

The Life and Times of Norman Speed

Good evening, Companions

I have had the enjoyment of attending many celebrations over the last 13 years as a member of a Group Executive, but it is certainly one of the special privileges of an Assistant to the Provincial Grand Principals to be invited to take part in the celebration of a companion's special anniversary.

Companions, it is said that the greatest happiness a man can have is to you know that he is loved, and the very fact that there are so many Companions here this evening who have made the journey to take part in this evening's celebration only serves to reinforce that statement and shows the high regard that our celebrant is held in. But to do that I must first tell you (as if you did not already know!) who that person is.....

Companion Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies can you please place Norman SPEED PPrGSN, on the floor of the lodge before me and ensure that he is comfortable.

The year 1943 was the fourth year of the Second World War and saw some major developments in the prosecution of the war, namely the Tehran Conference was held when the Allied leaders met to discuss the prosecution of the war and arrive at an agreement for the future of Europe after the war. 1943 was also a milestone for scientific firsts, namely the first jet fighter was tested and the first use of a fillable reusable aerosol spray!

Some very famous people were born in 1943 in the persons of musicians Sir Mick Jagger, Keith Richard of the Rolling Stones, Janis Joplin, the actors Robert De Niro, Sir Ben Kingsley and the tennis players Arthur Ashe and Billie Jean King and of course maybe the most famous of them all Norman Speed in August 1943 here in Widnes in what was then Lancashire.

You arrived into the world as the second son born to James Edward and Edith Emily Speed, the birth of your sister two years later completed the family unit. You lived at 3 Crow Wood Lane, Halton View, Widnes and your dad (Jim) worked as an engineer for Turners Asbestos Cement Company at the Everite Works on Derby Road, Widnes for almost 50 years.

The immediate post war period was somewhat austere as rationing of all goods such as clothing, food and sweets was still in place, particularly exotic fruits and, as far as you were concerned, bananas and oranges had not yet been invented. Your parents succeeded in nurturing and nourishing the family with what food was available, hence your love of roast or mashed potatoes and carrots.

The Halton View area at the time was mainly open fields and farmland, your house being only one of nine in the lane; this gave ample scope to play all day in the surrounding fields with children from the adjoining houses. Playing hide and seek at harvest time (no combine harvesters) was really good fun. One of your earliest childhood memories was seeing large ships, from your bedroom window, apparently floating through the fields. You later found out that the ships were on the Manchester Ship Canal and clearly visible in the distance.

Your family managed to have a holiday in some years thanks mainly to an aunt who had a boarding house in New Brighton. Off went the family to Liverpool on the Crosville bus to the Pier Head and there boarded the Mersey Ferry to New Brighton Pier. Happy summer days were spent in Vale Park and around Fort Perch Rock engaging in activities such as paddling and rock-pooling in the clean and clear blue waters of the River Mersey.

Another memorable childhood event was the Coronation in 1953 when a television with a 9-inch square screen, only the second in the lane, arrived in the house. Several aunties, complete with large hats, arrived on the day to view the spectacle, you recollect being banished behind the sofa to watch using a periscope between the hats.

Your school life started at Warrington Road Infants and Primary School where the headmaster was Hector Ireland, a fearsome man, whom you later came across at the start of your Masonic career. One of his many traits was classifying boys during assemblies and singing lessons as either songbirds or crows. At lunchtime on your first day at school you decided enough was enough and you wended your way back home up Castle Street and through the fields, whereupon your mum, thinking she had got rid of you for the day, marched you

straight back to school. That was the start of 17 years of formal education. You also told the teacher one year where she could stick the Maypole where she wanted as there was 'no way' you were going to dance round it.

You studied so diligently at primary school that you managed to fail the 11+ examination and went on to attend Fairfield Secondary Modern School on Peelhouse Lane. The headmaster was Robert (aka Cog) Roberts and there you met another fearsome man, Leslie Collier, whom you later came across at the start of your Royal Arch career. Academically your secondary education was good for you as by the time you got to the end of your third year you had excelled academically.

Subsequently you, and an elite group of 15 other boys, including such luminaries as Les Dobson, Bill Cank and Phil Le Broq, all of whom became both Craft and Royal Arch colleagues, were selected to study intensively for two years in order to sit the General Certificate of Education, which apparently was virtually unheard-of outside Grammar Schools at the time.

Excellent tuition by some very able and dedicated teachers, and lots of hard studying, particularly homework, over the two-year period culminated in you sitting and passing six subjects at GCE Level. This achievement combined with passing the Local Government Entrance Examination opened the door to the world of work at the age of 16 years.

In your early teenage years, you were in a skiffle group at the Wesley Methodist Church Youth Club playing the double base on a tea chest, you were also handy with the piano accordion belting out various country and western songs. You also joined the 3rd Widnes (Wesley Church) Company of the Boys Brigade. There you heard about, and later met, a notable member of the Boys Brigade in the Widnes area at the time, namely Alan Locke, who you subsequently revered during your Masonic career, you now sit alongside his son Ian, another distinguished Mason. You managed to aspire to be a side drummer in the Brigade band that regularly paraded around the local streets following Church Parade services. After several failed attempts to blow a bugle, you recollect the bandmaster telling you that you were no good at "blowing your own trumpet" so go and "bang your own drum".

Professional Career

In August 1959, following an earlier interview at Widnes Town Hall, you were appointed as Student Public Health Inspector by the Corporation of the Borough of Widnes at a starting salary of £208.00 per annum, i.e., £4.00 per week, a considerable sum of money at the time, together with a bicycle allowance of £5.00 per annum. You started work at the Health Centre/Clinic on Kingsway, namely the building that still stands immediately adjacent to this very building.

One of your first duties was to go on to the roof of the building and take daily meteorological readings of rainfall, temperatures and wind direction. You also had to attempt to assess which factories were emitting noxious odours and nauseas vapours. You also had to keep a look out for any dark or black smoke coming from factory chimneys, except of course when the fog/smog came down.

You quickly learned that safeguarding public health was a very complex subject that was going to require a considerable amount of further education, for which purpose you went to night school at St Helens Technical College (aka the Gamble Building) on the bus for two nights a week for two years studying Building Construction to City and Guilds Standard. Having completed that course of study you then embarked on a four-year part-time degree course, again two days and one evening a week, at the University of Salford.

All aspects of public, later called Environmental Health, were then unveiled to your view. Subjects such as food safety and hygiene, home safety, health and safety, housing standards, air and noise pollution, drainage, pest and dog control, licensing, sewage and refuse collection and disposal and finally the welfare of food animals, disease diagnosis and infection control in slaughterhouses. All of these subjects required an extensive knowledge of the relevant Legislation.

Considerable travelling was necessary to undertake this course of study, initially by steam train to Manchester Central Station and then walk to the campus. You later acquired a car, sharing ownership with your brother, and commuted along the ever-dangerous A580 East Lancashire Road, which was only 3 lanes wide at the time i.e., 2 inside lanes and a murder lane in the middle. The mixture of academic learning at the university with practical application with colleagues in the Public Health Department was eventually rewarded in June 1965 when you graduated with a BSc. (Hons) in Environmental Health.

Prior to leaving the employ of Widnes Corporation in 1967, having completed a two-year probationary period as a Qualified Public Health Inspector, much of your time was spent inspecting and reporting on the condition of houses in the West Bank, Moss Bank and town centre areas of Widnes. (hence - the need for a bicycle). Unsurprisingly a vast number of houses were found to be totally unfit for human habitation and an on-going extensive slum clearance programme was implemented. Complete terraces of houses were demolished, and the area redeveloped particularly in West Bank around St Mary's Church and the Travis Street/Grenfell Street area. Moss Bank was never redeveloped and is now completely industrial in nature.

On 18 April 1964 you married your childhood sweetheart Brenda at Wesley Methodist Church and set up home in Park Road Widnes. During the ensuing four years the family grew when Andrea and then Paul were born.

By this time, you had acquired a more reliable car and you were appointed as a Public Health Inspector by Golborne Urban District Council, a small Local Authority area south of Wigan and Leigh consisting of the three distinct communities namely; Golborne, Lowton and Culcheth. Your career at Golborne progressed when in 1971 you were appointed as Chief Public Health Inspector and assumed additional responsibilities, in particular the management of the Refuse Collection Service. Your man management skills were then considerably tested and enhanced whilst debating/negotiating/arguing with 36 men in the refuse yard at 7.30am when you were trying to tell them what you wanted them to do, and they are trying to tell you what they wanted to do. This period of your career was very challenging and an extremely rewarding time.

As a result of your promotion the family was re-located to Lowton where your second daughter Nicola was born, a much more difficult time for family life time as you were away from both your, and Brenda's, families and therefore had little support locally.

Another significant upheaval in your career occurred in April 1974 when the national structure of local government changed radically, and you were appointed Assistant Chief Environmental Health Officer by the Warrington Borough Council. You then became part of a large department of some 50 staff and your responsibilities were to manage a group of 22 professional, technical, and administrative officers. You had wide ranging duties including overseeing the inspection of over 1,600 food premises for safety and hygiene control, some 3,500 workplaces for health and safety compliance, an extensive pest and dog control service and supervising the hygienic slaughter and inspection of food animals in two large slaughterhouses dealing in beef and lamb, and one was a bacon factory that processed some 620 pigs a day, i.e., 3,600 pigs per week.

You originally intended to stay at Warrington for a few years before progressing your career elsewhere, however that proved not to be the case and you remained at Warrington Borough Council for 25 years. Accordingly, the family was, once again, relocated to 20 Gleneagles Drive, Widnes were you now live. (That move coincided with the Queens Silver Jubilee weekend).

Having settled the children into school and eventually college life they grew, matured, and eventually found purposeful employment. During the 1990's they all "fled the nest" and for each of them marriage followed. They have subsequently presented you and Brenda with seven wonderful grandchildren, a boy, and a girl for each of them, plus second son for your own son. The age range for is 32 years to 6 years. A great granddaughter has been added to the family flock. Both. you and Brenda are extremely proud of the family and you often comment that without your children and grandchildren etc. you would be considerably the richer financially – but much the poorer emotionally.

Your employment with Warrington Borough Council terminated when you took early retirement in March 1999 at the culmination of 40 years' Local Government service. This release from full-time employment allowed Brenda and yourself the opportunity to travel extensively to many countries, in particular Singapore, Bali, Canada, Alaska, New Zealand, Australia, many of the Caribbean and Mediterranean Islands and enjoyed frequent family holidays.

You felt the need to fill the void left from your previous employment and subsequently established your own consultancy business acting as an Associate Advisor to various organisations (not all at the same time) including: - Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, University of Salford, HM Planning Inspectorate, HM Dept. for Work and Pensions, United Utilities, Whitbread Hotel and Restaurant Group, and Mitchell and Butler Restaurant Group.

Having completed a further 10-year period of self-employment, that involved extensive travel around the country, you eventually retired completely in March 2009. You then promptly joined Widnes Golf Club, (you have Keith Lysons to thank for that). This presented another of life's challenges for you that involves a four hour walk whilst hitting a little white ball with a big stick, a skill you have yet to master. You were privileged during the 2016 golfing season to be elected as Captain of the Senior's Section of the Club which involved leading a team of 16 players to compete in home and away games at several clubs in the locality, the team remained unbeaten at home during the season.

The challenge of playing golf continues (also referred to as a stick with a ball at one end and a fool at the other end and has similarities to both snooker and fishing!!). You have always been interested in watching and partaking in all sorts of sport. You have been a member of several fitness centres, a life-long supporter and season ticket holder of Widnes Vikings, which in itself is pretty stressful at the moment. You played rugby in your younger youthful days (with a name like speed you could always run fast) as well as playing cricket, tennis and squash, but your passion has always been the game of badminton, which you still play on a regular basis.

You were asked for a quote to describe your present-day life-style and you responded: - "Domestic bliss combined with 4 G's and an M, not necessarily in any particular order they are golf, gym, gardening, grandchildren and masonry".

Masonic Career.

Your Masonic career in the Lodge of Equity No 1384 commenced on 1 June 1967, following the proposition by your father, who was the WM, seconded by Clarrie Edmundson. Your initiation was attended by a considerable number of brethren, the principal guest was the Rev Richard Kenyon Leigh PGD, Asst. Provincial Grand Master. You were passed to the second degree in January 1968 and raised to the degree of master Mason on 5 December 1968. Both these Ceremonies were conducted by your father which proved to be very emotional for you both.

The first 10 years of your Masonic career was spent as one of 15 stewards on the stewards list. The duties were quite onerous as you were expected to serve meals and drinks at the festive boards and attempt to eat your own meal at the same time, this proved to be a definite recipe for indigestion.

In February 1977 you were appointed tyler of the Lodge, which was then a progressive office at that time; you went on to serve in every office on the ladder eventually being Installed as WM on 7 February 1985. The installation was attended by 125 Brethren, the principal guest being Frank Cowburn PSGD, Asst. Provincial Grand Master.

Over the intervening period you have always been willing and able to fill any vacancy that arose eventually being appointed as director of ceremonies in 2010. Additionally, you were the representative on the Widnes Group for your lodge and chapter for many years culminating in being appointed as Vice Chairman of the Group in 2016. You were appointed to the rank of PPrAGDC in 1995 and promoted as PPrSGD in 2013. You celebrated 50 years as a Freemason in 2017

Your Royal Arch career commenced on 16 October 1973 when you were exalted into this chapter by your father who was first principal, his proposition being seconded by J (Len) Tomlinson.

Scribe E to read the minutes of the Ceremony

You were appointed assistant sojourner in 1976 for a 3-year period and then principal sojourner for a further two years. Both these positions were qualifying offices for progression to the principal's chairs at that time. As you were still some years away from attaining the chair of your lodge you were appointed as scribe Ezra in February 1981 and remained in that office for (an almost) continuous period of 32 years. The duties of scribe Ezra for the three years in which you occupied the principal's chairs were undertaken by John Wright. You were elected to the first principals chair at the convocation in December 1987, regrettably your father passed away 3 days later on 20 December 1987. The ceremony of installation into the first principals chair was held on 16 February 1988. The ceremony was conducted in exemplary fashion by Arthur Howard Ford-Giltrap in

the presence of the then Grand Superintendent Alan Fletcher Ferris and Leslie D Bullen PAGSoj, Asst to PrGPr's together with 86 Companions.

The highlight of your Royal Arch career was undoubtedly the dedication of the chapter banner on 17 October 2006, which still hangs proudly in the east, this ceremony coincided with the 75th anniversary of the chapter. The ceremony was conducted by the then Deputy Grand Superintendent Stephen PJ Reid, in the presence of John C Hutton PGStdB, Asst. to ProvGP's and K Cox PAGSoj Third ProvGP who delivered an emotional oration, a copy of which is included in the minutes of that meeting. The 42 companions who also attended witnessed another very memorable and enjoyable evening.

You were appointed as PPrPGSoj in 1994 and promoted to the high rank of PPrGSN in 2000. Your tenure as scribe Ezra terminated in 2013 and you reverted to becoming a steward in the Chapter.

You are also a member of other Masonic Orders, namely 3 Mark Masonic Lodges. Norman such is the importance of your own golden jubilee that our Grand Superintendent Mark Matthews has caused a certificate to be struck to mark this wonderful achievement, which I shall now ask our group chairman David Atkinson to read.