

Good evening, companions,

With the greatest of respect to what has just taken place, we now come to the main attraction of the evening and that is to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Peter Connolly Past Assistant Grand Sojourner as a Royal Arch Mason.

Companion first principal, I wonder whether you would assist me by vacating your chair and taking mine, whilst I ask the Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies Rob Fitzsimmons to place Peter in the chair of first principal.

It is one of the special privileges of an Assistant to the Provincial Grand Principals to be invited to take part in the celebration of a special anniversary. But what a particular pleasure this evening for such an illustrious person as tonight's celebrant. Peter, the affection and high regard which is felt for you is obvious by the tremendous support there is for you in the chapter this evening and by the many messages of good wished you have received.

Peter, You were born in 1941, the same year as some famous singers and musicians - Bob Dylan, Richie Valens, Neil Diamond, Otis Redding and Placido Domingo and this perhaps explains your deep love of music and singing, although I think any further comparison with Placido Domingo stops right there!

Peter was born to mother Gladys, a housewife and father William Joseph, known as Bill, who was the manager of a shipping agent's business in Liverpool. You were brought up in a house known as Seafield, Abbotsford Road, Blundellsands, a large, detached house. The house had originally been built for a sea captain. It has now been converted into a 16-bed home for the elderly and mentally infirmed. I have recently spoken to them, and you will be pleased to know that you are now top of the waiting list! A return home, just in time, perhaps?

Peter, I know you look back with great fondness on this early part of your life. Your close family bond, especially with your father who introduced you to your lifelong love of trains and transport vehicles, recalling many trips on the Liverpool Overhead Railway with your father on the occasional Saturdays when he was not working.

You began your education at the Ursuline Convent. You attended Merchant Taylor's School, Crosby for three years. In November 1952 tragedy struck in that your father died suddenly, aged just 46. He had just joined Fairfield Lodge No 2290 in 1949 and only just - in October 1952 - reached the stewards' list.

Dr Fred Wilson, who was then a medical officer for one of the shipping lines out of Liverpool, proposed you for the RMBI School at Bushey, which you attended for two-and-a-half years. The closure of the school was proposed, but anyone about to start their GCE course was moved to another school, so that their studies would not be interrupted. You were moved to Liverpool College as a boarding scholar. You left in 1959 having GCE O and A level certificates and equally important your athletics colours particularly in cross country running.

Although Peter recalls that his boarding school was somewhat Victorian, he nevertheless enjoyed his schooling, and I think we can safely say that it set you up for life. Perhaps, your many friends at school helped your upbringing. These included: Nigel McCulloch (subsequently Bishop of Manchester) Malcolm Thornton (Minister for Wales under Mrs Thatcher) and also a certain Richard Stilgoe was also at school with you. You were also in the Combined Cadet Force for five years which you tell me was responsible for your very early introduction to whiskey & smoking.

You clearly had a sturdy early education. . Indeed , Peter tells me that he thinks he is the only Freemason qualified to be a member of Old Crosbians Lodge No 4992, Old Masonians Lodge No 7702 and Old Lerpoolian Lodge No 9270 – all schools he attended.

Off you went to the College of Commerce, and you joined Norwest Construction as a management trainee. You did two years as an internal auditor and then joined Southern, a national firm of timber merchants. You started up their joinery department and eventually became a manager of the substantial 'Door and Joinery Division', with responsibility for a turnover of £2,000,000. Following a merger with Magnet, you were appointed to the Board of Magnet Joinery Sales – a huge job with a major household name company.

In 1985, you resigned from the board, started your own business, and quickly became the second largest supplier of spiral stairs (or perhaps we should say, winding stairs) in the UK. You then went on to design, market and sell extruded plastic products for the newly introduced roof ventilation regulations for 22 years, retiring in 2008.

Peter joined the Territorial Army in 1959, being commissioned in 1960, he completed his career as a substantive Captain and Acting Major. He commanded 309 Signals at Prescot but left the Territorial Army shortly after it became the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve.

You married in 1964, and have three children: Andrea, Stephen, and Paul, and four grandchildren. You re-married in 1999 to Lynne, as a result you have acquired a further three grandchildren.

Peter has another love in his life, which is to listen to and play the great Willis organs made in Liverpool. This includes the Willis organ in our headquarters at Great Queen Street, London and Peter can often be heard regaling to his compatriots on the Joys of the Willis organ in the Grand Temple.

Following years of Lynne looking after Peter both domestically and Masonically, it was to be her turn to shine, and she undertook a course of study to qualify her as a vicar, this would involve years of educational study and practical experience within several churches.

Lynne was made a Deacon and then Priest of the Church of England being ordained in Liverpool Cathedral. She is very busy, and indeed when I visited you the other evening Lynn was only around for a short while as parish business called yet again. Peter I know you are, justly, proud of her and her accomplishments and that she is a great support to you.

Peter let us know turn to your Masonic journey, or as you said to me: “The boring bit!” But what a journey it has been.

You were initiated into Fairfield Lodge No 2229, your father’s lodge on 15 November 1963, becoming WM in 1977. Sadly your lodge surrendered its warrant in 2009.

Peter became a joining member of Lathom Lodge No 2229 and you were also a founding member of Old Lerpoolian Lodge in which you were installed as WM 2010.

Peter’s talents were recognised by the Province of West Lancashire when he was appointed to your first and only provincial rank, the very high acting rank of Provincial Senior Grand Warden in 1984.

Following his year as acting Senior Warden it was not long before Peter was invited by the Provincial Grand Master to serve as the Vice Chairman of the Eighth Liverpool Group, before going on to serve with much distinction as its chairman.

It was not long before Peter’s service to Freemasonry in general was recognised by The United Grand Lodge of England with a first appointment to Grand Rank

as Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies in 1984. He was further rewarded with a promotion to the high rank of Past Junior Grand Deacon in 2008.

Peter completed his journey in pure and ancient Freemasonry when he was exalted into Royal Arch on 13 May 1965. Of note of that particular year, I was shortly to reach my first birthday, petrol was 4 shillings 11p a gallon – equivalent to 6p a litre! Edward Heath became leader of the conservative party and Winston Churchill died – perhaps he could see what was coming!?

As a companion of the Liverpool Chapter No 292, Peter again progressed through the offices becoming its first principal in 1982 and serving as first principal for a second time in 2015.

Again, your first and only provincial appointment was to the high acting rank of Provincial Grand Scribe Nehemiah in 1984.

It was not long before Peter's service to Royal Arch freemasonry in general, was recognised by Supreme Grand Chapter of England with a first appointment to Grand Rank as Past Grand Standard Bearer in 1989. He was further rewarded with a promotion to the high rank of Past Assistant Grand Sojourner in 2010.

Peter, despite everything else that has gone on in your illustrious Masonic career, your support for and encouragement of the Royal Arch has been exemplary, and for that we thank you.

Companions, I could go on and on, such are Peter's achievements. Peter, you have celebrated your 60th in the Craft and we are all delighted to be here tonight to help you celebrate your latest milestone of 60 years as a Royal Arch Mason.

Peter, I have had the privilege of knowing you for many years introduced through the late and still much missed Michael Hedley Hill. I have the pleasure of belonging to various lodges of which you are also a member. Your presence on any occasion truly elevates the overall experience, infusing meetings with warmth and enthusiasm. Your engaging personality, your humour, your general knowledge and your huge Masonic experience are something for which we are very grateful. There can be few Masonic careers as successful and varied as yours. You are a much respected and loved person and Mason. I have had many messages from colleagues who are not able to be here tonight but who all send their very best wishes. One of those is the Grand Superintendent, Mark Matthews and I know he telephoned you to pass on his best wishes for this occasion.

I'm sure I speak on behalf of everybody present that we are absolutely delighted to see you here this evening to celebrate your 60th anniversary as a Royal arch

Mason and even more so that you have allowed us to celebrate your special evening with you.

In addition to his telephonic wishes, Mark has caused a certificate to be struck to mark this wonderful achievement which I shall now ask the Group Chairman Dave Johnson to read....