

Provincial Grand Charity
Information Day
The Parsonage Hotel Escrick 13 October 2005

The day started early for members of the Provincial Grand Charity, assisting our guest speakers from the Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys Les Hutchinson Secretary to the Council of the Trust and John Halahan co-ordinator of “Lifelites” the Millennium project of RMTGB, in setting the room for the keynote presentation of our day.

It was expected that registration and coffee would start at 10.30, but it was quickly noted that delegates started to arrive shortly after 9.30. A good omen for an interested audience and enthusiastic gathering.

Early arrival gave an opportunity to the delegates to greet old friends and meet new ones, exchange views and examine the new Almoner and Charity Steward handbook.

The handbook prepared by the Provincial Almoner and Provincial Charity Steward is formatted in a more convenient pocket size and unites the guidance given to Lodge and Chapter Almoners and Charity Stewards. The handbook replaces all previous guidance and was distributed strictly to the named Almoner or Charity Steward. If you were not in attendance a copy will be posted to you. Please remember this handbook should be transferred to your successor on or near the day of Installation. Of course if you have any difficulty you can always contact the Charity Office on a Wednesday morning 9.30 – 12.00 telephone 01904 685504.



The Provincial Grand Master Richard Anderson was in attendance and when he was introduced to John Halahan, he was quickly given an official "Lifelites" lapel pin. An exchange of views took place and as many of you will know, to your cost, the PGM actively promotes the scheme and sells his own "Lifelites" lapel pin with all proceeds going to our Festival 2006. Only the PGM knows if he managed to sell one to John? After some preliminary notices the PGM took the floor and addressed the meeting on a sad occasion and reported the death of Worshipful Brother Geoffrey Norman Clarke, asking the meeting to stand in respect of departed merit.

Geoffrey Norman Clarke
1924 – 2005
PSGD, PAsstPGM, PPJGW, PPGDC.

The chairman Clive Gregory introduced the team from RMTGB and they presented a talk entitled, The Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys "A Jewel in the Crown of Masonic Charity".

Les Hutchinson spoke and highlighted the plight and distress of children and families who are in the protection of the Trust and have suffered as a consequence of desertion, death, abuse, accident and even murder. If you can think of it, somebody is doing it and there are so many things we cannot conceive of. These children and families are in need of our wholehearted support. Festivals and the ability for the Trust to do its work are inextricably linked. Les emphasised this in his presentation before handing over to his colleague John Halahan.

John spoke about the inspiration and founding of "Lifelites". The Trust had considered ways to mark the millennium and within its remit sought to aid those children in Hospice care.

If we think about the purpose of a Hospice, we immediately know it is for those with life threatening and terminal illness. When we put a child into that thought process it is almost impossible, no it is impossible, to imagine the circumstance that family must be in.

The purpose of the scheme was to introduce computer technology into every Children's Hospice in England and Wales. The launch of "Lifelites" for the millennium was funded with £7.5 million pounds and was introduced to 30 hospices with the support of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists who advised on the project.

We now know that by August 2005, 34 Hospices are benefiting from the scheme and another 6 are being considered. This needs a continued investment and "Lifelites" will soon become an independent charity run by RMTGB, but as an independent it can benefit from both Masonic and non Masonic funding.

Les Hutchinson closed the presentation with a thank you to this Province and the delegates who are the instrument of the fund raising effort. He also informed us of the future strategies that the Trust may employ, one of which will be to transfer the administrative base into Freemasons Hall from January 2006.

Continuing the theme of RMTGB, the Treasurer of Festival 2006, Mike Roberts gave his presentation of the progress made to date and reported that on this day our total stood at £1,724,000, [he did not know Festival Secretary had £1,500 in cheques in his pocket] a compliment to everyone who has donated and testimony to the essential work of OUR Charity Stewards.

His message to the delegates and the Province is that of our Provincial Grand Master, "WELL DONE". We know you can push that total the extra inch and ensure we reach the £2,000,000 and share in the most successful Festival this Province has sponsored. He sensed as many of us do that the feeling of achievement is spreading and the brethren want to share in that moment when Festival is declared at York University on the 20th May 2006.

And so to lunch a chance to digest the newfound knowledge and visit the Charity Information Desk, which was busy even though many had plates in hand. The afternoon session was commenced with an introduction to " Selling the Good News of our Charitable Works" by Pat Cambage. We know what we do and how we do it, but for too long we have been humble in promoting our contribution to our communities and the wider world. Pat gave us pointers that will stimulate the attention of media groups, "do's and do nots" and a reminder of the value of your Lodge Information Officer to aid you in gaining recognition for our Charity. Proceeding onwards in the company of Edmund Levie we looked at the template which has been used to great advantage by the Middlesbrough group of Lodges in supporting Charity in the local community, and how they unite that community by inviting the representatives to attend " A CHARITY PRESENTATION EVENING". As with all Lodges, apart from Festival we do have a wider role and that is usually defined by the Master of the year in designating a local Charity with which he has some affinity. The charitable works of the Lodges are co-ordinated into one evening when invited guests and media groups attend Roman Road for an open evening, supper and the presentations. This is an example that groups of Lodges could emulate and raise public awareness Freemasonry.

The programme continues with a band of itinerant players strutting their stuff for the audience. They were not itinerant when they started, but they may be after the way they introduced characters into the sketch.

Starting out with Dad's Army and the Bank of Warmington-on-Sea , Captain Mainwaring, or was it Provincial Almoner Charles Ravis, identified a brother in need who resided in South Duffield at Chez Moggies. Change of scene, they proceed to the home of the distressed brother and advised him in a somewhat dramatic form and by way of questions and answers of the manner in which the four Masonic Charities can assist those in need.

To the great delight and gasps of the audience they did put across a very important outline of the work of Charity and the advantages to the elderly, young, talented, disabled, infirm, families and brethren of Freemasonry.

The cast could be named, "but walls have ears" your secret is safe with me Derek, Paul and Ed.

The final speakers at our Information day, as has become the custom, represented a local organisation that has been supported by local Lodges and or Provincial Grand Charity. This year our guests were from the “Yorkshire Air Ambulance”, Bob Smailles and his wife Jeanette who had been with us all day and were in awe of the work of Freemasonry and the way which we raise and distribute donations. However, they enlightened us to the scope of work to which the Air Ambulance is tasked. Operating during daylight hours they respond to all manner of incidents, Road Sporting Industrial Domestic and others. On each occasion you may think they load the casualty and transport them to the nearest Hospital. Not so. Each case is individually assessed at the scene and the patient is transported to the most appropriate receiving Hospital that may for example, specialise in spinal injury or coronary care.

Funding and a base for operations are a constant concern, Bob needs to secure £1.5 million per year to operate and plan strategically for the future. A second aircraft is coming on line with a greater load capacity to allow the family or friend of the patient to be transported from the scene as well. In the past this was not possible and you can imagine the distress of a mother being parted from a seriously injured child or vice versa. The management of the casualty is not always purely medical. Good news for the Yorkshire Air Ambulance and those that will need its resources are that a secure base is in view. They now operate their own tasking and assessment desk and looking further, a night flying capability is planned.

The presentation was a very informative way to close a constructive day, with reports suggesting that the delegates gained from the day and were able to see ways to implement the knowledge.

One note of concern, not all Lodges or Chapters were represented and some did not even reply to the invitation. It would be a good problem to have to find a venue that could accommodate all our Almoners and Charity Stewards. Work and family excepted, we all have some thing to learn on days like this.