

PROVINCE OF SUSSEX

ADDRESS OF THE M E GRAND SUPERINTENDENT to the ANNUAL CONVOCATION at WORTHING on Monday 20th March 2017

Companions,

It has been a great pleasure for me to preside over this, my first, Annual Convocation as your Grand Superintendent. I have now been in office for nine months and it has been a steep learning curve. Having been plucked from the relative obscurity, and safety, of a Past Provincial Grand Standard Bearer to become the Grand Superintendent of a Province of this size, even if not untypical in the South East, I was in some need of help and assistance. It is therefore entirely appropriate that my first expressions of thanks are to my Deputy, and the Second and Third Provincial Grand Principals, as well as the Provincial Grand Scribe E and Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies, and those Companions who work under them, not only for their help and guidance but also for their patience. Indeed such has been their invaluable assistance that I felt I could not do without them and I have been very pleased to reappoint them in their respective offices this afternoon.

This year, however, we say goodbye to three non-annual Provincial officers. E. Comp. Keith Schofield as Provincial Registrar and E Comp. David Maynard as Provincial Charity Steward have served us well in their respective offices for some time but I am sure they will not mind if I particularly mention the appreciation of the Province to the retiring Provincial Janitor, E Comp. Kevin Gillespie. Having also served as the Provincial Tyler until recently he has been a great servant to this Province. I thank them and all the other officers retiring today for their hard work and dedication in the service of Royal Arch Masonry in this Province.

I also take the opportunity of thanking not only those who have worked so hard to make this Convocation the smooth running success that I hope it undoubtedly is – and many Companions are involved in its preparation and execution – but also those on the Chapter side of the Provincial office who do so much to make sure that all runs smoothly throughout the year. Companions, I would that I could name you all but you know who you are and you have not only my thanks but also that of the whole Province.

Whilst in thanks mode I mention our Distinguished Visitors whom I introduced earlier. They have travelled from far and wide to be with us today and I thank them for doing so. Our Convocation is much enhanced by their presence and it gives me the opportunity of thanking them personally for their always warm welcome and wonderful hospitality when I and members of our Executive visit their Provinces. There is great inter-provincial friendship in the Royal Arch and long may it continue. I am delighted to reciprocate today not only their hospitality but also that which I

have received in this Province when visiting the other Orders who are represented here today.

Next month at the Annual Investiture in Supreme Grand Chapter three of our Companions will receive Grand Chapter rank and I am sure you will all wish to join with me in congratulating E Comp. John Hornblow on his appointment to PGStB, and E.Comps. Gerry Frazer and Colin Cochran on their appointments to PAGDCs.

I also congratulate all those whom I have had the pleasure of appointing or promoting and investing with their Provincial Grand Chapter Ranks this afternoon. I hope Companions, that you will continue to enjoy your Royal Arch Masonry. Please bear in mind, however, that these honours are not only by way of appreciation and recognition for what you have done but also by way of expectation of your future services in the interests and furtherance of Royal Arch Masonry in this Province.

And there is much to be done. The Visiting Officer scheme now being rolled out in the Craft will be implemented by Chapter from September and I am obliged to the Third Provincial Grand Principal for organising the initiative so efficiently as well as those who are or will be assisting him – including those of you here today who will volunteer their assistance even if you do not yet know it. Become involved Companions. This is your Province and its success will depend on your willing participation.

So also with the Second Provincial Grand Principal who chairs the liaison committee with the Craft implementing such initiatives as our variation of the very successful Metropolitan Grand Chapter's Talking Heads, the production of leaflets promoting Chapter to our Craft brethren as well as the overall coordination of Royal Arch representatives in all of our Lodges. That scheme, however, will stand or fall on the abilities and enthusiasm of the representatives themselves and I ask you Companions, if you find that in your Lodge the representative is inactive or ineffectual, you will use your best endeavours to bring about the appointment of a brother who will encourage the brethren to take their fourth step in Freemasonry.

On your arrival here today you may have noticed the banners advertising that fourth step. Their message on this occasion only serves to preach to the converted and they are of course intended to be viewed by the Craft and I intend that they will be prominently exhibited at all our Provincial Centres. Do not waste the opportunity they present of discussing the Royal Arch and prospective membership with those of our brethren who have not yet joined us - but also make sure that you have fully prepared yourselves to do so. You will only be able to attract a brother to join Chapter if you are able to explain intelligibly and convincingly why you are attracted to the Order and why you obtain enjoyment from your membership. This may require some serious thought on your part and perhaps discussion with other Companions but it will be well worth while. Not only may you obtain a well informed candidate but also learn a little more about your own relationship to the Royal Arch.

But Companions, what is the point of the Royal Arch? It is not a rhetorical question and it needs to be answered by each and every one of us not only so that we may explain to potential candidates for Exaltation what, in general terms, to expect but also in order that we may retain them once they have joined. Even a cursory glance at the statistics in the Provincial Grand Scribe E's report in the order paper will show that if in the last two years we had been able even to halve the resignations, exclusions and cessations we would have been in growth – just so in 2015 and very much so in 2016. I am indebted to E Comp. Kevin Gest who, for his own research purposes, made enquiries a couple of years or so ago as to why Companions in some of the Brighton Chapters, had either resigned or had let their membership lapse. He found that in over fifty per cent of cases the reason or the main reason given was that they did not understand Chapter, it had never been explained to them, they did not understand what genuine secrets were recovered and, in short, they didn't see the point of it. So, having become bored they voted with their feet. And that they did so is not a criticism of them but is a very potent criticism of us. So I ask you again Companions, what is the point of the Royal Arch. If you are satisfied in your own minds that you understand both its message and the symbolism by which we explain that message then please pass it on. If you do not have that understanding then please take steps to do so – by observation and enquiry as I have just mentioned to the new Exaltees of the year. Not only will you find it personally rewarding but also you will be able to benefit the Companions who do not have that understanding and by so doing may well save your Chapter.

If I had a text for my address to you today it would be taken from the Second Book of Esdras in the Apocrypha chapter 14 verse 25 “and come hither and I shall light a candle of understanding”. We are not particularly good at making our Craft brethren come hither. We are woeful, when they have done so, at imparting understanding. For the sake of this wonderful Order in Sussex we must endeavour to do better at both.

Thank you all for attending our Annual Convocation today and I wish you enjoyment and understanding in your Royal Arch Masonry during the ensuing year. Thank you Companions.