Reid who immediately spotted the wrong warrant on display when he attended. I could go on but the beer is probably getting warm in the bar.

Ian both your life journey and your Masonic one have certainly been full of interest and endeavour. Classical music, choral singing, potholing, climbing, caravanning, fly fishing, hiking, wood turning and clock repairing. Possibly the only thing you said you would have liked to have been more involved with but didn't pursue was politics.

From the early days of athletics, your chosen career, every syncopated chasse, promenade hesitation and reverse fleckerl, feet seem to always have featured prominently. One of the most important steps though as I said earlier in this presentation, both for you I hope and certainly for everyone gathered here was the one you took as a Freemason.

Together with the wonderful support of Doreen, in spite of that third degree, you have proved to be an outstanding servant to our fraternity in everything you have done. You are a strong character with a point of view to express, no yes man, which I for one respect. Whatever you have done over the last 50 years has been carried out with enthusiasm, enjoyment and total commitment in every aspect of your Freemasonry and I have no doubt whatsoever that will always be the case.

Please pass on our very best wishes and thanks to Doreen, where would we be without our ladies and I am sure she will be as delighted as everyone here today on seeing you joining those select band of brothers achieving 50 years membership of the Craft. Our RWPGM Bro James Anthony Harrison is very much aware of your celebration and I do believe you may have received his personal greetings in a phone call this morning.

He has also sent his congratulations in the form of a certificate, which I will now ask the Group Chairman, Neil McGill to read out.

Ian, may I wish you and Doreen the very best of good health to enjoy many more years together and I hope the longevity of your parents has passed to you and indeed as Doreen's mum is 100 not out, for her too. As a Freemason we hope that you continue to have many more happy times in wherever your masonic journey continues to take you.

You have not only my respect and admiration but I am sure that of all the members and friends here in reaching this milestone today. It has been my great fortune and pleasure to be able to preside over your Golden Jubilee and now Brethren, will you please join with me in showing our congratulations and appreciation in the usual West Lancashire way to Ian Cuerden, PPrJGW, today celebrating 50 years as a Craft Freemason.

David Randerson PSGD.
Assistant Provincial Grand Master.