

**Granville Stacey Angell, *Volume of Valour***, printed privately by Granville Stacey Angell, 2017. Hardback, ISBN 978-0-9560933-8-7, 704 pages, 253 illustrations.

*Reviewed by Bro Paul Richard Calderwood*

This is a massive piece of research by any measure. It is the most comprehensive publication to date in terms of identifying and cataloguing the lives of Freemasons who were awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award of the United Kingdom's military honours system, a decoration that is awarded for gallantry in the presence of the enemy.

This book is the result of more than 50 years of investigation. The author served in the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy for 23 years before starting a second career as a lecturer at a College of Further Education in the UK. He was initiated into Zetland Lodge No 515 in 1965 and almost immediately acquired a curiosity with regard to the relationship between the award of the Victoria Cross and those brethren who received it - which developed over time, "stimulating an all-consuming dedication to continuously research the subject". His fascination with the subject began when he learned that Royal Naval Officers, William Nathan Wrighte Hewett (the first Freemason to be decorated with a Victoria Cross, 26th June 1857) and Cecil William Buckley, who was the first to have his name published in the *London Gazette* (24 February 1857), were both 'Initiated' in Zetland Lodge, then No. 757, (now No. 515) in January 1856 and together they were 'Passed' on 28 January 1856. When Granville Angell began his research, UGLE records indicated that only about 100 Freemasons were known to have won the Victoria Cross. Since then his researches have taken him to seventeen countries and have resulted in the identification of a further 77 Freemasons who were awarded the VC.

His research and acquired expertise in this subject was recognised when he was appointed as the Prestonian Lecturer for 2006. It is not surprising therefore that his lecture bore the title *The Victoria Cross Freemasons' Band Of Brothers*. Since then he has continued to unearth new names and new details and in 2014 published a book with the title of *The Great War 1914 - 1918, Victoria Cross Freemasons*.

Bro Angell's latest publication, *Volume of Valour*, has been deliberately produced to coincide with the tercentenary of the formation of the first Grand Lodge. He states that "The content of the *Volume of Valour* seeks to illustrate, through individual stories, those aspects of bravery and gallantry which are encapsulated in the supreme award for valour, the Victoria Cross, and those eminent principles which are applied by freemasons the world over through Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth". It includes a short history of the Victoria Cross and reveals what the author claims are some hitherto unpublished details. He points out that although more than 2000 books have been published on the subject of the Victoria Cross, many of them simply repeat past errors and do not contribute new or entirely reliable information. As a result he resolved to go to great lengths to base his information on primary sources so far as possible and to challenge inherited ideas.

The book does not attempt a thematic approach but takes the form of a catalogue of biographies arranged in alphabetical order, each entry focussing upon the life and deeds of one particular brother who earned the distinction of the Victoria Cross. The author claims that the total number of Victoria Cross recipients at the time when *Volume of Valour* went to press was 1,363 and that 177 of them (or 13%) were Freemasons. He also states that in the Great War (1914-1918), the total number of Victoria Cross awards made was 629, of which 107 (or 17%) were presented to Freemasons. This is a much higher incidence than for the general population of course and it prompts the question why. It is a question that the

author answers only by broad references to a shared sense of duty and service summed up in the basic Masonic principles of brotherly love, relief and truth. Incidentally, it should be mentioned that since the book went to press three further names have been added to the impressive list of Masonic recipients.

In tracing the connections between Freemasonry and the Victoria Cross, Granville Angell's main focus is upon the high number of recipients from the fraternity but he also describes a number of other links, including the part played in the design and production of the Victoria Cross in 1856 by Lord Panmure (later Dalhousie), who was not only the Secretary of State for War at the time but was also a leading Freemason (appointed Deputy Grand Master of UGLE in 1857). The author makes strong claims for the influence that the design of Masonic Jewels had upon the final ribbons chosen for the decoration. The list which the book contains of lodges to which VC Holders belonged will be of particular interest to many brethren.

This handsome book in appearance resembles two volumes of the Encyclopaedia Britannica merged in to a single leather-bound volume. Inevitably, perhaps, in a book which encompasses more than 700 A4 pages a number of typographical mistakes, grammatical slips and other minor issues have escaped the attention of the proof readers. With regard to the quality of the illustrations, the author acknowledges in the introduction that there are great differences, owing to the age and availability of relevant images. What is particularly regrettable is the absence of photo credits. Although the book contains a good bibliography and a set of end-notes it is also disappointing that there is no index, which would have been so useful given the fact that this is a highly detailed book of over 700 pages in length. I understand that the original intention, to include an index, was not followed through for various production reasons.

*Volume of Valour* was produced at the author's own expense. He commissioned just 125 copies of the book and he has donated all but a handful of them, most generously, to libraries, museums and Grand Lodges throughout the world. (Brethren who were awarded the VC came from Australia, Canada, Ceylon, England, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland and South Africa). Sadly therefore you are unlikely to be able to purchase a copy of this book - but it is important to be aware of its existence and that it can be consulted at those institutions which have had the good fortune to be presented with a copy. Nonetheless and despite an occasionally poetic literary style, there is no doubt that this is a monumental piece of painstaking research which brings together an enormous amount of detail and previously undiscovered information – and we should be aware of its existence and be very grateful to the author.