

Address to Provincial Grand Lodge 20th October 2022

Brethren it is now that time when I address Provincial Grand Lodge. First can I say how delighted I am with the attendance at both my Installation this morning and at Provincial Grand Lodge. It is extremely encouraging to see so many of you here today.

Although I welcomed all the distinguished guests this morning can I once again thank them for their attendance, many of whom have travelled long distances. The comradery among the Executive of all Provinces is something that makes this Order very special and the visiting that is carried out certainly adds lustre to all Provincial meetings.

Due to the protocols applicable it isn't possible for the retiring Provincial Grand Master, R.W. Bro. Michael Heenan to be present today. However, I would like to put on record my sincere thanks to him for not only the last 6 years as Provincial Grand Master but for the many years prior to that when he served as Assistant and Deputy Provincial Grand Master. I would like to thank him for having the confidence in me and for his expert guidance. It was a fitting tribute to R.W.Bro Michael Heenan that there was an excellent attendance at his recent retirement dinner.

I would also like to say thank you to R.W.Bro David Edwards for acting as Presiding Officer this morning. W.Bro. David has been one of my guiding lights in Mark Masonry. Indeed, I can remember the very evening in early 2007 when I was discussing the possibility of joining Mark degree with a Royal Arch companion after a Chapter meeting and suddenly, an application form for the Mark was produced by David who was listening intently to the conversation I was having. Standing here today I hope he has seen the results of his actions justified.

In respect of today's Investiture meeting I would like to express my personal thanks to the cushion bearers and members of the Escort Team who took part this morning. My thanks of course must go to the whole of the secretariat team, namely the Provincial Grand Secretary Selwyn Burton, Deputy Provincial Grand Secretary Paul Crutchley and the Assistant Provincial Grand Secretary Martin Edwards who have worked tirelessly to ensure that today has gone smoothly. In the last couple of weeks I don't think there has been a day gone by when I have not received a phone call from W.Bro. Selwyn about the arrangements. In addition the Provincial secretary has had to handle the routine matters and queries connected with the smooth running of the Province. Selwyn, even when things proved difficult, I know that you remained calm, or appeared to remain calm, and for that your efforts are greatly appreciated.

Thanks must also go to the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies Peter Tyson and the rest of the DC team for the excellent way they have set up Provincial Grand Lodge today. This is the first time that the Investiture and Provincial Meeting has been held in this room and you have come through with flying colours.

My thanks must go to all the outgoing Active Officers who have supported the Executive at Installations and other meetings within the Province and who have greatly added to the numbers at such meetings. For most of these Officers it has been a 2-year appointment due to the effects of the Covid Pandemic. My special thanks are extended to the retiring Provincial Wardens David Prince and Tony Marshall for their travels around the Province, the addresses carried out and their dedication to the role even during times of personal stress and heartache. I would also like to thank the Overseers who have also supported the Province by attending and delivering addresses.

May I now address a few remarks to those who have been appointed and promoted in Provincial Grand Lodge today. My congratulations to you all. This is not only in recognition of your services to date but for what you will be expected to do in the future. I would urge you all to take the opportunity to visit around the Province to support the various Lodges at Installations, Advancements, Elevations and other special events. Your attendance at Lodges will be greatly appreciated and I'm sure will add to your Masonic enjoyment and will give you the opportunity to visit all parts of the Province. There will be several full Provincial visits during the year and your support at these will be greatly appreciated. Two have already been arranged – one to Noah's Ark Lodge on 2nd November 2022 to celebrate their Golden Jubilee and then to Severn Lodge on 11th April 2023 when they will be moving to new premises.

At the meeting of Grand Lodge in June several Brethren were honoured with appointments. W.Bro. Mario Rizzardi was reappointed Grand Organist. W.Bros. Selwyn Burton, Steve Bird and Peter Thompson were appointed to Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies and W.Bro. John Phillips was appointed to the active rank of Grand Steward. At the September meeting of Grand Lodge V.W.Bro. Ian Smith was promoted to Past Grand Senior Overseer and W.Bro. Graham Holden was promoted to Past Grand Junior Overseer which also now entitles him to have the style "Very Worshipful Brother". On both occasions there was an excellent number of Brethren who travelled to London in support.

I'm very pleased to advise that at the Annual Assembly of Royal Ark Mariners to be held on 12th December W.Bro. Rob Barker and W.Bro. Chris Jones will be honoured with Royal Ark Mariner Grand Rank and I offer my congratulations to them both. This

Assembly meeting is open to all Royal Ark Mariners I trust that a good number from the Province will be able to travel and support these Brethren.

Several ventures and success stories I want to mention include the Children's Christmas party which is once again being run after a 3-year hiatus on 3rd December at The Red House, Albrighton. The Provincial Overseers are organising and driving this event and I would ask all of you to support where you can by bringing your children and grandchildren to the event. I'm pleased to report that the Mark weekend went ahead again a couple of weeks ago in Llandudno and was superbly arranged by W.Bro. Mick Towns. This was his first year as Ladies weekend secretary and I wish him well with next year's event which we hope to have in Lytham St. Annes. Full details to be issued in the near future.

I was delighted to learn that W.Bro. Colin Albrow who along with W.Bro. Arthur Muller run the second-hand regalia scheme within the Province, have recently transferred a further £1000 to the Staffordshire & Shropshire Mark Benevolent Association. This has taken the total amount raised from the proceeds of sales to over £10,000 in the last 10 years. Brethren, please continue to support Bros Colin and Arthur in this wonderful initiative. My thanks to you both.

The Keystone Millennium Fund is now going from strength to strength under the leadership of W.Bro. Mark Ashton. Wherever he travels throughout the Province I know that he is attracting new members to the fund. As a result not only is the charitable aspect of the fund increasing but the amount for prizes under the scheme is also improving which is certainly a win win situation.

In looking to the future I'm very encouraged by the willingness of Brethren to get back to their Masonry which has undoubtedly struggled over the past couple of years. There are still a cohort of our Brethren who are reticent to return following the pandemic and I would urge you all to keep in touch with them. We are far from being back to normal and there are still many threats to our membership such as the potential impact that the cost of living increases may have on masonry. I would ask you to remain vigilant and ensure that a dialogue is kept in place with all Brethren.

Since the resumption of Masonry following the lockdown, I have been greatly encouraged by the resurgence in Advancements and Elevations but we must strive to continue to attract new members to the Mark degree.

With this in mind a new initiative under the banner of the 'Magic of the Mark' is being launched by Grand Lodge on the 1st November 2022 to encourage new Brethren into this Wonderful Order. Once the campaign is officially launched tri-fold leaflets and business cards giving details for Craft Masons will be made available. These are currently being prepared for our Province with all the new Executive details and other information pertinent to Staffordshire and Shropshire and it is hoped that the material will be made available in all Lodge rooms as well as to existing Mark Brethren.

Once launched, this information will also contain a contact phone number. Please pass it on to your Craft Brethren and encourage them to ring as soon as possible to get the necessary joining details.

Building upon the drive for new members I would like to thank the communications committee for everything they do regarding the 'Making our Mark' publication. This together with social media is an area that I believe is highly important as we move forward because it will not only enable the Province to build upon the 'Magic of the Mark' but also increase the profile of Mark Masonry to the wider public.

I'm also a very firm believer that we need to work with the Craft and other Orders for the benefit of Freemasonry in general and to attract new members to the wider fraternity. This in turn will go a long way to increasing the pool of Brethren available to join the Wonderful Mark Order.

Finally Brethren, can I thank you all for your attendance here today. Please remember that the most important aspect is that we all enjoy Mark Masonry. Continue to spread the word about our Order, Mark Well and may the Great Overseer of the Universe keep you all safe.