

Provincial Grand Master's Address – 5th April 2018

This is a very special day for those on whom I have conferred acting or past Somerset Provincial rank and I am sure that each will be thrilled to have received theirs in the presence of so many fellow members and friends.

Brethren you have all contributed to your lodges and in many cases to the Province too. Congratulations, enjoy your honour but please remember the commitment you have to continue that support and to help in our future success.

I am sure that will wish to join me in congratulating those who are to receive appointments to or promotions in Grand Lodge on 25th April.

Receiving first appointments are

- to PJGD

W Bro Martin Slocombe

Asst Provincial Grand Master

- to PAGDC

W Bro Barry Burridge

Provincial Prior, Knights Templar

W Bro Chris Marchmont

Provincial Grand DC

Receiving Promotions are

W Bro Barry McCormack,

Asst PGM to PJGD

W Bro Michael Webb

Past Treasurer to PJGD

W Bro Patrick Morrissey

Previous Compass Editor to PAGDC

I also congratulate those who received Tercentenary appointments last month:

W Bro Gerry Chilcott

PAGDC

W Bro Steve Merryweather

PAGDC

W Bro John Cole

Promotion to PJGD

W Bro Ben White

ditto

Brethren, I express my deep gratitude to the many Members who take on offices and roles in support of their lodges, masonic centres and the Province. Much of the work is unseen and continues between one meeting and the next. Without that enthusiasm and commitment, we could not function.

Many of those supporting the Province are listed in today's programme but there are others such as the Adair Club Committee and Champions, the Visiting Volunteers supporting applicants for MCF assistance, the local teams organising and running events for the Friends Association and of course our sporting associations.

All are volunteers and help to ensure that not only does the organisation run smoothly but that it also enables each of us to more fully enjoy our membership. Please give them all your support, cooperation and thanks.

2017 was a special year and generated a huge feel-good wave of pride and emotion. Freemasonry has a higher, more positive profile as a result.

I thank everyone who helped to organise or supported our many events. It was hard work but brought many rewards and overall was fun and worthwhile.

Civic and church leaders in Somerset supported our events and spoke positively about what we do. Our support of the needy of Somerset has been immense. Over £400,000 was given to Somerset communities and charities last year. Much of this was reported in the recent Compass Magazine, on our website and is summarised in the Annual report of the PG Charity Steward W Bro David Maddern, which is circulating currently.

Recently unwarranted allegations were ably confronted by our Grand Secretary designate W Bro David Staples under the banner of "Enough is Enough". It was timely and met with wide acclaim from Members.

Brethren we need to build on all this by striving to engage further with our communities and promote the true purpose and merits of Freemasonry. We are still not well enough known or understood. I do hope that you are more prepared to declare your membership, to talk confidently and positively about the personal development, fulfilment and enjoyment that being a Member has offered you and which is on offer to so many others.

There are many men (and women) who would make first class Freemasons, who are unaware of the benefits and pleasure of membership or unsure of how to make contact.

UGLE and Provincial websites and social media help by signposting inquirers but the best way is through our lodges and centres, and yes, by you being known as a Freemason and being involved in and contributing to your community.

Personally, you may be wary of exposing your membership or perhaps just comfortable as a covert member? Brethren we can't afford to continue under wraps.

We need many more Members to sustain our 89 lodges. At present Initiates and Joining Members together are barely enough to sustain, let alone grow more than 70 lodges.

I'm not for a moment suggesting that we should relax our entry criteria. On the contrary the bar should be high and not driven merely by the need to have candidates for ceremonies.

It is often suggested that we should only admit "good men". If that means men of good character, I'm all for that but the objective should be to identify those we believe we can help to be better men.

To adhere to this standard and grow membership means having to access more potential members than ever before.

What does this mean? Well, open days – certainly, white table events – yes, they have their place, but we need to tap into new veins.

Giving talks to clubs and societies, inviting them to hold one of their meetings in our premises and giving them a private tour and talk; helping at community events, having interesting stories in the local papers and on community radio. Challenging? Difficult? To start with probably yes, but those who have done these things already have found them enjoyable and positive.

There are simple actions: Signpost your hall; have information leaflets in local libraries and community centres, leave your Compass and FMT magazine in your local hairdressers – you ought to talk to him about Freemasonry first though!

All are activities leading to the Members' Pathway, the process by which in future we will select, initiate and help our new members to progress successfully through the Craft and hopefully to the Royal Arch and other Orders too.

It is apparent that sometimes we don't do enough to provide a welcoming and practical solution that will enable the younger working family man to be an effective and appreciative member.

A similar number of men leave as are initiated and join us each year. What a waste. Little wonder most lodges are getting smaller by the year.

Brethren if our Lodges are to thrive we must be smarter and slicker, identify what really matters, do it well and always act in the best interests of our Members and their families.

We must adapt to suit the needs and interests of new as well as more senior members. Some lodges are doing this with very positive results.

This does not mean lower standards or casual attitudes. It does mean ensuring that we induce a “feel good” factor and add value to being a Member.

We must recognise and seek to address the reasons that make attendance difficult or infrequent. Rather than allow drift towards resignation let’s explore the issues, and for instance, consider whether another lodge would be more convenient to a Member’s circumstances and more appropriate to his needs.

Brethren, take a close look at your Lodge and use the Members’ Pathway as the means of being more successful in recruitment, retention and development. To understand and make effective use of Pathway all Lodges are requested to attend one of three events when we can explore how to use Pathway to improve our Membership prospects. These will take place in May. Please book in at the Pathway stand provided today by V W Bro Ray Guthrie and our Provincial Mentor Richard Parrish and Membership Officer Nick Wright.

Having celebrated the 300th anniversary of Grand Lodge we now mark the 250th anniversary of this Province. Records indicate that it came into being on this day in 1768. Events will take place in Bath, Bridgwater and Taunton, the locations of the 4 Lodges of that era.

The Taunton event will be a lunch at Taunton Cricket Ground on Sunday 7th October organised by the Friendship Association. Given last year’s great success you should book early.

We will hold a Provincial Service, Procession and Strawberry tea in Bridgwater on 24th June and in Bath on 30th September a further public procession and meeting at the first purpose-built Masonic Hall.

The Provincial Team will visit the surviving 2 lodges Royal Cumberland and Perpetual Friendship under whose Banners we meet today.

To mark the centenary of the end of the Great War we are organising a commemorative event at Wells Cathedral on Sunday 4th November. This will include an act of remembrance at the Masonic Memorial in the Cathedral to remember the 31 Somerset Brethren who lost their lives while serving their country. I hope that that this will attract a good turnout of Members.

Many centres and lodges attend local Remembrance events and lay a wreath on behalf of local Freemasons. This special anniversary year is perhaps an ideal opportunity to do this more widely across Somerset.

Festival

In January we celebrated with the MCF having raised £2m towards our 2020 Festival goal of £2.8m. The Leaders of the Masonic Charitable Foundation who visited expressed their deep gratitude for your generosity. You have given an average of £570pm so far. On behalf of the Province I express my heartfelt thanks for the generous support you are giving the Festival.

The Foundation manages our donations in a well-focussed efficient and effective manner providing support for our own in time of need and bringing substantial public benefit by supporting many charities on your behalf.

Brethren we have two years left and I am confident that we can reach our goal. Very few lodges will achieve the Golden Award, but it will require every Lodge to prioritise support for the Festival, to use Gift Aid to enhance our giving and to think of other ways to raise that little bit more. I remind you that Gift Aid contributed £0.5m to our Festival in 2007 so its well worth the trouble of filling out the form.

We've had wing walkers, dragon boat racers and parachutists. Now fire-walkers are being sought for an autumn event. Just circulating is an opportunity for each Lodge to raise a few pounds by offering a chance to win a litre of Irish Whiskey next St Patrick's Day. Such events may raise only a modest amount but do provide some fun in working for our Festival. If you have a plan for a sponsored activity we should like to hear from you please.

I express my thanks to W Bro David Medlock, Festival Chairman, W Bro David Maddern, PG Charity Steward, the Festival Committee and all Charity Stewards for their support and hard work.

Before leaving the subject of charitable effort I would like to encourage you to look for and respond positively to requests for practical help. In recent months we have been asked if we can provide help at the Beacon Centre at Wincanton, the Heads-Up Centre in Wells and very recently the Children's Hospital at Wraxall.

We have also been asked to form a Somerset Branch of the Masonic Fishing Charity. The aim is to bring an interactive fishing experience to those with special educational needs. We need both coarse and fly-fisherman to help provide a quality day out once or twice a year. If you could assist,

please let W Bro Richard Ellis know. We are one of the few Provinces without a branch. A gap I would like us to fill please.

Halls / Costs

Having asked for your monetary support for the Festival may I say that I am aware of personal cost pressures and its impact on masonic membership and involvement. Not the least of these are associated with our masonic buildings. Many are old, inefficient and unattractive for external use.

W Bro Chris Cluff, our Superintendent of Works is working to support Hall Management teams to address these issues.

UGLE have now produced an online Hall Managers Guide. All Hall Managers have access to it and I am sure it will be a great help in enabling your buildings to be more efficiently run and compliant with regulations.

Some halls are facing difficult issues. It is my hope that we can assist in finding good quality solutions that are robust for the future and more economical on members' pockets.

Admin Effort

I must thank the Provincial Secretariat, especially W Bro Richard Ellis and W Bro Roger Allen, and the PG Director of Ceremonies W Bro Chris Marchmont and their Teams for arranging today's meeting.

I offer special thanks to W Bro Keith Baker and his team of Stewards and helpers who have done a magnificent job in planning, setting up and managing the proceedings.

Finally, I thank the Webbington Team for their co-operation and great effort to make this a successful meeting.

Conclusion

Brethren, we are a happy and friendly Province and it is my hope that through collaborative effort and co-operation we shall see it grow and prosper. I seek your collaboration and cooperation as I work to that end.

I thank you all for your attendance and hope you will have had an enjoyable day.

May the Great Architect protect and support us in the coming year.