

The CHAPTER

Scribe

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Our 150th Anniversary

Our 150th Anniversary year went off very well with a number of well supported special events culminating in a memorable Dinner at the York Racecourse in late November.

The York Racecourse will be the future venue for Provincial Grand Chapter. This year it will be on September 10th - the only date available at the Racecourse on a Saturday in 2005. For future years dates have been booked towards the end of September. The Grand Superintendent has decided that the foreshortening of the present "active" Provincial Officers year cannot be accepted and that they will complete the previously arranged events for September and October 2005 as planned rather than having them taken over at short notice by the new group in September.

It will be sad to break a 28 year happy association with York University. However, the newly introduced hire charges brought about by the University having hived off their commercial activities to a separate Company were unsustainable as was the proposal to increase lunch charges from £18 to £25 per head. Our friends in the Mark Degree have been using the Racecourse successfully for many years and have kindly offered to assist

us to settle into the new venue giving us the benefit of their experience.

The happy state of inter-Order relations in the Province was further underlined when Michael Carr, Inspector General for the Ancient and Accepted Rite in this Province readily agreed to move their District meeting from September 10th to later in the month to enable us to accept the only vacancy at the Racecourse.

Sadly we shall be obliged to accept higher rental costs than we had previously enjoyed at the University albeit less than half of their proposed new charge of £4700 plus VAT. This will put great strain upon our finances and necessitate an increase in Provincial dues. Racecourse lunch charges are, however, much lower than those offered now by the University and in many people's opinion substantially better.

We are, of course, obliged by Supreme Grand Chapter Regulation 37 to hold an annual meeting of Provincial Grand Chapter. In a

sense we are victims of our own success in this respect. Turnout to our meetings is always a surprise to guests from other Provinces many of which can comfortably accommodate their meetings in one of their own Masonic Halls.

The good news about our meeting in September is that we shall be honoured by the presence of the Second Grand Principal ME Comp Iain Ross Bryce. Whether, with a new venue to contend with the Provincial Grand Scribe E and the Provincial Director of Ceremonies share the view that this is "good news" is debatable but for the rest of us it will undoubtedly add lustre to what is invariably a pleasant occasion.

As last year it is the intention of the Grand Superintendent to invite all new exaltees during the previous year to be present and he hopes Chapter Principals will encourage them to take up the invitation.

Strategic Working Party on the Royal Arch

Following the publication and approval of the SWP Report the Grand Superintendent decided to appoint a small working party under the chairmanship of E Comp Bruce Harrison to advise upon measures that might be taken to ensure the smooth introduction of the required and optional changes to our ways of working on a consistent basis throughout the Province. He was, therefore, surprised to discover that this intention had been pre-empted by Supreme Grand Chapter writing with instructions on the matter directly to each individual Chapter. "To discover" is the right way of putting it as neither he nor the Provincial Grand Scribe E were included in the mailing.

This pre-emption is already causing problems of inconsistent application of the SWP proposals as individual Chapters read different interpretations into the instructions and proposals given therein. The Grand Superintendent believes that there is still need for some Provincial guidance to our Chapters if we are not to find ourselves at odds with each other about what is and what is not intended by the changes.

Without wishing to pre-empt advice he hopes shortly to receive from his Working Party, there are several key points on which he offers his own thoughts.

1. We shall need a new Chapter address to

be produced since the SWP have forbidden any employment of the term "completion of the Third Degree" as a descriptor of the need to be a Royal Arch Masons before having fully appreciated the significance of the Master Masons degree. Several other points of detail will need to be amended also.

2. The letter requires Chapter to make certain alterations to their ritual and practice. These are NOT negotiable. There can be no "but we have always done it that way in our Chapter" excuses. We have been instructed to make certain changes and must do so.

3. It is the permissive variant to enable Companions who have not been through the Craft Chair to be elected to the Royal Arch chairs which gives him most misgivings. Whilst absolutely approving of the measure in general terms Grand Superintendent is concerned about its application in specific cases. It is imperative that Chapters should be quite certain that a Companion so elected has the competence and breadth of knowledge to do so. To this end he feels it vital that a person to be elected can be relied upon to perform the intellectually demanding ritual and procedures of the Royal Arch in a proper manner. It is widely known in the Province how strongly the Grand Superintendent disapproves of Companions using rituals books in Open Chapter (or any other

sort of script for that matter). It will be essential to be convinced by the performance of a Companion - as Sojourner for example - in carrying out work in Open Chapter that he will add dignity to the proceedings by competent performance. In general he does not feel that a Companion should be so elected without having had a number of years in regularly attending and working membership of his Chapter. He does not feel that less than five years in such working membership will be sufficient to ensure the maintenance of standards for one lacking the undoubtedly valuable experience of managing a Craft Lodge successfully as Master. Whilst he has no powers in the matter according to the SWP he does hope that Chapters will seek his advice - and be prepared to

accept it ! - in cases where there is any doubt.

4. The Grand Superintendent certainly hopes that all Chapters will adopt the sensible permission to truncate the Installation readings and, indeed all of the other options in respect of the lectures and new passages of ritual proposed. Shorter, brisker, meetings in which the whole Chapter can take part will surely work to retain the interest and enthusiasm of Companions.

Further amplification of this general advice will be forthcoming when his Working Party reports but, in the meantime, he hopes Chapters will be prepared to operate in the spirit of that given above.

Annual Report

There was an impression that the request for an Annual Report from Chapters last year was a "one off" for the 150th anniversary year. Not so! Chapters have received a pro-forma for this year for presentation to the Grand Superintendent by their MEZ on September 10th. A couple of Chapters clearly resented Grand Superintendent's requirement for the submission of a Report last year - and said so rather forcibly in one case! He is, of course, entitled to request whatever information from Chapters he deems necessary and there is a regulatory requirement to supply it.

The majority of Chapters produced excellent and encouraging reports which have added greatly to his knowledge of the achievements and points of difficulty experienced in individual Chapters. It was gratifying to see that task carried out so carefully and intelligently in almost all cases.

The Grand Superintendent's desire to have an Annual Report was not capricious or merely designed to impose further Provincial burdens upon hard working Officers. He himself is required to produce an Annual Report to Supreme Grand Chapter each January. Without the detailed information provided by your Reports the substantially greater demand for specific information embodied in the 2004 Supreme Grand Chapter requirement would have been impossible to fulfil. He also feels it important that each Chapter has a regular opportunity to discuss and debate their progress - or lack

of it - amongst themselves which is why he asked for these Reports to be discussed and approved in Open Chapter.

It was disappointing to find that several Chapters were still unwilling to appoint Charity Steward and Almoner to their list of Officers. The Grand Superintendent finds the reason given "this is dealt with by the Craft Officers" unconvincing. A little less than half of our Craft Lodges do not have an associated Chapter. Some Chapters ostensibly associated with a Craft Lodge of the same name have the majority of their members in other Lodges. How can the Principals and Scribes E of such Chapters be so certain that the Craft Charity Stewards and Almoners are carrying out their duties successfully in those other Lodges. More pointedly how do they know that Companions who are not members of Craft Lodges in this Province (and there are many) are being properly looked after.

The offices of Charity Steward and Almoner in Craft Lodges are onerous ones often difficult to fill. At very least by appointing such Officers in Chapters they can become working assistants to their colleagues in the Craft Lodges and even obtain useful experience to become their successors. Fulfilling these Offices successfully in Chapter might also become a significant recommendation for advancing a Master Mason to the Principal's chairs in association with Sojourner's work.

Two Housekeeping Points

From time to time, outbreaks of a malady brought on by the appointment of new Officers occurs, and is observable in summonses and minute books.

It is not possible to appoint a "Chief" Steward and so name him on a summons. Regulation 48 lays down the list of Officers a Chapter is entitled to appoint. It does not include a Chief Steward - nor, indeed, Assistant Organist, Orator, Lecture Master, Superintendent of Works or any other imaginative addition to the stated list. Certainly no collars can be invented for such appointments. There can be no objection to asking individuals to undertake specific roles such as those indicated above but they must not be accounted "Officers of the Chapter" and named as such.

The Deputy Grand Superintendent and Second and Third Principals do not "represent" the Grand Superintendent. They are Rulers with delegated authority to attend whatever Chapter in the Province they fancy whenever they fancy as if they were, in fact the Grand Superintendent. Similarly Representatives such as a Supreme Grand Chapter or Provincial Officer attend Chapters on certain occasions because they have been told to. It is inappropriate, therefore, to list them undifferentiated amongst the "visitors" as just one among several such. The presence of Rulers and Representatives should always be minuted as a separate item apart from the lists of other attendees.

These are, perhaps, seen as a couple of bits of Provincial bureaucracy but it is always pleasant to do things right is it not?