

Good afternoon brethren and a warm welcome to each and every one of you, to this our Annual Provincial Meeting. The annual meeting not only gives me the opportunity to reflect on the past year but also to express my thoughts concerning what I hope we will achieve in the coming year. At the Festive Board there will be a toast to our Distinguished Guests but I would personally like to formally welcome them and ask that you withhold your spontaneous and rapturous applause until the end. For some of our visitors it is the first and hopefully not the last occasion that we have had the pleasure of their company. For others it will be the last in their present capacity but once again I am sure it won't be their last visit to this meeting.

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Can I also give a warm welcome to our Past Deputies V. W. Bros Mike Louis and Fred Main and our past Assistant V.W. Bro Ian Daniel, we are delighted to have your company.

As is the usual practice I would now like to mention the heads of other orders whom have joined us here this morning. First of all, I welcome W. Bro Alan Hume, Provincial Prior for Northumberland, then we have W. Bro Michael Daws Inspector General the Rose Croix and the Intendant General in the Red Cross of Constantine, W. Bro John Harvey District Grand Master of the Royal and Select Masters and W. Bro Alan Radford, Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler in the Order of the Secret Monitor. RW. Bro Peter Croft has already been mentioned as part of the delegation from Durham but with his other two hats he is the District Grand Prefect of the of the Order of the Allied Masonic Degrees and the President of the General Board at Mark Masons Hall.

Brethren please acclaim our guests.

Once again in the summer TI Lodge made use of their travelling warrant and held their meeting in Bellingham which was a great success with over sixty brethren dining at the festive board and all money raised during the night went to the benevolent fund. The meeting was attended by the then Assistant Grand Master, R.W. Bro Ray Smith who made the significant journey north to be with us despite his wife's ill health. My thanks go to the members of TI for organising the event as well as the brethren of Risingham Mark for their assistance in facilitating the occasion.

A substantial number of our brethren travelled down to London in June to Grand Lodge and I am certain a good time was had by the majority. I am aware of the technical difficulties in Freemasons Hall which did reduce the enjoyment of occasion for some brethren but rest assured that Mark Masons Hall were most dissatisfied with the situation, which was out of their hands, and are taking steps to prevent a reoccurrence. I would now like to mention those brethren who were appointed to and promoted in Grand Lodge at the meeting last June and would ask them to stand when their names are called. We received two acting ranks, W. Bro Les Francis was promoted to Grand Junior Deacon and W. Bro Chris Allan was appointed as a Grand Steward. W. Bro Richard Northey was promoted to Past Grand Junior Deacon as was W. Bro Colin Narey. W. Bro Bob Angus was appointed to Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies as were W. Bros Stephen Matthews and Alexander Thompson. Last but by no means least W. Bro Graham Howie was appointed to Past Assistant Grand Sword Bearer. Congratulations to all of these brethren and may they live long to enjoy the honour bestowed on them.

To the officers of Provincial Grand Lodge who were appointed last year I would like to thank them for the support they have given and hope that they have enjoyed the year. Visiting lodges and making new friends is, I think, one of the major attributes and benefits of freemasonry and being a freemason, especially in our wonderful order. I would particularly like to thank the two wardens, W. Bro. Michael Gair and W. Bro. Alan Sherett for not only the work done in preparing toasts to lodges but in addition for their company on visits to other provinces. W. Bro Alan has in particular travelled many hundreds of miles with me and other members of the executive visiting other provinces, if I was

able to appoint a provincial chauffeur he would certainly be the first in line.

For those whom I have just appointed to or promoted in Provincial Grand Rank today marks an important stage in, but not I hasten to add, a conclusion, to their Masonic careers and duties. They now have an even greater responsibility to work diligently for the good of their lodge as well as the province. I will ask that the Wardens and Overseers visit as many lodges as they can not only to make themselves known to the brethren but also to assist in the ceremonies whenever called upon.

In early summer we had what was the first provincial weekend when a small number of brethren and their wives had a delightful couple of days Marshall Meadows Hotel in the Scottish borders. We were well looked after by the hotel and most importantly well fed and I hope to repeat the occasion at a date to be announced before the end of the year when I am optimistic more couples will be able to join us.

During the course of the year the benevolent committee again organised four fund raising events for which I am most grateful. At these events we were both well fed and entertained with substantial sums of money being raised for worthy and worthwhile local charities details of which were given in the Benevolent Fund Accounts. W. Bro. Tom Grey and his band of merry men strive to and succeed in making every event both a financial and social success, long may this continue.

Over the past couple of years my deputy had delivered a number of talks at Mark meetings to which potential members were invited. With the permission of our Provincial Grand Master, who will incidentally be joining us for lunch, I intend spreading the message further by giving briefings at Craft meetings. So brethren, if your Craft lodge has a free night, why not contact me through the provincial office and I or my Deputy or Assistant will come along and tell those brethren who have not seen the light what they are missing. Additionally, at the Craft Annual Provincial Meeting in November there will be a display giving information about the Mark. Please approach brethren who may be potential members of the Mark, you would be surprised how many people when I've asked why they're not members have replied "Well nobody has asked me".

Earlier in the year W. Bro John Chan offered to re vamp and update the website and today sees its launch. Screenshots from the website are being shown in the dining room and the new site address will be circulated by the secretariat next week. I am delighted to have such a talented individual as W. Bro John amongst us who can turn his hand to this type of activity. Remaining with the modern communication theme I had intended to launch the province's Facebook page, which has been set up by W. Bro Peter Younger, at this meeting. However, events overtook me and the handover of the Northumbria blood bikes was too good an opportunity to miss. Again details of the method of accessing the page will be circulated soon. Can I thank W. Bro John Watt of Durham province for bringing the blood bike here this morning, unfortunately John was unable to stay as he has an engagement this afternoon not, I hasten to add, involving the blood bike.

Northumbria Blood Bikes is a charitable organisation established by local volunteers to deliver essential blood and urgent medical supplies, out of hours, between hospitals and healthcare sites and laboratories in North East England. For those of you who are not aware the Mark Benevolent Fund donated £18,000 to cover the cost of purchasing and kitting out the bike as well as its running costs.

You cannot fail to have noticed W. Bro Ian Brown selling his book in the lobby. W. Bro Ian has invested much time in pulling the book together which contains a vast amount of information for Northumberland Masons. As well as time W. Bro Ian has also invested financially as he has paid to have the books printed himself and all money raised from their sale will go to the Northumberland Mark Benevolent Fund. Can I now put on record my sincere thanks to W. Bro Ian for his hard work and generosity.

Last February a number of brethren from Northumberland travelled to Spain to attend the annual meeting of that district. Not only did this give the brethren the opportunity to sample Spain's winter climate which is, I have to say, considerably warmer than it is here. Additionally, those who are fans of the television series Benidorm were able to visit the hotel where some of the scenes are filmed. We were well entertained by the province as apart from the meeting on Saturday, there was a demonstration of the Mark degree delivered by a team of Scottish masons the previous afternoon. It is my intention to return to Spain next year, I know some brethren are so keen to attend they have already booked flights and accommodation. Again details will be circulated soon and I will leave it up to those attending to make their own travel and accommodation arrangements.

The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> July 2017 sees the culmination of the 149<sup>th</sup> Mark Benevolent Fund Festival in Berkshire. It is my intention to travel to Berkshire with my wife and I invite as many brethren as are able to attend. Even if you cannot attend I encourage to you make a contribution towards the festival by wearing the festival badges which are on sale in the foyer for the princely sum of £5 and all money from the sale of these badges will go towards the festival.

It has now come to the time when I must I must draw my address to a close. I would like to thank you brethren for the attention you have paid this morning and to wish you well in the coming year in every respect.

May the Great Overseer of the universe have you in his holy keeping now and forever more.

May I take this opportunity to formally thank a number of people: First of all the management and staff at Corbridge Road for permitting us to hold our meeting here, to the host lodges for the assistance of their members in providing stewards, to the Director of Ceremonies, his Deputy and his Assistant for the extremely competent way they have conducted proceedings not only today but at all of our Provincial Visits and lastly once again may I thank most sincerely the Secretariat for their administrative activities for today and the year as a whole.