



**PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE
OF HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT**

3rd February 2017

**Special Meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge
Provincial Grand Master's Address**

1. **Brethren, I start by welcoming you all to this Special Meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge – the seventh such meeting which I introduced to honour brethren who, for a whole variety of reasons, are not recognised in the normal course by the Province notwithstanding their continuing support and involvement.**
2. **This year, the event is even more special. It is the Tercentenary Year of Grand Lodge – a great milestone in the history of Freemasonry. It is the 250th anniversary of the Province of Hampshire, founded in February 1767 – and I am grateful to my ProvGOerator for his illuminating Address which gave an insight into our beginnings.**
3. **As part of an organisation which has developed over three centuries, and as a Province which has existed for 250 years, we can, and should, be enormously proud. We can look back and marvel at how an organisation which started with a small gathering in a London Ale House developed into a world-wide organisation.**
4. **Anniversaries are a great time to reflect on the past. But there can be no celebration unless one can be confident of the future. There is no doubt that the Craft has experienced many changes in its fortunes over the centuries. We know that at the turn of the 19th century and as the Craft entered the 20th century it was thriving and generally recognised as a force for good in the community. Men were proud to be recognised as members; and their families were proud of the Masonic connection. Things changed dramatically during the last century consequent upon persecution of the Craft by the Nazis and other similar organisations – forces for evil determined to rid the world of a force for good.**
5. **In this country, our members became secretive about their membership - and that had a profound effect on the development of the Craft in the 20th century. An organisation previously accepted as a force for good was treated with suspicion by the public. Conspiracy theories developed and were given prominence by the media – it made news. Members were treated with suspicion by the authorities, by businesses, and by all those in society who were not part of it.**
6. **If the Craft was to have a future, it had to change the public perception. Shaking off the reputation of secrecy was a monumental task and in some parts of the community the myth of secrecy still exists, but I believe that society as a whole now accepts Freemasonry for what it is consequent upon the programme of openness which we have followed, coupled with our charitable support. Our community events are supported by members of Parliament, the Lords Lieutenant, the High Sheriff, and civic leaders, who are happy to attend and obtain a better understanding of our organisation.**

7. Notwithstanding, for a period of 20 years from 1990, the Craft experienced a significant decline which was unsustainable and which if continued would have resulted in the demise of our organisation. In this country, over that 20 year period, the Craft lost one third of its members. Extraordinarily, during that period, the Craft was still able to attract 8000 new members each year, but its members were leaving at an alarming and ever increasing rate. Clearly, those joining were disappointed with the experience – the Craft was not living up to their expectations.
8. We can look for reasons – what happened during those twenty years. There were massive changes in Society - the World Wide Web, Global Positioning Systems, Google, mobile telephones became the norm developing into smart phones, and computers which at the start of the period filled a room or more in business premises were now captured on a device which could be carried by hand and available to all including children. Devices and advances in technology increased the pace of life and paradoxically men had less time for activities outside the home and business environment. Time was precious and had to be well spent.
9. Regrettably, the Craft did not respond to these monumental changes in society. Having existed and developed over almost 300 years it had unquestionably adapted to the changes in society over that period. But as the pace of change in society quickened, the Craft failed to react. It fell behind the society of which it was part, and needed to be proactive to catch up.
10. In this Province we began the necessary changes 7 years ago. It has been a slow but nonetheless very rewarding process. We are seeing growth in this Province for the first time for a generation. Grand Lodge have introduced a number of changes and the Craft itself is benefitting with most Provinces now turning the tide and moving towards a period of growth.
11. This is a tremendously exciting time for Freemasonry, for Freemasons, and for this Province and its brethren. There will be many opportunities for Lodges arising out of the Tercentenary and no Province is better placed to take advantage of these opportunities than Hampshire and Isle of Wight.
12. The majority of our Lodges are seeing growth and will benefit from this special year. Regrettably, we still have Lodges struggling in the modern environment and our Area teams are working hard to assist, and in some respects to change the culture of such Lodges – in some cases to ensure that the Lodge members understand the importance of moving with the times, and taking advantage of the many initiatives which have been introduced. Fundamentally and above all we are a caring organisation - everyone who joins is special and should be looked after. We must ensure that we live up to the expectations of the millennial man, and that he and his family are happy for him to spend his time with us, and above all, that he enjoys his Freemasonry.
13. It is important that our Lodges continue to look at growth – not just initiations, but monitoring, and taking steps to minimise resignations and exclusions, working double ceremonies where appropriate, stemming resignations, ensuring the Masonic experience for all members is such that they want to stay members. Lodges can work together with other Lodges in the same Centre or Area – those with an influx of candidates can share the work with Lodges with a shortage who will benefit from the involvement.

14. **There are a number of issues here relating to membership which are crucial to our future – each Area, and each Lodge, has officers dedicated to these issues, but it is nonetheless the responsibility of all of us to work together to continue to take our Lodges, and the Province, forward. If that means changing the culture of a Lodge, or brethren within a Lodge, then so be it.**
15. **I wish to thank all members of the Area Executives – which did not exist just three years ago but which have made an enormous difference to the Craft in this Province whilst giving brethren an early and lasting opportunity to serve the Province at an early stage.**
16. **I now move back to the here and now! I am delighted to welcome you all to this Special Meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge - it is an intimate event within our Province and the occasion is very much enhanced by the attendance of our Guests – the heads of other Masonic Orders within the Province whose support I greatly value and I thank them for their continuing commitment to the Craft. They will be taking part in the Heads of Orders lecture later in the year at Hermes Lodge which won the draw – look out for the date later in the year which will be an opportunity to see the Heads of all our Orders working together.**
17. **The plans for Tercentenary events within the Province are well publicised. In just 6 weeks' time, on the 19th of March, the family Thanksgiving Service at Winchester Cathedral will be held. Hymns you know and to tunes you learnt at school will make this a very special event in one of the most beautiful buildings in the country.**
18. **The Family Fun Day on the 24th of June, the very day of the Tercentenary, is a fabulous opportunity to enjoy Marwell Zoo at a greatly reduced cost with all your family and friends; and to engage with local charities, especially those focussing on children, and other organisations our lodges support on a regular basis. A number of lodges are already planning to sponsor underprivileged children and carers. It would be very special if all lodges considered doing something similar. A variety of additional entertainments have been arranged and we will have exclusive use of the park after it has closed to the general public in the evening. This is a real opportunity for us to demonstrate our commitment to Freemasonry in the Community. And each Area will host a Charity Presentation Event themed to the Tercentenary.**
19. **The Provincial finale will be the Grand Ball at the Grand Harbour hotel on the 9th of September which was sold out within a matter of days. Brethren, sell-outs are becoming common in this Province, not least because of our innovative and simple to use on-line booking system. I do urge you to book early whenever you learn that events are open via squareevents.org.**
20. **These Provincial Events will tie in with similar Events organised by Grand Lodge and Provinces across the country. The profile of our organisation should reach an all-time high – and we need to take advantage. In this Province we have the necessary mechanism in place at Provincial and Area level, but if all our Lodges are to benefit they must all step up to the plate, and in particular ensure that all those who join us are valued, enjoy the experience, and continue to support.**
21. **Finally, brethren I congratulate all those brethren whom I have been privileged to honour this evening – brethren especially selected by their Area APGMs on the basis mentioned in my Introduction to the Paper of Business, part of which I will repeat now – *“brethren whose love of the Craft is apparent in all that they do; and who have continued to serve regardless of any personal preferment, or indeed the***

hope or expectation of such. It is this which makes this Meeting so special and I am pleased to pay tribute to these brethren.”

22. I thank these brethren for their contribution to the Province and I wish them well in the coming years. I know that they will continue to contribute and enjoy their Freemasonry – but I make it clear that (save in respect of those serving as Visiting Officers) the honour is for what they have done in the past and is not an earnest of future performance.
23. Quite different of course from those brethren promoted as Visiting Officers who have been recognised for their work in that increasingly important role and I wish them continuing success in supporting the Lodges to which they have been appointed.
24. I now return to the main objective of this Meeting, which is a celebration for those I have appointed and promoted. I trust that they will enjoy the rest of the evening; and all the years to come in their respective offices.
25. I thank the Provincial Grand Stewards Lodge for organising the construction of a Lodge Room from a restaurant, shortly to be a restaurant again, which started early this morning. And of course our Provincial GDC and his Deputies, and the Provincial Secretariat who have work tirelessly to ensure the success of the occasion. Finally may I thank you all for your attendance today, for supporting this meeting, and making it special for those who have been honoured.

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