

Across the Plain

The magazine of Wiltshire Freemasons



Winter 2023
Online edition

Happy Christmas



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The Provincial Grand Master.....



As we approach the festive season of Christmas I am always aware that for a short period of time there is a subtle but clear change in the attitudes of people towards each other. It's as if the message of peace on the earth and goodwill towards man is actually felt and practiced. I would like to think my belief in the essential goodness of people is not misplaced, and I welcome the kindness of a fellow motorist who encourages me to filter into the line of traffic and allows me to move ahead of them. I know that come the middle of January 'goodwill' will be in short supply and road rage will return with a vengeance.

Sadly, the issue of people falling out with each other is nothing new. As Christmas draws near, numerous surveys have revealed what makes us most stressed around the festive season. It was found that family arguments are the most stressful part of Christmas, with more than three quarters of people claiming this impacts negatively on their well-being at Christmastime.

However, it's not all bad news for families, as more than four in five people (84%) said spending time with family improved their mental well-being over the festive period, coming a narrow second on the list of positive influences, behind having time off work. Giving presents came in at number four on the positive list, above getting presents at number eight.

The past year has made me very aware that even members of the Wiltshire Masonic family can and indeed do fall out with each other, thankfully most episodes are dealt with quickly and in a manner that recognises the need to amicably settle a difference and typifies the very best of Freemasonry. However, occasionally the issues are of such a nature as to be not so easily adjusted and the outcome is invariably two or more disgruntled and unhappy members.

Sometimes the issue at hand can be resolved within the Lodge using that age old remedy - common sense, and in a few cases there may well be a need to reference the Book of Constitutions, and the By-Laws of the Lodge. The involvement of the Province should only occur in circumstances when the Lodge has exhausted its role in what might be described as Masonic jurisprudence, or when the issue is of such a nature as to make it a matter for a higher authority.

Our rules and By-Laws are framed in such a way as to enable reasonable men to rub along even when they disagree with each other. After all, a Lodge is essentially a group of Brethren who meet together to enjoy Freemasonry and each other's company which by default suggests they have an interest in preserving harmony within the Lodge. This suggests to me that a Brother who maintains a personal resentment over some supposed grievance or perceived wrong that has no merit beyond a strong opinion, should seriously ask himself if membership of the Lodge or even Freemasonry is right for him.

My constant wish mirrors that of each of my predecessors in that I believe it is so important that Freemasonry is enjoyable (I'm never quite convinced it should be fun) and that as far as is possible every member should have a positive experience whenever attending a Lodge meeting. I am often reminded of the words addressed to every Master at his Installation "that by virtuous, amiable and discreet conduct we prove to the world the happy and beneficial effects of our Ancient Institution."

And if this isn't enough, let me add that the 'goodwill' I referred to at the beginning of this page can just as easily find its way into every Freemason's life and actions - not just for Christmas but for life.

Perhaps this Christmas will be the time when ongoing enmities are put to one side and Brethren come together to work with that love and harmony that should at all times characterise Freemasons.

The Provincial Grand Master.....

With Christmas being just 'around the corner' it will come as no surprise that I am championing the Christmas Carol Service being held on Sunday 17th December at 3.00pm. When I first mentioned that we might change from an ordinary church service to something a little different, little did I imagine that Colin, Des and John would embrace the idea as wholeheartedly as they have. However, having discovered an incredible venue in the glorious Chapel of Marlborough College, they set about the task of making the event very special indeed. The result is that the Christmas Carol Service has attracted over six hundred attendees. I am quite amazed and absolutely delighted and it will be my pleasure to welcome you to Marlborough for what I am assured will be a uniquely family themed service with lots of well known and popular carols.

The Wiltshire 2028 Festival is almost one year into its journey and is scheduled to end in December 2028 which to some may seem a long way off, but I am sure the weeks and months will pass by very quickly and we will all be saying "where did the last five years go?". Thank you to the many Lodges that have made a significant contribution to their 'goal'- I really am so pleased to see the funds flowing into our Provincial Wiltshire 2028 Festival Relief Chest No.E2028. If you still need to be persuaded to move funds from your own Lodge Relief Chest let me repeat what has been said many times before; the interest rate available from the MCF should surely be sufficient incentive for your Lodge Treasurer to release the money.

The festival events team have announced the next dinner/dance will be held on Saturday 10th February at a tried trusted venue - Bowood. I'm looking forward to catching up with many of you as we show our support for the Wiltshire 2028 Festival and the Masonic Charitable Foundation. To book a place (even a table for eight) just visit the online booking facility tinyurl.com/wiltsmasons or scan the QR code.



In my dual role as Provincial Grand Master and Grand Superintendent I am keen to promote the indissoluble link between the Craft and the Royal Arch. It is no secret that the Pro Grand Master's Membership Challenge includes an ambition to increase the flow of Craft Masons taking up membership of a Royal Arch Chapter, and there is very good reason why his expectation should be realised. It is often said, and genuinely worth repeating that the Royal Arch provides answers to the questions that are posed on the conclusion of the Third Degree. In likening the Masonic experience to reading a book I do ask the question "Why wouldn't you want to read the final chapter?" Simon Ellingham writes about ARCHWAY and points out that it is a key element to the programme of activity that empowers Royal Arch Chapters to shape their future, expand their membership, and elevate the overall experience of being a Royal Arch Companion for their members.

I am pleased to see so many new Brethren becoming a Companion by joining a Wiltshire Chapter. If you are interested in discovering what membership of the Royal Arch can mean to your Masonic experience please speak with your Royal Arch Representative or contact membership@wiltshirefreemasons.org.uk

Finally, I wish all of our readers a very happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous new year.



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In the Summer edition of Across the Plain I mused on the fact that six months had vanished since we launched the Wiltshire 2028 Festival. Today, as I sit penning the words for the Winter edition I'm very conscious of the fact that we are about to enjoy another dinner/dance event promoting the festival.

I'm sure you'll forgive me for banging the drum for the dinner/dance which will be held at Bowood Golf and Spa, Nr Chippenham on Saturday 10th February 2024. The team advise me that they already have over thirty bookings and I'm sure that will increase over the next few weeks. The four elements that make for a successful event are the venue, the food, the music and the support you give. I'm

really looking forward to seeing as many of you that can make the date, so please do book your place today using the online link tinyurl.com/wiltsmasons By the way, I want you to know that this event is not a fund raiser, albeit we will have a small raffle, the purpose of the event is for you to enjoy the evening with friends.

Many members of our fraternity continue to experience the effects of the global cost of living crisis, while others are confronted with issues that affect their every day life and shape their future. What continues to amaze me is that Freemasons continue to find time in their lives to think about other people and support them by contributing to schemes such as the Wiltshire 2028 Festival.

As the Chairman of the Wiltshire 2028 Festival, I receive regular updates on the festival's progress, the events being planned, jewels being purchased and distributed and of course the aggregated sum of donations made and promised. I am pleased to report that Lodges and individual members have confirmed the truth of the words of the Charity Charge and have supported the Wiltshire 2028 Festival with pledges that, when realised, will result in the Province achieving almost a third of its overall goal.

This support, while voluntary, does to an extent depend on the incredible work of your Lodge Charity Steward who is tasked with promoting the Wiltshire 2028 Festival and to be inventive in income generating initiatives. Asking Brethren to open their wallets and make 'another' contribution is sometimes described as a 'thankless task' and often the Charity Steward becomes invisible to the membership as they make the case for a donation. Brethren, the Charity Steward has a big job to do and I would ask that you work with him and remember that all they will ever ask of you is that you give as your circumstances in life fairly allow.

I also want to mention the support of Lodges for Teddies for Loving Care (Wiltshire). The team overseeing TLC perform their work with little if any fanfare, and I am not going to change that today. Providing a young person with a TLC bear when they have been admitted to the Accident and Emergency Department of Salisbury General Hospital, or Swindon's Great Western Hospital can have a significant effect on the well-being of the individual and make the job of the clinical staff much easier. I continue to be impressed with the stories related by parents, grand-parents and even the recipients of a TLC bear. Every Lodge should be proud of the contribution they make to the life of a child that receives a TLC bear. Thank you for continuing to fund the Teddies for Loving Care (Wiltshire) initiative from the proceeds of a Lodge raffle, a donation from your Relief Chest and the many individual gifts made every year.

Finally, I trust you will join John Reid, Phil Still, and myself at the Christmas Carol Service being held in the Chapel of Marlborough College on Sunday 17th December. It really does promise to be a wonderful event and just to make it even more special I'm told that two of our members identifying as 'wise men' of the kingly sort will be singing solo verses for one of the carols. I for one am looking forward to the event which will herald Christmas for us all.



Time really does fly and it really does seem that the past year has vanished in a haze of activity. Our Wiltshire 2028 Festival got off to a flying start with the launch event in February and I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the effort you all have put in towards making year one of the Wiltshire 2028 Festival a great success. I can confirm that we are now almost a third of the way towards our goal (taking into account donations received and pledges made via Regular Payment Promises). This is a great start but leaves plenty still to do!

A major part of my role as Provincial Charity Steward is to keep Charity Stewards informed and updated on their Lodge's progress. At the beginning of October I was able to provide details of the position of each Lodge as at 30 September 2023. As with previous reports, this only shows the money that has made it (or been pledged via Regular Payment Plan) to the Wiltshire 2028 Festival Relief Chest (E2028). I know that many Lodges are using their own relief chests to accumulate funds before transferring it to the central relief chest, so my reports will not necessarily reflect the full extent of your Lodge's progress.

Lodge Charity Stewards across the Province have been asked to provide me with details setting out how they hope to reach the Lodge's goal. Please don't be at all surprised if your Lodge Charity Steward sidles up to you and asks you to sign a RPP form for the festival. Your Lodge Charity Steward will understand if you do not wish to open an RPP.

Charity Stewards have also been asked to advise whether the Lodge is confident of achieving their goal by the end of the Festival in December 2028.

I am impressed at the work and all the effort that has been made so far and it is testament to the hard work undertaken by the Lodge that we are in such a good position with the Wiltshire 2028 Festival.

In this edition of Across the Plain you will find details of a trek to Mount Toubkai being organised by Derek Gibbens. Derek is a seasoned 'trekker' having just returned from Nepal where he trekked to the base camp of Mount Everest. It is hoped that twenty hardy souls will join Derek for this quite amazing opportunity to experience and enjoy the amazing scenery, the challenge, sense of achievement, making friendships, and experiencing the local culture. The trek is being planned for September 2025 which leaves plenty of time to improve your level of fitness before the event. Contact Derek for more detail by email derek.gibbens@btinternet.com



Jumping for joy

Down to earth with a bump and ready to collect donations from your sponsors



Service with a smile

A great way to enjoy good food and super company especially with a cheery chef



Be kind to animals

Sheep racing without upsetting anyone and the winner is always ewe



ARCHWAY

I am sure you will all have seen the promotional material for ARCHWAY particularly if you follow the Royal Arch Provincial Communications Officer David Clatworthy on X (formerly known as twitter).

The launch of ARCHWAY is a key element to the programme of activity that empowers Wiltshire Royal Arch Chapters to shape their future, expand their membership, and elevate the overall experience of being a Wiltshire Royal Arch Companion for their members.

ARCHWAY is the result of extensive research and consultation with Companions throughout England and Wales. ARCHWAY acknowledges and addresses the unique challenges faced by Royal Arch Chapters, distinct from those encountered by Lodges.

It would have been easy to create a mere adaptation of The Members' Pathway into the Royal Arch, however such a course of action was resisted and ARCHWAY has been designed to meet the specific needs of Wiltshire Chapters. Nevertheless, it recognises shared challenges and endeavours to provide solutions.

The primary goal of ARCHWAY is to encourage Wiltshire Chapters, to foster a more vibrant and enjoyable environment where every Companion eagerly anticipates attending their forthcoming meetings. The platform offers valuable resources to enable Wiltshire Companions to obtain a deeper understanding of the Royal Arch, coupled with guidance on how to attract new members and support the existing Wiltshire Chapter community.

You may be asking yourself why should we need to know more about the Royal Arch beyond the fact that it's the completion of a craftsman's Masonic journey. I'm often reminded of an analogy used by the Grand Superintendent, who likens the journey from Craftsman to Companion to a man reading a book. After completing three quarters of the book he doesn't close the book and not read the final chapter, he wants, and indeed needs to know the conclusion of the story. Hence he continues reading until he reaches the end of the book.

For the Craft Freemason the ceremony of the Third Degree poses as many question as it provides answers. Chief amongst which are, What is next?, How do I discover the secrets that were lost?, Or even, what does it all mean?

The Royal Arch provides the answers to these and many other questions and is where the Master Mason will discover more. It's not by accident that the phrase Initiation to Exaltation was framed as a Freemason's Initiation is simply the beginning of a lifelong journey in which he can discover more about the identity of the builder referred to when he stood in the north East part of the Lodge.

In becoming a Royal Arch Companion the Exalte completes the journey of discovery and recovers the true secrets of a Master Mason through a spectacular, colourful, and dramatic ceremony that he will remember forever. But the 'genuine secrets' discovered in the Royal Arch are not what he might think they are - they are even better.

In March 2023 the First Pro-Principal spoke about the importance of the Royal Arch in relation to the Craft. We are pleased to repeat his remarks in this article.

"In 1813, our predecessors in the two rival Grand Lodges (the Antients, and the Moderns) were seeking to achieve an appropriate and delicate balance in order to create a statement about the Royal Arch that would allow their union to form a United Grand Lodge of England. That statement, derived from the 1813 Act of Union, now forms the preliminary declaration in our Book of Constitutions and makes us unique among Grand Lodges around the world by establishing a clear and indissoluble link between the Craft and the Royal Arch.

That statement means that we, as Freemasons of the United Grand Lodge established in 1813, practice pure, Antient Masonry. This consists of three degrees and no more, namely those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch. It is clear there are four elements at play here, the first three being governed by the United Grand Lodge of England and the fourth, the Royal Arch, whose operation and governance is entrusted to this Supreme Grand Chapter.

In real terms, we are therefore one organisation – and so when someone is made a Freemason, he needs to be made fully aware from the outset that his journey consists of these four elements – with the Royal Arch as the fourth and ultimate stage and one which enriches and completes that journey. It is an aspect that I hope all will aspire to experience when the time is right for them.

As a practical consequence of this indissoluble link, and to demonstrate its reality, we have developed a clear, integrated strategy moving forwards. As many of you are aware, the 'Strategy for Freemasonry 2022 and Beyond' will be launched at the December Quarterly Communication. A key part of this strategy is that the Craft and Royal Arch must work seamlessly together at all levels as one organisation. This means not only that we must better educate all our members about the value of the Royal Arch and its benefit, but also exploit this link in more practical ways to engage and retain our members who are so vital for our future.

It also means that we must start at the beginning and move to a clear understanding of this four-stage experience within our own Craft Lodges, so that the indissoluble link is in the forefront and visible. What better way could there be to express this than with the image of the interlinked red and blue chains you will have seen around the building today?

I must again emphasise, Companions, that this fourth element is one that all Freemasons under the United Grand Lodge of England ought to aspire to experience when the time is right for them. It would be quite counterproductive to force the issue if it is not yet the right time for an individual member of the Craft. I would strongly encourage Master Masons to experience the Royal Arch and complete their journey in pure Antient Masonry before joining any other orders of Freemasonry however supportive I am, and will remain, of those other orders."

Explore Archway and embark on a journey to enhance your Chapter's vitality and the satisfaction of every Companion. Access Archway at <https://b.ugle.org.uk/membership/archway>.



Congratulations to the Province's new Exaltees. Chapter of Concord No.632 welcomed Jason, while Stonehenge Chapter No.6114 extended a warm welcome to Richard.



Companions Pirie and Bell were welcomed into the Royal Arch as members of Thynne Chapter No.1478 meeting in Warminster in a very special double Exaltation ceremony.



A very successful Christmas lunch attended by sixty Companions and their partners for 'Children at Christmas' raised £2000 for local charities on Sunday in Chippenham.



Christmas and the Spirit of Freemasonry....

It was a long walk home and as the Masons Arms loomed into view Fred proposed they paused and had a medicinal 'night cap'. (The motion was passed *nem con.*) The public bar was warm and welcoming but, finding a fire in the empty Snug, Charlie chose to sit there in a solemn silence closely matching his evening's mood.

At last he admitted to Fred that he hadn't enjoyed the night. The atmosphere both in the Lodge Room and at dinner had been tense. The Spirit of Christmas had long ago fled the scene as the Secretary and the DC had clearly had 'strong words' before the evening started. They snapped at one and all and were somewhat waspish even with the portly Father Christmas. Everyone seemed to feel the vibrations. Altogether it was not a good advert for 'brotherly love'.

Charlie mused to Fred: *'If they're true Freemasons how can two senior Lodge officers totally ignore the guidance "never put on that badge if there is a brother present with whom you are at variance". As well as being a key to the First Degree it seems just plain good manners - and common sense too - to be civil in public. They've spoilt our Christmas evening for the rest of us. I tell you this. Some new members might well feel they could've had a far better evening staying at home and watching telly. It would've involved them in far less effort ...not forgetting expense! An advert for retention? Fat chance.'*

Fred paused and sipped on his pint. *"You could well have added, young Charlie, that they've also conveniently forgotten the wise words at every Installation: "We shall have but one aim in view, to please each other and unite in the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness"*

'Yes, that spells it out, for Pete's sake,' reflected Charlie, 'so why the blazes do they ignore 'brotherly love' at their age? In one ear and out the other, I suppose? Why do we still keep them as members, Fred?'

'Numbers, Charlie, numbers. In my day if a chap had sharp edges or a short fuse a prospective Proposer might well pause, purse his lips and regretfully move on to Prospect B. Today we can no longer select from just well-known neighbours or workmates. It follows we may not know some applicants let alone their families beforehand. It then becomes a lucky dip for them and us but, to be fair, many 'unknowns' become very good Freemasons.'

'Bluntly, Charlie, we either recruit from the wider society around us and accept the risk or, if we become too 'picky', Freemasonry may no longer be financially viable before it fades away and dies.'

'But, Fred, how on earth does having a barney on a Christmas night help anyone's cause?'

Fred shrugged his shoulders a little ruefully. *'Could be several reasons? He waved an arm vaguely in the direction of a by now distant Lodge. 'Society has changed. We used to promote simple Brotherhood, helping your neighbour, that sort of thing. Today? Some in the community are more concerned about the very reverse - what the Masonic Lodge can do for them rather than what they can do for their Brethren. Prestige, status, self promotion, competitive edge are often a driving force at work. These can easily spill over into the Lodge – what Lodge office do I need to get promoted etc.? It all rather works against the spirit of 'brotherhood'.*

He swilled the beer round his tankard reflectively. *'Also, Charlie, they're only human. They might have pressures we know nothing about. Problems at work, disharmony in the home, job insecurity, money worries – they're all guaranteed to shorten the fuse before they enter the Lodge door and given one more hiccup then, boom, Hiroshima here we come.'*

Fred took another sip. *'Our two tonight? They've both been in office since Solomon was a choir boy and each thinks privately that he alone actually runs the Lodge. So...when someone appears to trespass on 'their' patch without permission they bridle, big time.'*

He paused. *'The DC believes the jewel in the Masonic crown is our three hundred years of an unchanging tradition to be preserved at all costs. On the other hand our 'Sec' thinks our aim should be a reputation for a relaxed, friendly and charitable Lodge fun night without too much emphasis on fussy tradition. The two aims don't always match. Fur can then fly.'*

Charlie was exasperated. *'You've explained at painful length why they don't show brotherly love. How then do we achieve it?'*

Fred smiled. *'Simple - although diplomatically delicate. Remind members that their Lodge is not a social club in which you elect your committee, pay your sub and sit back. In a Masonic Lodge all Brothers are completely equal and every member has to take his turn in running the Lodge admin. A Lodge committee has no power, only the members do. (Rule.154 BoC). No officer should be kept in post so long he believes he actually rules the Members. Periods in office should perhaps be restricted to three years, exceptionally five, but no longer.'*

'That might ruffle a few feathers', whistled Charlie.

'I say again, simple but diplomatically delicate', repeated Fred. *'Province could help by promoting not on the quantity of a Brother's participation but by valuing the quality of effort. The contribution of a Mason who repeats his solitary piece year after year shouldn't equate to a man who has gone to the trouble of learning new passages.'*

'Fred, you make it all sound so depressing. Come on. Are we really no better than the Lions, the Rotary and so on? Do we no longer have anything in common with our Founders?'

'Charlie, my son, yes we still have one great and powerful link with our Founders which makes us fundamentally different from all 'the competition' .

'What makes you so sure you're right, Fred?'

'Charlie, in late April I was seated in the Great Hall at Great Queen Street alongside two thousand other Freemasons from all around the world. One question kept coming to my mind – what was it about Freemasonry that made all the effort and expense of their long journeys here so worthwhile? How did Freemasonry inspire such global commitment?'

It seems Freemasonry represents the practise of a universal friendship, the "Brotherhood of Man". It encourages a world-wide acceptance by Masons of simply being who you are, high or low, rich or poor, young or old. In short, Charlie, Freemasonry's greatest gift is to offer brotherly love to all.'

As Charlie brought back their re-filled glasses he mused: *'Such a gift would make the spirit of Freemasonry rather like an everlasting spirit of Christmas, Fred.'*

Fred smiled and raised his glass: *'To Christmas and Freemasonry, Charlie'*.

Note from the Editor: Fred and Charlie's conversation will hopefully strike a chord with many of our members as their conversations reflect those moments encountered by every Freemason at some time during a Masonic career. The musings of Fred and Charlie were introduced into Wiltshire freemasonry by Bro Michael Lee on 22nd November 2006. During a long and illustrious tenure as preceptor in Stonehenge Lodge No.6114 Michael always sought to make learning as enjoyable as it could be; especially for the new Brother to whom the finer points of our ceremonies could so easily be lost in the explanation.

The principles of Freemasonry are taught through the medium of allegory, that is simply a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral one. For example, John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress is an allegory of the spiritual journey. Michael Lee has used the characters of Fred and Charlie to tell a story and we trust you will discover the 'not so hidden meaning'



In this edition of Across the Plain we celebrate the season of Christmas with the Provincial Crest encircled by a festive wreath.

Important information.

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The Team behind Across the Plain.

Editor: Des Morgan. [✉ comms@wiltshirefreemasons.org.uk](mailto:comms@wiltshirefreemasons.org.uk)

Reviewers: Steve Lee, Colin Cheshire, Alan Colman, Bill Hughes

Images: Adrian Wooster, Gary Dolphin,

Royal Arch Communication Officer: David Clatworthy

[✉ RAComms@wiltshirefreemasons.org.uk](mailto:RAComms@wiltshirefreemasons.org.uk)

Twitter: [@wiltspgl](https://twitter.com/wiltspgl)

[✉ Contact@wiltshirefreemasons.co.uk](mailto:Contact@wiltshirefreemasons.co.uk)

In the Summer 2023 edition of Across the Plain I wrote about how important it was to protect and defend the right of free speech in society in general and Freemasonry in particular. The right to express an opinion is or should be sacrosanct, with the proviso that such a right doesn't allow or countenance the promotion of violence, hatred or the uttering of falsehoods and untruths.

In the past few weeks we have witnessed scenes in the capital and various other towns and cities that suggest some people want to use the right of free speech to articulate hatred towards a section of our society based on their religious belief. As Freemasons we stand apart from such improper and inappropriate comments insofar as they constitute an incursion into the murky world of politics with a 'small p'.

However, as citizens of the world we are perfectly entitled to hold an opinion or view on matters that conflict or contradict our own sense of right and wrong, and influence our view of others. The issue that we should always bear in mind and for which we must exercise the greatest of care is in not making any contribution to national debate that might be viewed as being the view of Freemasonry.

I believe visiting to be an enjoyable part of Freemasonry and I do admire the resolve and tenacity of Geoff Johnson (and Paul Robinson) in making it their mission to visit every lodge in the Province during his Mastership (Geoff) and his time as an active Provincial Officer (Paul). What they both prove is that visiting is an experience in itself and that there is so much to be admired in the work undertaken by another Lodge and the different ways in which the ritual is practiced. I most certainly commend 'visiting' to every Freemason, and don't forget to invite your host to your Lodge

Note from the editor: Articles appearing in the Monthly Newsletter or Across the Plain have a number of purposes, including to inform, to educate, to entertain and to challenge. Not every piece written will meet with universal approbation, but neither are they intended to offend. The editor is delighted to receive your views on any article appearing in the Newsletter or Magazine.

I have always enjoyed visiting and watching how other Lodges carried out their business. I felt that I have learnt to understand that while the ritual is the same, it can also be very different from Lodge to Lodge, well that was my assumption.

On the 6th April 2023 I was installed as the WM of the Lodge of Brothers in Arms No.9540. Many Brethren recommended that I should "Go out and visit around the Province", not least Bro Paul Robinson who said he had visited every Craft Lodge while he was WM. Well, I thought, as a member of the Irish Guards I couldn't let a cavalryman outgun me. So, I announced that I would visit all the Wiltshire Lodges and nine months later I achieved my target. I even visited a Wiltshire Lodge holding its meeting in Hampshire.

What an experience this has been. Of the many things that spring to mind, I have seen many different methods of conducting a ballot: counting them in and counting them out, behind a screen, to handing the ballot ball in person in open Lodge. *(editor note: The means of ballot i.e. a ball or token should be handed to a member by the Deacon, or other officer. This ensures that only the proper number of balls or tokens are given out.)*

The ceremonies that I have seen have all been excellent and I highly recommend all Freemasons to visit and see how things are done elsewhere. For example, in some parts of the ritual there is singing while the perambulation is taking place, and some Lodge have slightly different ways to display the Tracing Boards.

The number of attendees is also interesting to see. If you think your Lodge is the best supported, which it may well be, but you won't know until you see how other Brethren support their own Lodges and most of all be prepared to step in and cover a gap - it happens. Although seldom, but it does and I thoroughly enjoyed standing in for an absent Brother even though it did mean I was left racking my memory for the correct words.

For me, the collective support and welcome from everyone and every Lodge has been exceptional and provided me with a much greater understanding of why we should visit. It empowers you with knowledge and a daily advancement, support from your neighbours, and heart felt thank you for attending a Lodge meeting and festive board. Comparing and contrasting how things are done in the knowledge that we are all like minded individuals with the same goal in mind of brotherly love, relief, and truth.

For those who are starting out on their Masonic journey I would urge them to try and visit within your own immediate circle of close Lodges, stick to local Lodges to see the ceremony you have just gone through and widen your circle of friends. You don't have to wait to be invited this can easily be arranged through your own secretary or the secretary of the Lodge you wish to visit. Although, until you are a MM, it is always best to be accompanied by someone from your own Lodge.

Finally, there are 44 Lodges in the Province of Wiltshire that is 43 craft visits, (you can't count your own) and taking in the Provincial Meeting the total is 44. However, we in Wiltshire are blessed to have a travelling Lodge from the Irish Constitution based in Warminster. St Patricks Lodge No.295, is affiliated with the Royal Dragoon Guards and a visit to witness any of their unique ceremonies should be a must do in your Masonic diary. I have certainly added this to my experience.

In total I have been to a scheduled 45 meetings, not including my own Lodge, travelled 2362 miles, eaten lots of excellent meals and put on a few stone, but it has been well worth it. I have met many Brethren and made many new friends along the way, and I look forward to re-visiting many of our wonderful Lodges during the coming year.

Have your say!

Have you a question to ask, or is there something you want to know about Freemasonry. Maybe you just want to express a view or make a comment, whatever it is why not write to the Provincial Grand Master?

ATPLetters@pglwilts.org.uk

All letters and emails are subject to editorial control. Regrettably due to space not all letters can be published

Is this for you?

Would you like to play a part in promoting Freemasonry in the Province, can you write media copy? The Communications Team would be pleased to hear from you. pc0@pglwilts.org.uk



Q. Do you have a view on members viewing and using mobile phones at the supper table

A. It's a good question that can answered with a few words. The supper table is not the place for Brethren and Companions to be looking at or using their mobile phones. It's simply discourteous to the Master, and bad manners to spend time reviewing messages, or worse, watching a football match on your mobile phone while attending the festive board. The only person who should be using a mobile phone is the Comms Officer and even then it's only for taking pictures of the event.

Q. In my Lodge we are told that we use strict Emulation Ritual. This means the Inner Guard and the Deacons say nothing at the opening of the Lodge. Is this right?

A. A few Lodges claim to be avid practitioners of the Emulation Ritual but on closer examination their claims are often found to be without foundation. It is certainly the case that the Emulation Ritual does not allow for the Inner Guard, and the Deacons to speak at the opening of the Lodge, all dialogue is between the Master and his two Wardens. However, almost every Lodge utilises the services of a Chaplain, and an organist, neither of which are mandated in Emulation ritual.

I would like to see more Lodges and Chapters recognising the importance of including as many members as possible in the work being undertaken. In a recent meeting I was part of a team of fourteen people that contributed to a ceremony - it was a thrilling experience and everyone who took part was buzzing with excitement.

We often say we need to involve more of the membership in the work of the Lodge or Chapter. That doesn't mean giving a person a large chunk of ritual to one person to perform, much better to give several people a small part to memorise and perform. The importance of including as many people as possible cannot be overstated.

Please do have a word with your Director of Ceremonies and ask if a change can be made to include more people in the ceremony.

Q. Why am I being pressured into joining the Royal Arch, I've only just been made a Master Mason?

A. First, let me say that no one should ever be pressured into joining any Order beyond the Craft. I would hope that a Master Mason is 'encouraged' to join the Royal Arch on the basis that it represents the next logical step in the Freemason's journey. A Freemason's Initiation is simply the beginning of a lifelong journey in which he can discover more about the identity of the builder referred to when he stood in the North East part of the Lodge, and learn about what is was that was lost and which he hoped to find.

Wiltshire 2028 Festival



The Provincial Grand Master
Invites you to make a personal
donation to the
Wiltshire 2028 Festival



contact@wiltshirefreemasons.co.uk

One of the great privileges attached to the office of Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies is being able to talk with my Lodge colleagues and discuss ways in which our profoundly beautiful ceremonies can be enhanced.

During my time as one of the two deputies I was often asked for my view on a point of detail as to how something should be done, or could be done a little better, or a little smarter. It won't surprise you to know that the main stumbling block to changing anything was to be found in that often used phrase "We don't do it that way" or "The Founders wanted it done like that" and sometimes, "The committee won't like it if we change". All perfectly reasonable in their way, but do such sentiments really dictate and control how we do things today, particularly in this Province?

As a Director of Ceremonies I value 'tradition' - I also welcome innovation and I recognise that many so-called traditions were themselves once considered innovations. Their timelessness cannot be measured as existing 'from time immemorial' neither can they be classified as immutable.

I never cease to be amazed at the fact that a simple action such as saluting (especially in the First Degree) in the proper prescribed manner can produce such an assortment of waves, grabs, flicks and other strange movements. After all, a reading of the eighteen words in the ritual appear to be very clear, with absolutely no mention whatsoever of a wave, grab or flick, and yet.....

I do understand and appreciate that some Lodges have customs and traditions which are unique to the way they operate and it is the undoubted right of any Lodge to regulate their own proceedings, provided they are consistent with the general laws and regulations of the Craft. However, it is always best to ascertain from the Province as to whether any supposed tradition is an Alteration or Innovation in the Body of Masonry. Something which is not allowed.

Part of my role, and that of my team, is to assist a Lodge Director of Ceremonies as they seek to make sure the ceremonial of the meeting, which includes the actions printed in red in the Ritual Book, is conducted to the highest possible standard; it is not normally the Lodge Director of Ceremonies task to concern himself with the words of the ritual used or to act as a prompt.

It is also a part of my duties to see that Brethren observe certain rules and protocols as required by the UGLE and the Province.

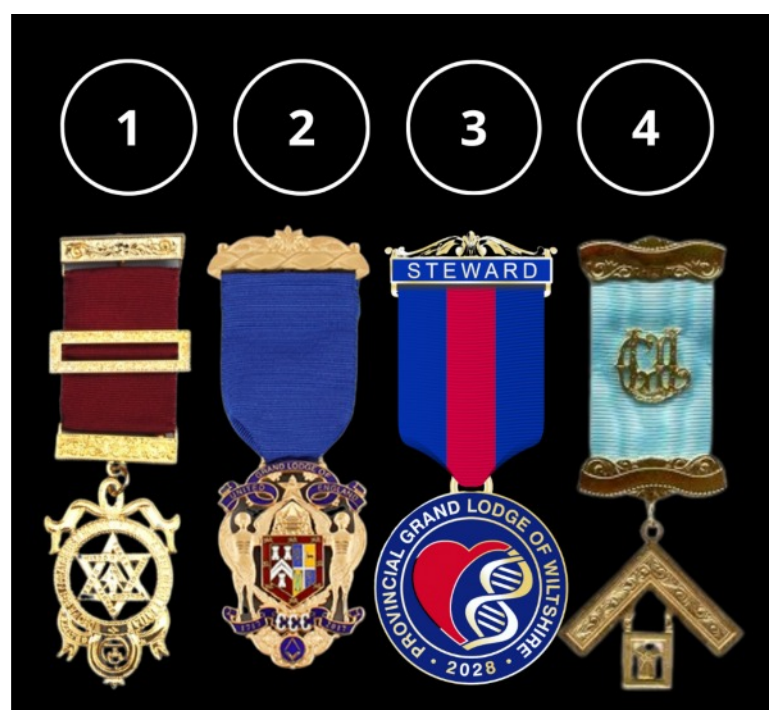
Which brings me nicely to a topic close to my heart- the wearing of breast jewels. The Provincial Grand Master has noticed that there have been instances where Brethren have worn their breast jewels in the incorrect sequence.

In this Province the correct order is as follows:

1. Royal Arch jewel (one of three)
2. UGLE Tercentenary jewel.
3. Provincial Festival jewel.
4. Past Master's jewel.
5. Lodge Centenary jewel.

Lodge jewels which include a Past Master's breast jewel (item 4) may **only be worn** in the Lodge to which they apply and were issued.

(The wearing of any jewel is subject to qualification)



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Derek Gibbens MBA, FCII, DipPFS,
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Personal office: 19 Crow Lane, Wilton,
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Most people think the famous climbing phrase "because it is there" was first uttered by Edmund Hillary when he and Tenzing Norgay conquered Mount Everest in 1953. Sadly, it's but an urban myth as actually George Leigh Mallory, three decades earlier, said it as he prepared to scale the world's highest peak.

Your editor was thinking of this famous quote when he received details from Derek Gibbens (Lodge Elias de Derham No.586) of a planned charity trek scheduled for September 2025 to raise funds for the Wiltshire 2028 Festival. Derek, who has just returned from a charity trek to the Everest Base Camp is inviting any Wiltshire Freemasons who have an adventurous spirit to register their interest in being a part of this incredible experience.

The charity trek involves flying to Morocco as part of a closed group of friends led by experienced guides to trek Mount Toubkai the highest peak in the Atlas Mountains.

A slow meandering climb up to the high refuge will see you pass through ancient villages, dominated by an enormous Kasbah, and meet hospitable Berbers who may treat you to refreshing drinks and show you beautiful crystals found in the mountain. You will want to stop to marvel at the mountain scenery as it opens up around you, and wind your way through rocky paths and, depending on the time of year, snow, to reach the peak where the Atlas range opens up before you. The silence is remarkable, the High Atlas utterly unforgettable.

A trekker said of a previous trip *"It is a great introduction to trekking, a real physical and mental challenge, and you can experience a very different culture without travelling too far. The highlights were the amazing scenery, the challenge, sense of achievement, amazing scenery, banter, making friendships, experiencing local culture. The expedition was challenging, fulfilling, exciting, and profound."*

There is a cost, but it's a snip at only £1,100 per person. The planned date is 8th September 2025 for 5 days, 4 nights. Derek is looking for at least twenty trekkers to join him and Simon (the chairman of the Wiltshire 2028 Festival) is looking for a minimum of £5,000 to be raised for the Wiltshire 2028 Festival. Interested ? Contact Derek by email derek.gibbens@btinternet.com

Is there a catch? We want this event to raise lots of money for the Wiltshire 2028 Festival and you can do this do by getting sponsorship from family, friends and even the milkman (well maybe not the milkman) but start with family and friends. The funds raised should be in addition to Lodge or Individual targets.



Trekking with Derek and friends
Enjoy the sights and sounds of
Morocco, and the beauty of
Mount Toubkai.

Bros. Darren Astley (left), Liam East - Middle) and Paul Rowcliffe (right) took part in Movember a charity focused around mental health and suicide prevention, prostate cancer and testicular cancer.

Since 2003, Movember has funded more than 1,320 men's health projects around the world, challenging the status quo, shaking up men's health research and transforming the way health services reach and support men.

With the help of the Bethren of Calley Lodge No.7525 and numerous other supporters we collectively raised the fantastic sum of £1000.



...

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Supporting Teddies for Loving Care....

The Provincial Grand Master John Reid is a great supporter of Teddies for Loving Care and it will come as no surprise that he chose to allocate donations made at the Christmas Carol Service to helping the Province to continue providing lovable teddies to the accident and emergency departments of the county's two main hospitals in Swindon, and Salisbury.

A hospital visit can be a frightening experience for a young child, especially in an emergency situation. Giving a child a Teddies for Loving Care bear is a way of providing much-needed comfort to children in A&E departments, helping to reduce the shock and distress of their experience.

The bears are used to calm children down, reward them for being brave or to demonstrate procedures. Often the bears are used to distract children so nurses and doctors can get their jobs done quickly and efficiently. Doctors and nurses recognise a Teddies for Loving Care bear to be an invaluable tool for medical professionals.

Thanks to John King (Tisbury Lodge No.8718) and Ian Priest (Methuen Lodge No.8692), the storage and despatch of Teddies to the two centres is carried out with the minimum of fuss and bother - a phone call from the hospital is all that it takes for John and Ian to jump into action and make sure that no location is ever without a supply of cuddly teddies.

The work of the team to supply teddies is totally dependent on Freemasons making regular donations to Teddies for Loving Care (Wiltshire). Your Lodge can play its part in supporting Teddies for Loving Care (Wiltshire) by holding one raffle every year and donating the proceeds to this amazing initiative.



The core aim of Teddies for Loving Care is to provide cuddly teddy bears to distressed children admitted to the Accident & Emergency department at either of Wiltshire's two general hospitals located in Salisbury and Swindon.

Most of the money raised for 'Teddies for Loving Care' comes from within the Freemason community through Lodge donations and fundraising activities.

The TLC Wiltshire scheme operates under the umbrella of the Provincial Grand Lodge with all donations ring-fenced to support the purchase and distribution of TLC Bears.

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