John Mace celebrates golden jubilee - Derek Parkinson’s presentation

One of the benefits of holding a senior position in the Province is the opportunity to take the chair to celebrate a brother's special moment in his Masonic career. lt gives me an opportunity to find out a bit about the celebrant and their life. Many of the celebrations have been for brethren in their 80s and 90s and so I can also look back at what was going on in the world during the 1920's, 30's and 40's, between when the celebrant was born to when they became a Mason. However in your case, John, you weren't born until the second half of 1946 and so l'll start my story from just after the end of the war until you were initiated in the late 1960’s, and l'll begin brethren by asking our Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies to place our celebrant before me.

John, you were born in 1946. The previous year Germany had officially surrendered to the allies, followed four months later by Japan signing the Instrument of Surrender, bringing to an end the six years and one day of the Second World War. The following year, just before your first birthday, Liverpool won the League Championship, bringing to an end the longest number of years when one club had held the title. This was because the League winners in 1939 held the title throughout the Second World War whilst the Football League was suspended and replaced with the Wartime League, which only allowed clubs to play another within a 50-mile radius. Just to balance things up with Liverpool winning the League, the club that had held the title for eight years, a record never beaten, was Everton.

Moving forward to the 1950's and 1960's signalled a big change in various aspects of life in this country and worldwide. In the 1950's things seemed to get a lot better and there were many reasons for celebration; petrol rationing ended, followed by the end of all rationing, and in 1953 at around the same time that Queen Elizabeth II was crowned, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of Everest. The following year Roger Bannister ran the first sub four-minute mile, at 3 minutes 59.4 seconds and it's quite staggering to think that it has now been run in under 3 minutes 45 seconds. In 1955 the first polio vaccine was developed by Jonas Salk, and four years afterwards, in 1959, the microchip was invented. I don't know if that comes as a surprise to many of you but I hadn’t realised that the microchip was invented 60 years ago.

Internationally the development of the atomic bomb which had continued after the war led to what was known as the 'cold war' between the west and Russia. We were probably both still in short pants at the time and if you're like me you won't remember much about it, but it was causing unrest and tension throughout the world. I presume it was similar to the events that have kept appearing in the news over the last few months, and even in the last few days, increasing people's concerns that international relations are delicately balanced. In the early sixties the Beatles released their first single, Spiderman made his first appearance in the fantasy comics and the BBC broadcast the first episode of Dr Who with William Hartnell in the title role.

Just before the end of the decade, in the year before you were initiated into Freemasonry, Apollo 11 was launched and Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon, the first of only 12 people ever to have walked on the lunar surface.

But back to yourself John. Your father was a marine engineer with his own business and also Chief Engineer for the T J Harrison Shipping Line. He had been at sea during the Battle of the Atlantic and received war decorations. Your mother worked in a well-known shop in Bold Street, Bon Marche.

Your father had met your mother in the late 193O's and they were married in 1940. When you started school, you attended local infants and junior school up to the age of nine. Sadly, your father had died when you were only five and you and your two younger sisters, Joan and Julie, were brought up by your mum and grandfather. He was an engine driver at Edge Hill Shunting Yard and your mentor as you grew up but sadly he died when you were 20. The house was almost a community centre as you had the only phone in the street and all the neighbours got their calls there.

Going back to when you were nine someone approached your mum and talked to her about the possibility of you continuing your education at the Masonic School for Boys in Bushey, Herefordshire. You took some entrance exams and were successful in being offered a place and you continued your education there until you left at 16 with a certificate in maths, the only subject you excelled in.

The school was funded through the Masonic Trust for Boys and in the 1940's had over 800 pupils. The central school at Bushey closed in 1977 and boys were then allocated places at schools local to where they lived with the fees being paid or subsidised by the Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys, one of the four charities that now comes under the umbrella of the Masonic Charitable Foundation.

Your sisters were also offered places at the Masonic Girls School in Rickmansworth but decided not to go.

When you left school, you were given a marine engineering apprenticeship at T&J Harrison Lne. This was in fulfilment of a promise made by the company to your mum when your father died. However, your apprentice training wasn't without mishap. You were bleeding air out of the engine lubricating pipes and put a spanner on top of a beam above. The engineer started the engine and the vibrations caused the spanner to fall and jam the works, but surprisingly you were punished and rewarded at the same time. You were made to work the night shift to watch the fitters fix the problem but they paid you for that shift as well as the day work and your mother was delighted at the extra income.

Having completed the apprenticeship and qualified, you trained as a mechanical fitter at Clarence Dock Power Station. This led to 16 years at sea finishing up as Chief Engineer. You seemed to be involved in several incidents whilst at sea, ranging from finding the junior engineer asleep on a burning mattress when you went to wake him to take over your shift, putting out two other fires on ships, one in the Mersey, and pulling the deck boy and a girl out of the water in two separate incidents. After all that excitement you ended your career at sea and moved onto shore jobs in 1984.You worked on the technical side for James Fisher, a local shipping company, for 12 years., and then for Bibby and Cammell Laird. You took some courses in various aspects of marine surveying and inspections and that led to working for Germanisher Lloyd as a surveyor. Some of their work was on the drive support systems for the Astute Class of submarines and for that you had to have high level clearance for the Submarine Inspection and Testing Facility at Barrow-in-Furness, and the Chalfont shore facility at Faslane, better known as the base for the Navy's fleet of nuclear submarines. I came across another interesting fact that also connects you also to Faslane. One of the ships you were on in 1970 when you helped pull the deck boy out of the water, the Port Lyttleton, was scrapped in 1974 at Faslane, and by that time the Port Line had joined with the Blue Star line and they became part of Cunard.

After your time with Germanisher Lloyd you went to work for a few years for MacGregor GBR, an international company, being responsible for their compliance, training and integrated Management Systems. You have since started you own company, Mace Maritime Consultancy Service which involves surveying ships for their condition, pre-charter inspection and pre-purchase inspection.

Three years ago, you completed a period as Chairman of the Liverpool Marine Engineers and Naval Architect Guild, and you have also served as the Vice Chairman and Chairman of the local branch of the Institute of Marine Engineers, Science and Technology North West Branch and you are currently their treasurer. You are also a Director of Mersey Mission to Seafarers.

Going back to your earlier life, during your time at sea you had met Ann and was married in 1970. You hadn't had any children but when you came ashore in 1984 you and Ann adopted Raymon. Years later you were left to look after Ramon by yourself but fortune smiled when you met Barbara, the lady who was to become your second wife, in 1996 at the church you attended, and you were married the following year. She already had two children from her first marriage, Claire and Mark. Mark and Raymon are very close and get on very well together but they are incredibly competitive. You also have five grandchildren who keep you busy, in fact when I visited you were looking after one of them, Oscar I think it was. Your hobby is DIY projects and you have done a huge amount of restoration and refurbishment work in your house, and it's still ongoing, in fact brethren I was assured by John when I telephoned to arrange to visit him that although it was a bit like a building site I didn't need a hard hat.

Now turning to your Masonic Career, the main reason for why we are here this evening. Your introduction to Freemasonry was similar to mine in that our fathers and grandfathers were Freemasons, and of course your attendance at the Boys School made it almost certain that you would wish to become a Freemason yourself. You father and grandfather had both died by the time you were asking to join when you were just 21.

You were proposed into this lodge by Lionel Dew and seconded by Gordon Fish and initiated into Old Masonians West Lancashire Lodge 50 years ago yesterday.

Having been through the three degrees your career at sea prevented you taking office in the lodge in the early days, but once you were back on land in 1984 you went through the progressive offices and were installed as WM in 1988 and again in 2006, the year you received first appointment in Provincial Grand Lodge as Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies. You have also held the offices of charity steward and almoner in the lodge and in 1993 you were exalted into Old Masonians West Lancashire Chapter No 7702.

I'd now like to call on your group chairman Mark Matthews, and ask Mark to read the jubilee certificate.

John, you have contributed to the community through your local church and the Mersey Mission and have contributed to serving Freemasonry by your work as lodge charity steward and almoner, and I know you have got a great deal of pleasure and enjoyment from it and so it is a great honour and a privilege to say to you, John, thank you for all you have done for this lodge and the wider community, and congratulations on achieving 50 years as a Mason and we all look forward to seeing you enjoy many more years as a member of this great order.