

Address by Provincial Grand Master At Provincial Grand Lodge on 27 October 2009

I welcome you all to our October Provincial Grand Lodge Meeting and I am grateful to you for attending in such goodly numbers.

I begin by referring to one of my declared plans and strategies, that relating to Recruitment and Retention. The new Provincial Membership Officer W Bro John Wingfield is well advanced with his planning and, by next month, a team of Group Membership Officers will be in place, comprising Brethren who are capable of taking up and developing membership recruitment at a local level, as part of a coherent and consistent Provincial policy. All of this is being undertaken in conjunction with our work of upgrading and improving our Provincial Website, led by my Assistant W Bro John Moore. It is essential that our Website becomes more exciting and dynamic and also more user friendly to both Masons and Non-Masons. The guiding principles for our website comprise a combination of public relations, recruitment, openness in our Order, and news and events.

Mentoring is of increasing importance in regard to helping and supporting our Brethren. In these circumstances, I have decided to hold a Provincial Mentoring Conference on Friday 15 January 2010 for those specifically involved in mentoring in each Group. The Conference will be divided into three parts: first, a keynote speaker who will talk professionally about mentoring; secondly, four selected Groups will explain their respective approaches to mentoring; and thirdly, I will chair an interactive session, much like the very successful interactive session at the Masonic Halls Seminar. Based upon this, I will put together a flexible mentoring policy for the Province.

During the months of June July and September, the Province was in sporting and charitable mode with the National Masonic Inter Provincial Clay Pigeon Shooting Competition, the Provincial Bowling Competition and the Provincial Golf Final. The Province and I take great pride in the holding of these successful and pleasing events. They give pleasure and sporting enjoyment to many as well as raising funds for charity. Brethren, all these events are worthy of your support.

In September, which was a busy month, the Province was honoured to welcome two distinguished Freemasons. First, Senatores Lodge was pleased to receive RW Bro George Pison Francis who is the Second Grand Principal in the Royal Arch. He gave a talk entitled 'the Relationship between the Craft and the Royal Arch'. Also in September, Lathom Lodge was delighted to receive RW Bro George Peake, the Provincial Grand Master for the Isle of Man. He gave a talk entitled 'Notes from a Small Island' which explained the development of Freemasonry in the Isle of Man and he mentioned the fact that the Isle of Man Province is our daughter Province. I now know that when I am in the Isle of Man, Britain is not the mainland but simply the adjacent island.

During both September and October, I have also visited with my Provincial Team several Craft lodges and one Royal Arch chapter. During my visits, I have enjoyed talking to as many Brethren and Companions as time will allow and I have to say that there is an encouraging and infectious enthusiasm in so many parts of the Province for our future. That said, I do understand that there are several lodges and chapters who continue to struggle. May I say to the members of those lodges and chapters, please talk openly and frankly with each other, plan for the future, try and set targets, and make sure that you fully understand the options available to you. During our time as Brethren and Companions, we are all custodians of Freemasonry and we have an obligation to hand on the torch to our successors - doing nothing is not an option. If necessary, please seek help from the Province, from your Assistant, or from your Group Officers.

The 2010 Festival Appeal has been a substantial effort for all. W Bro Stuart Thornber and his team continue to promote the Appeal and they are to be thanked for their tireless efforts. We have already pledged and raised approximately £4.4 million pounds for the benefit of many Brethren and their dependants, both in this Province and throughout the country, who are suffering and in need of either medical help or support with respite care. At the outset of the appeal in May 2005, no target was set for a final figure to be raised, and, throughout the Festival, the Province has been relying upon the unstinting generosity of our brethren to raise as much as possible. I now appeal to those brethren, who have yet to be persuaded to come on board, to act without delay and make that vital personal commitment. Make a contribution and thus 'make a difference' and become a part of our Festival. Contact your Lodge Charity Steward or Group Charity Steward who will be only too pleased to give any help that is required. Let me leave you with one thought: only 40% of the brethren in the Province have made a personal commitment to the Festival. I would very much like that figure to be at least 50% when we hand over our cheque.

The 2010 Festival itself will be held over two days, Friday 7 May 2010 and Saturday 8 May 2010 and Invitations and Booking Forms are already in the post. My Assistant Frank Wilkinson and his team are using their very best endeavour's to ensure that our celebrations properly reflect all the hard work and Endeavour's of so many as well as the kind and generous giving of the Brethren.

Our own West Lancashire Freemasons Charity has recently held its Annual General Meeting and its annual report and accounts, which are available to be read on our Website, show quite clearly that it has successfully managed to take important steps forward, notwithstanding the understandable effects of the 2010 Festival. The Charity is still looking for a substantial headline project to launch and financially support after next May. If any of you is able to identify a suitable project please contact the Charity direct or the Provincial Office with your ideas. Briefly, the guiding principles are that West Lancashire Freemasons' Charity wishes to be the sole or major sponsor of the project and the project should relate to the whole of the Province and not be confined to a single locality. It must show Freemasonry in a good light, and, ideally, should have a lasting public relations value.

Finally, may I remind you that the 150th Provincial Ball will be held at the Reebok Centre on Friday 12 March 2010. Application Forms have already been sent out and all Brethren and their wives or partners are cordially invited. This is exciting change of venue with a competitive price per ticket. Come and join us for this important social event in the Provincial calendar.

In conclusion, I thank the Provincial Grand Secretary and his team and the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies and his team for their considerable input in the planning and management of today's meeting. I also thank our Provincial Medical Team, under the leadership of Ramesh Gandhi, for their important presence here today.

Lastly, I thank the Preston Group, under the chairmanship of W Bro Ian Greenwood which has acted as the Host Group for this meeting. In particular, and on behalf of all who have attended today, may express my pleasure and thanks to W Bro Tom Ashcroft the Captain of Stewards (who, unfortunately cannot be present today), his Vice Captain, W Bro Eric Sarti and his team for the very efficient and effective way in which they have looked after our every need.