

Provincial Grand Master's Address To Three Counties – 20th October 2017

Brethren, It is a very special pleasure to congratulate VW Bro James Newman on his Installation into the Chair of this Lodge and I thank W Bro Norman Pope for an excellent piece of installation work. Do not relax too much Norman because on 25th of this month, next Wednesday, I shall be installing you into the chair of our Installed Masters Lodge.

Many of you will know James Newman as he is the Deputy President of the Masonic Charitable Foundation. He was previously President of the RMBI and visited several of the celebratory events that we held to complete our last festival. He is a member of the Old Wellingburian Lodge that meets at the school in Wellingborough and was Master of that Lodge in 2013/2014. He was Initiated into Hadassah Lodge in the Province of Yorkshire West Riding in 1974 and retains membership of that Lodge. I believe that he is also a current member of ten other Craft Lodges and also of three Royal Arch Chapters. Perhaps you are beginning to understand why I am so pleased that he has found time to occupy the Chair in this Lodge.

It is at this time that I announce the name of the next Master. In October 2018 VW Bro James will Install W Bro Tom Quinn into this Chair. W Bro Tom is a West Kent and Buckinghamshire Mason and is currently the Provincial Grand Master of the Royal Order of Scotland which meets in our Province.

Let me now welcome our newly elected joining members. W Bro. Brian Elliott is the Deputy Provincial Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons and W Bro. Ian Knox is the Deputy District Grand Master in the order of Royal & Select Masters. Both are very well known around our Province and I am delighted that they are now members of this Lodge.

I would now update you with the current situation regarding this building at Sheaf Close. As you are all aware, we have secured planning permission for the construction of a care home on the adjacent site. We have had several enquiries from building and construction companies, but nothing has yet proceeded to a sale. Interest has been shown by various other organisations, but either they have been unable to raise sufficient funds, or their offers were not of sufficient value. This is thought to have something to do with the current economic uncertainty. We have, therefore, discussed with the relevant authorities the possibility of the site being used for other types of building, possibly residential, and the reaction was encouraging. I am confident that something will happen in the coming months, but the fact remains that we are under no pressure to sell. We do have some debt attached to this building but these liabilities are well under control.

Now a word about the Provincial Building Fund. This has accumulated to a total in excess £70,000 and I am very pleased to say that we were able to assist the centre at Wellingborough with a loan to enable the refurbishments to Mill Road to be carried out during the summer break. The management at Wellingborough have created a much more comfortable and attractive building and I congratulate them on their efforts. This is, of course, exactly the sort of project that we wanted to support and we were delighted to help.

At this time last year I talked about a project being carried out by W Bros Ged Dempsey and Mike Pescod, supported by many others, in assisting homeless people in Peterborough. The scheme now operates as a registered charity known as The 3 Pillars Feed The Homeless Trust. Our brethren, with the help of many non-Masons are currently feeding and caring for 60 to 70 homeless people twice a week. This is a marvellous example of how Freemasonry Cares and I ask all of us to support this project – perhaps with time as well as money.

The Tercentenary celebrations in our Province have proved very enjoyable and successful. The visit to Grand Lodge in March continues to be a talking point around the Province and further afield, as does our Peterborough parade in June. This parade through the streets to the Cathedral with around 900 members taking part showed the popular world a view of Freemasonry and can only have impressed the public. There will shortly be a DVD available showing a record of the day with some interesting interviews. Our final large event is tomorrow evening when almost 500 of us will be at Wicksteed Park for the Grand Ball. Whilst the previous events were, in part, about communicating with the general public, this is really about us. We can celebrate our membership of this ancient and honourable institution in style and all be proud of our membership. I thank W Bro William Diggins who has chaired the Tercentenary committee throughout and he has been so well supported by his team from around the Province.

I would like to use this opportunity to talk about membership levels. We have progressed very well in recent times and we still have an increasing membership on a year on year basis. The maintenance of our buildings and the care of our distressed brethren are costs that will continue to rise, so I feel that we do have a need to increase our membership to help to bear these costs, apart from the obvious reason that we would want other quality men to share our experiences as Masons. We perform very well with initiations and we are experiencing a surge in interest following the TV series and the many open events that have been held both here and throughout the country. However, I firmly believe that a more rapid increase in numbers will be achieved if we are able to reduce resignations. To address this problem of resignations I would like all Lodges to maintain an attendance register. A simple spreadsheet with the full list of names and a schedule of the meeting dates can be maintained by, perhaps, the Assistant Secretary. During the meeting he can quietly tick off the names of those present. It will then be a straightforward exercise to highlight any member who has missed two consecutive meetings without any explanation or apology.

Contact by the most appropriate person with the missing member should then be made. It may be his proposer, the secretary, the Almoner or anyone who knows him well. I am sure that this will result in fewer resignations and therefore aid in increasing overall numbers. This is not an edict and it remains with each Lodge to decide upon its use. Neither will its use be tracked by Province. It is a simple idea that has been proved to work elsewhere in this country and I do commend it to you. Frequently, the reaction from the defaulting member is that 'someone cares'.

It is now traditional that I speak about the Provincial Executive. It is with much regret that I must inform you that at the Provincial Meeting on 17th May next year, VW Brother Trevor Boswell will retire as Deputy Provincial Grand Master. This is a great sadness to me as Trevor has been such a marvellous support for me over many years. I will say more about him in May, but suffice to say now that after five years as Assistant Secretary, five years as Provincial Secretary and then three years as Deputy PGM he wishes to reduce his work load and spend more time with his family. We have to respect his wishes.

I am sure that you will all be delighted to learn that in May it is my intention to appoint W Bro Charles Bennett as my Deputy Provincial Grand Master. Charles is now commencing his second season as an Assistant PGM following five years as Provincial Director of Ceremonies. I know that he is highly regarded around our Province and I ask you to give him maximum support.

It is usual for Assistant PGM's to serve a period of three years and W Bro David Burton will complete his term next May. However, in order that I may maintain some continuity David has agreed to continue in office. I know that he also is held in high regard around the Province.

All of this does, of course, mean that there will be a vacancy for an Assistant PGM. Brethren, I am very pleased to inform you that, at the meeting in May 2018, I will invest W Bro Luigi Orsi as Assistant PGM. Luigi has carried out sterling work in Kettering for many years and was a very successful Provincial Senior Grand Warden in 2014/2015. I believe that this will be a popular appointment and I ask you all to give him the support that he deserves.

Brethren, I thank you all for attending this evening and look forward to your continued support throughout this season.