

A shortened version of the Grand Superintendent's Address to Provincial Grand Chapter 2005

The venue change was caused by increases in rental and meal charges at the University. Rentals here at the Racecourse are higher than previously enjoyed at the University and this is the main reason why it has been necessary to raise capitation fees this year.

I am grateful to R.W.Bro. Eric Gore-Brown and his colleagues in the Mark Degree for giving us the benefit of their experience in this venue in planning today's meeting. It is a special pleasure to welcome The Most Excellent Second Grand Principal, Companion Iain Ross Bryce, today. He will retire on October 31st. and it is fitting that one of his last official duties in his distinguished term of Office should be within his own Province.

Your Director of Ceremonies, Companion George Francis, is no stranger having been with us at my Installation in 2002. Companions, he will become Second Grand Principal on November 9th.

Looking back over Provincial minute books recently I was struck by a remark made by the Grand Superintendent in 1960. He said :-
"Reports I have received point to a generally high standard of work and conduct throughout the Province. This is essential for without it Masonry would lose most of its appeal and purpose."

This comment seems to me at least as relevant today as it was then. With standards in Society in decline it is more important than ever to maintain ours at a high level. It is disappointing, therefore, when a report from one of my Representatives indicates little effort has been made with the ceremonial work. Where is a Chapter's pride when it is content to see the ritual read from the book – and sometimes doing even that rather badly!

Last year my colleagues and I were fortunate to witness many sparkingly well conducted meetings and it leaves us wondering why the obvious pride in performance evidenced by the many does not inspire the few to emulation.

It is also disappointing to hear of late running after proceedings - in one or two cases dragging on into the early hours because too many toasts to be proposed and responded to at inordinate length. This greatly inhibits the essential function of after proceedings - Fellowship.

Whilst on the subject of after proceedings four and five course meals served at 9-30 p.m. are not sensible either in terms of time taken serving them or the digestive systems of a membership of average age well on the wrong side of 60. Our older members frequently tell me that they do not stay to the after proceedings as they can not take heavy meals late at night.

We already have a member retention problem in Masonry. We should not exacerbate it by indulging in unhealthy late night feeding frenzies!

I commend the practice of St Cuthberts Chapter 630. They take the meal before the meeting and coffee and a limited number toasts after. Recently I gave a talk on the Royal Arch to Lodge of St Hilda 6666. A delightful two course buffet was served before the meeting with coffee and only three toasts following. It was most enjoyable and the proceedings closed at a sensible hour.

I am grateful to Companion Bruce Harrison and his colleagues for producing a concise and thoughtful report analysing the provisions of the Supreme Grand Chapter Strategic Working Party on the Royal Arch which was circulated to Chapters and has become a comprehensive guide to the new procedures.

The SWP was established with the aim of making the Royal Arch more relevant and accessible to Master Masons as well as proposing changes to make ceremonies more coherent.

Chapters have, of course, adopted the “mandatory” changes required by Supreme Grand Chapter but some appear resistant to the permissive variations. These are sensible cleaning up of parts of the ceremonies taking nothing from their essence. I hope that they will be given a fair trial.

Whilst I am in favour of the decision to make the Chapter chairs accessible to Master Masons I have been alarmed by one or two Chapters proposing to elect people with little experience of Royal Arch Masonry to the Third Chair.

I had hoped that progress by Master Masons would be by Grand Superintendent dispensation. That the SGC decided to permit this process to be within the discretion of individual Chapters places great responsibility upon them to ensure that the dignity of the Order is protected.

Two other recent opportunities for improving the Chapter meeting in briskness and efficiency should be taken up.

Firstly, the permission to dispense with written ballot's when only one nomination has been received for an office. Secondly, the recommendation that minutes of meetings be reduced to statements of bare fact.

Examples of printed and circulated minutes running to five or six closely typed pages are commonly found as are lengthy minutes read in Open Chapter to a manifestly bored and restive audience.

I have been told that shorter minutes would interfere with the preservation of the historical record. I can not accept this. Recently 500 words were used to record in the minutes of one of our Chapters that my Representative had attended.

“Excellent Companion so-and-so Representing the M.E. Grand Superintendent was received” would amply preserve the historical record - and kept the members awake. Another example recently seen was two long paragraphs recording the manifold virtues and excellencies of the person who had delivered the Historical Lecture. Doubtless his ego was suitably boosted thereby but the historical record would have been amply served by recording that the Lecture had been given by a named individual.

Cut out the floss and stick to the bare facts

Briefer minutes, well performed ceremonies, lighter meals with fewer toasts and responses would leave Companions with happy thoughts looking forward to the next meeting.

The Report of the Strategic Working Party is an opportunity to re-examine of our practices and procedures to make them relevant to the 21st. Century and, especially, the younger members who are our future.

Keith Buckham retired today as Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies. His obvious enjoyment of his Masonry has been inspiring. Thank you Keith for all you have done.

Throughout last year, our 150th, we held a number of special events including the first of what is to be an annual outing to the November meeting of Supreme Grand Chapter with lunch at the appropriately named Freemasons' Arms. We shall be holding our next luncheon on November 9th.

This is the last year of the Provincial Grand Master's Festival for the RMTGB to which some Chapters have already made impressive contributions. The PGM and I have agreed a draft of a letter he will send to Chapters asking for a final push to make the Festival a success. Please give of your best to this important project. Whilst a few Chapters have donated £3000 + others languish in very low double figures and could do better.

Finally, as last year, I wrote to new exaltees welcoming them into the Order inviting them to attend this meeting. Those who could do so are at the back of the room on the left. Welcome to you.

An Alms collection before the meeting closed raised £2217 which the M.E. Grand Superintendent donated to the Provincial Grand Master's 2006 Festival for the RMTGB on behalf of Provincial Grand chapter.