

Grand Superintendents address to Provincial Grand Chapter 19th May 2022

My first pleasant task is to welcome our guests, we have representatives with us today from twelve other Provinces and Metropolitan Grand Chapter, including no less than ten Grand Superintendents. Normally I would welcome them all individually but on this occasion, as the proceedings are already extended I will seek their cooperation and forgo that pleasure to ensure that they, and you companions get home at a reasonable time. Visiting Companions I welcome you all, thank you for enhancing our proceedings here, I look forward to visiting your Provinces in the near future.

From our own Province I welcome the Past Grand Superintendent and Past Deputy Grand Superintendent, The Provincial Grand Master, his Deputy and Assistants and the Rulers of all the Masonic orders meeting in our Province. Welcome I thank you all for your support and I look forward to working with you all in the future.

Companions please give our guests a warm Somerset welcome.

Companions of the Province of Somerset. I'm delighted to see so many of you here, I very much appreciate your support and I hope that you, like me have had a really enjoyable day.

Congratulation to those Companions whom I have appointed to, and promoted in Provincial Grand Chapter today, I hope that you all enjoy your new well earned ranks and I look forward to working with you.

Congratulations also to Excellent Companion David Dixon, Past 3rd Provincial Grand Principal who was promoted to the Rank of Past Grand Standard Bearer in Supreme Grand Chapter on the 28th April.

The shock waves from the pandemic have made the last two years difficult for everyone. Our lives have been, at best put on hold and for some their world has been turned upside down. Close to home we also witnessed the illness and sad death of our Grand Superintendent, E.Comp Barry Woodside, another blow to the Province in what was an already difficult period. Our grateful thanks are due to the Deputy Grand Superintendent, Clive Lambert and the second and third Principals, Neil Hurcum and Geoff Lester for keeping the ship on course over the past nine months since Barry's passing.

Now the sunny days of late spring combined with the firm hope that the effects of the Pandemic are receding may lead us to think that all is now well and that we will enjoy a welcome return to normality. I too share that hope Companions but I'm under no illusion that things will immediately return to the way they were in our Chapters in 2019. Much has changed in our lives, we will need to work to make sure our Chapters and the Province are strong enough to weather the challenges that lie ahead.

As life has changed around us we have to accept that if we are to make progress we have we also must change. To that end Companions there are several changes I would like to see that I hope will help move us all forward.

Provincial Fraternal Visits which have proved both popular and successful in the Craft since they were introduced ten years ago, will now be introduced in the Royal Arch. From September there will be a Provincial fraternal visit every month to a Chapter. It will be led by myself or one of my co principals or the Deputy Grand Superintendent. The

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active Provincial Officers of the year are welcome and indeed encouraged to join us on these visits. The object, as in the Craft is to swell the numbers attending the Chapter, to enjoy the ceremony and the festive board and to be part of that special Royal Arch fellowship. I will lead the first Provincial Fraternal visit to Taunton Deane Chapter on Friday 2nd of September, active Provincial Officers take note of that date. As in the Craft those who attend a Provincial Fraternal Visit will pay for their own meal. A full list of visits for the year will be published in due course.

The most serious challenge that we have to confront, is the continuing loss of members. In Somerset we have 860 Royal Arch Masons who are subscribing members of at least one Chapter in the Province. However, there are a further 500 plus Royal Arch Masons in our Province who are no longer subscribing members of a Chapter but remain subscribing members of a Craft Lodge. It is a staggering number Companions and obviously it hasn't just happened but has built up over the years. We all must know some of those companions who wear their Chapter jewel in the Craft, as indeed they are perfectly entitled to do, but they no longer join our Convocations. I am not suggesting that it is possible to get them all to rejoin but if just 20% were to do so, it would add four extra members to every chapter in the Province.

However asking unattached Royal Arch Masons to rejoin isn't going to work if the reasons why they originally resigned still exist. Those Companions left for a variety of reasons but the underlying reason is that they weren't happy or comfortable in their Chapter.

We all should reflect on how we can help to make our Chapters happy, comfortable and enjoyable places to be. We have to consider the needs of the individual above the needs of the Chapter, not the other way round.

To help effect this I will be asking every Chapter to appoint a Mentor. The mentors task will be to look after newer members in particular and make sure that they are comfortable, that they have gained an understanding of the ritual and are happy to support the Chapter, although they may not wish progress through the offices. I believe there is a place in the Royal Arch for everyone including those who do not wish to progress through the three Chairs.

Turning now to Charity - It is some years since the Province has had a Charity project. Although we did give significant support to the Craft 2020 Festival.

We have all become familiar with rising prices, food poverty is becoming more wide spread and the pressure on food banks has in some areas become acute. I will be asking Chapters to support their local food bank. I hope that will not only be with donations but perhaps also by giving your time in volunteering to help in some way. Community involvement is something we all should care about, being part of our local community will raise the positive profile of Freemasonry and that can only be to our long term benefit. The details are yet to be finalised but there will be a meeting of Chapter Charity Stewards before September to discuss the project and decide the best way forward.

Today's retiring collection will be donated to the MCF Ukraine appeal so please give generously Companions using the gift aid envelopes if you can.

We are very fortunate in having a very good working relationship with the Craft Province. Our Provincial Grand Master, David Medlock and his team are all very supportive of the Royal Arch and that is much appreciated. That close cooperation will certainly continue

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under my tenure as your Grand Superintendent and I look forward to working together with the Provincial Craft executive in promoting Freemasonry in Somerset. Similarly I look forward to working with the leaders of all the masonic orders in the province to our mutual benefit.

Companions there are many people to thank for helping to make this day a success. The retiring Provincial Scribe E, Tony Beaumont, the Deputy Provincial director of ceremonies Richard Stone his team of assistant DCs and Stewards and the Provincial Janitor, Ray Johnson Smith. The Companions of Dungarvan Chapter, under whose banner this convocation has been held for supplying the Chapter equipment. The management and the team at the Webbington Hotel. Our organist, Companion Barry Renwick and our sound engineer, Excellent Companion Toby Hammond. I thank you one and all. If I have missed anyone please accept my apologies.

Since my appointment was announced some months ago I have been humbled by your kind good wishes and your generous offers of help. I have had great support from our past Grand Superintendents, Past Provincial Principals and Grand Officers, Past and present Provincial Officers as well as the Principals and members of the Chapters. I hope Companions that I can live up to your expectations and that together we can all make our Province stronger.

Thank you for your attention Companions and may the TALGMH keep you all safe.

Ray Guthrie
19th May 2022