

MEGSupt Address to Provincial Grand Chapter 18.3.10

Companions

This afternoon I wish to share with you my vision for this great Province and invite each of you to continue to participate in ensuring a better future. You, as Royal Arch Masons, have already proved your commitment to Freemasonry in taking that extra step to complete your journey through Craft Freemasonry, when you became members of the Holy Royal Arch. I am gratified that so many of you are here today to support this very essential part of Freemasonry: - the view from here never fails to excite and impress me.

My Royal Arch and Craft Executive Teams have abundant passion and enthusiasm for the duties that they perform on our behalf, but they can only accomplish it when they have earned the respect and goodwill of you, the Companions and Brethren, who, in turn, contribute to our success.

As Masonic Leaders they are there to serve us all and take pleasure in doing their work for all of our benefit and that of the Craft and Royal Arch in general.

My vision for the future is simple, Companions. Whatever it means to each of us and at whatever level, Freemasonry in East Lancashire can be practised to a very high standard and, through its virtues, can represent a beacon of hope for its members and for all those whom Freemasonry touches; we must, surely, strive towards excellence in every aspect of our lives.

There are many reasons why Freemasonry is important to us, and more importantly why we keep coming back. For each of us there is something very special about Masonry and even more so for those of us who are also members of this beautiful Order, the Royal Arch.

For me, Freemasonry has become an extension of my own lifestyle; I feel at ease with my masonic associations; I feel accepted amongst my brethren and companions; I take great pleasure dining and socialising in masonic company; I feel closer to mankind and to my spiritual beliefs and I appreciate the whole ethos and ambience of that which we do.

Within our ritual and our etiquette we have a 'code for life' that has the power to improve further the quality of the man if he is led and motivated both to understand and to incorporate it into his being.

This is the nub Companions: Our Freemasonry must focus on and perpetuate quality in all that we do.

How does that affect us in the present; what do we need to do to protect our history, our traditions, our brethren and companions and, indeed, to secure Freemasonry for the future. Time will not permit me to discuss every facet in detail today, so I will restrict what I wish to say to a few very current and important areas:

Firstly, membership and organisation. We all know that like many fraternal societies, we have suffered, in recent years, from reduced numbers and, as that has affected the Craft, so it eventually comes to affect the Royal Arch too. Quality, in our members in both Lodges and Chapters is far more desirable than having members “by the ton”, indeed in many cases, a quest for numbers has been proven to be counter-productive. Bigger isn’t necessarily better!

We have tried to control consolidation as membership has fallen and many mechanisms are available. One major step, which several Chapters have already taken, is amalgamation. Companions, this is a major step which needs very careful planning and forethought.

Those contemplating amalgamation must have an awareness of what they are entering into; the “honeymoon period” is so essential. Sadly we are all too familiar with amalgamated Lodges falling into decline and subsequent erasure. Having seen this on many occasions in the Craft, and as your Most Excellent Grand Superintendent, I will be content that if a Lodge or Chapter is no longer viable then the members, individually or collectively, might not wish to amalgamate, but seek to join other Lodges or Chapters where they will feel at home and where they can make a lasting contribution. This in many cases may be a better choice for the maintenance of quality, than the amalgamation option.

When we are recruiting, for the Craft or the Royal Arch, our aim is to attract men of worth and quality, independent of their station in life.

We must invest in our future. Companions, you are the most important communicators we have. You are the ones who have the opportunity to deliver an insight into what we are about. You are ambassadors for Freemasonry and ‘sandwich boards’ to the outside world.

Don't be shy of any opportunity to tell of our great organisation and why you remain a member. Tell them of the great things Freemasonry does for you.

There are many men out there searching for meaning to life and a place to belong. Every one of us has an obligation to seek out men of quality and introduce them to the opportunities that await here. Once they join us, we must all then focus on their future care.

Companion Martin Roche, together with his team of District Mentors in the Craft, has provided us with a 'mentoring toolkit'. This was the result of much thought and hard work and has been admired by many other Provinces and even Grand Lodge itself. The new Provincial Grand Mentor, Companion 'Tony Costello, is now there to support us within the Royal Arch The Deputy Grand Superintendent and the Royal Arch Executive have already begun considering how aspects of Mentoring can be introduced to make the environment in Chapters a better place, and how we collectively can ensure the continued welfare of our Companions and their families.

This will be the theme of the next meeting of the East Lancashire Provincial Grand Officers' Chapter No 3747.

The individual feeling of all our colleagues is so important, together with an “innermost” feeling that each and everyone has spent a worthwhile evening – with a full agenda to ensure that each and everyone benefitted [no matter how little] from the time that they have spent in each others’ company.

I next turn your attention to Charity. The importance of Charity is understood by all of us; giving aid, assistance, donations and kindness – as acts of impartial love – to others. Charity is the essence or embodiment of Freemasonry. We can enjoy our meetings and the good company afterwards. We can enjoy our social activities and our understanding of the Order. But acceptance and affirmation of our beliefs in Freemasonry and its fundamental principles means putting into practice that which we have learned: what better way to show this than through our charitable activities.

My message is again simple, Companions, the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution Festival 2015 should be our priority. Let us raise a sum which the Province can be proud of and for which we will be respected. Let me again be clear that, in these difficult times, I

have no targets. Please learn about the RMBI from your Chapter or Lodge Festival Representative, or from our website. We really do need to give full consideration to firstly providing support for elderly and needy Freemasons and their families.

Beyond the Festival our next consideration should be our own East Lancashire Masonic Charity.

We should not forget that this has a similar purpose to the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution and, like the RMBI, the beneficiaries, including young people, are increasing in number and need.

After the Festival and the ELMC there may be other deserving causes. Support of those is then a matter for each individual Mason, within the limits available to him, after he has given consideration to the former two. There will be time after the Festival to channel endeavours into other projects.

Companions, I have talked about ensuring quality and excellence in our Freemasonry in order to invest in our future. This should be my very clear message, which I do hope you will all carry to your

colleagues in your Chapters and Lodges. Our aim should be to attract men of quality and character into our Lodges and, in due course, our Chapters - where the members feel valued, special and enjoy their Freemasonry in a consistently welcoming, loving and rewarding environment.

We all must exercise our own responsibilities (charitable or otherwise) to the best of our ability and carry the good messages of Freemasonry to the world outside.

We are an organisation with strong values to preserve and a real contribution to make to the society in which we live.

Companions, it will be your commitment and motivation that will ensure the continuity of success in our East Lancashire Royal Arch Province. When we secure this success, it is not just for us; it is for the young men who are only just coming into the Order and are the future of Freemasonry. There is no room for divisiveness, complacency or reducing standards: only excellence in our contribution to life and to our Order.

My hope is that every one of you will share the vision and together - with love, mutual trust and respect, openness and enthusiasm – we will make the vision a vibrant reality.

Finally, just a short few words to thank you all for the tremendous support that you have given in your prayers, your emails, your letters and in conversation with both Dorothy and me.

Yes, the last year has been a challenge, but we have risen above it and the prognosis is very good; hopefully, I only need to revisit the Consultant for the usual routine check ups.

Thank you for your tremendous support.

Companions, I have spoken at some length about quality and in fact to continue that theme, there are a goodly numbers of companions fitting that description who I am about to appoint or promote in Provincial Grand Chapter this afternoon.

Finally, Companions, as you all know, events such as today do not just happen.

To bring the meeting together, we have relied on many Companions, support staff here at King George's Hall, our "Bridge Street" Ladies, the Hall Stewards and the Security Stewards; far too many to mention individually. What a wonderful job they all do for us. Perhaps I can, though, include everyone by mentioning the two teams in particular, those of the Provincial Grand Scribe E and those of the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies, to all of you who have been involved in any way, my very grateful thanks.

However, today, I need to mention in particular, the Managers of the King George's Hall, who have just now begun their retirement, but are with us today, for the last time.

David Cooper-Hughes and **Wendy Bertie** have been with us for over twenty years and always have given to both the Craft and to the Royal Arch, the highest Professional support.

We thank them most sincerely and wish them well in their retirement.

To conclude and once again, I just wish to say from my heart,

- well done to each and everyone of you for the contribution that you are making to your Chapter,
- well done to those receiving an Honour,
- well done for the tremendous support that you are giving to the Province,
- well done for using your very precious time by being present with us this afternoon and
- sincere thanks for the continued support that you give to Dorothy and to me.

God Bless You All.

EComp JACK PRICE