

## **ADDRESS TO CHAPTER (INSTALLATION)**

Most Excellent Pro First Grand Principal, Excellent Companions, Companions all:

My first, and very pleasant duty, is to thank most sincerely the Pro First Grand Principal, Most Excellent Companion Peter Geoffrey Lowndes, for investing me today as the Most Excellent Grand Superintendent in and over the Province of Sussex. In doing so I not only thank him for myself but also on behalf of this Province. It is a great honour for us to be able to receive you, Sir, in our Province. We appreciate that with your commitments in the Craft Tercentenary Year of 2017, your commitments in 2016 will also have multiplied and on behalf of the Province of Sussex I thank you for taking the time to be with us today.

You do not come alone and therefore our thanks are also due to the team of Officers accompanying you from Supreme Grand Chapter. I am in awe of the manner in which they have performed their duties. They are a pleasure to see and hear and they provide a spectacle that the Companions of this Province will long remember.

Companions, it is not just those that we see and hear today to whom our thanks are due. I am sure the Provincial Grand Scribe Ezra will join with me in thanking all those of Supreme Grand Chapter at Freemasons' Hall who have so helpfully and patiently answered our queries and guided us along the right path to what I hope has been a successful morning.

In addition to those in the official party from Supreme Grand Chapter we have with us a number of Grand Superintendents and other distinguished guests too numerous to mention individually at this stage although I hope to be able to do so later this afternoon. For the moment, therefore, I will content myself with thanking them for joining us today and for enhancing our proceedings by their very presence.

I take this opportunity to thank the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies and his team for their part in this morning's ceremony but my main thanks must go to our Provincial Grand Scribe Ezra and his team. I have been staggered by the thought, detail, time, attention and sheer hard work that goes into the preparation for an event such as today. I thank them, and him particularly, most sincerely.

I should also mention one of our number who is not here today and that is our previous Most Excellent Grand Superintendent, Excellent Companion Ken Thomas. Although Excellent Companion Ken's service in high office in the Craft in this Province spans a greater period than that in Royal Arch it is no easy task to combine the duties of both the Craft and the Royal Arch without a considerable commitment. Excellent Companion Ken has shown that commitment for nine years which, by any stretch of the imagination, is a long period and on behalf of you all I would like to pay tribute both to his services to the Holy Royal Arch in Sussex and to thank him for all the work he has undertaken on our behalf in this Province.

Companions, I recently attended a Craft Provincial Meeting and I sat between a Grand Superintendent from another Province and an Assistant Provincial Grand Master who is also in the higher ranks of Chapter in a different Province. I was shocked to learn that in their Provinces the percentage of Craft Masons who are also Royal Arch Masons is 48% and 46% respectively. At best I think we are at about 38% and that may be generous. Sussex therefore holds the national, if I may term it such, average down and that is an unfortunate and unacceptable position for a proud Province such as Sussex in which to find itself.

Perhaps we have failed to appreciate our situation because, as I understand it, we have hardly lost a Chapter, if any, for very many years and this has obscured a serious decline in membership to the position where many of our Chapters have reached the point of that critical mass which makes them unviable. I have very recently been made aware that unfortunately there are a significant number Chapters in this Province considering the return of their Charters. I also think it fair to say that the situation is likely to become worse before it becomes better.

Because of this I consider that I need to hit the ground running and steps are now being taken to prepare and introduce measures to assist our Chapters in the hope of recovery for at least most of them. I will not, though, have the opportunity of addressing you again until March 2017 and I need to make a general and a specific point today and I do so to you, the Companions of Sussex, not only as the current leaders of the Holy Royal Arch in this Province but also, by your presence here today, as the keenest and most active members.

The general point is whether you wish to save Holy Royal Arch Masonry in the Province of Sussex. The use of the word “save” may sound like hyperbole but, Companions, history is full of disintegrations, implosions and failures which could have been avoided had appropriate effort been made. We suffer as other social organisations are or have suffered and we ignore the lessons of history at our peril. Are we, like the Ten Tribes of Israel two and a half millennia ago, docilely to disappear out of history and into legend, to become no more than an historical footnote – because that is what we will be unless we, collectively and individually, each and every one of us, actually do something about it.

I therefore hope that we will eschew the tragic example of the Ten Tribes and emulate that Tribe which, in our main ceremony, we purport to represent - the Tribe of Judah and which, throughout history, has suffered the greatest vicissitudes, some atrocious and horrific, but is nevertheless still with us. Let us show some of their spirit in going back to our Craft Lodges, which is inevitably where the salvation of Chapter lies, explain the pleasure and enjoyment that we have in our Royal Arch Masonry and bring new blood into the Holy Royal Arch. If you are successful in doing so I hope you shall not only save the Royal Arch in Sussex but you shall have so saved it as to make, and to keep it, forever worthy of the saving.

The specific matter I wish to raise is of my disappointment in observing the number of those whom later this afternoon I shall appoint and promote to Craft office in this Province who are not Royal Arch Masons. Companions, the preamble to the Book of Constitutions states that:

“...pure Antient Masonry consists of Three Degrees and no more, viz., those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch”.

Much has been written and said over this admittedly curious wording - I sometimes think ad infinitum and possibly ad absurdum. To me, however, the meaning is clear and simple – that a Brother is not a complete Mason unless he is also a Companion – and the Craft Province of Sussex has a right to expect that its active officers and those appointed or promoted to the higher end of the Past Ranks should be complete Masons.

I appreciate that this is primarily a message for members of Craft Lodges but I need those who understand the point to take it back to their Craft Lodges and explain it to the Craft members so that it is known that, from now on, in making appointments to active office and appointments and promotions to the higher echelons of Past Rank in the Craft in this Province, subscribing membership of this Order will be a very important consideration

Companions I thank you all for bearing with me. I look forward to working with you and to a brighter tomorrow.