

From the Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master



Brethren, I commence my Address, by thanking each and every one of you for your attendance today, for what is one of the most important dates in our Provincial Diary.

It was my pleasure to reappoint Philip Gunning, as my Deputy Provincial Grand Master. Phil has a wealth of masonic knowledge and experience, and I greatly appreciate his continued support.

It was also my pleasure to reappoint seven of my Assistant Provincial Grand Masters. I thank all of those Brethren for their considerable work to date, especially in terms of assisting me in the management of our large Province. I know that their high standards of performance will continue into the future.

As you heard earlier brethren, David Ogden has retired today after 5 years of committed and dedicated service as an Assistant Provincial Grand Master. David, I thank you for all of your hard work, and I wish both you and your wife Joan, a long, healthy and happy retirement.

I am delighted to have appointed Malcolm Bell as successor to David. Malcolm will be responsible for the Wigan and District Group and the Leigh Group. Brethren, as I mentioned earlier, Malcolm has served the Province since 2012, formerly as a Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies, and as the Craft Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies for the last 4 years. Malcolm I am looking forward to working with you.

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I was most pleased to appoint Barry Fitzgerald to succeed Malcolm as the Craft Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies. From the work that Barry has carried out, as a Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies, I know that he will excel in his new role.

Brethren you will know that the Pro Grand Master launched his Strategic Road Map for Freemasonry in December last year. Five months on, and with your considerable assistance, I am endeavoring to deliver it, together with the indissoluble link between Craft and Royal Arch Freemasonry.

To help in achieving strategic delivery, you will be aware that I have merged our former separate Craft and Royal Arch Cabinets into one Cabinet. The Cabinet includes all of our senior leaders from both Orders. I am certain that this development will contribute considerably to the delivery of the Strategy.

Additionally, our West Lancashire Freemasons website and all social media forums fully reflect that we are one organisation, significantly highlighting the equal importance of Craft and Royal Arch.

Brethren it is no coincidence that His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent is the head of the Craft and Royal Arch, both here in the UK and the Districts overseas,

It therefore makes sense, that like many of my colleagues in Office in other Provinces, I am Provincial Grand Master and the Grand Superintendent.

The Membership challenge for Craft and Royal Arch Freemasonry must be key areas of focus for all of us. I sincerely thank those lodges and chapters who have risen to my request to address falling numbers in local memberships.

Many lodges and chapters have been holding multiple ceremonies, additional ceremonies by dispensation, and have been asking other lodges and chapters without a candidate, to work ceremonies on their behalf. This has been a tremendous effort and I congratulate all of those concerned for their commitment, hard work and dedication in respect of maintaining and enhancing our membership. Please keep this action going as we approach the end of this season and as we will soon be approaching the start of the new season.

We are in the very positive position of having a significant number of gentlemen waiting to be initiated into the Craft, together with a high number of Craft Masons waiting to be exalted into Royal Arch.

Please continue your dedicated work with regards to membership and effective and meaningful lodge and chapter planning, in bringing those Craft Initiations and Royal Arch Exaltations to successful fruition.

I also ask that you speak to any unattached Royal Arch Masons in your lodges about them returning to a Chapter. I'm sure that you will agree, that we all need to be ambassadors for Craft and Royal Arch membership.

The support from our craft lodges and groups in terms of White Table Events aimed at attracting men into Royal Arch, has also been significant. Thank you to those lodges and groups who have embraced and supported this ongoing initiative. I very much appreciate your engagement and enthusiasm.

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I particularly thank those non-Royal Arch Masons who have attended to find out more about Royal Arch Membership. I trust that they will go on to enjoy successful Royal Arch memberships together with making new and long lasting friendships.

Brethren please do not rely on the highly successful National Digital Marketing Campaigns and our industrious Membership Officers to bring in new members to your lodges.

Please consider your work colleagues, friends, neighbours and family for their suitability as masonic prospects.

We need to invest for the future. With that in mind, younger men would be most welcome as candidates. There are also many men in our local communities who are aged in their 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s and beyond, who will be retired or semi-retired. We can meaningfully fill a potential gap for them, and in return they can bring a wealth of skills and abilities to our fine organisation.

Brethren, I don't need to tell you that freemasonry has existed for over 300 years. But, we need to maintain our membership for the future. You must focus on the longevity of your lodges, your chapters, your Province and the wider national freemasonry in general.

That future membership of freemasonry lies in all of our hands. Our lodges and chapters are on the same journey. Furthermore, our lodges and chapters are one organisation. You must always remember that in terms of membership, it's all about your lodge, your chapter, your province, your future!

Our objective in my opinion, is not so much to get more men into Masonry, but to get Masonry into more men!

Brethren, as I travel around the Province, I have been able to share your company on so many occasions, whilst attending Installations, Centenaries, Regular Meetings, Exaltations, White Table Events, Joint Convocations, Masters and First Principals Group Dinners, the Provincial Ball and Group Balls, to name but a few. Throughout this time, I have been amazed by your considerable enthusiasm, commitment and contribution to charity.

In terms of dedication and charitable giving to our local communities, within the last year, our Groups and the West Lancashire Freemason's Charity have contributed in excess of £300,000 to non-masonic charities. Many more thousands of pounds have been donated to our own members who have found themselves in hardship and distress.

This is a timely opportunity for me to say that we are currently living in difficult financial times. Particularly in terms of the cost of living and fuel bills. If you or members of your lodges and chapters need help, do not suffer in silence, or let others suffer in silence. Please call the WLFC Office at Huyton for totally confidential advice. Brethren, my message is simple, help is there if needed, please reach out and ask for it.

All of your charitable giving and activity, together with other worthy initiatives such as support to foodbanks and the homeless, demonstrates that we really are a force for good. Brethren thank you for your kindness and concern for those less fortunate than ourselves.

Many of our masonic halls are the hub of our communities in which they are located. I thank all of our local Group Executive and Masonic Hall Teams for their considerable endeavours. Those brethren are the very engine room of our Province.

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Brethren, major occasions such as today, don't just happen. On all of our behalves, I thank Peter Taylor, Mick Southern, Diana and Violet and all of the Provincial Office Volunteers for their hard work in arranging everything to such a high standard.

I thank our hard-working Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies and all of his Deputies in ensuring that everything has run so smoothly.

I also thank the Wigan and District Group and the Leigh Group for providing our very important and hardworking Stewards, who have marshalled the day so well and safely for us.

To all of those Brethren who are to today receiving Acting Offices, First Appointments and Promotions, I thank you for all the work that you have done to date for our Province, and for that work which I know you will continue to perform in the future.

To those who are dining later, I look forward to your company at the Festive Board. I trust that you will all have a safe journey home.

*To conclude Brethren, my main wish and objective is for you to enjoy your freemasonry, please ensure that you do that and.....
May The Red Rose Continue To Bloom!*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Francis Matthews', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Francis Matthews,
Provincial Grand Master