



Mark Masons' Hall
86 St James's Street, London, SW1A 1PL

Address on the day of Grand Council - Tuesday, 20 April 2021

By

Most Illustrious Companion Kessick John Jones, Grand Master

Companions, before I begin my address to you, I am sure that you would wish me, on behalf of our Order, to extend our heartfelt condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and members of the Royal family on the sad loss of HRH The Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, who lived respected and died regretted.

So today, more than a year on, after months of selfless and courageous sacrifice by our front-line public service workers, we stand at the very brink of finally putting the misery of 2020 behind us and moving forward to that great and glorious normality.

By now, thanks in a large part to the excellence of our scientists and the accelerated roll out of the national vaccine programme, many of us will have had at least the initial vaccination and perhaps even the follow up, or at least a date for it. Covid figures are gradually decreasing, so hopefully, (and I quote from the ritual of Scottish Masters of St. Andrew) "*meliora praesumo – I look for better things to come*".

In the meantime, complacency must be our sworn enemy.

Staying safe is vital for everyone's welfare and wellbeing and for a better tomorrow. Whether or not you have had one, or both vaccinations, do not drop your guard. This battle is not yet over. You may be much safer now than before, but none of us is immune, so take great care and strictly follow the guidelines issued by HMG and MMH.

Now on to the business of Grand Council, over which I should have been presiding today and sadly I begin with the Obituaries.

Since our cancelled meeting last year, The Supreme Master of the Universe has called a number of Companions to higher service. I would like to mention in particular the loss of:

R. Ill. Comp. John Brackley, P.Dep.G.M.

R. Ill. Comp John Robson, P.Dist. G.M. (Northumberland)

R. Ill. Comp. Brian Clifford Wareham. P.Dist.G.M. (Sussex)

R. Ill. Comp. Francis Edward Brown, P.G.Coun.

R. Ill. Comp. Raymond Ashton Newport, P.G. Coun.

R. Ill. Comp. Tommy Thomson, upon who had been bestowed the Commonwealth Police Medal, P.G. Coun.

and

R. Ill. Comp. David Edwin Woolnough, P.G. Coun.

Regretfully, in addition there are 72 others detailed in the Report of the Executive Committee.

Companions, I cannot sufficiently describe the disappointment I am experiencing, in having to deliver a virtual address for a second year, instead of welcoming you all to the magnificent and cavernous proportions of the Grand Temple at Free Masons Hall.

We are unfortunate to be chronologically disadvantaged by the date of our meeting. Nevertheless, I welcome all of you who are logging in today and those who may listen later.

I offer my congratulations to all the Companions whom today I have appointed, re-appointed and promoted. I am again, so sorry that circumstances have once more deprived me of the privilege and pleasure of personally investing you.

Before I go any further, I must refer to item four of the business paper for this cancelled meeting and thank you for my re-election

Next, I am delighted to announce the re-appointment of the Deputy Grand Master and the Grand Principal Conductor of the Work, both have been a tower of strength and support to me during a past year of difficult and uncertain times. They have also put in an enormous amount of work into their respective ancillary duties. I thank them and congratulate them.

You will be aware that last year was completely redundant as far as Cryptic activities were concerned; therefore, I have decided to re-appoint the rest of the active officers of 2020 and sincerely hope that they get to see some action in the year to come.

As per last year all promotions and appointments become effective from today.

Grand Rank in the Order of Royal and Select Masters is an achievement to be very proud of and serves not only to recognise your contributions to our Order, but also as an inducement to your future efforts in explaining and promulgating Cryptic Masonry to our Brethren in the Craft and Mark, our Companions in the Royal Arch, and of course beyond.

It is not only a senior position within the Order, but also a social and public position, and one which should only be held by those who publicly exemplify our precepts and principles.

Coronavirus has drastically changed all our lives and our activities. However, new innovations have helped to ease a heavy burden.

Think back Companions to a year ago, how many of us had even heard of Zoom, let alone used it! Today it is a common place, but welcome tool, to keep us together and in contact.

We have learned much during the pandemic – as Disraeli once said “There is no education like adversity”.

Many of the changes have been for the good of both Freemasonry and society in general.

In your Districts, not much has happened in terms of actual Masonic activity, but much has been made to happen in the true Masonic ethos.

An increased rise in support for Charitable Institutions, both Masonic and otherwise, the care and protection of the vulnerable and isolated, delivery of food supplies and protective equipment and countless other examples of voluntary assistance to the disabled and disadvantaged.

All of this has enhanced our profile in the eyes of the community.

In short, good humour, compassion, and resilience. The re-directing of your natural Cryptic enthusiasm into these worthy causes and countless others, has taken courage and strength of character.

District Grand Masters will remember that I said during their virtual Conference in January, that I usually leave biblical quotations to our Grand Chaplain, but I wish to share with you the befitting words contained in Corinthians 1 Chapter 16 Verse 13, which I consider to be spot on. “Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, be men of courage, be strong.”

It has not been all bad news. We have not consistently lost members year on year as feared and the losses are proportionally in a small percentage and could have been much worse. Any loss, however small, is a disappointment, but the Grand Recorder assures me that the figures are still within what might be termed acceptable margins, given the prevailing circumstances.

In addition, there is cause for comfort in that the core and committed membership remains broadly intact.

There have been other examples of good cheer.

The Grand Recorder's letter of June 2020 setting out new Retention and Relocation Guidelines has had a really positive effect on recovering resignations.

The launch of the Virtual Business Meeting scheme has enabled many Councils to continue transacting their administrative business.

In addition to an extension of the reduction in Registration and Joining Fees announced in February 2020, there will be a discount of £10 on annual dues to be invoiced in September.

I am sure that this reduction in annual dues for members of Orders administered from MMH will not go amiss!

With regard to the actual activities of Grand Council, these of course have all been virtual and very different, but the pandemic has not found us idle. We have welcomed four new leaders into our fold.

On 1st August 2020, Fraser McPherson was appointed by Patent as District Grand Master for West Yorkshire; this was in consequence to the very sad death of David Cordell.

Harding Watler was appointed by the same method, as Grand Inspector for Jamaica and the Cayman Islands on 2nd November 2020, in succession to Graham Smith who had served diligently since July 2012 and who had also been District Grand Master for Kent from 2002-2007.

Graham has been, and still continues to be a great servant to the Order.

On 28th November 2020 Ken Rondell was installed as Grand Inspector for the Channel Islands by his predecessor David Rosser, who had served in that office since March 2010 and whose promotion today is so justly merited.

On 1st January this year Bryan Hughes was appointed by Patent as District Grand Master for Cheshire and the Marches.

This was in consequence of the retirement of Shaun Crutchley, who had served steadfastly and with great honour since October 2009. I was pleased to attend their Zoomed Annual Meeting at the end of October 2020 and was able to pay a fitting tribute to Shaun for his services to his District and to the Order

I am sure that you will all join with me in wishing these Companions every happiness and success in their new roles.

Districts have continued with their regular and frequent Zoomed Annual Meetings and Virtual Business Meetings and I have been in attendance at most, if not all of them.

We are also busy planning for 2023 when Grand Council will realise its Sesquicentenary.

A small committee has been set up to explore the best ways to celebrate this momentous occasion.

The Deputy Grand Master continues to look after our Overseas Unattached Councils, with the care and compassion made famous by members of the judiciary! His continuing attentive contact will ensure that isolation does not add to the pressures and problems brought about by Covid 19.

Also, the Grand Director of Ceremonies has perfected a special piece of ceremonial which we will perform when normality returns, to confirm the status of those District Grand Masters who had received their appointment by Patent. Indeed, a whole host of visits will be undertaken by various members of the Executive, to make up for time and our presence lost during the pandemic.

So there is much to look forward to. When we eventually do resume normality - and we will, a bright future lies ahead, when we can surge forward with renewed vigour.

Until then we must remain patient, vigilant, and resilient.

It is important that we continue to keep in touch and maintain contacts and interests, so that when it is all over, we may re-ignite that flame, which may have spluttered a bit during the lockdowns, but has never quite gone out.

Every obstacle we have successfully conquered serves to strengthen not only our will, but our confidence and therefore, our ability to confront future challenges.

I make no departure from my usual sincere thankyou.

To my District Grand Masters and Grand Inspectors, for keeping their Districts and Inspectorates motivated and happy and for all the humorous examples of banter and badinage experienced and enjoyed during the course of many Zoom meetings.

To the Grand Recorder and his staff, for their continuing fortitude and commitment to the smooth running of this, and our Sister Orders.

Although there has not been the pressure of putting together a large annual event, they have had to be diligent in their difficult task of keeping our ship on a straight course through the "Suez Canal" of the pandemic".

This has involved juggling their duties between working from home and at Mark Masons' Hall, coping with the mountainous waves of the pandemic-induced problems.

These have included the balancing of staffing levels and flying the flag at never ending Zooms which have encompassed all the Orders administered there. In short, Companions, ensuring, as much as possible, that it is business as usual at No. 86.

The same goes for the Grand Director of Ceremonies, who has kept the ceremonial clock ticking and has looked after me in our respective absence as well as he did when present.

I am very much looking forward to the time when we can all meet again, and I can get a haircut!

During the past twelve months many of you will have suffered, hardship, isolation, uncertainty, fear, pressures, both physical and mental, and perhaps tragically, the loss of loved ones.

So keep in your minds the lyrics from that famous song, by Richard Rogers originally written for the musical Carousel and later sung by Gerry Marsden of he and the Pacemakers (and many thousands of Liverpool supporters too) - "When you walk through a storm".....

Don't get excited Companions – I am not going to sing it to you, I just ask you to think about the lyrics.

Companions you have borne the burden well and I leave you with some words by Martin Luther King Junior, uttered in 1963 during a turbulent period of his life and a year before he became the youngest ever to be awarded the Nobel Peace prize.

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in moments of challenge and adversity".

Companions continue to enjoy your Cryptic Masonry as much as you can under the prevailing circumstances - it is very special – please keep it that way.

Finally Companions, be of one mind, live in peace, and may the Supreme Master of the Universe delight to dwell amongst you and bless you for evermore.

M.III.Comp. Kessick J. Jones

Grand Master