

W.Bro. John Allen Powell PPrJGW

Celebrating 50 Years in Craft Masonry

A very good evening to you all Brethren.

It is my great pleasure and privilege to be here in Anchorsholme Lodge once again to preside over this meeting for another of your respected brother's 50th celebration.

50 years of commitment to anything in life shows a great deal of loyalty and a genuine love and affection for whatever that cause or vocation may be.

It never ceases to amaze me during the many celebrations I have already been fortunate to attend of the stories of not only celebrants 50 years in the Craft, or more in some cases, but the fascinating lives they have lead. How they manage to remember in such detail the events of years gone by I do not know and our celebrant tonight is one who could quote to me the days, months and years of certain events when I am lucky to remember what happened last week.

Time can seem to pass very quickly, particularly as we get older yet what changes we have seen over those 50 years and even greater ones since the start of our celebrant's life journey.

It was 1936 and George V died to be succeeded by Edward VIII who in turn was to abdicate and George VI took the throne. Buddy Holly was born, Billy Butlin opened his first Holiday Camp in Skegness, the RMS Queen Mary had her maiden voyage to New York and the first red telephone boxes were introduced. It was however to be an even more important year in the lives of Allen and Margery Powell as we shall soon discover brethren.

Jason Dell, PrDGDC, will you please place our celebrant in a comfortable chair before me.

I hope you are nicely settled John and looking forward to me providing an insight into the life and times of John Powell PPrJGW.

You were born in Brighton Sussex to Allen and Margery as I have already mentioned who both hailed from Birmingham. You were their second child having a four year older brother Peter.

Dad worked for the Prudential and Mum at one of the Ministry Offices in Brighton. One of your father's great passions was music, which you inherited and he was a very accomplished pianist and choir master. He encouraged both you and Peter to learn piano but at one particular examination at the famous Brighton Pavilion, they described your efforts as being like a fairy elephant going over the keys which soon saw you change to learning the violin. Mind you brethren, John was only four at the time.

That was the time also when war had broken out with Germany and it was to see the family have to make several moves as Brighton was constantly under the flight path of many of the bombing raids.

Those moves also resulted in you having no fewer than six different primary schools. After the Battle of Britain you and your brother were evacuated to Herefordshire and your next school at Kimbolton near Leominster. After several months there you moved back to Brighton when things had quietened down a little and started at Ditchilin Road Primary. Bombing still continued and you remember the school yard being strafed with bullets but you were all safe in the shelters.

Once again you were moved, this time to your Grandparents in Birmingham and the Anthony Road School for 3 or 4 months. You enjoyed being with your Granddad as he was a skilled pattern maker and this generated your great interest in woodworking. During many of the summer school holidays you would return to Birmingham to join him at work making your own slightly simpler patterns but you were thrilled when one of them was actually accepted by the company to use.

Whilst in Birmingham you came under more bombing when the city was attacked – you couldn't get away from it John could you.

Your father began a new job as a workhouse relief manager in Kings Lynn in Norfolk so off you went again to another school, Paradise Road. Your parents got involved in the local community and your Dad became a Scout Master in Downham Market and you were to join the cubs. You remember the celebration of VE day whilst at a scout camp and also pictures of your Grandfather who was also in Scouting, dressed very much like Baden Powell in the old photos of him.

In 1946 after the war had ended, he got a job as Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages at Witney in Oxfordshire and so another school beckoned.

From there you went to Grammar School for the next two years. When you had been evacuated during the war it was to a farm and Mum always said you would become a gentleman farmer as you were enjoyed it so much. At that time another school Burford Grammar had started a special agricultural course so you took the entrance exam and successfully passed to move there. They had their own small farm and you thoroughly enjoyed the next three years there.

At 16 there was a recruitment drive at the school from the Navy and as your brother Peter had already joined up you went to have a look. You had always been interested in aero modelling so the film they showed showing apprentices doing just that convinced you to apply.

You went along to the recruitment office but they said they didn't think you were sufficiently educated to pass the entrance exam which, to say the least left you totally 'miffed'!

Determined to prove them wrong a family friend gave you some extra tuition over the next two months, you took the exam and passed, signing up in September 1952 for 22 years.

You were sent to HMS Fisgard at Torpoint as an Artificer Apprentice and their motto of 'Non Manibus Solem Sed Corde, 'Not with hands alone but with the heart' is what you have always tried to live up to.

Your practical tests in the first term was woodworking, right up your street and you received the top craftsmanship award. As soon as Dad found out he went straight round to the Recruitment Office to tell them in no uncertain terms of your achievement.

Second Term it was fitting and the engine rooms Artificers logo had Tubal Cain under the crest. It was also when you joined the Artificers Volunteer Brass Band, well I say volunteer but you were stopped in a corridor one day by a senior apprentice, asked if you could read music and when you said yes a cornet was stuffed in your hands (which you had never played before) and told you were in the band!

You were selected for the Fleet Air Arm and posted to Arbroath to complete the last two years or so of your training qualifying as an Aircraft Artificer. You were also by this time solo cornet player in the band.

They let you loose as you put in John on the aircraft at 891 Squadron at Yeovilton who had the first planes with ejection seats. You were promoted to Petty Officer and then Chief Petty Officer at 23 years of age and then moved to Lossiemouth for the next three years. From there you decided to take a one year conversion course to Air Electrical Artificer at Lee on Solent.

You took up golf while you were there and joined the Portsmouth Command Golfing Society. Both your musical talents and your golfing came with many added benefits including being able to play some great courses like St Andrews, Carnoustie for just 5 old shillings a round and the Wentworth course.

After 12 years in the Navy you reached a point where you considered whether to leave but as I will go into a little later you continued with your career.

You served on several Naval Air Squadrons on both fixed wing and helicopters at various Naval Air Stations and as an Electrical instructor at RNAS Arbroath.

For two years you were stationed in the Far East on Aircraft Carriers Victorious and HMS Albion based at Singapore Naval Base. While on board you visited Malaya, Hong Kong, Japan, Western Australia, Philippines, Cambodia and Thailand. You were promoted to Royal Naval officer and became a member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers.

You moved into Air Ordnance (weapons) and became Air Ordnance Officer at RNAS Culdrose for 3 years before joining the Ministry of Defence in London for a further 3 years. Here you were responsible for arranging, chairing and writing the minutes of meetings with Senior Office (Navy, Army and Air Force) and Senior Civil Servants in London and at RAE Farnborough. You were only a Sub Lieutenant and working with those of ranks such as Major so you were immediately promoted to Lieutenant.

Eventually you decided it was time to leave the Navy so you resigned your commission in 1976 whereupon you took up a post at British Aerospace in Warton as Senior Test Flight Engineer responsible for the preparation and execution of the Tri-National Weapons Clearance Trials on the Tornado Aircraft Project. This involved you in regular visits to Germany and Italy to civilian and International Government Establishments.

In 1989 you spent 4 months at the China Lake Naval Weapons Centre in California on the Tornado Aircraft weapons trials and then became Principal Project Engineer on the Al-Yamamah Project with Saudi Arabia visiting Riyadh and other Saudi Air Force Bases.

In 1993 you decided it was time to take early retirement from what had been both a fascinating but varied career.

Well during all this of course John came your family life, beginning when you were at Arbroath at one of the big dances that were held before the Apprentices passing out parade.

Four trainee nurses from Glasgow were on holiday in Arbroath and had been invited to the dance by a friend. One of your fellow Apprentices went across to chat the ladies up and he asked if they fancied any of his mates. One young lady pointed across at you and said 'he's not bad looking', that of course was Janet Murray or 'Jay' as she is known.

What was to follow was a whirlwind courtship. Mum and Dad were in Arbroath for your passing out parade staying in a caravan so you took the plunge and decided to introduce your new girlfriend to them although Jay did think it would be pertinent for you to know her name before you went into the caravan!

Dad took to Jay straight away and your parents thought you had been going out for some time. They invited you both to go with them on their caravan holiday, which you did. That was in August 1956 and in December you decided to get engaged. When your father became ill you decided to seek the permission of your Captain to marry and Jay had to ask her Matron. The date was set and in December 1957 you were married in Kirkintilloch. In December this year you will celebrate the remarkable achievement of 62 years of marriage. Your Dad sadly passed away the following year at just 51.

There have been highs and lows in your family life John. You were blessed with three daughters Linda, Janet and Jillian and also a son Christopher who very sadly only lived for a few hours. Linda became a staff nurse but tragically she suffered a brain haemorrhage whilst living and working in Gibraltar in 2007. Janet though is an Advanced Nurse Practitioner so a lot of family history in Nursing John, with your wife Jay working until 2001 when she retired as a Senior Sister. Jillian is studying for a Higher Diploma in Business Studies and they both live close by in St. Annes. You have eight grandchildren and one great grandson. There is some considerable competition within the family members to appear on your 'Rogues Gallery' wall in cap and gown featuring their education successes and Jillian is determined not to be out- done.

One granddaughter, Lindsay who is in the Military Police, has won both silver and bronze medals in judo at the Commonwealth Games and of course you are all very proud of her.

I mentioned earlier about the consideration you gave to coming out of the Navy after 12 years. This was due in many ways, to the fact that you were moving about with your work so much that you felt it was unfair on your children's education. Weighing up the pros and cons of leaving and finding another job, you both decided the financial outlook if you left was not too rosy so your Navy career continued.

Things eventually became more settled for the family when you joined British Aerospace in 1976 through the recommendation of a good friend Ron Hirst and you moved to St. Annes. He came from the area and knew none other than Dougie and Audrey Lowe who ran the Craigavon Hotel where he advised you stay until you found a home. More of that association later brethren but first we must look at how you came into Freemasonry John.

Well, Jay's father and his brother in law were both Freemasons in Scotland and having been encouraged to attend Ladies Evening and Socials there was only one direction that was to lead. That came in the year 1969 when Mohammed Ali was convicted of avoiding the draft, British troops were first sent to Northern Ireland and a freemason stepped onto the moon's surface. Neil Armstrong's father was a Grand Officer but Buzz Aldrin was an active mason, a member of Clear Lake Lodge No 1417 in Seabrook, Texas. There were many connections with freemasonry including Vice President Lyndon B Johnson who was a great advocate of space travel. There was even a masonic authority assigned to hold lodges on the moon, the Grand Lodge of Texas.

On October 27th of that year Mr John Allen Powell was initiated into the Athole Lodge No 384 in the Scottish Constitution and became Brother John Powell.

I would now like to invite the Assistant Secretary to read a précis of the minutes of that meeting.

It was an emergency meeting in Kirkintilloch and the initiation fee was £11 and 5 old shillings. As a result of your naval career and the many moves, your Passing took place in Lossiemouth in April 1970, actually in St Johns Chapter 195 as in Scotland it takes in part of the Mark Degree, which is not a separate order there. Your third degree, the high and sublime degree was another emergency meeting in April 1971 and you were advanced to the Mark Degree in November 1972. You are of course a lifetime member in Scotland.

Not only did your busy and much travelled career mean your progress to a Master Mason taking place at different locations but any future hope of taking on a permanent position in the lodge and progressing through to the chair were impossible.

Moving to St Annes though and that meeting with Duggie Lowe was to prove fortuitous. He invited you to visit Melita Lodge, meeting at The Palace in St. Annes and you became a regular visitor for the next four years before deciding it was about time you joined the Lodge. In November 1978 you were obligated to the United Grand Lodge of England and became a member of Melita with three members from your mother lodge supporting you.

You progressed through the various offices until you reached the chair in April 1984. What a year that was to be, with a Ladies Evening in the Clifton Arms featuring Pipe and Drums plus a very special country dance, 'The Mason's Apron' with some significant participants including yourself and Jay, Dougie and Audrey Lowe and Mike and Maureen Goodwin. It went so well it even impressed none other than Bill Salthouse – now that is saying something!

At your last meeting in the chair, in March 1985, 29 members of your mother lodge came down to do a demonstration 3rd degree which filled the Lodge Room at The Palace. There then developed a long association between Melita and the Athole Lodge.

Another long association came about when Bro David Rhodes Master of Royal Preston 333 asked to come to the demonstration. From there he

went on to arrange many visits to many 333 Lodges including in Limerick, Paris and of course Glasgow where a certain Jim Peddie was a member.

For those who do not know James Campbell Peddie has just retired as the PGM for the Province of Glasgow. He was intending to be here today but unfortunately his partner Chris has had a nasty accident and naturally Jim doesn't want to leave her on her own. We are joined though by David Irving the Depute Provincial Grand Master for the Province of Dunbartonshire, Jim Hunter and Billy Hopgood, both Past Masters of the Athole Lodge. I have to hold my hand up brethren and say our paths have crossed before in Brigantes Lodge in Kendal where I am a member as was Dougie Lowe and so is Peddie.

A delight to see you all and a very warm welcome to this special evening.

Back to you John and you became Secretary of Melita Lodge in 1993 until 2003 during which time you were recognised with appointment to Provincial rank as PPrJGD and then promoted in 2001 to the high rank of PPrJGW. You have acted as Vice-Captain of Stewards at the Craft and RA Provincial meetings in 1990 and 2003 for the South Fylde Group and 2005 for the North Fylde.

For many years you had visited this the Anchorsholme Lodge as a guest of Brian Ashton, a colleague at Aerospace and in 2004 you became a joining member. In 2006 you also joined the Senatores Lodge of Installed Masters.

Now, your journey in Royal Arch started a little later than anticipated when you were exalted into Anchorsholme Chapter in April 1988 reaching the 1st Principals chair in in February 1999 and joining Senatores Chapter of Installed Principals in the same year.

You have served as Almoner for seven years, Group Rep for seven years and Charity Steward for another six years resulting in appointment as Acting Prov.A.G.Soj in 2004 and promoted to PPrGSwdB in 2018.

A certain Terry Hudson and the late Brian Crowe persuaded you to join Bispham with Norbreck Mark Lodge in 1991 and you have enjoyed much

happiness and success in that degree as well. Installed as Master in 2000 you were appointed to the prestigious rank of Provincial SGW in 2005, a year I remember well as I was invited to join your Mark Provincial Dinner at Fleetwood in my position as PrJGW in the Craft.

You received Grand Rank as PAGDC in 2008 and were then promoted to PGSD in 2015. Your memberships include Philadelphia Lodge of Inst MMM, Adoniram Lodge, Prov MMM and Unity Lodge of MMM, the Provincial Wardens Lodge.

In 2004 you joined Royal Ark Mariners becoming Worshipful Commander in 2010 and appointed in 2014 to RAM Prov.G.Rank.

Throughout your time over the last 50 years John you have seen some considerable changes and have met a few interesting characters. Cecil Henriques was a member of Melita Lodge as is his son the retired judge Sir Richard Henriques. You remember Richard going in the chair when you were Secretary and him proposing the toast to his father's health at his 60th in Freemasonry when Ken Moxley attended.

He was probably the longest serving brother to remain a light blue as he never had the time to attend meetings, until suddenly, in one leap he was elevated to the stratospheric height in Grand Lodge of PJGW!

Over recent years your own health issues and those of your wife Jay have restricted your attendances which is totally understandable but your commitment to Freemasonry has held strong even when faced with these and other challenges and Jay has always given you her full support.

Our Provincial Grand Master James Anthony Harrison is well aware of your celebration this evening and I believe you may have spoken with him already yesterday.

He has also sent his congratulations in the form of a certificate, which I will now ask the Group Chairman, Peter Greathead to read out.

John, may I wish you and Jay improved good health to enjoy many more years together with your family and I hope as a Freemason that you continue to have many more happy times in not only the Craft but the other degrees of which you are member.

My thanks to you and Jay for your hospitality when I visited you to hear your life and masonic story.

You are a true gentleman and you have not only my respect and admiration but I am sure that of all the members and friends assembled here, delighted to see you reaching this milestone today. For someone John whom they claimed was not good enough at 16 to pass the navy entrance exam, you have certainly proved them wrong, in spades.

It has been my great fortune and pleasure to be able to preside over your Golden Jubilee and now Brethren, will you please join with me in showing our congratulations and appreciation in the usual West Lancashire way to John Allen Powell, PPrJGW, today celebrating 50 years as a Craft Freemason.

David Randerson P.S.G.D., A.Pr.G.M.