

# Across the Plain

The magazine of Wiltshire Freemasons



Winter 2023  
Online edition



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# The Provincial Grand Master.....



For many of our members, especially those in the farming and agricultural communities the first six months of the year has not brought them undiluted joy, far from it. Farmers have been dealing with record-breaking rainfall over at least the past year, meaning food produced in Britain has fallen drastically. Livestock and crops have been affected as fields have been submerged since last autumn on account of it being an exceptionally wet 18 months. According to the Met Office, rainfall from October 2022 to March 2024 was the highest amount record for any 18-month period in England. Heavy rain after weeks of dry weather and high temperatures is causing a harvesting headache for UK arable growers with most regions across the country experiencing a stop-start harvest.

Thankfully it appears that the next few months will provide some respite from the rain and a satisfying burst of summer sunshine, a situation that will be welcomed by those of us who will enjoying a 'staycation' as opposed to travelling abroad.

I know, that for many of our Lodge secretaries the summer months give them time to re-charge their batteries, attend to the issues of UGLE, and Provincial returns, updating membership records (for which they do need your help) and preparing for the coming season's activities. This year, secretaries will also be getting to grips with HERMES.

Hermes has been rolled out in a number of Provinces and the feedback from Secretaries and Scribes has been very positive. The messages being fed back, is that the package is well designed, easy to use, and will make life very much easier for the Secretary, and Scribe.

Craft Secretaries and Royal Arch Scribes should all now be using the training system to test the new system and practice the new skills required before we go live. The Province is not offering specific training sessions, more 'walk in' mornings, details of which will be communicated during the coming weeks. A special email facility is already in place and is being used. The training will be delivered by Steve Lee's team of selected volunteers from across the Province, who will ensure that the transition is implemented as smoothly as possible.

The Provincial secretariat will also be very busy during the next few months. Having informed members of first appointments and promotions in Provincial Grand Rank, and having received acceptances, the next step is to ensure everything is in order for the annual meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge which is being held at Trowbridge of Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> October. Incidentally, the summons for the meeting is included in this edition of Across the Plain and can also be found on the Provincial website.

This year, a number of acting Officers will be standing down. All of them will have made a contribution to the Province during their term in office. However, I would like to pay a special tribute to Ian Iever PrSGW and Alan Colman PrJGW who created Wiltshire history by occupying the Warden's offices for two consecutive years. Not only did they attend an incredible number of meetings, they also demonstrated the highest of standards when presenting their addresses. Ian will be enjoying a welcome break from acting office, although I know he is already engaging with the Communication Team on a project, and Alan will be appointed to lead the Learning & Development Team.

A key appointment in the Provincial team is that of Assistant Provincial Grand Master, and I am grateful to Phil Still for his service to the Province as he steps down after completing his agreed tenure in post. I am pleased to announce that W Bro Steve Lee, of Harry C Preater Lodge No.8204 will be Appointed and Invested as Assistant Provincial Grand Master of Wiltshire at Provincial Grand Lodge in October.



# The Provincial Grand Master.....

I feel sure that Steve can count on your support at both the Investiture meeting and as he presides at Installation Meetings across the Province.

In a recent edition of [In Touch > On Line](#) the editor made particular reference to the importance of Brethren wearing the correct regalia in a Lodge meeting. The advice given was taken from the aptly titled Information For The Guidance Of Members Of The Craft which has the full force of the Book of Constitutions and as such must be conformed to. For the sake of regularity, I have asked that the article be reproduced in this edition of Across the Plain and posted on the Provincial website.

I must confess that I find it quite strange that Brethren appear unwilling to adhere to the requirements governing the wearing of regalia. I do trust that every member will bear in mind and seek to follow the words of Rule 239 BoC which states that *"no Brother shall be admitted into any meeting of the Grand lodge, or any subordinate Lodge, without the clothing appropriate to his rank under the Grand Lodge."*

I know that the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies will be reinforcing this message at the Lodge Director of Ceremonies meeting at Devizes on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> July.

## One Organisation



## One Journey

In my dual role as Provincial Grand Master and Grand Superintendent I am keen to promote the 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?"

I am pleased to see so many Brethren making the decision to become a Companion of the Royal Arch. I genuinely believe it will enhance their Masonic experience. If you are interested in Discovering More about the Royal Arch why not join me and the Royal Arch team at a very special Open Day on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October at The Chippenham Masonic Centre.

We are very fortunate in Wiltshire Freemasonry to have a number of Brethren that have been honoured for their public service whether that has been in the Armed Forces, the Police or as in the case of Les Welling, his service as a volunteer in the community in which he lives. It is therefore appropriate that I offer my congratulations to Bro Prof Tony Fooks a member of Radnor Lodge No.4451 who was honoured by HM The King and appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (**OBE**) as lead scientist for his work on Animal Health and Welfare.

Finally, it will not have escaped the notice of many members that there is a football tournament being played in Germany - the Euro's, and as a passionate watcher of almost any sport, I have followed the passage of England and Scotland through the opening group games. I have been impressed with the skill level on display and have enjoyed seeing some wonderful goals being scored. What I keep hearing from the analysts and ex professionals is that the level of football being played demonstrates the intensity of the training every player has to undertake in order to achieve the high standard required to play at this level - it's the same in Freemasonry, what you put in determines what you get back.

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 he appeals 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.



One of the most pleasant of duties I am called on to perform is to receive a donation on behalf of the Wiltshire 2028 Festival and I was particularly pleased to receive a cheque for £4,000 from Mervyn Johns who I was delighted to see being Installed into the Chair of Highworth Lodge No.9009 for the fifth time. I'm not sure if that's a record for a Wiltshire Lodge but I know the Provincial Registrar will let me know. At the same meeting long serving member John Hudson laid down his 'quill pen' after serving the Lodge as Secretary for twenty years and handed the duties over to outgoing Treasurer Peter Brygan.

## The Earl of St Andrews.



I wonder how many of our members noticed that The MW Grand Master HRH The Duke of Kent appointed and Invested his son George Windsor, Earl of St Andrews as Senior Grand Warden at the recent annual Investiture at Freemasons' Hall.

The Earl of St Andrews was born in 1962. He was educated at Eton College (Kings Scholar) and Downing College, Cambridge University, where he read history.

After a period in HM Diplomatic Service during which he served in New York (at the UK Mission to the UN) and Budapest, he worked for a number of years in the antiquarian book business, including at Christies UK.

A part of my role as Provincial Almoner is to oversee the **Teddies For Loving Care (Wiltshire)** programme. It's a job that gives me no end of satisfaction as I know that providing a child with a teddy has far reaching and long lasting benefits.

The team overseeing **Teddies for Loving Care (Wiltshire)** perform their work with little if any fanfare, and I know they would not want it any other way. However, it's also the case that the support of Lodges, in particular your Lodge, is absolutely essential to the programme's success. It really isn't being over dramatic to say that without you there would be no **Teddies for Loving Care (Wiltshire)**.

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.

In the first four months of 2024 we have distributed 1,080 teddy bears and are on target to donate two thousand five hundred bears by the end of the year. We need to raise £6,000 just to meet the current demand, and we are always being asked to do more. Currently we only have funds to meet demand until the end of this year and we need your help to enable **Teddies for Loving Care (Wiltshire)** to continue its important work in helping a child to cope with trauma of being admitted to the Accident and Emergency Department of their local hospital.

**Teddies for Loving Care (Wiltshire)** is a unique charity as it is managed and funded solely by Wiltshire Freemasons - you, me, and our friends in every Craft Lodge and Royal Arch Chapter. I know you give generously to local charities and yet I'm asking you to treat **Teddies for Loving Care (Wiltshire)** as a very special case whenever you consider making a donation to a local cause. Thank you.



THANK  
**YOU**



**Lodge of Innocence & Morality No.9587**

**£500**

WILL HELP US TO BUY 200 TEDDIES FOR LOVING CARE



[www.wiltshirefreemasons.co.uk](http://www.wiltshirefreemasons.co.uk)



# The Grand Superintendent

An edited version of the Grand Superintendent's address to the 2024 Annual Convocation.

Companions, may I once again welcome you all to our Annual Convocation. For me this is, and has always been, a very special occasion, enabling our Chapters to come together and share the day with our distinguished guests, allowing me to thank you for a successful year and to thank our guests for their most generous hospitality when we have attended their Provincial Convocations. I trust today will be a most enjoyable and memorable occasion for us all.

Today we celebrate with those Companions receiving their first appointments and promotions in recognition of their contribution to the Royal Arch. As always I offer my sincere congratulations to you all. I am sure, that the new Provincial Team will match the enthusiasm and commitment of the outgoing team in their support of the Provincial Executive.

At this point I remind you that as deserving as these appointments and promotions are, with them comes an expectation of your future commitment to your Chapters; imparting your experience, knowledge and encouragement to support not only the members of your Chapter but also those non-attendees. They are every bit as important to the Royal Arch as your regular attendees.

Included in today's celebration, I congratulate those Wiltshire Companions who were promoted or appointed in Grand Rank, EComp Andrew Tiffin promoted to Past Assistant Grand Sojourner, and first appointments to Past Grand Standard Bearer to both Peter Davies and Roger Pounder, and Howard Jones as Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies.

I am sure by now we are all very familiar with the words, 'One Journey One Organisation', as well as, the 'Strategy for Freemasons 2022 and beyond' focusing on creating a thriving membership, a coherent organisation and community engagement. It is important to understand that the Craft and the Royal Arch is one organisation, therefore the strategy is as important to the Royal Arch as it is to the Craft. It is incumbent on every Companion to engage in its implementation. We must accept Freemasonry is changing, and we need to embrace that change, we can no longer live in the past.

We must focus and accept there is always a need for improvement, to do things differently, and to innovate. I am pleased to see many Chapters are now challenging themselves to spread the sharing of the ritual for the inclusion of more Companions, while at the same time acting out the ritual in the vault. This brings our ritual to life, creating greater understanding and a more memorable experience for the Candidate, not to mention a more inclusive team ethos with your members.

For those Chapters who may be thinking about how best you can move forward, please do not overlook the recently launched Archway, it is an intuitive tool and provides a framework to assist Chapters based on proven best practices. Should you need assistance please do not hesitate to request help from the Province, Companion David Clatworthy being our Single Point of Contact and lead.

In addition, there is so much more information available to us via the recently revamped Solomon website, and for those potential Candidates in our Craft Lodges please pass on the recently issued 'Discover More' booklet which I am sure will stimulate an increased interest in those considering joining the Royal Arch.

As mentioned earlier one of the key Strategies is a 'Thriving Membership', and yes, our Province is part of the Pro Grand Masters 'Membership Challenge'. Not only is this a Craft challenge, it also relates to the Royal Arch. We have heard from the Provincial Registrar and his report confirms we have once again made a net gain to our membership, with which I am delighted, and I thank you all for your continued hard work in promoting this wonderful Order.



# Address to Provincial Convocation (edited highlights)

We all know It is important to focus on new Exaltees, joining and re-joining members but let us not forget that by improving our members' experience, meeting their expectations, and increasing their enjoyment at our meetings we will reduce the number of resignations. Both of these aspects, recruitment and retention, can and will, significantly affect how successful we will be in meeting the 'Membership Challenge'.

Companions you are all aware that our Province is in Festival supporting the Masonic Charitable Foundation. We all know that our major charitable contribution is made through our Craft Lodges, I thank those individuals who have contributed and signed up to a Regular Payment Plan, as well as those Chapters who have generously donated to the Wiltshire 2028 Festival thus far.

The success of the Royal Arch Children at Christmas initiative is a result of the tremendous support of those members and their families who attend the luncheon, and those Chapters who have regularly supported this initiative. So, Companions it will come as no surprise that the collection at the end of our Convocation today will be for the Children at Christmas Initiative.

Companions, before I conclude I must thank the outgoing Provincial team for their hard work and commitment during their term of office, I am sure they will need no encouragement in continuing to support our Chapters. I thank the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Provincial Grand Principals EComps Andrew Tiffin and Roger Pounder, the Treasurer Larry Baldry and Lee Fuller, the Provincial Assistant Grand Scribe Ezra who are all stepping down today. They have served their respected offices with great dignity and total commitment to the Province, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

As a last note Companions, let's ensure we all focus on good communication, co-operation, and enjoyment whilst fully engaging with every level of our membership.



Mark Lovell

John Reid

Simon Ellingham

Richard Palmer



## ARCHWAY

Archway was officially launched at the Supreme Grand Chapter in November 2023. Provinces across the England and Wales have enthusiastically embraced the initiative, viewing Archway not merely as a separate project, but as an important element of the Membership Challenge and the 'One Journey - One Organisation' approach. In Wiltshire the highlights of the initiative can be explained thus:

- Executives from both the Craft and Royal Arch are working collaboratively to make Archway a success.
- Dedicated teams at both Provincial and Chapter level are driving Archway implementation.
- We have a Province wide communication plan, tailored to Archway.
- Archway QR codes feature on our Chapter Summons and other Provincial material.
- Senior Provincial officers are briefed to promote Archway activity.
- In October 2024 the Royal Arch will be promoting One Organisation - One Journey with a special presentation at the Chippenham Masonic Centre.

### FIFTY YEARS A COMPANION.

There are not many Companions who can lay claim to have been a member of the Royal Arch for over fifty years. St Aldhelm Chapter No.2888 member E Comp John Kerslake is one of that select group, and in recognition of his amazing achievement was the recipient of a very special certificate presented to him by the Grand Superintendent John Reid.

John (Kerslake, that is) was Initiated into St Aldhelm Lodge No.2888 on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 1971 and was Exalted in the Royal Arch on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 1974. It should come as no surprise that John joined St Aldhelm Chapter No.2888 or that apart from a short spell as a member of Chapter of rectitude No.335 he has steadfastly remained a St Aldhelm 'Freemason'.

Many congratulations John.







A CHANGE OF REGALIA BUT STILL RECOGNISABLE AS A ROYAL ARCH MASON



# Do we read or do we memorise?

Fred was waiting patiently in his favourite tavern for Charlie to appear after the Saturday shop. An apparition eventually emerged through the doors. A family-sized trolley heaped high with the supermarket's unmissable offers was apparently propelled by an elderly Father Time, sans scythe but prematurely bent with the gaunt and haggard look of one recently escaped the clutches of the week-end till queue.

Fred's friendly offer of a restorative 'half' was met, after just one sip, with the apparition's considered view that carpet cleaner should always have been kept in a stoppered bottle. Fred, never slow in these matters, accepted that something was clearly 'up'. His gentle enquiries of what, when, where and why punctured the dam.

The ensuing torrent centred on the need for the apparition to deliver a Second Degree Tracing Board in, the fates dictated, a disastrously few day's time. Nothing would apparently 'stick'. The apparition's outburst concluded with a plaintive query of why did everything in Masonry have to be learnt by heart?

Fred, normally helpful in these matters, rather insensitively offered Charlie (for the apparition was he) not the tears of brotherly compassion but a crisp synopsis of the history of Masonic memory. Starting with Schaw's Statute of 1598, Fred swiftly touched on the Lodge of Reconciliation's morph in December 1815 of all the Ancient and Modern lectures into the three playlets we know today. Although approved by Grand Lodge, those Gentlemen declined to authorise any printed version. The sentence '*I will not write those s., i., c., e., m., or otherwise them delineate...*' presumably had proved too troubling. The simplest advice would be to ignore any formal disclosure. They took it.

In 1823 enthusiastic members of the Reconciliation formed a new Lodge of Emulation, designed to teach visiting masons all that the Founders could recall from December 1815. Taking their cue from Grand Lodge – that 'secrets' should never be published – Emulation in turn declined to put anything into print until 1969, 150 or so years later. Even today each Master of Emulation still learns and delivers the three ceremonies entirely by heart.

## A despondent Charlie

Charlie, if not disgruntled by Fred's display of erudition, was clearly not yet fully grunted. '*That's yesterday's stuff, Fred. We now have the Emulation book. Why on earth do we have to learn it all by heart today? The BofC doesn't require it.*'

Fred paused. *Take Schaw's Masonic traditions demanding a trained memory in every Mason, Charlie, and Grand Lodge's reluctance to print a ritual. Don't they suggest to you that Great Queen Street still wants it learnt by heart and not simply read aloud?*

*'Fred, come on, join me in the real world. That was fine in the days when men had the time and educational expertise to learn the words. Today? How many boys still have to stand and recite a poem in front of the class at school? How many sit down today and refer to their iPhone rather than a book. We're used to having all that's relevant presented within the one concise news flash. As for learning the pages of a ritual for fun - come off it, Fred.'*

Fred paused, recognising a grain of truth in what Charlie had said.

Charlie however surged on with spirit. '*Mortgages - ever heard of 'em, Fred? Most couples both have to help pay them off. A long day at work or commuting and an evening helping with the kids homework or the household chores doesn't leave much room, energy or enthusiasm for tackling, say, the Charge After Initiation, does it now?*'



# Fred and Charlie say

Fred started to speak but Charlie swept on.

*'The net result, Fred, is that a chap on the ladder feels obliged to have a go. Most only have time to learn a small part of the WM's ritual - and that not necessarily well. The poor old Candidate then has to stand and listen to a Master as likely as not being prompted every paragraph, if not every sentence. The WM knows it's below his best and feels embarrassed; the Candidate listening to this double act between WM and prompter also feels embarrassed - both for them and for the creaky outfit he's joined; and those 'old stagers' on the back benches, still with pride in their Lodge, may simply reflect on the past and wonder why they came. Visitors may say how well it all went - but everyone knows it didn't.'*

Fred sat groping for a timely counter argument - without success.

The tsunami, oblivious, swept on. *It's time, Fred to rejoice that those who have the time and talent to learn the ritual properly will continue to do so. Others less gifted who reach the Chair should surely now just be allowed to read it. Rehearse it well, of course, but above all read it well. Master, Candidate, Lodge will sigh with relief and all will surely benefit.'*

## **Fred's turn...**

While Charlie paused for breath Fred seized his opportunity. *'Freemasonry is a system of morality taught in our three plays. To fully understand the words and glimpse the moral truths behind them the painstaking act of memorising our lines becomes indispensable. Reading them? The word will go in one ear and out the other. Another thing, if we allow one man to read, no one will make the slightest effort to learn. Why should they? We'll have lost our centuries-old tradition. Baby and bathwater. Nobody wins'. Fred added thoughtfully 'If a WM really tries and still can't remember his lines they can be delegated to someone else who can'.*

Fred then got into his stride. *'Reading your lines is a cop-out. If you can't sing, you don't join a choir; if you can't play an instrument you don't join an orchestra; if you can't memorise your lines then you don't join a drama club let alone an organisation whose primary aim is to teach morality through remembering its values. You can always find good mates elsewhere. Masonry's not unique in that.'*

Charlie began to open his mouth to protest but Fred raised an authoritative, silencing, finger. *'The great thing about Freemasonry is its team spirit. Everyone in a team putting on a ritual has to make an effort, everyone. Some may do it better than others - not everyone's a Harry Kane - but you're all made to feel part of a team. If even just one member reads his bit then the team spirit may go – pwht!'*

## **...and Charlie's**

Charlie now had a glint in his eye. *'Look, Fred old chap, you've told me often enough that the focus of our ritual should always be the Candidate and no one but the Candidate. Which is better for the Candidate? To listen to a well-read explanation of the Masonic story or to try to make sense of someone who clearly hasn't even grasped the words let alone their meaning?'*

Charlie continued. *'As I said, many in the Lodge will always have a gift for ritual and will take pride in learning and delivering a beautiful piece from the heart. If a busy WM can read it well the Candidate benefits both ways from a clear explanation of our traditions.'*

*'Another thing, Fred. You mentioned delegating the WM's ritual. There's a very real risk of the Lodge then becoming a drama club in which a small group of Past Masters each learns his own party piece and presents it for ever and a day. It stifles progression and, frankly, can become boring. Constant repetition does retention no favours.'*

## Fred and Charlie...

Fred sat quietly. He was a fair man. The persistence of Charlie's arguments troubled him. *'I admit, Charlie, that if we're to spread our net far more widely to increase numbers our Membership Officers can't afford to be too precious about a Candidate's ability to commit prose to memory. (Our Lodge has never actually rejected anyone for years and years.) Again, Charlie, in many Lodges most Masons only have one bite at the cherry of being Worshipful Master and we should make his year as pleasantly memorable as we can... even if this means making the ritual far more user-friendly.'*

*'It seems to come down, Charlie, to what role we see the Emulation ritual playing in future. Do we want it to deepen the moral understanding of just one man, the WM, by his memorising all the words? Or do we want to use it to create a near-flawless ceremony cementing a Lodge's brotherhood, harmony and pride by delegating its working to just a few talented 'actors' – doubtless impressing back-benchers as well as visitors?'*

Fred paused. *'Surely, Charlie, we want to use the occasion to put across to the Candidate all the benefits of Brotherhood and the beauty of Speculative Freemasonry in a way that's easiest for him to absorb. Emulation Ritual requires the WM to deliver the whole shebang from memory. If the WM is never ever going to memorise the ritual as Emulation intended, it cannot matter a fig to the Candidate whether the words are provided by the WM reading them himself or by delegating them to another PM. Give the WM the benefit, it's his Year.'*

Charlie added: *'Is there a bare minimum a WM should learn by heart?'* Fred replied: *'Of course. He should, in his Year, learn all the words to be delivered in, say, the Obligation, Signs or Secrets of the Degrees. That's precisely why he was elected. The moral pieces – the Charges and TBs - can still be delegated elsewhere as we do today. Let's just say he must learn everything when standing but he may read it - if he must - when seated.'*

*'To read or not to read? Was that not the Bard's question – but it's one well above my pay-grade',* smiled Fred. *'Grand Lodge has never sought ownership of the ritual. I suppose then it's up to each PrGM to decide what suits his Province best. He may feel that given the wide variety of Initiates joining today some selected reading by the WM (but only by the WM!) can make good sense. If he has a surplus of talented 'oldies' he may well opt for the status quo.'*

Fred and Charlie slowly made their way to the car park in a contented frame of mind. Problem posed, problem solved - the 'Old Firm' had again come to the rescue of their much-loved Freemasonry...

...or had they merely lit a fuse?

**Editor's note:** The issue of whether ritual should be learnt and recited, or read from the book has been the subject of much debate for the past fifty years. In present day society the reasons given for being unable to learn ritual vary from "I don't have time" to "I have a condition that makes it difficult for me to learn" through to "I don't see the need to learn stuff when I can read it on my smart phone" and yes, there are many variants in between. All of the reasons, and some of the excuses, carry a degree of weight, and for the individual they are perfectly valid. However, none of them actually address the core issue, which is that a man can be a Freemason without having to learn any ritual. As for whether a Brother who either can't or won't learn ritual can be the Master of the Lodge is another question altogether. Now, you may think that's too harsh, and yet very few would disagree that a person wouldn't be selected to play for the football, rugby or cricket team if he didn't attend training and was not able to perform to the level required. The same principle applies to a musician in the orchestra or band, and the actor who doesn't learn his lines. So why shouldn't the same principle apply to a Freemason? For most Brethren the journey from initiation to the Chair takes between seven and ten years, surely that's more than enough time to learn how to open and close the Lodge and to be able to conduct the First and Second Degree ceremonies?



# Welcoming a Visitor.

Contrary to the view expressed by well intentioned Brethren, there is no absolute right for a Freemason to visit any Lodge that he may choose. A Brother is eligible to attend (subject to Rule 127 BoC) but he is not entitled to attend. The admission of visitors and issues surrounding visitation is covered in the Book of Constitutions under Rules 125, and 126, the latter giving the Master the right to refuse a visitor admission but he cannot refuse a member the right to attend. Perhaps not that well known is that a visitor Brother is also bound to comply with the By-Laws of the Lodge he is visiting.

So, how does a Lodge satisfy itself that a Freemason who is 'unknown' to a member of the Lodge can be admitted to a meeting? The procedure to be followed is as set out in the second part of Rule 125 (a); this requires that "he be well vouched for after due examination." As I am sure you will recall, every Master upon being Installed also promises that "no visitor shall be received into your Lodge without due examination, and producing proper vouchers of his having been initiated in a regular Lodge." The proper vouchers would be the Brother's Grand Lodge certificate (which is why it should always be in your regalia case), or a letter showing the Brother is in good standing with any Lodges of which he is a member.

Who 'proves' or examines the visitor is also well established. That responsibility being delegated to the Junior Warden, who on being appointed and invested is told his duties include "the examination of Visitors, less through your neglect any unqualified person should gain admission to our assemblies." The examination could be as straightforward as asking him to demonstrate the signs pertinent to the degree the Lodge will be working in. I recall my first visit to a Wiltshire Lodge where I was not known, I was asked was to demonstrate the signs and words of the Third Degree and then the five points of entry - I struggled but got through.

Now to the Attendance Register\*. As you doubtless are aware, it is a 'requirement' (Rule 144 (ii) BoC) that every Lodge must maintain a record of attendees at a Lodge meeting, hence your secretary asking that details are printed legibly in the register. Furthermore the names of each attendee (but not those absent or offering apologies for their absence) must be shown in the Lodge Minutes for the meeting concerned. There is no requirement for a record to be kept of who introduces/brings a visitor to the Lodge, although almost all Attendance Registers have a space for that information.

Every Brother attending a Lodge meeting **MUST** enter:

1. Their name (legibly) in the Attendance Register
2. The name of their Lodge
3. The number of their Lodge
4. Their Masonic rank

and optionally

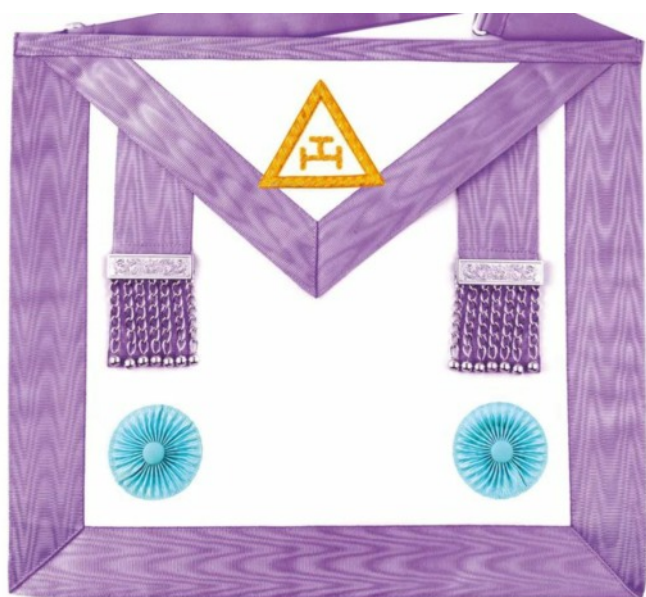
5. The name of the Brother that introduced them to the Lodge.

In the event the visiting Brother is unattached, he would provide the details of the last Lodge of which he was a member and the word UNATTACHED.

The main point to make about a visitor not known to the Lodge is that under no circumstances should they be permitted to be present in the Lodge unless and until the Master is satisfied as to his bona fides.

NB \*With the introduction of HERMES new guidance will be introduced for recording attendance and apologies.

# Nobody was April fooled....



A number of quite amazing April Fools posts appeared on X (formerly Twitter, and Facebook). My favourite was the post that suggested that One Organisation became a reality today (1<sup>st</sup> April) with the introduction of a new apron for RA Companions and Craft Masons. According to the post Freemasons were allowed to wear this unique regalia in their Chapter or Lodge. Of course we had to suggest that Companions ordered their new apron in time for Wiltshire's Annual RA Convocation in May. Although we did have a few 'enquiries' we are sure they were Brethren and Companion's just entering into the spirit of the day. Having said that, some members did express a liking for the new apron

## Are you free on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024?

Dr Ric Berman is the UGLE appointed Prestonian Lecturer for 2024.

He will be visiting Swindon Masonic Centre as the guest of Methuen Lodge No.8692 on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> October and you are invited to attend the Lodge meeting and hear Dr Berman deliver his lecture on The Second Grand Lodge: The Grand Lodge of Ireland, the London Irish & Antients Freemasonry



## METHUEN LODGE No.8692

**Dr Ric Berman FRHistS**  
THE PRESTONIAN LECTURE 2024

The Second Grand Lodge: The Grand Lodge of Ireland, the London Irish & Antients Freemasonry.

**TUESDAY 1ST OCTOBER 6.15PM**

Swindon Masonic Centre | The Planks | Swindon

contact Ian Priest: L8692@wiltshirefreemasons.org.uk



## Broade Forde Lodge No.8547

Members of Broade Forde Lodge No. 8547 enjoyed a wonderful evening with family and friends at recent 'White Table' event.

A special moment occurred when they made a donation of over £3,500 to Dorothy House Hospice. Proving beyond doubt the truth behind the statement "charity it's in a freemasons DNA."





Attending an Installation meeting provides many highlights, one of which is to see and hear the three addresses, the first to the Master, the second to the Wardens, and the third to the Brethren of the Lodge. It has to be said that the Presiding Officer's address tends to be overshadowed (even obliterated) by the thespian i.e. theatrical efforts of the Provincial Wardens. What I particularly enjoy is not knowing where the emphasis will be placed, it then comes as a surprise. However, it falls to the Junior Warden to utter those wonderful words "I trust therefore we shall have but one aim in view, to please each other and unite in the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness." It most certainly is, or should be the goal of every Freemason.

Deputy Provincial Grand Master Simon Leighfield was a guest at Lodge of Remembrance No.4037 to present Bro Wally Goldsmith (96) with a field promotion to PPrJGD

Deputy Provincial Grand Master Simon Leighfield was in attendance at Calley Lodge No.7525 to present Bro Dave Langton with a Provincial Grand Masters' Fifty Year service certificate.



A second year in the Chair for Bro Tony Eldridge definitely deserved a well done from Deputy Provincial Grand Master Simon Leighfield ably assisted by the Provincial Wardens and supported by Steve Bridge **PSGD**, **PAPrGM** and Lodge Secretary Ian Priest.





The Provincial Grand Master John Reid, and Simon Leighfield welcome Steve Lee who will be invested as Assistant Provincial Grand Master at the Annual Meeting in October  
*(P.S. Steve's Chapter jewel is hidden by his collar)*

### Important information.

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### Who's doing the representing?

I was slightly surprised to read in the Paper of Business for the June Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge that It has been represented to the Board of General Purposes that in an era when there is a far greater diversity of religions among the members of the Craft than at any previous time in its history, the total prohibition on holding meetings of Lodges (and Chapters) on Sundays is no longer sustainable. Now, I'm not sure about you but I must confess that was quite taken aback by the claim that keeping Sunday special is "not sustainable" by which I presume the authors mean, not able to be upheld or defended.

I don't think I have ever heard anyone query why Lodges don't meet on a Sunday let alone petition for a Sunday meeting. However, I am absolutely certain that treating Sunday as a special day is more than capable of being defended.

It is reported that the Board is aware that economic considerations may mean that for many venues it would not be viable to open for meetings on all seven days of the week. Having, however, given the matter due consideration, and presumably as a result of the undisclosed representations, it (the Board) has concluded that is nonetheless appropriate to grant power to the Grand Master (but only to the Grand Master) to give a dispensation for individual Lodges to meet on a Sunday. It envisages that such a dispensation might be for a single meeting or for all meetings of a Lodge.

The Board does not, however, recommend that Christmas Day or Good Friday should cease to be prohibited days. The question to be asked is why not? Easter Monday isn't a prohibited day despite it being recognised by many members of the Christian faith as being of greater importance than Good Friday. Strange but true.

**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.



# The rules on wearing regalia....

*“The regalia, clothing, insignia and jewels to be worn are as hereinafter prescribed, and no Brother shall be admitted into any meeting of the Grand Lodge, or of any subordinate Lodge, without the clothing appropriate to his rank under the Grand Lodge”.* Rule 239 BoC

“Why would anyone not want to wear the regalia to which they are entitled?” is the question that sparked the urge to write this short piece, but let’s clarify my intention. I don’t believe Brethren set out to deliberately disregard the rules on the wearing of regalia, and that includes the improper wearing of jewels, but due to misunderstanding the protocols or a simple ignorance of the rules, or even just receiving the incorrect advice, they have fallen into error. After all, who can claim to have read every rule in the BoC or Graham Redman’s excellent work on etiquette?



There are rules and then there is etiquette, where one stops and the other starts is often cause for debate but as a general rule common sense will inevitably prevail. A few Lodges have very distinctive aprons for the Master and his Wardens. These are ornamented with the emblem of the office in silver or white within a double circle, usually with the name and number of the Lodge. There is no rule that prohibits such aprons being worn outside of the Lodge to which they relate, but in practice the Master’s apron is the only one commonly to be seen elsewhere. The maxim here, is to make sure you

have the approval of the Lodge to wear the apron when visiting, never presume it to be a right.

One of the most common errors concerns the Past Master’s collar, and here it’s important to stress that it is not an Immediate Past Master’s Collar; there is no such collar in English Freemasonry.

Every Brother who has served a full year as Master of Lodge and has vacated the Chair on the installation of a new Master is not only entitled to, but he must wear the collar and jewel of a Past Master at all Craft meetings - until he is able to exchange it for a collar of a higher rank. Sadly, a Brother who resigns during his first term of office, or if the Lodge surrenders its Warrant during his tenure, loses the right to wear a Past Master’s collar until he completes a full year at a later date.

A similar fate awaits the Brother who joins a Lodge in the English Constitution from one outside it. That Brother, if he is a Past Master, must wear the apron of a Master but he cannot wear the collar and jewel of a Past Master until he has served as Master of a Lodge in the English Constitution. It might seem tough, even unfair, but it’s the rule.

A Provincial Officer who holds office in his Lodge must wear his dark blue collar beneath his Officer’s collar at all times. However, what he must not do, and it really is ‘bad form’ - is to fold the point of the collar backwards so that the jewel hangs through the ‘v’ of the Officer’s collar.

Another anomaly is that if a Brother holds more than one office in the Lodge he must wear both collars, if he is a Past Master or a Provincial Officer he must wear all three collars. Now, if the rule regarding a Past Master not being qualified to wear a Past Master’s collar might seem unfair, this one may seem positively bonkers, but it is the rule and we simply have to acknowledge that we have agreed to abide by them.

Finally wearing the correct regalia is not only a matter of observing etiquette, but also practicing courteous and proper respect. If you have been awarded Provincial Grand rank, or have served the office of Master of the Lodge it is only right and proper to wear the collar with which you have been invested **and which marks you out as a Past Master. To those who choose not to do so I would ask them “Why?”**

**Editor:** This item should be read in conjunction with the PrGM’s comment on page 3.

## 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](mailto:pc0@pglwilts.org.uk)

## Wiltshire 2028 Festival



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



[contact@wiltshirefreemasons.co.uk](mailto:contact@wiltshirefreemasons.co.uk)

**Q.** I would like to attend the Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge but Entered Apprentices and Fellow Craft Freemasons are not allowed to attend. Why is that?



**A.** I am glad to read that you would like to attend and I have some good news for you. However, let me first address your question. The rules regarding who can attend Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge are well established and as you might expect admission is restricted to Brethren eligible to attend. They are identified as Grand Officers (present and past) and the Master, present Wardens, and the Past Masters (if qualified under Rule 9, Book of Constitutions) of every Lodge under the English Constitution.

In addition Master Masons who, though not otherwise eligible, can apply to attend and obtain tickets for admission beforehand via the Provincial Grand Secretary. It's important to mention that Master Masons may attend but are not eligible to speak or vote.

The business of Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge is conducted in the Third Degree, as such a Freemason below the rank of a Master Mason cannot be admitted (it's no different to the situation at Provincial Grand Lodge, or when your Lodge moves to a higher Degree).

However, I did say that I have some good news for you which is that the team at Freemasons' Hall does recognise that many of our newer members would just love to attend a meeting and enjoy the experience of meeting in the Grand Temple. Plans are well advanced to make this possible and I know the Communication Team will provide details to Lodges as soon as everything has been finalised.

**Q.** I think I have seen my question answered before, but I can't find where it was. We have a Brother of high Masonic Rank who is joining us from a foreign constitution. Can he wear the apron and collar of a Past Master?

**A.** You are quite correct, this question has been asked and answered on a previous occasion, but is a good question and I am happy to confirm the process as set out previously.

First, it really is nice to welcome a Brother from a foreign constitution and I'm sure your Lodge will give him a warm Wiltshire welcome.

Secondly, the Brother will be entitled to wear the light blue apron of an Installed master with 'levels'. He will also be entitled to be referred to as Worshipful Brother. Under the rules, until he has served as Master of a Lodge under the English Constitution he cannot wear the collar and jewel of a Past Master.

While this may seem unfair and an outdated rule to apply, I'm sure the Brother in question will readily accede to the situation.



Just about everyone must have read or heard about The Membership Challenge, although coming hard on the heels of The Members' Pathway, Introducing Building Together, Archway, a revised Solomon, and not forgetting Hermes, it has to be said you could be forgiven for thinking that word spaghetti is the new culinary experience for the Freemason. However, while it might seem that way, I can assure you that its not intentional, it's just that so many people have lots of ideas they want to share and they are so desperate to get them out to you, so bear with them as we make a valiant attempt to deliver them.

The Membership Challenge is really quite easy to understand – in the simplest of terms we are being tasked to increase our net membership by a percentage of our existing members. I know that everyone will understand the need to do that, after all if we lose members and never replace them it won't be too long before we cease to exist. The same applies if we just maintain the status quo - we must go the extra mile and set out to increase our numerical strength beyond what is simply 'comfortable'.

In 2014 and 2015 the late Kevin Logan, and Des Morgan were tasked to conduct a 'state of the Province report' and to engage with Lodges on where we would be in 5, 10, 15 and 20 years' time if we were to (a) do nothing, or (b) increase our membership by a specific percentage year on year. The figures were quite striking and they presented to a number of Lodges, many of whom thought the figures were projecting a doomsday scenario when none existed. The reality is that many of the 'predictions' made at the time have indeed proven to be accurate. In 2024 we find ourselves in almost the exact position that 'doing nothing exceptional' forecasted we would be. We can't allow a trend to develop and The Membership Challenge is one way we can address the situation in a positive manner.

- The most important point of any form of change is to recognise that it has to come from a Lodge, yes you need to want to change. The Province can guide, it can assist, but what it will not do is impose change. All change must be by consent and with the agreement of the Lodge membership.
- Lodge committees make recommendations to the Lodge, it is the members who determine the future of the Lodge. Just as the Province cannot impose their will, neither can a coterie of Past Masters or senior Brethren. The total membership must be persuaded of the legitimacy of any proposal for it to be accepted, approved and implemented.
- Which brings me to address the individual member and ask: What sort of Lodge do you want? Will you invite guests? Can you introduce new members? What will you do to help the Lodge? Do you want to be an observer or a participant?

We can all look at our Lodge and see things that we would like to change but we don't necessarily know how to bring about change. Incidentally, not all change is good and therein lies the dilemma to the question, what change will benefit the Lodge?

Let me ask the senior members of the Lodge, have you asked the new members what they would like to see change (if anything) in the Lodge? Are they happy with the ritual, the meal, the overall atmosphere of the Lodge? Or is the prevailing view "we have our traditions and we are not prepared to change." That's okay if the Lodge is operating as a cohesive unit, in which everyone is happy and communicating happiness. The proof that is the case will probably be a growing membership, contented, active members, and lots of visitors wanting to experience a truly exceptional atmosphere.

The Membership Challenge isn't just a numbers game, it's about taking a holistic approach to making your Lodge one that people want to join. If you get that right the numbers will almost certainly take care of themselves.

**Derek Gibbens** MBA, FCII, DipPFS,  
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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 8<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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.



# Around the Province....



## (1) Downton Lodge No.9064

The Brethren of Downton Lodge conducted the Second Degree Passing ceremony of Bro Melvin Evans on behalf of Salisbury's Sarum Lodge No.5137. As it was also a Past Masters night, Bro David Little took the chair from WM Ray Webb and conducted the ceremony.

## (2) Corsham Lodge No.6616

A full Lodge Room witnessed Andreas Kalogerou being Installed into the Chair of King Solomon as Master of Corsham Lodge No.6616. Andreas was joined by many of his friends to celebrate the occasion and as is usual at Corsham the atmosphere was simply 'electric'.



## (3) Lodge of Remembrance No.4037

WM Matty Courtliff congratulates Bro Lewis Bird on being Raised to the Degree of a Master Mason.

## (4) Lodge of Friendship and Unity No.1271

WM Mark Duckett was joined by Lodge Secretary Andy Potter, and Lodge Almoner Derek Robbins to the Grand Lodge Quarterly Communication meeting at Freemasons' Hall, London.

There are two more opportunities to attend a QC meeting this year in September and December. The Christmas meeting is always a little special.







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As a Province we have our fair share of members who for a variety of reasons up sticks and leave the area. What may surprise you is that it falls to the Provincial Membership Officer, ably assisted by his Lodge counterpart to assist a Brother relocating to another part of the country to find a new Masonic home.

Members moving within England and Wales has long been an issue for Freemasonry but its only recently that proper attention has been given to the subject and help provide the necessary support to assist them to find a new Masonic home.

What won't surprise you is that Wiltshire has always been pro-active in supporting a Brother who moves to a new location. After all we do have a great deal of knowledge and experience especially in supporting our members who serve in the Armed Forces and who are liable to be posted or deployed, often at short notice and with little if any knowledge of how to connect with the membership team of the area they are moving to. However, it's not just the military who are required to move with their job.

The North of the Province has employers who are not just national companies but also international, plus Swindon is the centre for the seven research organisations under the umbrella of UK Research and Innovation. While staff from organisations and companies are given first class support in finding somewhere to live, advice on schools, doctors, dentists, churches and even the location of local leisure facilities, there isn't any help to find the nearest Masonic Hall. That's where the membership team come in.

Wiltshire has adopted what it feels is a simple approach to the Member Migration Process..

**Step 1.** If you're moving or you know a member is moving - tell your Lodge Secretary or tell someone.

**Step 2.** Ask the member for permission to start the Member Migration Process.

**Step 3.** The Member Migration Process is started by filing an online form.

**Step 4.** The online Member Migration Process form is sent automatically to the PGMO.

**Step 5.** The PGMO assesses the form and forwards it to the PGMO in the receiving Province.

**Step 6.** The receiving PGMO allocates the 'migrant' member to a Lodge in the Province.





WILTSHIRE FREEMASONS



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# Should Freemasonry embrace the constantly

A national newspaper recently published an article under the headline "Can William keep the Royal Family relevant?" For many the question might seem preposterous. However, numerous surveys suggest that the number of people, particularly among the under fifties, who want a monarchy is at a record low. So, perhaps the question is perfectly valid.

In 2015 the then newly elected Synod of the Church of England met to discuss the decline in membership in doing so they sought the answer to this question "How can the Church make itself relevant again?" Despite its best efforts to become 'relevant,' recent membership numbers suggest only 14% of the population claim any form of attachment to the established Church.

Freemasonry hasn't been immune to a dose of critical self-examination as evidenced by the UGLE commissioning a report titled 'The Future of Freemasonry' – published in March 2012. As you can guess one of the prime questions being asked was "Is Freemasonry still relevant?"

At the time of publishing the report, the then Grand Secretary opined that Freemasonry was indeed relevant – he also offered the view that "Freemasonry in the twenty-first century has become an amalgamation of the old and the new, of tradition and innovation, and therefore fits comfortably into the modern world." A bold claim that was supported by a membership claimed to be 250,000. Ten years later it was 150,000 – a serious setback when you consider the repeated claim that Freemasons are the second largest charitable giver after the National Lottery (*a claim incidentally not endorsed by the Masonic Charitable Foundation*), contributing an average of £30 million annually to worthy causes. It seems that Freemasons can't even buy a member, and if being relevant is measured by membership numbers it's obvious Freemasonry is not quite irrelevant but it's not necessarily as relevant as we all thought.

In its introduction the Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC) quotes the Grand Secretary on 'his vision' of the direction Freemasonry should now be moving in order to demonstrate its true role and relevance in contemporary society. This vision is not new in its character, indeed similar visions have been articulated over many years as many have sought to make Freemasonry relevant. Unfortunately, while the Grand Secretary lays claim to Freemasonry being "arguably more relevant today than it has ever been." the bold rhetoric simply doesn't hold water if relevancy is measured by popularity and membership numbers.

The changes proposed in the report and enacted by Freemasonry were largely managerial, geared towards efficiency and performance, arresting decline, and increasing membership. The so-called business model, fronted by a chief executive, appeared to be underpinned by a single objective – the numerical growth of the institution. Little wonder that the programmes put in place were developed to address an ageing membership and a lack of new arrivals. Who can forget the media headline - 'Out with the old boy's network... in with the millennials and vegans.'

The problems of poor attendance and falling membership has exercised Freemasonry for over fifty years (some might say, even longer.) Many of the initiatives being talked about today were in vogue in the 60s, 70s and 80s. The advocates of change are enthusiastic but often fail to appreciate the essence of Freemasonry. They are usually impatient of ceremonial and tradition and have a great desire to streamline (by which they mean reduce) the ritual practiced in the Lodge, the teaching of morality, and to increase the social aspect.

In 2023 the UGLE celebrated the tercentenary of the publication of the first Book of Constitutions. Is it time for a root and branch examination of the content and bringing it up to date? After all, even the Church of England recognised that obsolete medieval laws and the requirement to read marriage banns had little relevance in the modern-day church, so changed them.



Institutions such as Freemasonry, the Church, and the Monarchy have engaged in what many would describe as serious navel gazing to determine whether they are doing enough to make themselves relevant; what they never appear to do is question whether what they do will ever be enough to persuade a disinterested, disillusioned, or disapproving audience of their relevance.

There are those who contend that Freemasonry is outdated, and believe its survival depends on it becoming 'relevant' to the modern era, but is being relevant really key to having a future? Moreover, if 'being relevant' is interpreted as meaning to be acceptable, or to be an organisation people respect and relate to, other questions must be asked and answered. How does an organisation such as Freemasonry make itself acceptable, respectable, and relevant in a way that attracts men to join? and does being relevant really mean Freemasonry must adopt the latest social doctrines, and trends and promote minority issues in order to be seen as being on message?

Those same voices perpetuate the notion that because something is old it has passed its usefulness, and while it is a fact that Freemasonry is largely static and impervious to passing fads and fashion, its perceived weakness has indeed proved to be its strength and has allowed it to remain alive and strong. It has resisted attempts to embrace what the Book of Constitutions refers to as "the constantly changing doctrines of the outside world" on the basis that taking such a position would sow the seeds of discord; something The Grand Lodge recognised in 1938 and again in 1949.

It now appears that in its overwhelming desire to 'be relevant' – and believing being relevant as key to having a future, the fraternity has moved from a position to which it claimed a 'rigid adherence' and is now prepared to not just respect the constantly changing doctrines of the outside world but to actively promote and support them. In doing so they can claim to be embracing Diversity, Inclusivity and Equity while at the same time sowing the seeds of discord their predecessors were so anxious to avoid.

Others appear to believe the route to acceptability is to present Freemasonry as a leading charity; annual donations of £30 million to charities and worthy causes should surely lead the organisation to be considered respectable. Sadly, despite the charitable support Freemasons make locally, nationally, and even internationally, convincing its critics that the fraternity is a force for good is still very much a work in progress.

For many members, the twin obsessions of numbers and charitable giving are not conducive with their reasons for becoming Freemasons. Again, let me refer to the words of the former Grand Secretary who in 2012 said "You will find that talking to members, the easiest thing [for them to] talk about is charity. Yet they didn't join to give to charity..." So why do men join the Craft? The 2012 Future of Freemasonry report answered the question. "The principal reason for becoming a Freemason was the widened friendship network and a strong sense of social bonding which, they believed the Lodge would provide." Unsurprisingly to me and many others, the ritual aspects that distinguish Freemasonry from Lions International and Rotary was also cited as enhancing the social experience.

However, it's not just an external audience to which Freemasonry must appeal.

I have no doubt that the peculiar or special nature of Freemasonry is a more than attractive proposition to the man with an enquiring mind, who is prompted to become a Freemason by a favourable opinion preconceived of the Institution, a general desire of knowledge, and a sincere wish to make himself more extensively serviceable to society. Becoming a Freemason is something that men aspire to, and Freemasonry is an organisation that they want to be part of and in which they are willing to participate.

## Provincial Grand Lodge of Wiltshire

of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of England



RW Bro John C Reid

Provincial Grand Master

VW Bro Simon R Leighfield **PGSwdB**

Deputy Provincial Grand Master

W Bro Philip J Still **PSGD**

Assistant Provincial Grand Master

July 2024

Dear Sir and Brother,

By command of the Provincial Grand Master for Wiltshire the Annual Meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge will be held in the Lansdown Hall, The Civic, Trowbridge under the Banners of Gooch Lodge No. 1295, Corsham Lodge No. 6616 and Lodge of Brothers in Arms Lodge No. 9540 on **Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2024 at 2.30 pm.**

All Present and Past Provincial Grand Officers, Masters, Past Masters and Wardens of the Province are summoned to attend. Master Masons are invited to be present.

Yours sincerely and fraternally

Robert J Evans

**Provincial Grand Secretary**

1 The Grove

Warminster

BA12 8QL

Telephone 01985 214 874

Brethren are to wear dark Lounge Suits or Morning Dress with full dress Regalia (no gauntlets) and are requested to be in their seats in the Lansdown Hall by **2.15 pm**. It is the wish of the Provincial Grand Master that members wear the Provincial Tie.

Lunch (11.45 am for 12) will be available in the Usher Suite for Brethren and their Masonic Guests, subject to seats being available. Lunch is £35 per head which includes wine. Bookings may be made using the online link [BOOK HERE](#) and payments may be made to Sort Code 23-05-80, Account Number 43153161 (please use your Lodge number and name as a reference, eg 1234Bloggs). Alternatively, bookings with remittance (giving name, initials, rank, Lodge number and any dietary requirements) can be sent to J H Deane Esq, 10 West Park Road, Corsham, SN13 9LN. Cheques to be made payable to 'Provincial Grand Lodge of Wiltshire'. Bookings must be made as soon as possible but no later than **Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2024**.

The **Provincial Committee** will meet at **The Masonic Hall, Trowbridge**, at **7 pm** on **Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2024** to receive the accounts of the Provincial Grand Treasurer, to consider the disposal of funds and to transact any other Masonic business.



We might dream of a world where there are no rules, but how practical would it be? Most organisations operate according to a set of rules and it should come as no surprise that not long after its formation in 1717 Freemasonry recognised the importance of a framework that gave legitimacy in a tradition based society. The 1723 Constitutions set out the principles of Freemasonry and while there have been amendments and updates, the rules set out in the current *Book of Constitutions*, and its companion booklet titled *Information For The Guidance Of Members Of The Craft* form the basic law of the Fraternity. that regulates all Lodges and Freemasons.

However, there is another set of rules that all Freemasons are required to observe and submit to. These are the By Laws of the Lodge and under Rule 136 of the Book of Constitutions every Lodge has the power of framing By Laws for its government. This power is not quite as flexible as a Lodge might suppose. The UGLE issues a model set of By Laws that over time has become less of a model and more of an absolute requirement, with little if any room for flexibility. Indeed, it might be said that only a strict conformity to the model By-Laws will see a Lodge's By Laws being approved on behalf of the Grand Master by the Provincial Grand Master, who may approve By Laws or any alteration that conform to the Model By Laws from time to time issued on behalf of the Grand Master. In every other case (when the By Laws do not conform to the model they must be approved by the Grand Master. The Province will not submit a By Law amendment that does not conform to the model By Law as set out by UGLE.

Upon being Initiated and welcomed into Freemasonry every new made Brother is given a copy of the Book of Constitutions, and a copy of the Lodge By Laws. Rule 138 declares that by an acceptance of the copy of the By Laws the Brother agrees to a strict observance and submission to them.

Contrary to some commentators the rules and laws of Freemasonry are not designed to impede the work of the Lodge, in fact it's quite the reverse, and it's for this reason the Provincial Grand Master is inviting every Lodge to review its current By Laws and where appropriate to bring them up to date.

Fourteen Lodges have taken the opportunity to make amendments ranging from a change in the number of meetings, reducing the number of days on which the Lodge meets, and clarifying whether to continue offering Country Membership. Why is this important? In two months time the Province will implement the new HERMES system and this will require that data relating to meeting dates is 100% correct.

To assist Lodges, the Province is offering advice on useful notes that can be appended to the By Laws and used to highlight any traditions of the Lodge.



**Important:** In addition the Province has set out a common format that should be used in the production of printed copies of the By Laws. Secretaries are reminded that Rule 138 BoC requires that every member is supplied with a printed copy of the By Laws of the Lodge. Details of the format, and assistance in compiling Lodge By Laws can be obtained from the Provincial Communication Officer.

**NB.** The Book of Constitutions shall be referred to on every occasion for the guidance of the affairs of the Lodge. By-Laws being only intended to provide for such matters as are not settled by the Book of Constitutions.

# The Pro Grand Master speaks out.

You are all familiar with the usual myths, misconceptions, and innuendos which are trotted out and it is a matter of profound regret that they continue to be used so readily by a few journalists. More recently there have been two recurring themes from different journalists. The first is the claim that Freemasonry in this country is a male only activity and therefore inherently wrong, non-inclusive and misogynistic. The second is, once again, a focus on the alleged lack of transparency relating to Freemasonry and yet another push to require full declaration of our membership.

Brethren, we have all had enough of this fake narrative and we should state clearly and unambiguously what Freemasonry is. We have a proud tradition as a secular, non-religious, non-political, lawful, and law-abiding activity in the United Kingdom, as it is elsewhere in the world. Freemasonry is proud of its history of inclusivity and for the last three centuries, we have welcomed members from all walks of life, regardless of religion, ethnicity, sexuality or socio-economic background. Across the world, most nights, in Freemasons' Lodges, these groups of people come together to enjoy their Freemasonry, united in their commitment to our core values, articulated as Integrity, Friendship, Respect and Service.

These values are based on long-established Enlightenment values and Freemasonry has fundamental ideals including liberty, tolerance, constitutional government, and a meritocratic society. Our members are strongly encouraged to play an active and positive role in the communities where we live, through service by giving our time, skills, and expertise to local organisations, as well as supporting financially local charities.

You are all aware, Brethren, that in this country there have been for more than a century two Grand Lodges where membership is exclusively for women. These Grand Lodges adhere to the same principles and values I have already mentioned. We are fortunate that we enjoy a positive and constructive relationship with both the Women's Grand Lodges, as do they with us, and we co-operate, and indeed co-ordinate, on those matters which are of common interest to us all for the good of Freemasonry.

We are also all firmly agreed that none of us wishes to extend that co-operation to the work done within our Lodges. We all wish, as do our members, for our Lodges to remain exclusively male or female. This is no different to almost every major sport in this country. It is also consistent with one of the fundamental rights previous generations fought to maintain for us all, that of Freedom of Association.

In order to establish this beyond any reasonable doubt, I am delighted to tell you that a joint statement confirming this position has been issued by the three Grand Lodges. This is a first for both the Women's Grand Lodges and the United Grand Lodge of England and I am sure we will continue to build on this approach as we stand up to the misrepresentation and prejudice from which Freemasonry suffers.

I now wish to address the perennial issue of the demand for a declaration of Masonic membership. Freemasonry is, of course, usually the only organisation selected for such demands, all naturally, in the name of transparency.

As many of you will know, in 1799 the Government of William Pitt the Younger, in the face of the turmoil arising from the wars with Revolutionary France, passed The Unlawful Societies Act. This Act banned a number of radical, even subversive, societies but Freemasonry was not banned. Instead, an obligation was placed on every Lodge to provide a list of its members to the Clerk to the Local Magistrates each year. This requirement remained in force for almost 170 years until it was abolished, as being unnecessary and authoritarian, in 1967 as part of the Criminal Justice Act introduced by the then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins.



# The Joint Statement.

I think it appropriate we should all remember this part of our history when faced by demands for a blanket declaration of membership, which should be seen as both unnecessary and oppressive. Especially as, nowadays, it is often only Freemasonry where this is deemed to be necessary, whereas in the more immediately perilous circumstances of 1799 it was decided by Parliament to be unnecessary.

We should all remember that such demands would breach existing, long-established legislation in the United Kingdom and, indeed, elsewhere. Freedom of Association and a right to a private life is protected for Freemasons just as it is for individuals who are members of trade unions, political parties, religious organisations, the Round Table, football, rugby or even golf clubs. I can assure you, Brethren, we will be robust in tackling all such attempts to discriminate against Freemasons.

Brethren, you may have noticed that I am concerned, not to say angered, at yet another wave of ill-informed articles, pushing well-worn and plain wrong myths, prejudices, and often malicious innuendos. My fellow Rulers and I are determined we will be firm in dealing with them. We all will support strongly the Grand Secretary and the Communications teams as they respond to any more ill-informed or prejudiced articles. Enough is definitely enough!

## **Joint statement made by UGLE, the OWF, and the HFAF.**

Some 300 years ago the Grand Lodge of England published the Constitutions of the Free Masons which was adapted into the Constitutions of the new United Grand Lodge of England ("UGLE") in 1815.

These same Constitutions were adopted in 1908 by the Honourable Order of Ancient Masonry, which decided in 1920 to restrict admission to women only, and by 1935 was an exclusively female Grand Lodge. In 1958 the name was changed to The Order of Women Freemasons' ("OWF"). In addition in 1913 the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons ("HFAF") was formed, also, exclusively for women and it remains so today one hundred and eleven years later.

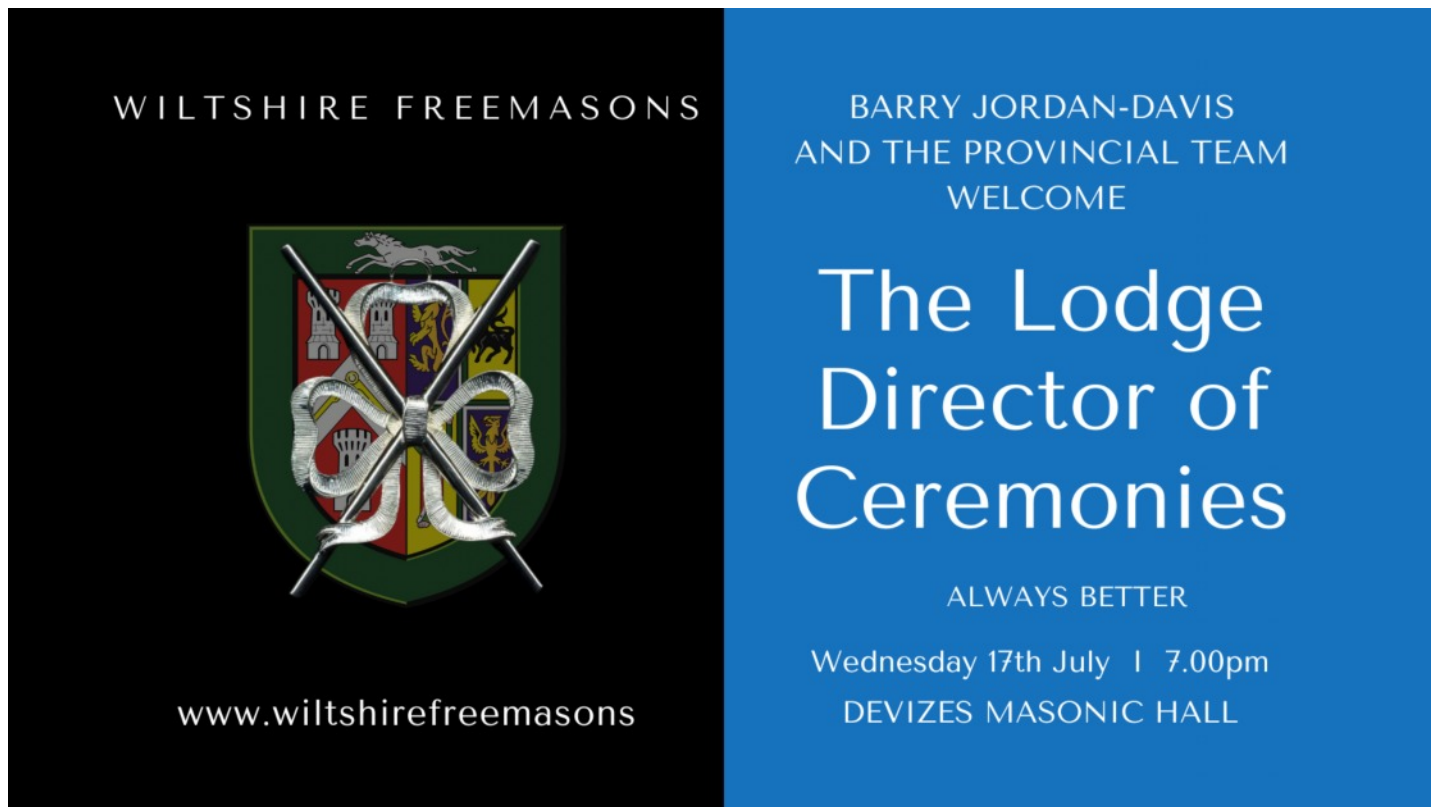
Both organisations still operate today and, together with UGLE, follow the same rules and regulations and promote integrity, friendship, respect, and service. UGLE is the largest and the oldest of the orders of Freemasonry in England and Wales and fully collaborates and shares premises with both the female Grand Lodges. All three Grand Lodges have been involved in Open House London at Freemasons' Hall in recent years to showcase both male and female Freemasonry as well as taking part in joint activities up and down the country, for example as part of the Universities Scheme or attending major meetings. There is much local cooperation throughout the country.

Neither OWF nor HFAF has any desire or intention to change their exclusively female membership, and their members value the practising of Freemasonry in a safe and single sex environment. This is supported by UGLE. Both Women's Orders are entirely supportive of the UGLE remaining an exclusively male organisation. Such an approach is not uncommon in other aspects of life, for example sports teams, and is entirely consistent with the principles of freedom of association so fundamental to the way of life in this country.


All three Grand Lodges will continue to work together to remove misconceptions and myths, as well as tackling prejudice, about Freemasonry which is a secular, inclusive and law-abiding activity in the United Kingdom. Its members are strongly encouraged to play an active and positive role in the communities where they live, through service by giving their time, skills and expertise to local organisations, as well as supporting local charities with donations.

# Meet the Director of Ceremonies.

An opportunity to meet the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies and the Provincial team for 2025, to review the past year and to discuss 'going forward'. As part of the evening the Provincial team will be pleased to answer any questions on protocol, procedures and the general duties and responsibilities of the Lodge Director of Ceremonies. If you have a question and want to submit it prior to the meeting please email to [contact@wiltshirefreemasons.co.uk](mailto:contact@wiltshirefreemasons.co.uk) or click on the image below.



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