



Companions and Brethren, I begin my Address by thanking you all for your attendance, for what is a most important date in our Provincial Diary.

It was my pleasure to reappoint my Deputy Grand Superintendent, Chris Butterfield, and my Second Provincial Grand Principal, Mike Threlfall. I thank both of those Companions for their continued hard work and contribution to our Province.

To complete the team of 'we three' it was with immense pleasure that I invested David Barr as Third Provincial Grand Principal. I know you will make a significant contribution to the running of the Province.

Likewise, I would extend a hearty welcome to John Murphy, John Porter and Gary Rogerson to the Cabinet.

To the three that have retired today - Godfrey, Colin and Barrie, enjoy your time in the sun and thank you for all your hard work in the past.

Companions and Brethren as I have travelled the Province, you will have frequently heard me reference the Strategic Roadmap for Freemasonry, launched by the Pro First Grand Principal and Pro Grand Master last December.

You will be aware that a key part of the Roadmap is Craft Membership, Royal Arch Membership and the indissoluble link between Craft and Royal Arch. All of you here today know that joining the Royal Arch completes your journey in pure Antient Freemasonry.

Craft and RA are indeed one organisation. That said, only 42% of our Craft Masons are currently members of the Royal Arch. I strongly believe that with a small amount of extra effort from us all, we could easily achieve a 50% plus RA membership here in West Lancashire.

The White Table Events and Joint Convocations aimed at increasing our RA numbers have been enthusiastically supported. I thank you all for that support.

You have also impressively risen to the Membership Challenge, by holding additional Meetings for ceremonies and in arranging multiple candidate occasions. Please keep up that good work in this new season.

Companions you have been personally notified, that the Province has offered our Craft Lodges presentations from the Executive, to discuss the issues facing modern freemasonry. This will include the importance of taking that next crucial step in joining RA. I urge you to take advantage of this opportunity, especially if your lodge should have a Meeting without a Candidate.

You can all assist me by being proactive RA Ambassadors. Please speak to the members of your lodges who have not yet joined us or who are unattached and may wish to consider re-joining our colourful and vibrant Order.

Our membership is slowly but surely increasing, I thank you all for your significant contribution to that. However, we must avoid complacency. Whilst we have successfully existed for over 300 years, we need to look towards the next 300 years.

Companions thank you for your total support and commitment to the National Digital Marketing Campaigns, which ran over the course of the last two masonic seasons. You made it work and as a result of your efforts, we have welcomed many new members, who in turn have brought in even more future Craft Prospects. Of course, those men are now joining or considering joining us in Royal Arch Freemasonry.

To fully evaluate the previous two National Digital Marketing Campaigns, UGLE have recently decided, that this year we will not be having a 2023 National Campaign.

In an effort to fill the void created by the withdrawal of the NDMC, we will be piloting Local Digital Marketing Campaigns in two of our 17 groups. After full evaluation of those pilots, particularly regarding costs and outcomes, consideration will be given to the feasibility of a Province wide Local Campaign. This initiative coupled with the work of our Community Engagement Advisory Group and Corporately Branded Hall Signage, aimed at enhancing and attracting Prospects, will I trust, continue to grow our Membership. I will give you more detail regarding the CEAG and Corporately Branded Signage later in this Address.

Companions don't only rely on campaigns to provide your Craft Candidates, who of course go on to become our RA Candidates. Please consider your relatives, friends, neighbours and work colleagues as potential candidates. We need younger men, but don't forget those men in their 50s, 60s and beyond who are retired or semi-retired.

We have a lot to offer to men of all ages, and they have a lot to offer us. It really is never too late to become a freemason. On the 1st November, I am attending a First Degree Ceremony, at which, the Candidate is 86 years of age!

In line with the Membership Pathway, it is crucial that you effectively plan for your lodges and chapters. Not only in terms of Candidates, but also in respect of your lodge and chapter succession planning for Offices. Planning has been a fundamental part of our organisation since our inception, yet still some of our chapters and lodges fail to adequately plan, then go on to find themselves in difficulty in terms of their longer term existence.

The eagerly anticipated Archway Strategy will be launched in November this year. It will provide guidance and advice on how to improve and sustain Membership in your chapter.

The strategy will be available from the province and on our website. Your Group Royal Arch lead will be able to provide further information, advice and assistance to you, should you need it. Companions it is interesting to note, that during the research phase for the new strategy, a survey was conducted involving current companions. One question asked why they joined the RA.

It probably won't be too much of a surprise, that 80% of the respondents said that they joined RA because someone had asked them. Companions please heed that very valid response, and ask your non RA Craft Masons to join us.

Companions and Brethren, most of us here today represent the present and the past in terms of Freemasonry in West Lancashire. We have many new light blue masons who are very much our future. Please carefully look after them, support them and guide them through your lodges and then towards the RA.

At the Provincial Grand Lodge Meeting on the 8th May 2024, fifty of our newer masons from our Light Blue Clubs will be invited to attend and dine as guests of the Province. There is a Light Blue Seminar at Southport Masonic Hall, on Saturday 24th February 2024, at which I will conduct a draw to identify those newer brethren who will be invited to attend. I recommend that our Groups who are without a club, explore their options to form one.

Companions I ask that you work with our newer companions and brethren to encourage First Principals and Masters to routinely visit other lodges and chapters during their year in Office. We all know that such outings help to develop our newer masons in their important roles, as well as affording them the opportunity to make many new friends. This practice is not as prevalent as it once was, and it needs to be addressed.

I heartily congratulate and thank you all for your continued significant contributions to our charities. In respect of the Masonic Charitable Foundation and the West Lancashire Freemasons Charity, if you are a taxpayer please take advantage of the Envelope Scheme. By doing so you can extend your donation by a further 25%, courtesy of the Tax Authorities.

Since January this year and thanks to your kindness, local charities in our West Lancashire communities have benefitted from MCF Grants totalling £152,000.

For the same period our own WLFC have made Grants to our communities totalling £84,000 and Grants totalling £124,300 to brethren who have found themselves in difficulty and distress.

Companions if you or other masons you know are in financial difficulties, don't suffer in silence or allow them to suffer in silence. Please contact the WLFC Office at Huyton for free and confidential advice. It is your charity, please use it.

Additionally, last season our lodges, chapters and Groups contributed a magnificent £146,300 in masonic grants and £187,600 to our communities in non-masonic grants. Companions and Brethren your charitable work and donations to our communities and masons in distress, is truly remarkable, thank you so much. Please be extremely proud of your achievement and inform your non-masonic friends, family and associates about our considerable annual contribution to charitable causes.

Our Masonic Halls remain the hub of our local communities. I commend the work of our Hall Chairmen and their Teams. Thank you for all that you do.

The Province has offered to fund professionally designed corporately branded external signage for our buildings. The key message being about how to apply to join our excellent organisation. I thank those groups who have committed to this initiative, which is now being rolled out and I trust that you will obtain enhanced membership from it.

If your hall has not subscribed to this significant Membership Challenge tool, I ask that you please reconsider it. You are missing out on a no cost opportunity to enhance your local membership, our provincial membership and the wider national membership.

Our Halls are at the heart of the communities. Many are used for weddings and other celebrations. Others have external businesses located within them. Some have Open Days and other events to interact with our communities.

Community engagement is essential to our reputation. It is also an important element to attract potential new prospects. The province has a Community Engagement Advisory Group. It consists of masons from the Cabinet, Communications and Marketing, Membership, Publicity Officers, Group Chairmen and the Charities. The team are monitoring our progress on Community Engagement. They will be providing good practice and advice to the groups regarding community engagement.

I thank our hard-working Group Executives for all that they do. I can assure you Companions and Brethren, that there has not been a summer recess for those busy Officers. The demand on their time and commitment is considerable. I very much appreciate and value the work of our Executive Teams.

I welcome and heartily congratulate all of those who have taken up their new Group Appointments. I wish you all every future success.

Companions I thank our Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies, David Thomas, and all of his Deputies for ensuring that everything has run so smoothly.

The organisation of a Provincial Meeting is considerable. On all of our behalves, I thank Peter Taylor, Mick Southern, Diana, Violet and all of the Provincial Office volunteers for their hard work in arranging everything to such a high standard.

I also thank the Furness and South Lakeland Groups for providing our hard-working Stewards who have marshalled PGC so well and safely for us.

To the Companions who are today receiving Acting Offices, First Appointments and Promotions, I thank you for all of the work that you have done to date on behalf of the Province. I also know that you will continue that work into the future.

I have high expectations that today's recipients will proactively discuss RA Membership with the non-RA and unattached RA Masons in their Craft Lodges. I don't apologise for reiterating something that I said earlier, you truly are Ambassadors for RA Freemasonry, go and tell your non-RA colleagues all about it and ask them to join us!

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

Companions to conclude, please continue to enjoy your RA and Craft Freemasonry and may the Red Rose continue to bloom!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Mark Francis Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Mark Francis Matthews,
Most Excellent Grand Superintendent