



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE
OF HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT

**Special Meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge
2nd February 2018
PGM's Address**

1. Brethren, I start by welcoming you all to this Special Meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge – which is now well-established in the Provincial Calendar and which provides an opportunity for the Province to honour brethren who, for a whole variety of reasons, have not been recognised in the normal course by the Province notwithstanding their continuing support and involvement.
2. This is very much our Province's meeting. The only guests of the Province are the Heads of Other Masonic Orders in the Province who I was very pleased to welcome earlier in the meeting. The Craft Province very much appreciates their support.
3. At this meeting last year, we were looking forward to a number of Events being planned to celebrate and mark the Tercentenary of our Grand Lodge. These Events are now behind us, and we can look back with pride on a great Tercentenary Celebration which ran through the year. Many Lodges arranged their own activities to mark, and effectively publicise, our organisation and this great milestone in its existence. It would be invidious to mention any in particular – some were very special and took considerable time and effort to organise and manage; and some are ongoing! You know who you are! I thank all those Lodges and brethren who played their part organising their own Events, and supporting others. Likewise, I thank the Area Teams who organised and managed Events throughout the year, notably our Charity Presentations. But in particular I wish to thank and pay tribute to our Tercentenary Planning Team, led by our Provincial GDC, for their magnificent contribution to the Tercentenary Year – starting with the Cathedral Service at Winchester in March and ending with our Grand Ball in November. Many will say that the high-spot was the day at Marwell which brethren and their families so enjoyed that we received many requests to repeat it on an annual basis. The impact of these Events should not be under-estimated; they provided an inspiration for our brethren to get involved and play their part; and we will reap the benefits for years to come.
4. The individual Events and activities are too numerous to mention but I must pay tribute to my NE Area APGM for organising the Victoria Cross Dinner in Winchester attended by the Lords Lieutenant of both Hampshire and the Isle of Wight which resulted in great publicity for the Province.
5. We are now 2018 and this will be a momentous year for our Province. Momentous can be defined as Historic, significant, and earth shattering. Yes, all of those things.
6. First, let me revert to 2015 when Grand Lodge introduced a Strategy for the Future of Freemasonry 2015-2020. This was prompted by the changing society in which we live and recognition at the highest level that the Craft would have to accept and adapt to those changes in order to survive in the modern world.

7. This was the first time in three centuries that Grand Lodge had considered the need to provide a road map for our future. The decision was Momentous – yes, as I have just defined that word, because it was a recognition by the Rulers that to survive in the modern world, the Craft would need direction. We could no longer rely on the ebbs and flows in our fortunes which we had experienced in the past. The decline over the two decades bringing an end to the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, was too dramatic and too great to be reversed without clear and positive leadership.
8. The Grand Lodge Strategy is producing results, and such was clearly apparent during our very important Tercentenary Year which has just ended. The Sky television series, now on DVD, a bold decision by Grand Lodge particularly as we had no editorial control, was a great success and has unquestionably increased interest in the Craft. The numerous Events and celebrations in this Province and across the Constitution were also an outstanding success and a clear indication of the renewed confidence that the brethren have in the future of our organisation.
9. In this Province we started our changes in 2010 and so by the start of the Tercentenary we were 6 years in. The growth which I mentioned in my Address at our AGM last year measured in terms of a reduction in Resignations and an increase in Initiations is being converted into rising numbers.
10. It is gratifying that we are continuing to attract good men into the organisation in increasing numbers; and they are staying. Present indications are that this will continue to increase during the current year. The Members Pathway has been embraced with very good effect by a number of Lodges who have seen the benefits through an increase in Initiations with new members clearly enjoying their Freemasonry. Our Membership Teams in the Areas are assisting with this process whilst also focussing on re-engaging brethren who, for whatever reason, are no longer attending Lodge but remain members; and this is producing results.
11. The teams are now engaging in a new process – effectively to tap into what could be a rich stream of potential members who resigned during the period of decline and stagnation which preceded the present era. Such former members will be encouraged to see what Freemasonry now has to offer and I am hopeful that this exercise will produce results to further increase our growth going forward.
12. This is an appropriate time for me to thank the Area APGMs and their teams for their dedication and commitment without which we could not have made the progress we have. Each has stepped up to the plate, risen to the challenges presented by the changes, and made an enormous difference to Freemasonry within the Province. We have become closer to our local communities and have established firm relationships with civic leaders across the Province, supporting our public events, primarily our Area Charity Presentations and inviting us, routinely to attend and play a part in many civic and community Events.
13. I would like these Charity Presentations to continue during the current year and to be fully supported by our Lodges – the benefits for the charities, for the local community, for the Areas and their Lodges, and for the Province are enormous and should not be under-estimated.
14. Men introduced to the Craft through the various Provincial and Grand Lodge initiatives, latterly through the Members Pathway, may have greater initial expectations than those introduced through friend or family in what might be regarded as the traditional way. It is important that we cater for such brethren and this is being managed by our Learning and Development Team who will ensure that learning is available to those who want it across the Province – through dedicated meetings of Focus Lodges to which Light Blues in the Area will be invited.
15. Notwithstanding the progress which we have made and the growth which we are now seeing as a Province, regrettably, perhaps inevitably, we still have some brethren and indeed Lodges which remain to be convinced but I am hopeful that



whatever the resistance, these Lodges will be carried along on the tide and that any remaining doubters will come on board or lose the influence which has been so damaging in past years.

16. At this meeting last year I launched an Appeal for Lifelites to assist that charity in providing updated equipment for Naomi House and maintain that equipment for four years until the next update will be required. The target of £50,000 was raised by the time of our AGM in July when the appeal was closed. Notwithstanding, money continued to come in for Lifelites, and so I had discussions with them as a result of which I am delighted to say that Lifelites are now finalising a package to assist Naomi House with a Long Term Ventilation unit – and to use this project as a pilot for similar projects at other children’s hospices. These are wonderful innovative charities, working together for the benefit of children and young persons with life limiting conditions across the country and I have pledged our continuing support. Accordingly, the Gift Aid envelope collection tonight will be for Lifelites and I ask our Lodges to continue their support for Lifelites to enable them to continue their amazing work in conjunction with Naomi House.
17. And so, to the Here and Now. I wish to congratulate all those brethren whom I have been privileged to honour this evening – brethren selected by their Area APGMs on the basis mentioned in my Introduction to the Paper of Business, part of which I make no apologies for repeating – *“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.”*
18. 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.
19. I now return to the main objective of this Meeting, which is a celebration for these brethren. I trust that they will enjoy the rest of the evening; and all the years to come in the Craft.
20. 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. Our Provincial GDC and his Deputies, and the Provincial Secretariat all of whom 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.

Michael J Wilks, Provincial Grand Master
2nd February 2018

