

**Provincial Grand Chapter
Province of Northamptonshire & Huntingdonshire
Annual Convocation – Address 25th June 2009**

Distinguished Guests, E Companions and Companions one and all.

Once again, it is good to see each and every one of you here this afternoon – I extend a very warm welcome to you all and to the Companions of Northamptonshire & Huntingdonshire in particular, your enthusiasm and resolute support for the Holy Royal Arch is once again truly exemplified by your very presence here today.

Companions, our many distinguished Guests from no less than SIXTEEN Provinces have already been introduced to you and they honour us with their presence here this afternoon.

We have also greeted the various Heads of other Orders from within our own Province; we are indeed grateful for their support also.

And Companions of this Province, can I on behalf of the Provincial Executive ask you to take back to your Chapters our sincere thanks again for the courtesies and the generous hospitality extended to us when we have made our official visits over the last 8/9 months or so.

As you know Companions, in the past it has concerned me somewhat that for many of our acting Provincial Officers of the year, we have needed to do more in order to make their special year a memorable one. It seemed such an anti-climax to be appointed one year, the next time to be seen twelve months later only when handing over to their successors with very little having taken place in between.

So, as an experiment, we introduced this year the concept of "team visits" where many of the acting Provincial team, with all the trimmings to include Standard Bearers and Sword Bearer, would turn out at a selected Chapter and make a special occasion of it for all concerned.

Our thanks therefore to St Peter's and Perseverance Chapters for their full co-operation in November and February respectively and what evenings they turned out to be for both the host Chapter and the visiting team.

Any concerns I had that we ran the risk of hijacking and dominating the Chapter proceedings were very quickly dispelled – our arrival was greeted with great enthusiasm by both Chapters concerned, setting

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precedents which we can now, with confidence, promote further this coming year.

To those Companions appointed, re-appointed and promoted this afternoon in Provincial Grand Chapter, I congratulate you all. Believe me, your recognition has been assessed on merit and contribution – rewarding mediocrity and under-achievement are failures of the past and with the honours system still subject to tighter restrictions and scrutiny than before, those Companions so recognised today have earned their preferment.

And indeed, will continue to earn it, Companions, because it is to you that I look to continue promoting the Royal Arch in your own individual Chapters, in your own individual Craft Lodges and in your own individual Centres.

That is the challenge that I lay before you; your acceptance of the honour conferred on you this afternoon implies your full co-operation.

As our ritual states in another context - "You have each accepted a trust to which is attached a weight of responsibility that will require all your efforts to discharge with honour to yourselves and satisfaction to your Companions"

These words, of course, are normally directed towards newly installed Chapter Principals but today, they are equally relevant to our newly invested and promoted Companions as we strive together to raise the profile of the Royal Arch and further enhance its reputation.

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And at the Investiture Meeting of Supreme Grand Chapter held at Great Queen Street at the end of April, two senior Companions were honoured with Grand Rank – E Comp Mike Coleman and E Comp Jim Boughton, both receiving First Appointment to Past GStdB.

Companions, such appointments and promotions at both Grand Rank and Provincial levels are all richly deserved and on behalf of us all here present this afternoon, I extend to those worthy recipients our hearty congratulations.

As you will have seen, I have been pleased to re-appoint E Comp David Jackson as Deputy Grand Superintendent and by the very same token, E Comp Terry Roy as our 2nd Provincial Grand Principal – their enthusiasm and commitment for the Royal Arch does not waiver and I greatly respect their valued support and loyalty.

But as you will have noticed, Companions, E Comp Trevor Cooke now stands down as our 3rd Provincial Grand Principal, an office in which he has served with distinction for the last TWO years, previously to which he excelled for FIVE years as a fine Provincial Grand Scribe E.

E Comp Trevor has given invaluable and dedicated support throughout and I personally have been extremely grateful to him for his wise counsel and friendship.

He will be facing challenges anew in the Craft Provincial Office as the newly appointed Provincial Grand Registrar – an acting appointment conferred on him just 5 weeks ago by the Provincial Grand Master.

Trevor, I know that you will still have the well being of the Holy Royal Arch close at heart and we wish you well in all your endeavours.

In his place, I have been pleased to appoint and invest this afternoon E Comp Roger Wood who needs no introduction – he has served Province magnificently for the last FIVE years as our PrGDC.

His performances at our Provincial Annual Convocations in particular have been described as legendary (or so he tells me!) but different challenges now await. I know that he will adapt well to his new

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responsibilities and I am sure, Companions, that you will extend the warmest of welcomes to him in your Chapters.

However, please try and remember to send him back to us – eventually - pure and unsullied as I am sure you will have received him!

Our new PrGDC is E Comp Derek Todd – a very experienced Deputy in Province for the last FOUR years and I have no doubts that he will prove a very worthy replacement.

Derek, we also wish you well in all your endeavours.

Companions, in today's Agenda Booklet, and on page SEVEN in particular, you will note the membership summary for 2008 under each Chapter.

We have fared much better but I am very conscious that one swallow doesn't necessarily make the proverbial summer! What was particularly pleasing was the number of exaltations at 57 – an average of over TWO candidates per working Chapter and with resignations also significantly down.

With the sad passing of another 25 Companions in the 2008 calendar year and whose memories we honoured earlier, membership losses were again high at 33 but that, I regret, is something which we cannot directly influence! Even so, a net increase overall in total membership for 2008 is most welcome.

And where retention and retrieval initiatives will prove so important to a number of membership issues, I am delighted to report that from a lowly figure of FOUR just some 12 months ago, we now have 25 Chapter Almoners appointed – a considerable improvement and they will have a vital role to play in a number of our retention and retrieval initiatives which continue to develop under the direction of the PrGAlmoner as well, of course, as their usual day-to-day pastoral duties which one normally associates with the Almoner's role.

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I am delighted to welcome them all on board and thank them for taking up the challenge.

Within the Royal Arch there is now growing emphasis from Great Queen Street on mentoring initiatives and the Royal Arch Representative scheme in our Craft Lodges in particular.

However, based on our proven “mentoring” successes in the Craft over a period of FIVE years, in 2007 we had already pre-empted the recommendations of Supreme Grand Chapter by adopting and adapting a simplified version of the Craft “mentoring” formula.

Some 18 months ago therefore, I asked a number of our Grand Officers to help me establish a Royal Arch “mentoring” initiative within a network of SIX strategic Centres throughout Province.

In support, a new range of Provincial Royal Arch promotional literature was introduced and which, I might add, has been very favourably received both within this Province and beyond.

Since last September, Companions, 120 Brethren have been raised to the Third Degree in our Craft Lodges – Master Masons one and all and to my reckoning, therefore, potentially 120 new Royal Arch Companions.

Whilst it would be naïve of me to suggest that each and everyone of them has most definitely been approached by our Grand Officers and gently introduced to the concept of the Royal Arch as intended, I do believe that we have made contact with the vast majority of them.

We must now ensure ongoing contact on a low-key basis but on a path heading for exaltation and then only when our potential Exalte is confident and ready. I am convinced that the fruits of our “mentoring” labours now will reflect well in our continued progress over the next year or two.

Indeed, I am grateful to all those Grand Officers who have helped to establish such a framework in such a relatively short period of time – that in itself is no small achievement and, throughout, our endeavours

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will have created a timely, new-found awareness of the Royal Arch and all that it stands for with those who will ultimately secure the future of the Order in the years ahead.

As you are aware, Companions, the Craft Province is making considerable progress towards its target for the 2013 Festival in support of the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution, and with still some 4 years to run.

The Royal Arch Province is committed to support the 2013 Festival as best we can in order to demonstrate our inextricable connection with the Craft, and it will have given us all great pleasure this afternoon to see E Comp Mike Green make our first donation to the Provincial Grand Master in the sum of £5000.

With donations already received from individual Chapters, this will take the running total for the Royal Arch close to a figure of £7500.

There is more for us to do quite clearly but as I have stated previously, we must be careful not to make too heavy a demand on the same pockets that so generously donate towards 2013 through their Craft Lodges.

Claims on one's charity should only be as one's circumstances in life may fairly warrant and this year of course, Companions, life is a little more difficult – we are in the midst of probably one of the worst recessions in living memory, certainly since the 1930s; times are hard for many and may even get worse before any significant signs of recovery are seen.

Many of our more elderly Brethren and Companions in particular will be on fixed incomes and whilst their hearts are willing to contribute wherever they can, common sense should dictate that perhaps they cannot be as generous now as they might have been in the past – trends I think for our newly appointed Chapter Almoners to identify at an early stage and to monitor carefully should there be other potential problems on the horizon.

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I repeat again, Companions, the occasional Alms Collection in your individual Chapters in support of the 2013 Festival, would help enormously. I will leave this thought with you.

I have to confess, Companions, that some two years ago, I stood here not knowing what to expect but be assured, it has been a thoroughly enjoyable journey.

For this, I am indebted to so many and not least for today's arrangements in particular. My thanks therefore, as always, to Ivan Greaves as our PrGScribe E and his worthy assistant in E Comp Barry Hadley.

To those outgoing Provincial Officers whose company I have enjoyed over the last 12 months – wherever we have travelled far and wide throughout Province, they have been there in support. We've enjoyed your company as much as I trust you have enjoyed ours.

To our team of PrGDCs for their major input today; to our outgoing PrGOrganist – E Comp Peter Simmonds – and, of course, not forgetting E Comp Bill Wright who has again acted as our Sound Engineer, my sincere thanks to you all.

To the Principals and Companions of Pemberton Chapter under whose banner we have met today – your help has been invaluable and the standards you have set in Pemberton Chapter in terms of recruitment, retention and quality of ritual over the last year or two stand as an example to us all.

To the Provincial Grand Master in particular who has supported us in the Royal Arch in everything we have tried to do.

But above all, Companions, to you – the members of this Royal Arch Province of Northamptonshire & Huntingdonshire. You are the ones that make this Province what it is.

Your enthusiasm has been infectious and I invite you yet again, to spread the word amongst the Companions of your own Chapters and amongst those Brethren still hovering, undecided, on the sidelines

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within your own Centres who need just a few more words of persuasion and encouragement to reap the benefits of Royal Arch Masonry.

Remind them that the Royal Arch is not an optional extra – it is the very completion of Craft Masonry itself and the essential next step for each and every aspiring Master Mason. Remind them all that in the Royal Arch, ours is that defining moment – we are the ones that bring that happy ending, that glorious conclusion to the tragic finale of the storyline that we all experienced at the end of Third Degree in Craft.

What a cause we have for celebration therefore; as I have said on so many occasions previously Companions, we must be seen to be enjoying our Royal Arch Masonry – we have just cause to: smiling in the Royal Arch is no longer optional. And that is precisely how we will spread the message and that's how we will attract those waverers still hovering on the sidelines.

And to that end remember Companions, ours is the Degree of rediscovery – a rediscovery not just of those long lost secrets that were so tragically lost at the East Gate some 500 years previously, but the rediscovery and the reawakening of one's own spiritual awareness and well-being, one's own spiritual relationship with his God, the Supreme Being, in whatever form that Supreme Being presents himself to each and everyone of us.

And that is the simple message that underpins the Royal Arch – we don't have to over-complicate it – it is the simplicity of that message that those 120 newly raised Master Masons this year - those 120 potential new Companions of the Royal Arch to whom I have already referred – will understand and appreciate as they contemplate the final part of their all-important journey through Pure Antient Masonry.

And meanwhile, Companions, we, in turn, must constantly remind ourselves that we remain the guardians, the temporary custodians of a great Masonic heritage which, in the Royal Arch, first saw the light of day in the 1730s and which, after a few turbulent years initially, has stood the test of time ever since.

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We have therefore a serious responsibility and an obligation to pass on to our successors something as equally as fulfilling, if not better, than that which we have inherited from those who have gone before.

In everything we do in our Freemasonry, standards must be maintained therefore – we must hold our heads high and if ever our principles and tenets needed to stand out as a beacon and as an example to others when standards in some other walks of life have of been collapsing all around us, might I suggest, Companions, now is the time.

May those whose integrity is proved to have fallen woefully short of acceptable take note and learn from our Masonic principals of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth – respect and consideration for others, addressing the needs of those less fortunate, justness and uprightness in life and actions, and honesty and integrity in all that we do.

We have every right therefore to be proud of our Freemasonry, Companions, and equally to be proud of our Royal Arch Masonry in particular.

I look forward to catching up with you all again soon – have a good summer break - but meanwhile, my sincere thanks to you all for your support today, for your very presence here at our Annual Convocation and for listening so attentively.
