

Firstly many congratulations again to you WM. WBro Martin you are very busy not only as head of the District of Royal and Select Masters, but also in Bedford as 2nd Provincial Grand Principal in the Royal Arch. They say if want a job done ask a busy man, so we thought you would be ideal for this chair.

This is of course a Heads of Orders Lodge created specifically to build bonds of friendship and communication across the Masonic family, that meet within our Province.

Earlier today I was delighted to host the first heads of orders meeting in the Province to establish even better relationships between all our orders. I hope those who attended found it useful and I look forward to it becoming an annual event, to enable us to work together and grow and extend the Masonic family, engaging our collective members in their individual Masonic journeys.

District and Divisional heads, however one of our number with us today is both the head of an East Midlands District, WBro Ray Ellis, but has also recently been appointed as the Second Grand Master Mason of the Operatives, so is a ruler in that order, many congratulations Ray. The Operatives as I am sure many of you know have their head quarters here within our own Province at Eaton Socon.

I do firmly believe the Companion Orders, as we now call them, have a large part to play in engagement of our members, but I encourage every brother to explore the Royal Arch and finish their journey In pure ancient Freemasonry, before they explore these other orders, and also not to get carried away and join everything - a members journey is a marathon not a sprint and so take your time and savour each experience.

This being the Mid Year address, always seems strange given we are only some 2 months into the new season, but it has been a busy summer break period, during which:

Our museums have come Out of the darkness and into the light, to celebrate our great and rich history, you will notice many items being catalogued and displayed within the anti rooms of each of our three lodges.

Thank you to WBro Bill Caswell for his work in Northampton and to WBro Allan Harden who has been working with Bill and our APGM Tim Almond on the museum and the new Provincial Library at Peterborough. Please take some time to wander through the anti rooms and to also visit Peterborough and see the progress and displays.

Our centres are looking sharper, particularly this year Peterborough and thanks to their centre management team and Bro Rob Donaldson who along with others did a lot of the work.

Here in Northampton you will have noticed meeting rooms are well appointed with furniture and pictures, and anti rooms are now spacious anti rooms, new picture frames that all match, new signing in tables with logoed table cloths and a full refresh of the centre.

I hope you like what we have achieved and I must particularly thank WBro's Kevin Foreman, Neil French, Vince Sones and Scott Austin for their considerable assistance over the summer months.

We were also busy over the summer introducing the Membership Challenge and the Members' Pathway tool, which we are using to meet that challenge.

I thank the Membership Working Party for the seminars, and workshops they have been running, particularly WBro's Alex Thomson, Jonathon Hibbins and Christopher Clark, also WBro John Ferguson for his support of these events. I also thank all the Lodge Membership teams and Group officers who attended those meetings.

I am delighted to have seen so much positive energy and action resulting, and so many external awareness raising events across the Province during the summer, which have had a very positive impact on our levels of initiates, and some re-joining members. We initiated 14 gentlemen in Sept this year compared to 6 the year before, October has also been very busy and November looks like being even busier with initiations. These events have also had a positive impact on our Profile within the community.

It is early days, but with our first treble initiation happening at Rockingham Forest on the 9th November and many double

initiations, together with 83 current live prospects awaiting initiation, these new initiatives are starting to have a real impact.

We must however brethren continue to push on, holding multiple ceremonies, and extra meetings, inviting suitable gentlemen to explore Freemasonry and continue to engage and retain our members if we are to grow and meet our membership challenge.

The 2024 Festival is proceeding well and we have the Gala Ball coming up on the 17th of this month. If you have not yet purchased tickets please do, your support will be much appreciated and if you have purchased tickets, the booking system is now open to family and friends, so see if you can invite a friend or family member along who might just have an interest in joining us.

We have sadly since the start of this season lost some stalwarts and important members during the summer and in the last two months, to mention just three WBros Ian Nelson, Harry Twelvetree and RWBro Michael Roalfe, but on a more positive note, we have through the life saving intervention and quick thinking of members during a meeting at Kettering, saved the life of WBro Michael Branch, who I am pleased to say is recovering well and I have been in touch with Michael earlier today.

There is no doubt that without the work of WBros Martin Peel & Red Litchfield, WBro Michael would not have survived, The use of the defibrillator was a crucial piece of equipment on that occasion, I do therefore urge every centre to ensure they not only have at least one defibrillator, but that it is regularly maintained and properly serviced to ensure it is in working order when needed. Brethren next time it might be you.....

I have commenced a consultation programme with Centre management teams and trustees to enquire about Asbestos logs and RAAC, (lightweight concrete) and we will also be asking about defibrillators, and first aid arrangements.

Some management Committees and trustees may feel I am intruding on their areas, but the health and well-being of my members, who use our centres, is part of my responsibilities as Provincial Grand Master, and so I make no apology for ensuring the safety of our buildings and members, and I ask them to please cooperate with the enquiries and reply as soon as possible.

Another trial underway is the Healthy Eating option.

I thank WBros Francis Margot and John Clarke in the Huntingdon Group and their caterers for piloting this initiative, which where it has been available, has been very successful with at some meetings 48% and even over 50% of members opting for the healthy option. The catering teams have worked hard to develop choices and have experimented in how these are delivered at meetings, and with some adaptations, have arrived at a workable solution, that offers healthier choices if desired.

Brethren if it was just 10% it would demonstrate a real need but at over 40% it can not be ignored that members welcome this initiative. I have for years sat with brethren at festive boards saying how the meals are too heavy at 8.30 at night, how they will be up all night with indigestion, seen waist lines, my own very much included, continually growing. All negative to our health. This is not a nanny state, but when the only option is steak and kidney pie three or four days a week and there is no other choice, then we need to look into this. The new initiative doesn't take away anything and the steak and kidney pie or its equivalent, will still be available at every meeting, we are just asking that there be an alternative healthier / lighter option available. A democratic not a dictatorial approach. I have had numerous members thank me for the introduction and I now wish following a successful pilot for this to be rolled out across the Province. There will be support and advice available to achieve this.

The Three Pillars continues to grow slowly and sensibly within its own resources and is now in Northampton with great community presence working with the local St James Church and even the Saints Rugby team. I thank and congratulate WBro Aaron Day particularly but also all those members and their better halves who give up their time to support the Northampton feeding station and food bank.

Peterborough continues and Rushden is now up and running.

Our Communications team have modernised and updated and hopefully everyone has seen positive changes in this area, I thank WBros Peter Robinson, Jason Brice, Craig Bundy, Reuben Freeman, Dan Cooke, Simon Key and all the local Comms team members for their sterling work in this area.

We have had a most successful bi centenary meeting for Socrates Lodge attended by the Assistant Grand Master RWBro Steven Varley.

Coming up, we have banner re dedications and lodges celebrating 50 years and other milestones.

Our Light Blues have reached their 500th member, who I hope to see soon.

I have recently presented my first Certificate of Merit to a well deserving WBro Jeff Freeman for all his work at Corby over many years.

A busy start to this season and I am looking forward to our first triple initiation at Rockingham Forest, and what looks like being a very busy and exciting season to come.

It is usual at this meeting for me to announce next years Three Counties Worshipful Master, and I am delighted to say that after an absence of 17 years the Rose Croix will return to this Chair as I have asked their Inspector General WBro John Booth to be next years Worshipful Master.

He was with us earlier for the meeting but has had to return to London this evening.

It is also at this time that the Provincial Grand Master normally announces any changes to his executive.

I therefore announce that in May 2024 our Provincial Grand Secretary WBro William Diggins will be stepping down and WBro Kevin Foreman will be taking on the position of Provincial Grand Secretary.

Also in May VWBro Charles Bennett, after a most successful term of six years as our Deputy Provincial Grand Master, and two Years as Assistant, together with his five years as Provincial Director of Ceremonies, will have completed some thirteen years on the Provincial Executive, and so will be standing down as our Deputy PGM. I will say more at Provincial Grand Lodge in May.

I am delighted to announce that stepping into his rather large shoes to fill, will be WBro Tim Almond.

This leaves a gap in my executive, which will be filled by a Brother who is well known to you all, as well as being an experienced member of this Province a Grand and Group Officer, he is also active within the Masonic charities as a member of the RMBI Finance committee and also serves our community as a member of the Peterborough cathedral finance committee.

I am delighted to say we will be re-welcoming our past Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies, WBro Dale Gilbert to the Executive team, as our second Assistant Provincial Grand Master.

Brethren we have started the season well, but we must keep our foot to the floor and get those initiations happening and retain our existing members through effective engagement. I know that together we can grow this Province
Brethren I thank you for your attention.

RWBro Mark Constant, Provincial Grand Master