

## **ADDRESS BY PROVINCIAL GRAND MASTER – June 2023**

Distinguished guests and Brethren all. I thank you for your patience for what has been a busy morning. I welcome you all to our AGM here today at The Fed.

Brethren its been a busy 12 months, It has been my aim to try and support as many Lodges and Chapters as we could, to show you all that Province is here to support you. I'm sure those retiring from acting office today will be mightily relieved for the rest. But seriously can I thank my inaugural team for the wonderful support you have given to me and the Province during your time in office.

I thank these Brethren for their considerable work to date, especially in terms of assisting me in the management of our Province.

I would like to congratulate all those Brethren who I have had the pleasure of appointing today. These honours are not awarded lightly, careful deliberation and time is given to make sure each and every one is thoroughly deserved. I hope you have enjoyed today and will continue to support your Lodges, your Masonic Halls and of course your Province wherever you can and enjoy the new responsibilities that you have been afforded.

For many years we have kindly borrowed items of furniture for our provincial meetings recently Londonderry Chapter of Amity and Rowlands Gill Lodge have closed and have kindly donated various 'key' items for our Provincial ceremonials

including these magnificent thrones and many other items related to the Chapter.

It is greatly appreciated and important to keep such items as significant 'living' pieces for the future as they have lots of history and significance. We hope former Brethren and Companions of these units when they attend the Provincial meetings in future years will both be interested to see the items are in continued use.

Brethren , WBro Claude Stewart from Darlington has worked his magic once again with a full restoration on the 3 candlesticks we are using today.

The three columns were originally made in the late 40's early 50's by Thomas Lee & Sons of Barnard Castle.

All were cleaned, de-varnished, stained, and lacquered.

Brethren can you please show your appreciation to Claude Stewart on his excellent workmanship .

In April this year we visited Grand Lodge to support Brethren from this Province who were honoured by receiving Grand Rank. I would be grateful if you could stand if you're named, and Brethren can you hold your enthusiasm to congratulate them until I have announced them all.

The MW Grand Master was pleased to appoint to and promote in Grand Lodge the following Durham Brethren:

**First Appointments to Grand Rank:**

Duncan Maw	PAGDC
David Turner	PAGDC
Malcolm Sweet	PAGSwdB
Sidney James Watson	PAGSwdB

**Promotions in Grand Rank:**

VW Bro Michael Graham promoted to Past Grand Sword br  
Andrew Foster promoted to Past senior grand Deacon  
Dennis Robinson promoted to Past junior grand Deacon

**TLC Appointment**

Brethren as you know WBro Duncan Maw now has his hands full as the Provincial Almoner and Vice Chairman of Durham Benevolence and Duncan has been our TLC Coordinator for over 6 years in which time the scheme has expanded to support more children than ever before with over 113,000 bears donated at a cost of £250,000 since 2005.

WBro Mark Davies from Eanred Lodge in Billingham has been one of our most active TLC ambassadors, especially during the COVID pandemic when Mark would still be as active as the law would allow. He is also instrumental in making those extra trips to the hospital with easter eggs and selection boxes. It therefore gives me great pleasure to announce Mark as our new TLC Coordinator. Brethren join with me in

thanking Duncan for all of his hard work and wishing Mark all the success in his new role.

## **Communication**

Brethren I said 12 months ago that communication is vital for us to be a successful and thriving organisation. Our Durham Insight monthly newsletter is now reaching every member, keeping you updated with what's happening in and around our Province and I pay tribute to its editor Bro Trevor Sherwood for his many hours of work in compiling this each month.

Our monthly second rising from the secretariat keeps you updated on official comms and key admin points from Province.

You are receiving the first rising direct from Shaun's team with news from UGLE.

And today we launch our new Provincial website, which looks clean modern, and focuses on attraction and what we can offer a prospective member but with all the added benefits for our existing members in a soon to be launched members section, which will cover the Royal Arch, Provincial diary, Solomon, members' pathway, Learning & Development, Provincial events, useful documents and much more.

Our website has a page for every Lodge and Chapter in every hall to highlight your unit, it will be your shop window for potential new members, make sure its completed. It could be the difference between getting new members or not.

I'm proud today that we have re-launched our Provincial Coat of Arms which celebrates 101 years since it was first

commissioned. WBro Jamie Campbell has digitally remastered our Coat of Arms which will now be used on all communications and digital Media including the new Provincial Website. This decision acknowledges the achievements of the past 300 years, whilst recognising the changes and challenges of the future.

You will have received our first '**BE Involved**' booklet today which summarises our many teams of volunteers that engage with our community and gives opportunities to our members to BE involved in our activities with other masons in Durham.

Not forgetting our social media feeds Facebook, Twitter, Instagram & our Mobile Team App with our Provincial yearbook and coming soon our very own Provincial podcast, first episode already recorded.

Shaun has reiterated today how important our communication is and that we try reach all our members in a cost-effective manner.

Can I thank all those have contributed to our comms over the last year with particular thanks to our Comms officer Paul O'Doherty with Rod Scott, Michael Graham, Gavin Rowell, Wayne Rumley and our many others who cover our events.

## **Membership**

As mentioned at the AGM last year I was keen that we had a strategy for our Province and was pleased that we launched it

some months ago in conjunction with the Pro Grand Master's 2022 and beyond. Already we are fulfilling some of those commitments, but we have more to do.

Brethren we have a membership challenge, last year our membership deficit was 118 members, and we are committed to reducing that deficit by encouraging new members and reducing the loss of our members.

The big losses brethren are resignations, cessations, and exclusions, we have to ask the big questions of why they are leaving. Please talk to your members don't wait for the resignation letter. If your member hasn't attended and not offered apologies for 2 or 3 months, have they already gone? You just haven't got the resignation letter yet.

Please don't let it get that far.

Do your Lodge plan, involve your members, ask them what they want from their membership. Do you need to change start times, do you need more or less meetings. When and where do you meet.

To quote our Pro GM lets use "Yes if" and not "No because"  
Challenge what has gone before.

### **New & young masons**

To assist in our membership & retention policy today we launch our new masons light blue group, over the last few months we have met with many new masons and asked what they wanted from their lodge and their province. The new group will draw on the experiences we learnt from those who

have gone before our **North East Corner** and **The light Blues Club** as well as other similar successful forums from across UGLE .

- The group will extend across the entire geographic area of the Province of Durham but will be sub divided into four semi-autonomous Regional Committee led areas, the NE, SE, SW and NW.

- The aim is to encourage inclusion, involvement, and development by Engagement through social events for members, non-members/masons, and partners/families, Discovering all aspects of masonry through visits to masonic themed attractions, talks, events etc., Exploring by encouraging visits to other lodges and Chapters, and Develop Masons (Craft/RA) by developing knowledge and skills through learning and development events.

- This will be achieved by organising a range of relaxed, socially focussed, and affordable events open to both Masons, non-masons and their families as appropriate. The group will act as a forum for open and candid discussion and be a conduit to inform Province of ideas and issues that are affecting our members and potential new members.

- This will result in members feeling invested in as valued members of the Province which we hope will in turn reinforce retention and encourage recruitment of new Freemasons.

More information will be released over the summer to those qualifying brethren.

## Halls

Membership also includes the environment we meet, are our buildings up to standard? Are our meals good enough?

We live in challenging times, with high inflation, high energy costs and many additional costs and legislation we didn't have in the past and this can have a huge impact on the viability of a hall.

We must avoid halls closing simply because they run out of funds due to loss of Lodges or other masonic units. Intervention is required early to manage the process of change.

Consider improvement to halls to enhance the masonic experience, Consider closure of failing halls and relocation,

Consider amalgamation to improve the vibrancy,

Could we together development a purpose-built masonic centre

What is your long-term plan ?

We have great examples in our Province of halls who have successfully managed change and made their centre successful such as:

Chester-Le-Street, Darlington, Sunderland and Durham - let's learn from them.

The Provincial Asset Management team remains willing to assist halls and we will be hosting a presentation later in the year and we invite all management teams to come along to discuss their future.



Brethren anything that is worth having is worth working for, I want our Lodges, Chapters, and buildings to be strong with healthy memberships.

Our membership and mentoring teams are all new today under the leadership of WBro Jamie Rielly and WBro Gaurav Jamnadass and have already begun assembling their teams to support you.

In the autumn they will be hoisting membership week, with activities geared around attraction , mentoring and retention.

They are to help, please keep the dialogue going with your members.

Write that Lodge Profile and Plan for your future.

The membership teams met with Lodges last year and will do so again this year, please come along. We want to hear from you.

136 members have joined our ranks since January through initiation and becoming joining members, lets ensure we keep them, and we attract more.

As Provincial Grand Master I want to be consecrating Lodges not closing them. I have been asked numerous times would I support starting new Lodges, specialised Lodges for those who want to bond not only because of freemasonry but from another passion, such as fishing, cycling, sci -fi, the military, shooting, motor bikes and the list goes on.

For the first time in 9 years, I have every confidence will be consecrating new Lodges next year, what an exciting time for our Province.

If you're considering founding a new Lodge you must have a plan with plenty of support, this doesn't happen overnight.

If you're considering this, talk to us we have guidelines to assist you.

Our organisation has adapted, changed, and thrived for over 300 years and will continue to do so.

### **Royal Arch**

I'm also keen that we continue to promote our Royal Arch Masonry, , I encourage you all to educate our brethren who are not members.

My aim is to increase RA membership from the 40% of craft members we have today.

I want to use our Visiting Support Officers in both Craft and Royal Arch along with our Royal Arch Representatives to promote the RA, increase our social media reach and utilise our communications efforts.

We are one organisation and I'm keen or craft memberships become Royal Arch companions.

Brethren an organisation like ours has been built on the goodwill and support of many over the years, we give our time and our efforts for the betterment of our Lodge and our Province. Many of you in the room are already supporting in numerous ways to which I'm very grateful. You have heard

today, and you see across the Province what we are trying to achieve, if you think you can help, if you have a skill we could utilise, if you have time to commit, please get in touch.

We are stronger together!

## **Thanks**

Can I thank our Provincial Grand Secretary, W Bro Tom Gittins, his Deputy, W Bro Mike Davies, Caroline & Pamela, and the many volunteers for making today the success it is.

Our Stewards Lodge who supports us in so many of our events

Can I take this opportunity to thank the team at The Fed for looking after us today?

Also, to the Provincial DC Martin Rankin and his Team for their outstanding work, today as always.

Today we start our new masonic year and I hope a year of optimism as we look at our future.

I'm keen for us to sustain and build our membership by promoting Freemasonry positively within the community to improve our public perception, improve our membership enquiries by emphasising our core values of integrity, respect, charity, and friendship.

I want the best membership experience for every member, whether it's from our buildings, ritual, dining to the positive interactions with Province to ensure the all-round experience ensures they want to stay members.

Enhancing our community profile helping those less fortunate than ourselves and demonstrate our commitment to discharging our civic duties.

In all of this don't forget those important people, our family who give us the support and encouragement to enjoy our freemasonry, make sure you always put your family first.

Can I thank you all for coming today and for making this day so special for those who have been appointed and promoted today and for the very kind attention you have given to this address.

Remember we are stronger together.

Brethren. I'm proud to be a Freemason, and extremely proud to lead this Province

And to quote a friend of mine.

**Your lodge, your province, your future**