

PROVINCIAL GRAND CHAPTER SEPTEMBER 30th. 2006

Grand Superintendent's address.

Welcome to you all for this, our second, meeting in these splendid premises.

A special welcome to our guests from other Provinces who have already been introduced to you but particularly our own Past Grand Supt John Raylor.

The year has been busy for the Rulers who have been well supported on many of their visits by the active Officers of the Province. I offer them the grateful thanks for their loyalty and enthusiasm.

Last Wednesday I presented a Centenary Warrant to Priory Chapter 561 at Guisborough with around 80 present. On the previous Tuesday Handyside 1618 Chapter celebrated its 25th. Anniversary with a the superbly crafted dedication of a Chapter Banner by the Third Principal, David Scott, in front of a near "full house" at Saltburn Masonic Hall. The Chapter was called off to enable Master Masons to witness the dedication ceremony and obtain a foretaste of the colourful World of Royal Arch Masonry. They stayed to Dinner I am sure took away a favourable impression of the Royal Arch. A sensible initiative I commend to you all

Sadly, Supreme Grand Chapter could not be persuaded to grant a Bi-Centenary Warrant to Constitutional Chapter 294 or a Centenary Warrant to Anchor Chapter 1337. Instead we held a Provincial celebration supported by numerous Supreme Grand Chapter and Provincial "active" Officers at both Chapters when I presented a Provincial Certificate of appreciation of their service to the Province.

Constitutional Chapter intend to invite Master Masons to a presentation on the Royal Arch in October. I also commend this initiative to all Chapters.

With family and working commitments assuming increasing significance in our their lives we can not expect new members to drop off trees. We must work at convincing them that the Royal Arch represents a sound investment of their time in terms of the message of the Order and of the enjoyment they will derive from it. Especially enjoyment !

The Royal Arch message is a serious one, it is true, and ceremonies must be treated in a dignified manner but there is no reason why the whole evening has to be carried through in an atmosphere of joyless solemnity.

Last year I indicated that it would be appreciated if after proceedings finished at a sensible hour with the fellowship of the meal not constantly interrupted by wine takings and too many toasts and speeches.

I said I should not be offended to be served a two course meal or a shortened toast list used at some meetings cutting out those to Principals, Candidates, Visitors and the Masonic Hall Cat. I advocated shorter minutes and interesting alternatives to "to rehearse a ceremony" in the absence of a candidate.

The message reached most Chapters but a few must have misheard me. Several Chapters seem to have increased their already over long minutes this year. In one Chapter Committee it was positively stated that The Grand Superintendent would not countenance anything but a rehearsal of a ceremony in the absence of a real candidate!

Perhaps if I were to amend my method of communicating my thoughts it would help clarify my message. I could say, perhaps, after proceedings with less than six courses, less than 15 Toasts all honoured at great length and minutes of less than several thousand words would offend me a reaction to my dictatorial ways might follow which would achieve my real objective?

Last year I sat through one six course feeding frenzy and spent the night (what was left of it after a long early morning drive home) calling weakly for Rennies. A couple of years ago I encountered a Chapter with a 15 item Toast list but I – and many others - were long gone before it was completed.

There is a message there. Such practices are not the way to encourage young family men with demanding jobs. It may be a Chapter tradition but if the result is loss of members interest where is the sense?

At Grand Lodge earlier this month the Pro Grand Master echoed wise words his illustrious predecessor, Lord Farnham, spoke ten years ago. He reminded us that acquiring candidates was not the issue. Retaining the interest of those we acquire is THE issue. Certainly it is true for this Province.

Relative to our membership size we are exalting more candidates than ever before but too many are not lasting the course – or even the first five years. Part of the problem is, I am sure, inappropriate practices and silly demands on the time of new members. Inefficiently conducted meetings and over long after proceedings play their part also. Listen to your younger and newer members. Indeed, why not ask them for their opinions? A fellow Grand Superintendent said to me recently that a survey in his Province asking for reasons for resignation was overwhelmingly responded to with the reason “pressure to undertake ritual work they felt inadequately prepared for and lack of sympathy when they did so poorly”.

The “pressure” and “lack of sympathy” was said to come from senior members of their Chapters. A case of misplaced zeal and unclarity of focus on the part of the seniors concerned one feels. It is good if new members are willing to take part in ceremonies but “doing ritual” is not the be all and end all of Masonry. If it drives young members away it is positively counter-productive.

There is only one significant role for “seniors” - the support of the next generation of our membership. I feel sure that we can rely upon that role being properly carried out in this Province.

The manner in which our Chapters have moved to adopt the recent mandatory and optional changes to the Royal Arch ritual has been impressive. In particular those leading to sensible reduction in the length of ceremonies and the absences of Companions from parts of the Installation ceremony have been taken up by most Chapters.

Maybe I am not fully informed but I detect none of the resistance to change that colleagues in some Provinces speak of. No personal credit is claimed for this happy state of affairs though I am most grateful for it.

The Report of the Provincial Working Party chaired by our new Third Provincial Grand Principal last year and the willingness of our Chapters to respond positively to change made possible the transition to new ways of working.

At Supreme Grand Chapter on November 8th. we shall be following our recent practice – we have done it twice so maybe I should be calling it a tradition – of lunching at the Freemasons’ Arms in Long Acre after attending the meeting which this year includes what promises to be an interesting talk on Mozart’s Masonic Music. Last year 70 attended including a number of Companions not yet through the Chairs. Companions are now not simply permitted to attend Supreme Grand Chapter meetings but positively encouraged. I understand from John Hemy who has taken over as organiser of the day out from Terry Burt that we can expect a similar number this year.

Speaking of Supreme Grand Chapter it was a great pleasure to witness some of our Companions receiving Supreme Grand Chapter honours in April. Companion Derek Pinder was appointed to the rank of Past Grand Standard Bearer and Companions Henry Hatton and Fred Harrison to PAGDC whilst Companion Francis George Woolgrove was promoted to PGStdB. Congratulations to them all.

I can assure you, Companions, that decisions to make such appointments are not taken lightly and certainly not “on the nod” from Grand Superintendents. Each year I am called on for detailed information on the Masonic careers and public services of candidates the First Grand Principal is considering for appointment.

I am grateful to Companions David Jackson, Scribe N and Andrew Hitchin, Provincial Registrar, for representing me so splendidly at many of our Chapters last year. It was pleasing to hear from them and other Representatives that ritual standards are rising in most Chapters but, sadly, in a few the message about not using ritual books during ceremonies has also not yet percolated through.

The RW Provincial Grand Master, Richard Anderson, is here accompanied by his Deputy, Jeffrey Gillyon and Assistant Provincial Grand Masters Alan Brundall and John Trout.

We are honoured by the presence of senior members of other Orders in Masonry today. I shall name them always remembering that I have never yet managed to do so accurately and, thereby, risk giving offence to one or two unnoticed. If it happens today, my apologies in advance. From the Orders of Mark and Royal Ark Masonry the Provincial Grand Master Eric Gore-Brown, his Deputy ,Francis George Woolgrove, and the Provincial Grand Secretary David Roach. I take this opportunity of thanking Companion Gore-Brown for all of the assistance kindly rendered by our Mark Mason colleagues in the organisation of this meeting.

From the Red Cross of Constantine we have the Deputy Intendant General, Geoffrey Butler. From the Order of Knights Templar Priests the Grand High Priest, Peter Donnison – and we congratulate you, Peter, on your accession to the headship of this International Order - accompanying him is the Grand Recorder Ian Fithian-Franks, From the Order of Knights Templar the Provincial Sub-Prior Paul Darley. Your support is much appreciated.

It was always a professional precept of mine that there must be regular rotation of roles to maintain freshness and enthusiasm. So too in Masonry. We have, today, seen a number of personnel changes which I am sure will benefit the Province. Nevertheless such a precept also brings sadness. Nigel Steele retires today as Second Provincial Grand Principal.

No words of mine will do justice to the debt of gratitude we owe to Nigel. His is an onerous and, indeed, distinguished medical career but he carries out his obligations to this and other Orders with his customary cheerful efficiency. Nigel, we thank you. Similarly it must be said that whilst the Rulers and, to an extent, the Secretariat represent the visible spectrum of our activity there are others with heavy responsibilities whose work goes largely unnoticed. Two of them retire today after five years. Peter Carlton-Scott as Provincial Treasurer and Terry Burt as Provincial Almoner. Phil Stewart also retires as Charity Steward but has gone on to higher things today.

Peter has managed our finances with care and, given our habitual poverty, considerable worry about how to make ends meet. The Almoner's work is necessarily below the visible spectrum as he must maintain the confidentiality of individual cases. Perhaps only the Rulers know what a great contribution to the well being of the Province Peter and Terry has made. We are all most grateful to you both. The Secretariat under the direction of Brian Baker continues to provide us with much appreciated administrative back up. Derek Pinder leads a dream team of Deputies as Provincial Director of Ceremonies and has had a terrific first year in Office. If the Devil is in the detail that gentleman simply has no chance in any meeting overseen by Companion Pinder so total is his grip on the detail himself.

Sad it is, therefore, that Derek can not be with us today. He had a small, apparently routine, surgical procedure two weeks ago which has not healed as it should. We wish him well and I am delighted to record our gratitude to his three Deputies – especially John Barlow – for the way they have coped today in his absence.

As ever I owe much to the support, encouragement and, occasionally, the restraining hand of the Deputy Grand Superintendent, Alan Brundall, and congratulate Companions David Scott and Bruce Harrison on their promotions today which they have both earned by their great service to Royal Arch Masonry. Congratulations to those appointed or promoted today.

Remember, Companions, that these honours are not merely symbolic. If any of you feel that the rank with which you have been invested is an opportunity to sit back and lord it over lesser mortals then I have made some wrong choices. I do not believe I have though.

Once again we have some of our Companions exalted in the last year present with us. I hope that this is the first of many. Would you mind standing for a moment to receive a welcome into our Provincial affairs.

Finally, Companions, this meeting will be my last as Grand Superintendent. My Patent runs out at the end of July 2007. This is, therefore, my only opportunity to record the fact that it has been a privilege to serve such a vibrant and happy Royal

Arch Province whose members have given me such unstinting support these past five years. BUT – and I repeat BUT ! - that is next July. Between now and then there is work to do and I shall be no less energetic its conduct than hitherto.

I do not wish my final year to turn into the sort of apparently unendingly re-run “farewell tour” in which Luciano Pavarotti specialises. Let us continue to work together for the benefit of this thriving Royal Arch Province.
I hope still to be around in August 2007 and beyond so keep the farewells for then.