

Provincial Grand Master address 28/06/2025

Brethren and Companions,

On my and your behalf I welcome the Deputy Grand Master and his retinue to our Province, we thank you, Sir Michael for taking time from your busy schedule to be with us and hope you, the Grand Secretary and all your supporting officers leave at the end of the day in the knowledge that Durham is in good heart. I also welcome “en bloc” the many Provincial Grand Masters, Past Provincial Grand Masters and other representatives from neighbouring Provinces, the Heads of Companion Orders and past rulers of this Province who I’m sure understand on this occasion our applause for them collectively is just as heartfelt as if time permitted individual introductions.

The significance of the responsibility I have undertaken in accepting appointment as Provincial Grand Master and Grand Superintendent is at the forefront of my mind and without doubt, I cannot lead the Province of Durham on the next chapter of its illustrious history without your support and the thousands of congratulatory messages sent to myself and the other rulers since the announcement of the new executive give confidence that will be so. We are all grateful for and humbled by the messages.

The past 3 years under the enthusiastic leadership of John Thompson have been a joy to be part of and I know we all wish him well on the next stage of his Masonic journey as Assistant Grand Master where he will undoubtedly make a difference nationally as he has here in Durham.

So, where do we go from here? The Provincial mantra of STRONGER TOGETHER will continue, and we will seal it with a KISS. Those of you involved in business development, or American military history, will know this as an acronym. We are going to KEEP IT STRAIGHTFORWARD & SIMPLE.

Part of the attraction of Freemasonry is Tradition and an escape from the Complex Planning and Strategy of the modern world. What I want is simply for our current and many more future members to enjoy their Freemasonry in Lodges, Chapters and Companion Orders where they experience our traditions of quality ritual, with exciting modern additions and a YES IF attitude. Where we spend time getting to know each other within and away from our meetings, turning charity into service, using activities such as those listed in the agenda booklet and long may this list continue and grow.

Today, 28th June, is Armed Forces day and whilst this meeting prevents us from marking it in any significant way I do so by announcing that in this Province, the entirety of November will be a remembrance month, when we celebrate all that the armed and other uniformed services have done and do for us. We will encourage the wearing of miniature medals at the festive board and a black Durham Freemasons tie with a red poppy emblem at all meetings. These ties are available from our merchandising team from today, and £10 from each £15 purchase will go to military charities as identified by our Armed Forces Committee.

Freemasonry has made me a better person. It has helped many of you develop and improve in your home, professional and social lives, you have met and made lifetime friends with people you'd never know were it not for Freemasonry.

We have a duty Brethren and Companions that Freemasonry, formally established 308 years and 9 days ago when our first Grand Lodge met in the Goose and Gridiron tavern, continues; to ensure future generations of men and women have the opportunity to enjoy what we enjoy today.

To do this we need to maintain and increase our membership. This, along with the 2032 charity festival will be the main focus during my tenure of office and I request that it is also yours.

This investiture meeting will be immediately followed by our 2025 Provincial Grand Lodge which on this occasion, and this occasion only, will be, of necessity significantly abbreviated. The collective promotion and appointment with Provincial Grand Rank in no way decreases my grateful thanks for all that the recipients have done, and will continue to do, for Freemasonry in this Province. Please ensure you come to the front for a well-deserved handshake when we circulate throughout The Fed between the meeting and the meal. I extend the same gratitude to all those acting Provincial Officers standing down today for a job well done, but I will name one, Keith Bibby who has been our diligent Provincial Grand Treasurer for over a decade. And I name only one current Provincial Officer. On his appointment as Provincial Grand Secretary only one year ago today it wasn't part of the deal that he would be arranging an Investiture in 2025. Thank you, Richard, and all who have assisted you.

Brethren and Companions, over this summer you will be informed about Building Together, the further harmonisation of Craft and Chapter, one organisation, one journey. In it is all the advice you need to grow Freemasonry. In Durham we will keep this straightforward and simple, using it as a tool to be Stronger Together and I very much look forward to the journey with your continued support and fraternal friendship.

John D Watts

Provincial Grand Master and Grand Superintendent