

## ADDRESS TO CRAFT (ANNUAL MEETING)

Right Worshipful Brethren, Distinguished Guests, Brethren all:

You have heard a great deal from me today and you will be relieved to hear that I do not propose to say too much more. I do, however, want to make a couple of points on the matters of membership and premises to which I alluded earlier.

Those of you who have had the misfortune to be present when I have visited Lodges in the Province over the last four years will be aware that my constant theme has been that of membership and therefore recruitment and retention but primarily recruitment. I make no apology that this theme will continue during my term of office as Provincial Grand Master and I hope that my Executive will follow suit. Many of our Lodges are low on numbers and finding it difficult to obtain new members. As a Province our numbers are still falling, as they have continuously for some years now, and we are less than half the numerical size we were thirty years ago. To a certain extent this situation has been masked by the number of our Lodges having diminished very little but too many of them are now reaching the stage where they will find it difficult to continue. I have no magic wand to wave, an increasing number of warrants will be returned, and the situation is going to become worse before it becomes better. Whether it does become better, Brethren, is mainly up to you, and when I say "you" I mean each and every one of you, not the Brother sitting opposite or in front of you or on either side of you or elsewhere, but you. Province will help as best it can and we are dealing with means and schemes which may assist you in being able to recruit but, at the end of the day, it is the individual Mason who has to bring the new Brother into his Lodge. Accordingly I make no apology for continuing to "beat the drum" about membership. If you wish to stop me doing so then bring about a sustained improvement in our numbers and I will stop. I do not promise, however, that I will not find something else to beat the drum about!

The other aspect on which I wish to concentrate will be that of our premises and particularly that of our Provincial Headquarters at Brighton which, in the presence of Brethren from other Provinces, I will simply describe as shabby. We need to do something about them. After all, they should be the flagship premises for our Province.

Which leads me indirectly to charity. With effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January next year, and therefore following the close of the 2017 Grand Charity Festival in this Province, we will revert, by popular demand, to Sussex for Sussex. I have always thought that Sussex for Sussex was and is a brilliant idea and I am delighted to resurrect it. There is, however, a proviso. I take the view that, to a certain extent, charity begins at home and I would like to see the Lodges of this Province diverting some of the money they raise, mainly from raffles but not necessarily exclusively so, to the maintenance and improvement of their Masonic Centres. Our public image is not improved by some of our premises - in some cases only because a number of our Centres are kept in excellent condition - appearing dilapidated and neglected. Such premises do not impress the potential candidate attending for interview nor he and his partner attending a white table event. Even the Centres that have been well maintained to date may find ongoing works, and particularly capital works, difficult to afford in times of falling membership. We need to improve our own environment and be able to impress our would-be members rather than to have them recoil from joining an organisation that meets in shabby premises. In the end the more members we have the more we will be able to raise for charity and therefore it is, I hope, a short term loss to charity for the purpose of long term gain. In the meantime, of course, I hope the Brethren will continue with their charity covenants and continue to raise money by the usual means for charitable purposes - just not so exclusively as has been the case in the past. Charity, at least for the time being, may quite literally begin at our Masonic homes.

I have already mentioned my gratitude to our Provincial Grand Secretary/Scribe Ezra and to our Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies. I would like to make a presentation to them which, had we had a annual dinner following this meeting, would have been made then. Today we have no annual dinner and although it is unusual to do so at a Provincial Meeting. I propose to break the mould by making a presentation to both Bros Geoffrey Cornwell and Mark Buckle for themselves and on behalf of Yamilet and Jane whom I am sure have been Masonic widows for the last few weeks and deserve some recognition for being without the consortium of their husbands during the lead up to today's events.

[The Provincial Grand Master presented each of Bros Cornwell and Buckle with a bottle of champagne for themselves and a bouquet of flowers for their wives]

I congratulate all those Brethren whom I have had the pleasure of appointing and promoting with Provincial Grand Rank this afternoon. I look forward to working with the active officers during the ensuing year and I thank them for accepting their posts. I particularly congratulate W Bro Trevor Newman on his appointment as an Assistant Provincial Grand Master. Bro Trevor has served this Province well as a Deputy and then Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies for four years and fully deserves his appointment. To those who have been promoted I hope they return to their Lodges to enjoy the accolades that go with those promotions. You Brethren are the current leaders of this Province and this Province needs you, as your Lodges need you, to act accordingly by going forth and Masonically multiplying.

And finally – you will be pleased and relieved to hear – the bright news is that our Grand Charity Festival 2017 is on course to be a great success and I congratulate the Brethren of this Province for their work and generosity. Many needy Masons and non-Masons will in due time benefit from that success. I trust we will all be able to enjoy a job well done at a fantastic, and I use the word advisedly, Festival celebration on 13<sup>th</sup> May next year in this very room.

A safe journey home Brethren, enjoy what will be for most of you the summer break and let us hit the ground running in September.