



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT

PROVINCIAL AGM 2017 Provincial Grand Master's Address

1. It is a delight to see this Guildhall filled to capacity and I thank you all for attending in such numbers and supporting those brethren I have had the privilege to honour this afternoon. This day is very much for those brethren and I thank them for their commitment to the Craft and to our Province and I wish them continuing happiness and success in their new roles.
2. I also thank the Pro Grand Master for supporting our Annual Meeting during the Tercentenary year of Grand Lodge – we know how busy he is particularly during this special year and we are very grateful to him for finding the time to be with us. And I thank our other guests from neighbouring Provinces, and the Heads of Other Masonic Orders in our Province, for their support which we very much value.
3. At our Annual Meeting in July 2010 I launched our 2016 Appeal for the Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys and that Appeal has featured in every Address which I have made at our Annual Meetings since then. Today is no exception. Although the result of the Appeal is now history, I wish to record my sincere thanks to all the brethren of the Province who made the Appeal such an outstanding success.
4. The leadership and guidance provided by those driving the Appeal was inspirational and once again I thank our retiring APGM Geoff Tuck and our retiring Provincial Charity Steward Barrie Hewitt for their commitment and dedication over the 6 year period. The Appeal is now behind us and our Lodges are focussing on local non-Masonic Charities with presentations to the Charities made at Area events attended by civic dignitaries and themed to the Tercentenary of Grand Lodge.
5. Kay and I have been privileged to attend each presentation and the support from civic leaders is heartening and an indication of the increased acceptance of the Craft within the community. The support for these Area Events, sometimes combined with an Open Day at a Masonic Centre, is testament to the commitment of our Lodges and our brethren to the community which we serve, and I thank all those involved in organising and managing the Events.

6. Before I move on from charitable giving, I must mention my personal Appeal for Lifelites and its continuing involvement in Naomi House and Jacks Place which has received great support from Lodges and brethren since its launch at our Special Meeting in February. I thank all those who have made contributions – the target of £50,000 will be reached by the end of this month and the Appeal will then be closed. This is an amazing achievement by our Lodges, immediately after the Festival Appeal and during a period when they have continued to support local non-Masonic charities through the Area Tercentenary Presentations.
7. Our Tercentenary Events are now well under way and I am delighted that many of our Lodges have themed individual Lodge Meetings to the Tercentenary which is producing a supply of candidates.
8. Our Tercentenary Thanksgiving Service at Winchester Cathedral was an outstanding success and attended by the Lord Lieutenants of Hampshire and of the Isle of Wight, and the High Sheriffs likewise of both Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, fourteen Mayors, and numerous charities whose company we enjoyed at a pre-service Reception. Quite apart from the Thanksgiving service, the individual Lodge events, and the Charity Presentation Events to which I have referred, we had a highly successful Family Fun Day at Marwell on the 24th June – 300 years to the day from the founding of our Grand Lodge.
9. Brethren and their families enjoyed a wonderful day along with a number of disadvantaged children and their carers who were treated for the day by individual Lodges. I thank the brethren who comprise our Marwell Team for their dedicated work over a three-year period and for making the day so special and memorable for all those who attended. The maximum number of 2,500 tickets for the all-ticket Event were fully sold within days of going on sale and this is now becoming the norm within the Province. Tickets for our Tercentenary Ball themed to Last Night of the Proms were likewise sold within days of going on sale; and tickets for our dinner following this meeting were fully sold within hours. The message brethren is, keep an eye out for what is going on and get in fast.
10. On the 9th June I received the Regional Communication Group 9 Tercentenary Banner which was flown in by private plane from the Province of Guernsey and Alderney and was paraded before this meeting for publicity purposes. I will be pleased to formally present this banner to the Provincial Grand Master for Wiltshire at the end of today's proceedings. The banner will continue its journey across the Provinces in the South and will generate publicity and an interest in the Craft as it proceeds. I congratulate the Provincial Grand Master for the Province of Devonshire on this initiative.
11. An electronic History Book of the Province covering the 250 years of our existence goes live today and is available on our public facing Provincial website. I thank Brett Clark and Brian Crane for the enormous amount of work in which they have been involved in this exercise which included converting the previous printed books on the History of the Province into electronic form so that they are now available to all. Our brethren are also looking forward to supporting the Grand Lodge events and we have of course taken our full allocation of tickets for the Royal Albert Hall and Battersea Evolution.
12. The Area structure continues to be a great success and our large Province appears much smaller as a result. The Area teams are involved in every aspect of management

of the Province and have responded with enthusiasm to the various initiatives being driven from the centre. The next stage is to establish Best Practice across the Province and our two retiring APGMs will examine the processes and the results on an Area basis with a view to making recommendations for improvement.

13. The enthusiasm amongst brethren within the Province is palpable and most of our Lodges are taking full advantage of the opportunities which have arisen from the increased profile which the Craft has received during its Tercentenary Year. Double ceremonies are now acknowledged not only as necessary in many cases, but also beneficial to the candidates who enjoy the immediate comradeship of the brother who has been initiated, passed or raised alongside. Membership and Mentoring workshops and seminars have been held regularly for the benefit of all and this will continue.
14. Re-engagement of brethren who are potential Resignations is now a routine process in many Lodges and this should be adopted by all Lodges to further reduce the loss of members. This is the responsibility of the Lodge Membership Officer and is a straightforward process once established. In the same vein, our Areas are identifying brethren who are due a 40th, 50th, or 60th certificate, and making contact with them regardless of their attendance at Lodge, with a view to presenting certificates to such brethren to rekindle their interest in the Craft. Brethren retrieved through these processes must be welcomed so that they feel immediately at ease and comfortable.
15. Initiations continue to increase in every Area of the Province and our focus on Mentoring and Re-engagement has reduced the number of Resignations likewise in every Area. However, the number of brethren resigning within their early years in the Craft remains unacceptably high and must be addressed.
16. Freemasonry is a journey of self-development – and the benefits become apparent during the course of that journey. Brethren learn without focussing on learning - they enjoy the company of like-minded men, they play their part, they take part in our rituals, and they become better men. But ask a brother immediately after a ceremony what he learnt and the likelihood is that he will not be able to provide a meaningful answer. Slowly, over a period of time, the message, the learning gets through.
17. This is unacceptable to some men of today; and I believe this is partly the reason why brethren leave the Craft in their early years. We need to address this so that we cater for those who join with high expectations of learning, and are impatient at the lack of focus on education. The euphemism is that Freemasonry is a marathon, not a sprint. The reality is that some men prefer to sprint. And we should cater for them. We are therefore introducing a process to ensure that dedicated learning is readily available to those brethren who want it.
18. This has been trialled in our Focus Lodge in the NC Area and has been very successful and I am grateful to the brethren of the Lodge of Economy for playing their part in this important process. A series of learning programmes has been compiled and delivered in the Focus Lodge with selected Lodge Meetings being dedicated to learning by enacting our ceremonies and focusing on the meaning and symbolism of the three degrees. New Masons within the Area are encouraged through the Mentoring process to attend these meetings which have been highly successful. I would like to see a Focus Lodge in each of the six Areas of the Province which could be achieved through Installed Masters Lodges, or other Lodges selected by the Area APGM. Our Learning

and Development Executive Committee headed by Past APGM Noel Voice will drive this forward and will ensure that sufficient relevant material is available for delivery by well qualified brethren. The programme will include the study of the history, traditions and culture of our institution. The Committee will also ensure that the range of material will include short presentations (known as Nuggets lasting less than 5 minutes) on a wide range of subjects of Masonic interest for delivery by Lodge Members.

19. Focussed learning will therefore be available across the Province for those who want it. I am not suggesting this is a panacea to prevent early resignations; but I have no doubt that it will have an impact. Enjoyment will always be key – and this shines through in so many of our Lodges and is very much part of the retention and re-engagement process.
20. Regrettably some Lodges are lagging behind and these are being supported by the Area teams – very often the problems are clear for all to see, as are the answers to the problems. Acceptance of the answers is more difficult for some but many such Lodges are now seeing the light and are prospering. These Lodges become an inspiration to other Lodges which are being held back, and as success in this area spreads, the resistance will hopefully become unsustainable so that such Lodges will no longer be constrained by so-called traditions which have no place in the modern world.
21. During the past year we have consecrated two new Lodges – Spinnaker Lodge for those interested in sailing/boating, and a Motorcyclists Lodge. This brings the number of special interest Lodges consecrated in the Province to seven in the last seven years. Each has generated interest in Freemasonry in areas of life thought to be far removed from the Masonic movement and has demonstrated that charitable support is very much part of the Masonic ethos. I have no doubt Freemasonry and the Province will benefit from these special interest Lodges taking Freemasonry into different parts of the community.
22. We are continuing to make progress in every Area, and I wish to thank all those involved in taking the Province forward - the Provincial Officers, and the Area Officers and their teams, whose commitment and enthusiasm are undoubted and who are having such a marked effect right across our Province. I also thank those brethren working for us in the community, The Freemasonry in the Community team and Ambassadors, our Social Media team, the Insight editor, our Provincial and Area Communications Officers, and our Marketing Committee.
23. In conclusion, I thank all those who have worked so hard to make today a success – the Provincial Grand Secretary and his team at the Provincial Office, the Provincial GDC and his team of Deputies, and the members of the Provincial Grand Stewards Lodge who work behind the scenes and front of house and are involved in every aspect of the meeting and the after proceedings. And of course the many brethren who volunteer to give up their time to do whatever is required to make this day a success and a credit to the Province.
24. These are exciting times for Freemasonry. We are making progress the like of which has not been seen for generations. We have to work at it to sustain it in a modern world which is fastmoving and where there are so many challenges and demands on our time. It is a privilege to lead our Province but all I can do is point the way – I rely entirely on our Executive team, and our Area Executive teams, and they in turn rely entirely upon

the Lodges and the brethren. It is working like never before, and I thank all those brethren within the Province for their support. Enjoy the ride brethren.

5 July 2017
R W Bro Michael J Wilks
Provincial Grand Master



UNITED GRAND LODGE
OF ENGLAND