

MEGSupt Address - Provincial Grand Chapter March 2011

Companions, we are here today primarily to partake in the joy of our colleagues and friends about to be appointed and promoted in Provincial Grand Chapter. Today, I repeat what has been said many times before: it is magnificent to see so many of you here sharing this special afternoon.

Like you, I am anxious to enjoy the proceedings and, more importantly, to reward those now waiting patiently for the recognition of work they have done in their Chapters and the Province. With that in mind I intend to keep what I have to say relatively short.

I have just made a number of changes in high office and expressed deep gratitude for the exertions that those departing office have made on our behalf. Time, however, never stands still and the new team will have plenty to do as they serve this delightful Royal Arch Province. Their collective attributes include commitment, loyalty, love, synergism and a capacity to listen. I have no doubt that they will gently, but passionately, work together, on your and my behalf, to steer the Royal Arch in the correct direction. Equally, they will recognise that it is you, the Companions, who are the driving force, and they will want to hear your ideas and thoughts as they set that direction. I must also remind you of the tremendous support they and we receive from the Assistants to the Provincial Grand Principals and the District Officers Royal Arch, whose focussed and attentive contributions add to the very fine leadership that we have in this, our very special Royal Arch Province: we are most grateful to them.

At Provincial Grand Chapter last year, I invited you all to participate in ensuring a positive future for both the Royal Arch and the Craft and I spoke of my vision which included: having men of quality and worth within Freemasonry who practise excellence in all that they do; the development of a strong and consolidated membership, both in the Craft and the Royal

Arch, where the culture has the welfare, enjoyment and understanding of Freemasonry at the fore and where we consistently portray a positive story of Freemasonry allowing us to integrate with our local communities. I developed these themes further at Provincial Grand Lodge last November and they are as current now as they were then.

The East Lancashire 2015 Festival Appeal Committee proudly announced last week that the total raised thus far has just passed the half million pounds mark and I take great encouragement that, at this stage, we have already reached a respectable figure. I wish to reiterate my gratitude to Companion David Thompson and his team for the sterling work they do on behalf of the Festival. A superb evening was enjoyed by all who attended the Vienna Proms night at the Albert Halls in Bolton last Friday and I am sure we are all looking forward to 'Walking the Province' for the Festival this summer.

There is a problem, though Companions: this total has been raised in a system where currently only one in six of our Brethren and Companions is making a regular contribution to the Festival. To some extent this is almost certainly because information is not getting through, and we can all support our Chapter and Lodge Festival Representatives in communicating knowledge about the RMBI and the reasons why we need to offer support. The message is simple Companions: The RMBI is a front led Masonic charity which needs our help and we can only do 'what we can, while we can', which is during the course of this Festival. Like our own charity, the ELMC, the prime function of the RMBI is to care for people, like you and I, at a stage in their lives when they are vulnerable; when they no longer have the means, or ability, to care properly for them. In these circumstances charity truly begins at home and so I implore you to think carefully about prioritising your giving and devoting consideration to putting the Festival, and then the ELMC, at the forefront of your minds.

Freemasons and their dependants, who rely on us for support, need to know that we are there for them.

The Leaders and I do appreciate that we are living in difficult times and many are only able to dip into their pots of gold so many times. This raises deeper and more general issues concerning the future of Freemasonry. Whilst not intending to explore these too deeply today, I would remind you that Freemasonry has constantly evolved with the times and survived over many centuries. However, whatever its strengths, there is always a cost; a cost increasingly difficult to meet for many of us today. There are fewer of us trying to maintain the same number of Masonic Halls as we once did with almost four times our current membership. We have calls on our purse for subscriptions, meals, visiting, regalia, raffles, alms, appeals, the Festival, local and National charities, local community good causes, special events and so on. We cannot ignore the financial and other challenges we face and so we need to begin looking closely at a number of issues, especially attracting younger members to “carry the torch” at an appropriate time. This includes a serious look at the locations where we currently meet: Some Districts are already actively looking at their Masonic Halls and especially the business plans of struggling Halls and, in a number of cases, making admirable progress. The support and guidance given by many experienced and professional masons is much appreciated.

You will all be aware of the phenomenal and innovative changes planned for our Headquarters in Manchester. I will not go into the detail, as all of you will have received the Circular, together with the Excellent Newsletter coverage. This time next year we should be in a very exciting phase of the development.

Please be assured that those Chapters meeting at Bridge Street will be supported by the Province. We will do whatever we can to assist you through the current evolution in our

fortunes: but think about this. Our origins may be in antiquity, but the future is in our hands today.

You will be a “major player” in this exciting development.

To quote a good friend of mine: “to do nothing, is not an option”.

Today’s meeting has been possible because of the reliance we have placed on many individuals who have worked diligently on our behalf: the ‘Bridge Street’ ladies, the support staff here at this splendid Hall, the Security, Hall and Charity Stewards and especially the teams belonging to the Provincial Grand Scribe E and our old (wise) and new (keen) Provincial Grand Directors of Ceremonies. Those who I am referring to know who you are - please accept our gratitude.

Now I move on to what I consider the most important part of the afternoon – the investiture of those Companions at the helm, on the decks, or in the engine room, who have contributed to making our Royal Arch Province so successful and who will continue to do so in the future.

I thank you for your kind attention Companions, Dorothy and I send you our sincere thanks for the tremendous support that you continue to give us and in exchange we give you our love and best wishes. Do look after each other, love one another and God Bless you all.

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