

Brethren, this is our first Annual Meeting for four years, with the exception of my installation, at the end of May last year, a great deal has happened and many problems have had to be suffered which we are all more than aware of during those four years, and we have suffered, as have many other organisations, from the effects, but we have now hopefully come through the worst, and now need to look forward and become more proactive and start building on the foundation laid by previous Officers and members of the District, we will still of course still need to give our continued support, to our own Councils, and where possible to the other Councils of our District.

Generally I feel there is cause for optimism, Meetings and Festive boards appear to be getting back the atmosphere we all crave and love, and in an effort to assist this we have introduced Team Visits, and I can report that they seem to have had the desired effect, and I thank our District Officers for supporting these visits and making them a success, so much so, that it has been decided to continue them, and we are hoping this coming year to visit Prince Edward 10th June, Frank G Whitworth 16th June, and ParagonE on 4th March 2024. I hope that the acting Officers will support these visits, and make them as enjoyable as they have been during this last term,

Our membership seems to be stable at the moment, and the losses we have suffered appear to have been covered by some rejoining members and some new members coming into the Order. Brethren virtually all the Orders in Freemasonry find themselves in this situation, so looking for new good candidates and spreading the word about the Allied Masonic Degrees, is as important as it has ever been, but at the same time we need to be encouraging good people into Craft Masonry, as they are the bedrock of all Freemasonry and there by the future candidates of Orders such as ours.

Brethren, one of the highlights of my last 10 months was to attend the Grand Council meeting at Grand Lodge on the 25th October and witness members of the District receiving their Grand Honours, these Honours were richly deserved and a reward for their hard work in the District and commitment to the Order, and it was very pleasing to see all 7 of our recipients there to be appointed by the Grand Master, and I am very pleased that they are in attendance today. I would like them to stand when their name is called and remain standing to allow us to give our congratulations to them collectively.

First appointment – W Bro Algis James Vasis to (acting) Grand Steward.

First appointment – W Bro Michael Bunce to Past Grand Standard Bearer.

First appointment – W Bro Philip George Christopher to Past Grand Inner Guard.

Promotion - VW Bro Philip Clive Ellenor to Past Grand Registrar.

Promotion - VW Bro Alan Jones to Past Grand Registrar.

Promotion - W Bro Anthony Burke to Past Grand Junior Deacon.

Promotion – W Bro Barry Massam to Past Grand Junior Deacon.

Promotion - W Bro Beverley John Heywood to Past Grand Junior Deacon.

Please give them your congratulations.

I would also like to congratulate all those who have received appointments and promotions in the District and look forward to you joining me at our future visits around the District. Again these appointments are a reward for the work and commitment to the District, your Councils and the Order in general, please keep up the good work. I must thank everyone for attending today and supporting this District and its members, particularly my fellow District Grand Prefects and their supporters, who have given up their time and made long journeys to support us. I cannot thank you all enough. Being part of your circle, and enjoying your friendship has been a great experience and for me, and has made the meetings so enjoyable and rewarding. I look forward to joining you at future meetings as often as I am able. I also thank the members of all the Councils of this District, for their reception, kindness and hospitality during my visits to their Councils. It has been very much appreciated.

Brethren, two of our long standing Officers are standing down today. Our Secretary, VW Bro Tom Spinks, who for the last 5 years has steered me and the District through some very choppy waters, whilst dealing with his own health problems, and at the same time having to nursemaid an inexperienced District Grand Prefect through his early days. The other Officer is our retiring Director of Ceremonies, W Bro Tony Burke, who has been part of the District Director of Ceremonies team for nine years and District Director of Ceremonies for three. Tony, your expertise, help and guidance has also been invaluable to me. I thank you both most sincerely.

Brethren before the snoring, coughing and shushing starts, if it hasn't already, I will draw my address to a close and look forward to joining you at the Festive Board.

Thank you again, and for those who are unable to join us, I hope you have enjoyed the meeting and please have a safe journey home.