

Most Excellent Grand Superintendents Address
Annual Convocation 22nd October 2020
Clevedon Masonic Hall

Companions, I am sure you will all agree that this is possibly one of the most obscure if not the strangest Provincial Grand Chapter Convocation in our 255yr History of Royal Arch Masonry in Somerset; in so far as the attendance has been restricted to just six attendees in line with Her Majesties' Government COVID-19 legislation. Nevertheless, in spite of the restrictions and a number of attempts to reschedule, it has now been possible to form a quorum here today to open Provincial Grand Chapter enabling us to address the business at hand which in accordance with our bylaws are required to be dealt with on an annual basis.

As you are all aware the original date for this convocation was to have been Thursday 21st May, but due to the suspension brought about by the present corona virus pandemic it was neither desired or possible to meet, resulting in todays much reduced and scaled down agenda; it is with great sadness that we have not on this occasion been able to welcome many of our own Companions, let alone any of our distinguished visitors and guests from other Provinces. Nevertheless, with the exception of the Third Provincial Grand Principal all those that were due to receive appointments and or promotions were contacted on the day in question by one of the Provincial Grand Principals or Deputy Grand Superintendent; which in turn was followed up with a personal letter of appointment and congratulation by me. It was furthermore confirmed that their active or past ranks including their entitled to wear the 'badge of their ranks' were effective from that day onwards.

Companions, we have made a number of inroads throughout this past year and I am delighted to announce as a result of your sterling efforts we have exalted 45 candidates within the past 12 months, all of which or those able to attend were due to be presented on the 21st May to receive an acknowledgment and personal welcome from me at the annual convocation. I am also delighted to announce that over the same period we have accumulated an additional 30 candidates that are now waiting in the wings in order to complete their journey in Pure Ancient Freemasonry as soon as circumstances permit.

The fraternal visiting scheme which was introduced last year in conjunction with the Craft and headed by E Comp Neil Hurcum, Past 3rd Provincial Grand Principal, is proving to be highly successful, as is Neil's additional role of Support and Training Officer for the Holy Royal Arch Reps in Craft Lodges. It would be remiss of me therefore, if at this stage I didn't thank the Provincial Grand Master RW Bro David Medlock DL and his team for their cooperation and support of both ventures.

There is no doubt, should circumstances relating to this present pandemic continue to persist, that the forthcoming year will inevitably lead to a range of new and possibly difficult challenges, in such cases we shall all have to learn to overcome by adapting to change in a number of new and innovative ways. Following an earlier pilot scheme there has now been a resurgence to re-engage with our often forgotten and unattached companions, this has resulted in the formation of a working group lead by our Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies E Comp Chris Moore, Past 3rd Provincial Grand Principal, and under his direction we have been able to identify and engage with over 275 unattached companions. That engagement is continuing on a regular ongoing basis and will continue throughout this present pandemic and beyond if necessary, not only to provide support and encouragement through these difficult times, but with a view of rekindling their enthusiasm and possible re-engagement once we are able to return to some semblance of normality.

Similarly to the disappointment of our own cancellation, this year's Supreme Grand Chapter Annual Investiture Convocation suffered the same fate and had to be cancelled, resulting in great disappointment for both E Comp David Parslow and E Comp Neil Hurcum who were destined for London to receive their Grand Collars, however, I'm delighted in being able to confirm that both David and Neil received a personal written confirmation and congratulatory letters from the Pro. First Grand Principal, ME Comp Peter Geoffrey Lowndes; and we too congratulate them on their preferment. I am only sorry, as I'm sure you all are, that they were unable to savour the ambience and full ceremonial spectacle of the occasion in being invested in those magnificent settings at Freemasons' Hall in Great Queens Street.

It is again extremely disappointing that the outgoing Provincial team were unable by some two months to complete their full term of office, but in order of recognition I would very much like now to take this opportunity to thank them all for their commitment, support and friendship throughout this past year. They have all been engaged in one form or another with the two Provincial Team visitation, the first being a sesquicentennial celebration and banner dedication at Inkerman Chapter No.1222 at Weston-super-Mare, whereby on that occasion the Chapter was honoured by the presence of the Third Grand Principal, ME Comp Gareth Jones OBE, the second being an Exaltation Ceremony at Dungarvan Chapter No.973 in Frome. Unfortunately, the two that were to follow never materialised due to the suspension and will be rescheduled to a later date.

I have also had the pleasure during the past year in presenting four Grand Superintendent's awards to E Comp Keith Smith of Chapter of Fidelity and Sincerity No.1966, E Comp's Norman and Ken Crang of Chapter of Brotherly Love No.329 and E Comp Colin Snook of Avalon Chapter No.446 not only for their outstanding services to the Holy Royal Arch in general, but in recognition for their past and continuing contribution to their own particular Chapters.

I would also like to take this opportunity to formally thank E Comp David Dixon for his enormous contribution and total commitment to the office of Third Provincial Grand Principal over the past year. David managed to take everything in his stride and never stepped away from his responsibilities and for that I am extremely grateful. I have no doubt that it won't be long before we see David back in a senior executive role, but in the meantime I'm sure we can find some further use for his particular attributes. Little has been mentioned about David's current involvement in support of the vulnerable and food distribution throughout Bath and the surrounding district, but it is highly commendable and ought to be acknowledged for the selfless commitment in the support that he is continuing to provide to his local community.

Most of today's organisation as usual has fallen upon our Provincial Grand Scribe Ezra, E Comp Tony Beaumont and I thank him for his attention to detail and hard work. I would also like to thank the sterling work undertaken by the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies for keeping us all in check and not forgetting E Comp Neil Hurcum for his assistance in providing us with a safe Covid secure environment in order to satisfy the requirements for this Provincial Convocation

and to E Comp John Bennett 'My Grand Superintendent' who was invited to stand in and act as Second Provincial Grand Principal in order to protect E Comp Ray Beckingham's family bubble, where shielding is particularly important due to Christine's health issues. Christine is currently in hospital awaiting major surgery, our thoughts and prayers remain very much with Chris and Ray at this stressful time in the sincere hope of a successful outcome.

My grateful thanks must also extend to my Deputy Grand Superintendent, E Comp Clive Lambert in supporting me with benefit of his wisdom and continued support, and to both E Comp Ray Beckingham and Neil Hurcum for their use of zoom technology in hosting regular talks and lectures for the benefit of the all Brethren and Companions alike during these unprecedented times of isolation.

Last year, I announced that the arms collection following the convocation would be in aid of the Provincial Grand Masters 2020 festival and that this year would be our final opportunity to make a difference to the festival fund. I can now confirm that through your sterling efforts our final contribution stands at 30K for which I am immensely proud of each and every one of you for achieving this magnificent sum in support of the 2020 festival appeal. Despite our best effort this year in identifying a deserving and local based charity, it seems that all our efforts have been diverted to focus on this unprecedented and dreadful COVID-19 pandemic, but hopefully by the time we start returning to some semblance of normality we will once again be considering new locally based nominations, so I would urge all Chapter Charity Stewards to start now by identifying worthy causes in your local areas.

Finally Companions, I am immensely proud of what you have all been able to achieve and continue to do in the support of Brethren and Companions through these difficult and stressful times. With clocks going back this weekend and with winter fast approaching, it is even more important and incumbent upon us all to continue to support each other through the weeks and possibly months to come, particularly those less fortunate than ourselves who may be isolated, living alone and without family or alternative support.

In the meantime, and until we are able to meet again without the imposition of restrictions, may the True and Living God Most High bless and support you all through these difficult and uncertain times and keep you safe and well.