

SPEECH TO PGL – 15th OCTOBER 2020

We now move on Brethren to Item 11 which is my address. When we received instructions from Grand Lodge as to the permitted agenda for this meeting, it did say at this item ‘short address’. I will leave to you to decide whether I have complied with their requirements.

It is indeed the fifth time I have had the honour of addressing Provincial Grand Lodge and when I did so last year, I could never have imagined the current circumstances in which we find ourselves, and the effect it has had on the practice of our beloved Mark masonry, but as they say “cometh the hour cometh the man” and there are so many examples of individual kindness to others which have come to my attention –for example :-

- * distribution of 4000 visors to nurses in care homes**
- * packing and delivering food for hospitals and medical facilities**
- * support to a fellow mark mason and his ill wife in lockdown**
- * helping and supporting 40-50 people with Parkinsons Disease by keeping in touch and providing speech therapy via Zoom**

The list goes on and on....

But there are also those who have tried to keep masonry alive. Some determined individuals have decided to have meetings whether in the flesh or via computer all within the rules, but we must also respect those who quite rightly think the risk is too great to meet or are prevented from getting out. We do have to compliment and commiserate with our Lodge Secretaries around the Province who have had an ever changing raft of regulations to comply with. Also thank you to those who in their Lodges have organised Zoom meetings or WhatsApp groups to keep people in touch.

As a Province we held a Covid Appeal and I thank all brethren who have supported that. Over £2500 was raised and will be split between the three Childrens Hospices in the Province.

One of the casualties of the restrictions is that we have not been able to present 60 and 50 year membership certificates and so I would like to mention those individuals who have lost out, namely, W.Bro Colin Hutchison and R.W. Bro. Bill

Whittall 60 years and R.W. Bro. Bill was also to receive one for 60 years in RAM, as well as W.Bro. John Tewson 50 years. Congratulations to you all brethren – I hope we can celebrate appropriately when restrictions end.

Also our travelling keystone has become stuck at South Shropshire Lodge. Again when circumstances permit I will personally donate appropriate refreshment to the next successful challengers to get it moving again.

We must not forget we did have an active masonic life up to March and we had two very successful Full Provincial visits, firstly to Talbot Lodge on 27th November and then to St Bartholomew RAM Lodge on 21st January to celebrate their Centenary, which they did in style, and we were very honoured to have present RW Bro Stephen Davison, Assistant Grand Master, who told me he thoroughly enjoyed the evening.

We also had a very successful Childrens Christmas Party with a goodly number of children present and a good time was had by all and I thank the outgoing Overseers for making it such a success. I regret to announce brethren the one scheduled for 12th December this year has had to be cancelled.

Also before lock-down the DPGM and APM along with Darren Coleman-Heald of the Mark Benevolent Fund battled through the floods in Shropshire to present £15000 to the 'Climbing Out' charity illustrating again our charitable ethos. We have just been notified of a further grant of £5000 from the MBF to a carers charity in Staffordshire.

It was also good to note that we had a number of Appointments and Promotions in Grand Lodge. W.Bro Mario Rizzardi was reappointed Grand Organist, and Roy Lees was promoted to PGJO which entitles him to the style of V.W. Brother. There were three appointments also announced – W.Bro. Dennis Hill our Asst PGM and W.Bro. Tom Fulton both became P.A.G.D.C.s and W.Bro. Tony Ford as P.G. Std B. It was a great tragedy that shortly after these announcements Tony succumbed to the Corona virus.

More recently it has been announced W.Bro. Alan Howls and W.Bro. Max Pipe are to be appointed to RAMGR in December along with our old friend W.Bro. Mike Daniels, now from Devonshire.

On a sad note I have to report that Eccleshall Lodge No 1827 handed in its Warrant to me on 14th August this year, because of falling numbers and support. I will be holding the warrant in abeyance, which I am permitted to do for up to three years, in case there is any new Lodge wishing to start in this Province. Watch this space Brethren!

The membership committee has continued to work to increase our membership and the 'Making our Mark' magazine has been regularly circulated. I would like to thank them all for their efforts, but especially R.W. Bro. Ian Dingwall who has worked incredibly hard, and who is retiring as Chairman today. He is to be succeeded by V.W. Bro Ian Smith.

Finally, a few thank-yous. Thank you to the Executive for their patience and forbearance since March. Especially can I thank our Provincial Secretary, who along with our Provincial DC, have navigated their way through all the twists and turns of the emerging regulations. Also to the Provincial Secretary who has had a harder job than usual in arranging this meeting. Also thank you to W. Bro. David Purslow who has allowed us to use his advanced Zoom facility for this meeting.

Brethren, we are living in very difficult times and it is quite easy to get depressed about the situation. However we are all very fortunate to be members of a fraternal organisation which has been through dark days before. The lack of ability to have social contact, illustrates all the more the importance of what masonry, and especially Mark masonry, adds to our lives. That and that alone should keep us together. I am well aware of all the contacts we have been making with each other – therein lies the hope for the future.

Keep safe and God bless and keep you all.