

Good evening, brethren,

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

Brethren 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 brethren 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 didn't already know!) who that person is.....Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies can you please place David Charles Jones PPJGW, on the floor of the lodge before me and ensure that he is comfortable. So let us think back to 1944 and what was happening in the world, well the sixth year of World War II has started, and the year would see some momentous events:

- WWII: Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle begin a 2-day conference in Marrakech in January 1944.
- The two-year Siege of Leningrad is lifted.
- The 16th Academy Awards Ceremony is held, the first Oscar ceremony held at a large public venue, Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. Casablanca, directed by Michael Curtiz, wins the Award for Best Picture.
- The "Great Escape": 76 Royal Air Force prisoners of war escape by tunnel "Harry" from Stalag Luft III this night. Only 3 men (2 Norwegians and a Dutchman) return to the UK; of those recaptured, 50 are summarily executed soon afterwards, in the Stalag Luft III murders.
- The German navy's Enigma messages are decoded in England almost in real time.
- More than 1,000 British bombers drop 5,000 tons of bombs on German gun batteries on the Normandy coast on 5 June, in preparation for D-Day.
- D-Day June 6: 155,000 Allied troops shipped from England land on the beaches of Normandy in northern France, beginning Operation Overlord and the Invasion of Normandy. The Allied soldiers quickly break through the Atlantic Wall and push inland, in the largest amphibious military operation in history. This operation helps liberate France from Germany and weakens the Nazi hold on Europe.
- Adolf Hitler survives the 20 July plot to assassinate him led by Claus von Stauffenberg; he and his fellow conspirators in this and Operation Valkyrie are executed the following day.
- Allied troops attempt the largest airborne military operation in history (at the time) when the Battle of Arnhem (Operation Market Garden) begins on September 17. The purpose of this operation was for Allied paratroopers to land in the Netherlands and take control of key bridges near the Rhine River from German forces. This was so that Allied troops could push through Germany and end the war much more quickly if successful. Unfortunately, for the Allies, German troops were aware of their arrival ahead of time and had the time to organize against them and destroy many of the bridges prior to the paratroopers' landing. Some Allied forces made it to the Arnhem Bridge, but they were short on supplies and forced to abandon their plans, leaving Germany in control of the Rhine River at that time.

Some very famous people were born in 1944 including, Danny DeVito the movie actor, Diana Ross the singer, Jerry Springer the TV Show host, George Lucas the film director, Michael Douglas the movie actor, Jimmy Page the guitarist, Gladys Knight the singer, Gary Glitter the singer, Len Goodman the ballroom dancer and judge on the TV show Strictly Come Dancing, Joe Frazier the boxer, Frank Sinatra the singer and probably the most famous of them all David Clews

David was born in April 1944 in St Asaph Old Workhouse, North Wales, which had been converted to a Cottage Hospital during the Second World War. His father Edward Ernest Jones was both a farmer and coal miner, whilst his mother Megan was a Land Army Girl. At the time of their marriage Edward was 32 years old and Megan was 19 years old. After his birth David would be taken home to the 38-acre family farm in Gwespyr, a small mining and quarry village in Flintshire, North Wales. The farm was responsible for supplying the village and surrounding area with milk, vegetables, eggs, poultry, and pig produce, and had grown exponentially during the war as they delivered produce.

David was the first child born to his parents, but over the following years the family would grow with the birth of his younger brother Wallace who is currently 76, his older sister Carys who is 72 (the name Carys comes from the word 'caru' (to love), it could also be a version of the name Ceridwen), and finally his youngest brother Gwynfor who is 65 (the name Gwynfor means great and white or Fair Lord or Fair Place. Gwynfor's meaning is from the Welsh element gwyn. Gwyn means light, fair, and blessed. It is combined with mawr which means great and large). Incidentally Gwynfor was born on David's 15th birthday, so they have always been close.

Gwespyr is a small village in Flintshire on the north coast of Wales in the community of Llanasa. Gwespyr had a population of 289 people in the United Kingdom 2001 census. It overlooks Point of Ayr on the west side of the river Dee estuary and its sandy beaches with dunes. The hills of the Clwydian Range behind the village form the eastern boundary of the Vale of Clwyd. Gwespyr also looks respectively Welsh but is an alien name. It represents Old English for 'West-bury' which came to be interpreted as the 'west fort' meaning the westernmost fort in Mercia. Originally, it is thought to have been a strategic Mercian lookout which was reduced in importance with the development of a fortified Rhuddlan.



Capel Gwesper and Gwesper War Memorial



Gwesper Hillside from Tallacre

Gwespyr stone has been quarried in quantity from Roman times and shipped to the rest of the UK and abroad. "Gwespyr Stone" was commercially successful for its grain, colour, and quality of cutting and shaping. It was used for many buildings around Gwespyr and was also used to build the ancient Maen Achwyfan Cross at Whitford, the chapel at St Winefride's Well in Holywell, stone carvings in Rhuddlan Castle and Denbigh Castle, St Asaph Cathedral, The Talacre Arms Public house in Gwespyr and Basingwerk Abbey in Greenfield, Flintshire. Gwespyr stone was also found on sites such as Prestatyn Castle and the Roman bath house in Prestatyn.

David told me that many of the buildings in Liverpool were also built from the stone as it is a hard sandstone. David has a few samples of the stone to remind him of the place of his birth. There is evidence of the stone industry in Gwespyr prevalent even today, though all but one quarry is disused. The quarry is in use today and home to Delyn Metal.

At the age of four David attended the local primary school which serviced the four local villages and was about one mile from each. David tells me that enjoyed his junior education, which was primarily the 3 R's but that he became bilingual in Welsh and English.

At the age of 11, David passed his “11 Plus” which in those days was just known as “The Scholarship”, this allowed David to attend the prestigious Holywell Grammar School. Whilst at Holywell David found that he had a flair for Rugby in the winter (but was never selected for the Welsh 15) and Discus throwing during the summer athletics season. At the end of five years study David obtained his General Certificate of Education in 1960. He reminded me that there was no such thing as grades in those days, you either passed or failed.

David did not enjoy secondary school as it was a long day, having to leave the house at 8:00am and not returning home until 5:00pm, and having to help on the farm for an hour both before and after the school day, then doing that dreaded homework for school next day. The only subjects David enjoyed at school were maths and technical drawing, both of which would to David’s delight be of use when he left school.

David discovered that the local colliery required an apprentice Mining Surveyor, following his application and the interview process, David was delighted to learn that he was successful. David was appointed by the Coal Board to the Point of Air Colliery, Flintshire and did his initial underground training at the ‘Dennis’ Seam’ in Gresford Colliery near Wrexham for three months. Safety was vitally important, and David told me that nobody took it lightly given the location of their training.

The colliery had become infamous due what had become known as the Gresford disaster, which occurred on 22 September 1934 at the Gresford Colliery. An explosion and underground fire killed 266 men. It is to this day one of Britain's worst coal mining disasters: a controversial inquiry into the disaster did not conclusively identify a cause, though evidence suggested that failures in safety procedures and poor mine management were contributory factors. Further public controversy was caused by the decision to seal the colliery's damaged sections permanently, meaning that only eleven of those who died were recovered from the pit. A memorial incorporating one of the old pit wheels was established in Bluebell Lane, Pandy to commemorate the victims of the disaster.



David would also attend Wrexham College to obtain his Ordinary National Certificate and then Wigan Technical College to obtain his Higher National Certificate and his licence as a Mining Surveyor. Why the change of college and one so far from home I hear you ask? Well of course for the love of a lady and we will return to this a little later in the evening. David recalls that his apprenticeship was very comprehensive and included civil engineering and geology, which would prove to be an asset later in his career.

In 1963 David joined the Territorial Army and was stationed at the Royal Artillery in Prestatyn. His army career was only to last for three years until 1966, but he was able to pass several driving tests with the Territorial Army. David informs me that his licence gave him Heavy Goods under the age of 21, but only when in uniform on maneuvers.



The 372nd (Flintshire and Denbighshire Yeomanry) Field Regiment, with Royal Artillery, was a Welsh unit of Britain's part-time Territorial Army (TA) formed after World War I from existing Royal Garrison Artillery and Yeomanry Cavalry units.

In World War II it fought in the Battle of France and was evacuated from Dunkirk. It returned to North-West Europe in June 1944, participating in the battles in the Orne valley and the bocage south of Caumont before the breakout from the Normandy beachhead, operations to close up to the Maas, and the assault crossing of the Rhine (Operation Plunder). The regiment continued in the postwar TA, and a successor unit continues in today's Army Reserve.



Sadly, the mining industry was in decline by the mid-sixties due to the sudden decline in coal burning in both domestic, industry and transport, coal mines were beginning to close, and David saw the writing on the wall. Thankfully Wigan Technical College produced a short course for newly qualified Mining Surveyors to enable them to qualify as either Land Surveyors or Civil Engineers. David thinking of the future took the course successfully passed it.

David left the National Coal Board in January 1966 and came to work in the great city of Liverpool, with the Liverpool City Corporation Works Department as a Site Engineer for their building boom of the mid-sixties which saw the construction of numerous new council high rise flats and housing estates. This would be followed by a short period as a Land Surveyor in the City Engineers Department.

In May 1968 David joined British Rail, his maternal Grandfather one of the Birkenhead Welsh had been a train

driver on the Great Western Railway and maybe the gene had surface in David, who know! Of course it was a Civil Engineering Surveyor not a train driver, just at the time when they were electrifying the track from Crewe to Glasgow. On completion of this contract David who thought he was on a four-year temporary contract, asked about the chance of a permanent job. His manager Peter Vine was surprised by the request and told David that he already had a permanent post and was in fact the most experienced man on the crew making him the governor. David then joined their Permanent Way Civil Engineers Office in Liverpool as Track Engineer until 1977.

David then took a three-year secondment in Bangor, North Wales as the Technical Liaison Engineer on the Britannia Bridge Road / Rail reconstruction project. A return to the homeland for a Welshman through and through. Although it did mean that he had to live in a caravan on the site for the duration of the project.



The Britannia Bridge was constructed by the civil engineer Robert Stephenson as a tubular railway bridge over the Menai Strait. The commissioning of the Britannia Bridge followed the opening of Thomas Telford's Menai Suspension Bridge, which had revolutionised coach travel between Holyhead and London. With the steadily increasing number of travellers between Ireland and Wales however, the construction of a railway line across the strait became necessary. Work on the bridge started in 1846 and four years later it was opened to the public.



To complete a bridge of this span, supporting the weight of two railway tracks was a difficult prospect. Following the same conditions that had been put in place when Telford designed the Menai Suspension Bridge, Stephenson's railway bridge also had to be high enough to allow ships to sail below it at all times. Stephenson came up with a revolutionary new tubular design that allowed a greater span without the need for suspension towers, testing this design with his construction of the smaller railway bridge across the estuary at Conwy, opened in 1849.

The masonry of the Britannia Bridge uses ancient Egyptian designs and four enormous lions, also in Egyptian style, decorate the entrances to the bridge on both sides.



Like the Menai Suspension Bridge, countless tourists flocked to the Britannia Bridge throughout its construction and after it was opened. For a long period, visitors were even allowed to explore the inside of the tubes! One excited account by the German traveller Rudolph Delbrück relates how, during a particularly hot and dry summer, the wooden roof of the tubes had dried out and caught fire from the sparks of the passing train. In turn, the burning tubes set the luggage ablaze which was carried on top of the train.

Following a substantial fire in 1970, the tubular girders were removed as they were deemed to have become structurally unstable due to the heat of the blaze. The bridge was reconstructed and now features two decks, the lower one still allowing trains to cross the Menai Strait, while the top carries the A55 road. The original masonry piers support the new structure, and the stone lions are still in place.



One of things David enjoyed most about his work on the bridge was that he was the Liaison Engineer for the job

and not always hands on with the hard work, so he was able to go around the local community and schools explain the construction, a role he really enjoyed.

David was explaining to me that the railway bridge at Rainhill was the first with a squiffy fitted keystone and that the father of Robert Louie Stevenson had used large blocks of soap from the Port Sunlight soap factory to carve the keystone to make sure it would be a perfect fit, before having the stonemasons carve the real keystone. This fits perfectly and has no cement or mortar to keep it in place. A train history quiz question, I think!

David would return to Liverpool after the secondment and resumed as a Track Engineer until 1985, when he was relocated to Manchester until 1989, and then relocated to Warrington until 1994 when British Rail was Privatised. David remembers hiding some of the strategic spares in the final two years as to raise funds British Rail would sell off any spares they could locate.

David joined one of the new privatised companies Rail Track as a Contract Manager for North Wales and Merseyside, he told me that once they were privatised it was if someone had turned on the money tap and it flowed faster than he had ever experienced. In 1997 David would then return to Track Engineering for the same area.

Railtrack was a group of companies that owned the track, signalling, tunnels, bridges, level crossings and all but a handful of the stations of the British railway system from 1994 until 2002. It was created as part of the privatisation of British Rail, listed on the London Stock Exchange, and was a constituent of the FTSE 100 Index. In 2002, after experiencing major financial difficulty, most of Railtrack's operations were transferred to the state-controlled non-profit company Network Rail.

In 2003 as his 60th birthday loomed, David decided to take early retirement, but for several years he did some consultancy work and other small scale Civil Engineering Projects with private firms until he eventually threw my hard hat away.

Let us now turn to your family life; David tells me that he met his wife Hazel whilst she was on holiday with her parents in 1963, near to where he lived in North Wales. Following that early encounter, they continued to see each other until 1966, when David came to work and live in Liverpool, and they got married on 13 August that year at Mossley Hill Church as Hazel liked the look of it for a wedding. So, the family's long relationship with that Church commenced as they would become regular church attenders. In fact, Hazel is the current Church Warden, and her daughter is heavily involved in the Brownies and other church activities.

David says that even though his work has involved working in several different locations both in England and Wales, he has always continued to live in Liverpool at the family home and travel to or lodged at his place of work.

David and Hazel's first home was in Knotty Ash for eleven years, before they moved to their present home in Mossley Hill. Whilst living in Knotty Ash and when working away, David was always asked by colleagues to send them postcards of Knotty Ash, because they thought it was a fictional place name invented by Ken Dodd as the home of the Diddy men, and not real place in Liverpool. David now collects postcards but said he does not have one of Knotty Ash.

David and Hazel have been blessed with three daughters, Carla who is 57 years of age and is married to Graham who is a member of St David's Lodge No.2950, unfortunately he is not in attendance tonight as he is at Anfield watching the football match.

Sharon who is 50 years of age and married to Harry and Nerys who is 47 years of age today and is married to Roger. The girls have also produced four lovely grandchildren two grandsons and two granddaughters. Carla has two children Holly who is 25 years of age and Ben who is 29 years of age. Nerys has one son Kaleb who is 6 years of age and Sharon has one daughter Sophie who is 17 years of age. David was telling me that Sophie is an accomplished flute player and in fact made her first appearance with the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra a week. David and Hazel will be celebrating, their 58th wedding anniversary in August 2024.

David tells me that he has not had any real hobbies as he found his work to be so very interesting, that he regularly enjoyed visiting in his spare time other Railway and Civil Engineering construction sites in the British Isles and Ireland. David also visited the construction of the Mass Transit Railways in South China, Hong Kong,

and Singapore, along with several railway Construction Sites in Europe and America.

David also has a passion for steam locomotives both rail and road, along with static and all other vintage vehicles and machinery, he would often attend shows and rallies whenever possible. He continues this passion to the present day but now at a much lesser pace.

David Being a typical late 50's early 60's teenager, told me that he enjoyed the music of that age being rock and roll, he was according to rumour a leather clad motorcycle fanatic with a BSA 175cc Bantam. His passion for motorcycles continued all his life he still has a 1957 James Captain 200cc, however he assures me that today he does not ride it anymore.

Once he passed his car test in the Territorial Army David also acquired a motor car, and he has had a car to the present day, during the 1970's and 1980's he loved towing the family mobile caravan throughout the British Isles, and this enable him to take Hazel and the children on many fantastic family holidays. Although David says he has now resorted to a static caravan in Penrith, North Lake District. David, a very similar story to my own, I started with tents, progressing to a Conway trailer tent and then a touring caravan, allowing myself to have many happy holidays with Amanda and the children. I too have now resorted to a static caravan in Cark in Cartmel, South Lake District. I wonder if your children like mine think it is their free holiday home and that you need to ask permission to use it!!

David told me that his favourite car was a white Volvo P1800 Sports Car (Simon Templar "The Saint") which he enjoyed from 1969 to 1973, but that his second daughter's arrival put paid to that, and he then had to get a sensible family car.

David informs me that he has now started to take more interest in Natural History and our Environment, especially with his grandchildren. The following are some of David's greatest memories:

Having a pint of beer with Tom Jones, the singer, in a pub in Chester in May 1965.

- Meeting Prince Charles in May 1980 at the opening of the Britannia Road Bridge in Bangor.
 - Being with my wife when she met the Queen in Liverpool on Maundy Thursday 2000.
 - Falling asleep on a train in West Germany and ended up in East Germany with no papers in 1985.
- and brethren I am sure David will tell us more about these when he responds to the toast to his health at the festive board later.

David let us know turn to your Masonic career, you were initiated into Lodge of Harmony No.220 at Garston Masonic Hall on 27 February 1974. His proposer was George Donaghy and his seconder John Phillips both of whom were railwaymen.

David was passed to the degree of a fellow craft on 25 September 1974 and raised to the sublime degree of a master Mason on 18 May 1975. David did not stay in the lodge for long and resigned from the lodge on 27 October 1976.

On 30 April 1976 David became a joining member of St David's Lodge No.2950. He rose through the progressive offices of the lodge and was installed as its master in 1986 for the first time. David also served the lodge as its master on a further three occasions, being installed on 19 February 2010, 21 February 2020 and 19 February 2021. David also held several of the important offices in the lodge over the years, serving long spells as secretary, almoner and director of ceremonies. In 2003, David produced the Centenary Booklet and was heavily involved in the arrangements for the Lodge's Centenary celebrations, which were thoroughly enjoyed by everybody who attended the meeting.

David remembers with fondness a series of events that changed the future of St David's Lodge No.2950. He was responsible for giving the Notice of Motion to close St David's Lodge at the October 2019 meeting. Following a chance meeting at the Provincial Grand Mark Lodge meeting with Colin Boardman a former vice chairman of the Warrington Group of Craft Freemasons, St David's Lodge No.2950 was rescued by several brethren from the Warrington Group who turned it into a daytime lodge. David remembers well the first meeting at the lodge's ne home at Warrington Masonic Hall in October 2021, brethren the lodge continues today going from strength to strength.

David became a founding member of Garston Lodge of Installed Masters No.9403 on 6 December 1991, and was installed as its master on 9 May 2007. David has been a real stalwart of the lodge since its formation having served as charity steward and as its secretary for the last 16 years.

David's services to his lodge were recognised by the Province of West Lancashire when he received his first appointment to Provincial rank as a Past Provincial Junior Grand Deacon on 19 May 1994. David was subsequently recognised by the Province with a field promotion to the rank of Past Provincial Grand Superintendent of Works on 21 March 2003 at the occasion of St David's Lodge centenary meeting.

David was again recognised by the Province of West Lancashire on 16 October 2012, when he was promoted to the very high rank of Past Provincial Junior Grand Warden, the rank he still holds today.

David was exalted into the Holy Royal Arch in Chapter of Harmony No.220 on 21 April 1976. He progressed through the junior progressive offices and became the chapters first principal on 2 December 1992. David remained a member of Chapter of Harmony until he resigned on 15 April 2008.

David became a joining member of Hamer Chapter No.1393 on 17 September 1998, he served in some of the progressive offices before becoming the chapters first principal on 18 October 2004 and then again for a second time on 21 January 2010. David also served the chapter as its charity steward and treasurer for several years, before resigning from Hamer Chapter on 1 April 2017.

David also became a joining member of Everton Chapter No.823 on 13 September 2001, and has served as its scribe Ezra since 2018. David remembers several memorable occasions during the time he has been a member of the chapter. The first being attending the 9/11 memorial as part of an organised trip by the members of the chapter to New York in April 2003. The second being seated in a chapter meeting in 2022, when the janitor interrupted the meeting to inform the companions that Queen Elizabeth II has passed away.

David's services to his chapter were recognised by the Province of West Lancashire when he received his first appointment to Provincial rank as an acting Provincial Grand Standard Bearer on 22 April 2004. David was subsequently recognised by the Province with a promotion to the rank of Past Provincial Grand Sojourner on 16 April 2008.

David was again recognised by the Provincial Grand Chapter of West Lancashire on 11 April 2016 to the very high rank of past Provincial Grand Scribe Nehemiah, the rank he still holds today.

David will also complete 50 years in Royal Arch Masonry in just over two years' time on 21 April 2026, and we look forward to being with you on that occasion to celebrate that milestone with you.

Garston Masonic Hall has been the home for David's Craft and Royal Arch Freemasonry for 50 years and he is proud to meet at the hall, which over the years he has supported in many ways. In the late 1980's he was responsible for providing the hall with a fire escape stairway from the upstairs of the building at the rear. More recently David managed a £10,000 legacy from the daughter of a Freemason to provide and install a disabled lift in Garston Masonic Hall for the benefit of its disabled and older members. David is also a member of several other Masonic Orders and has put in a lot of good service for which he has achieved recognition.

I'm sure I speak on behalf of everybody present that we are absolutely delighted to see you here this evening to celebrate your 50th anniversary as a Freemason and even more so that you have allowed us to celebrate your special evening with you.

David told me that the various experiences during his 50 years of Masonic life have brought him considerable satisfaction, pride, and enormous pleasure. David hopes that he will have the opportunity to contribute to his Lodge and Chapter many years to come.

David such is the importance of your own golden jubilee that our Provincial Grand Master Right Worshipful Brother Mark Francis Matthews has caused a certificate to be struck to mark this wonderful achievement which I shall now ask the Group Chairman David Atkinson to read.