

The Provincial Grand Master's Address to Provincial Grand Lodge

Thursday 5th October 2023

Brethren, a warm welcome to you all; having already welcomed our distinguished guests many of whom have travelled long distances to be with us, I take this opportunity to thank all the Province's represented here today for the warmth of their welcome, and the most generous hospitality we receive when attending your Annual Meetings, we trust your visit to Wiltshire today will be both enjoyable and memorable.

Brethren my first year in office has exceeded all my expectations. I thank those the Lodges which I have had the pleasure to attend for the warmth of their welcome. I am also grateful for the tremendous support and commitment I have received from the Provincial Executive and the Active Officers.

Today is a special occasion, more so for those Brethren I have had the immense pleasure to appoint to and promote in Provincial Grand Rank. Before I continue, I thank those Provincial Officers who are standing down today; as disappointing as this may be, let us not forget that Freemasonry is a progressive science and a time will come when we all must move aside and allow new blood to infuse the fraternity. JR – you might consider using the example of Tim Henderson – Ross who is retiring

To the newly appointed and promoted Provincial Officers, I am sure you will not need reminding that the Provincial honour you have received is not given lightly. You have earned the accolade for your contribution and commitment with the expectation you will continue to do so.

As active Provincial Officers, there is an added responsibility to support the Provincial Executive at Installations and other special occasions as arranged by the Province. Your active involvement will truly enhance your Masonic experience, as well as extending your Masonic friendships which will remain with you long into the future.

Brethren, one of the questions posed when I became Provincial Grand Master was – what changes would I make? I am sure you will have noticed the improved Provincial Teams procession at Installations, especially the leading role assigned to the Provincial Stewards. What I introduced in the Lodges I have carried over into this meeting. I trust you enjoyed the spectacle of colour as the Stewards led the escort.

More clarity has been given in the guidance notes for Provincial appointments and promotions. Please do take the time to read the notes which can be found on the Provincial website.

More recently Lodges and Chapters have been invited to sign up to @wiltshirefreemasons.org.uk a discrete email address that provides for the separation of personal emails from those related to the Lodge, ensuring better security, and a more visible Masonic identity. Brethren, this is a positive initiative, please embrace and support it.

And with effect from today, a revised Visiting Officers scheme will commence. I do thank those visiting officers who have completed their tour of duty and wish the new VO's and those continuing in office all the very best.

Brethren six months ago the Pro Grand Master launched the 'Strategy for Freemasons 2022 and beyond' its aim is focused on creating a thriving membership, a coherent organisation and community engagement.

It is incumbent on every member to engage in its implementation, we must accept Freemasonry is changing, we need to embrace that change, we can no longer stay living in the past and just because we have always done it that way is simply an unacceptable retort to the call to action.

We need to focus and accept there is always a need for improvement, to do things differently, and to innovate.

We must focus on communication, co-operation, and enjoyment whilst fully engaging with every level of our membership. To be very clear Brethren, from the Entered Apprentice to the most senior member of the Lodge, every member has an equal say and vote within the Lodge.

Much of our energy is focused on the activities within the Lodge and those members who attend, but let's not forget our absent Brethren. I want to direct a question to you - when was the last time you contacted a member and asked them why they may have been absent from the Lodge? Unless we know, how we can rectify a potential problem or address their concerns?

This brings me back to my earlier point. How do we move forward, do we need to implement change, and if we do what will that change look like?

Brethren do not overlook The Members' Pathway - it provides a framework to assist your Lodge to Plan, Attract Engage and Retrieve. Today, let me be very clear the Province is here to help, you only have to ask.

One of the principal aims of the Strategy I referred to earlier is to increase membership, and yes, our Province is part of the Pro Grand Master's 'Membership Challenge'. I am pleased to report our membership is currently showing a net gain thanks to The Provincial Membership Officer and his team having processed a number of Candidates equal to those introduced by Lodge members.

Brethren as disappointing as it is, if your Lodge hasn't had a candidate for some time, you cannot sit back and wait for the Membership Team to provide Candidates for you. May I also plead with all those who are in a role in which communication with the Province is a regular occurrence how vital it is to deal with such correspondence in a very timely manner? Taking more than 48 hours to respond to such requests often causes considerable difficulty and much frustration.

You all have a responsibility to take your Lodges forward, you need to create a membership action plan, apathy is our enemy. Let us remember the Pro Grand Master's words; 'we must adopt a yes if attitude, and not a no because'.

However, the introduction of new candidates will not in itself address the Membership Challenge. We must reduce our losses by identifying and addressing members' concerns while doing all we can to meet their reasonable expectations and aspirations.

To assist in this challenge teams led by the Provincial Mentor together with the Provincial Learning and Development Officer are providing well-structured informative workshops, not only for Lodge Mentors but also for our newer members and those members approaching the Chair. Brethren

these workshops are invaluable for those wishing to learn, understand and progress. I therefore encourage members to seriously consider attending one or more of the appropriate workshops.

Brethren, please do not underestimate the considerable work our Executive and their teams do throughout the year.

Brethren we are now nine months into the Wiltshire 2028 Festival in aid of the Masonic Charitable Foundation (MCF). It's pleasing to see so many members throughout the Province showing their support by wearing the festival jewel, which incidentally can also be worn in the Royal Arch in this Province.

I once again urge all members that haven't done so, to please, please, set up a regular payment plan in support of the festival. The MCF is your charity, looking after Freemasons and the wider community, they rely on your support to continue and expand their charitable works. So, it will come as no surprise that the alms collection today will go towards the Wiltshire 2028 Festival.

The sharp eyed among you will have noticed a recent change in the four principles identifying Freemasonry. While raising money is important, charity means so much more than that. Integrity, Friendship, and Respect will always be markers by which to know a Freemason. Added to these three is the word Service. I'm sure you will recall that moment when you were told that part of your life's work was to serve a friend or Brother in time of need.

As the Head of Wiltshire Freemasonry, it is important to point out that the Royal Arch is an integral part of the Strategy's approach, requiring the Craft and the Royal Arch to work seamlessly together, we are One Organisation, on One Journey, from Entered Apprentice to Companion, a four-stage journey in Pure Antient Masonry. It is my belief every Master Mason should aspire to complete that journey when the time is right for them. In doing so you will uncover new perspectives that will support you in a personal journey of discovery. Please don't wait to be asked, each Lodge has a Royal Arch representative, as a Royal Arch Companion he can be identified by the Royal Arch jewel. So let us all move forward as members of one organisation to ensure this is a thriving Province of which we can all be proud and to which we want to belong.

Today's event could not possibly have happened without the huge amount of work by so many behind the scenes. I am so aware of the time, planning and commitment that has been expended by all the Brethren involved, to those members I thank you most sincerely. Special thanks are extended to the Secretariat, Director of Ceremonies, and Communication teams, as well as those Lodges under whose banners we are meeting today, the Lodge of Concord No. 632 who have also provided the furniture and fitting, the Lodge of Good Fellowship No.8388, and New Temple Lodge No.8435.

Finally, Brethren I thank every one of you for your attendance today and look forward with great optimism to serving this wonderful Province as your Provincial Grand Master in the year ahead. Brethren I thank you for your attention and may TGAOTU keep you safe and be with you all.