

## **John Reid addresses Provincial Grand Lodge - October 2024**

Brethren, once again a very warm welcome to the annual meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge. This is your meeting, and I am pleased to see so many of you are here to support the Province, in particular those receiving a first appointment or promotion. I congratulate you all.

As you have heard many times on such occasions, an appointment is not only a reward for the services rendered by you in Lodge or at Provincial level. It does also carry the expectation that you will continue your commitment to ensure the harmonious running and growth of your Lodge. Your masonic experience is invaluable to support, guide, and encourage our newer members whether they wish to progress through the various offices or not. The desire just to be a Provincial Officer is itself not enough. So, sitting back and resting on your laurels is not an option.

As with all new appointments there comes a time when Brethren must step aside, as has happened today. I thank Worshipful Brother Phil Still who has served this Province in an active role since 2012, the most significant being Provincial Grand Secretary, and more recently, as Assistant Provincial Grand Master. I am sure you would wish to join with me in thanking him for his contribution to the smooth running of the Province over those years.

Likewise, to our outgoing Wardens who have served for two years, arguably a first in Wiltshire for some considerable time; both serving with dignity, humour, and exceptional ritual. I also thank Worshipful Brother Andy Entwistle, for his contribution in assisting with the Learning and Development team.

Having just had the pleasure of appointing and investing him as Assistant Provincial Grand Master, I am delighted to welcome Worshipful Brother Steve Lee to the Provincial Executive. I am sure you would wish to join me in congratulating Steve on his appointment as we continue to take the Province forward.

Brethren, we all have an important role to play in promoting and improving the close relationship we all have with the various Masonic Orders in this Province. We are all, in one way or another, part of the larger Masonic Wiltshire family, and we must respect and support each other in whichever Order we choose to be a member. It would be remiss of me not to remind you that the Royal Arch

should be the next step from the Craft in completing your journey in Pure Antient Freemasonry.

I have reappointed several brethren to acting Provincial office. Brethren I would ask you to be mindful of the endless hours and days they commit to ensuring the smooth running of the Province, much of which goes unnoticed. You may think during the summer recess the Executive and their teams have had a well-earned break, sadly that is never the case. I am grateful for their support, time, and the professionalism they dedicate to this Province, not least in responding to Lodge queries, providing advice, recommending solutions, and collating data, the list is endless. Communication is key, and I would ask that should the Executive request information from your Lodge, that you please provide a timely response, delays are unnecessary and lead to much frustration.

I extend my plea to you all, please respond to your own Lodge summons, be it an apology or booking for a meal, not to mention ensuring your annual subscriptions are settled in line with your Lodge by Laws.

During the past year it has been brought to my attention that Lodges have either misinterpreted, or ignored their own by-laws, not to mention regulations contained within the Book of Constitutions. Brethren at my Installation as Provincial Grand Master, in common with every Master of a Lodge I took an obligation to observe and enforce all Laws, Regulations and Ordinances of the Grand Lodge; in addition, I undertook to uphold the Landmarks and Usages of the Order. I for one am being true to my obligation, with the expectation that all Members will do the same.

Brethren as a Province we continue to develop and deliver on the Strategy 2027 and beyond. It's important to draw your attention to the Membership Challenge where we are currently showing a marginal numerical net gain in the Craft and a goodly gain in the Royal Arch. I do acknowledge that new members are important for growth ensuring future success and continuance of our Lodges. Equally important are our existing members. Engagement and Retention is of equal importance to Attraction. I believe this is an area in which we can, and must improve. We are either missing the signs of a Brother losing interest, or we are turning a blind eye to a Brothers non-attendance, or we are not making our ceremonies and meetings as enjoyable as they might be. There is no doubt that good and well delivered ritual is an essential part of an enjoyable meeting.

As a member's organisation, and a caring organisation, let's exercise those principles on which the Craft's strong foundation sits, Integrity, Friendship and Respect. Aided by a sound mentoring system we can reduce our losses. The Province has an excellent Mentoring Team which has, and will provide guidance and training should you require it. You only have to ask.

Brethren last year I stressed the importance of the Royal Arch as an integral part of Pure Antient Masonry bringing the Craft and Royal Arch seamlessly together under the banner of "One Organisation, One Journey". Grand Lodge has continued to further cement the connection by approving a one off registration fee covering both Craft and the Royal Arch for new members, by agreeing to harmonise the financial management of the two organisations. Both changes take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025.

So, Brethren should you be thinking of joining the Royal Arch, if that should a New Year's resolution, there will no longer be a registration fee for those already registered with United Grand Lodge, (it's a great deal, buy one get one free).

Brethren, In the foyer this afternoon you will have seen the display illustrating the Three pillars. You will doubtless be aware that the third pillar is promoting SERVICE and community engagement. It is pleasing to see that several Lodges have actively committed themselves to engage with their local communities, as their way of service to the community and heightening the profile of Freemasonry, and it's not costing them a penny. As an example, I know of one Lodge that spends a number of Saturdays, litter picking in their own and neighbouring towns. Brethren we don't always have to donate money to undertake a charitable act, giving of our time can often be more valuable to a community than a financial donation.

I am delighted to report that our charitable giving in this Province has increased over the last three years, even though we are in Festival, we have not detracted from giving to other charities. The Wiltshire 2028 Festival is steadily progressing, with several Lodges already having reached their goal, to them I am eternally grateful. We still have a way to go if we are to achieve our goal of £1m. To those Lodges who are collecting funds in their own accounts I would encourage you to pay the monies into the Wiltshire 2028 Festival account as early as possible to allow for a higher interest rate, currently 6.75% as only being available in this central relief chest.

Once again, I urge all members that haven't done so already, to please, please, set up a regular payment plan in support of the festival. The MCF is your charity. If you need any more convincing, since April of this year the MCF has provided 17 grants supporting 24 of our members and families, with a total amount approaching £96k, while the last five years to March 2024 this Province received 232 grants in support of 321 individuals, totalling a little over £735k.

I am only a few sentences from finishing my address. But I would be in trouble if I wasn't to mention the Christmas Carol Service to be held in the wonderful Marlborough College Chapel on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December at 3.00pm. Over 450 members, family and friends have pre-booked which is over to thirds of the Chapel's capacity. Last year we had a wonderful time, and I have no doubt the Provincial Chaplain will have chosen some well know carols for us all to sing along to. Please do join us if you can. I can vouch for the quality of the mince pies.

Today's event could not possibly have happened without the huge amount of work by so many behind the scenes. I am so aware of the time, planning and commitment that has been expended by all the Brethren involved, to those members I thank you most sincerely. Special thanks are extended to the Secretariat, Director of Ceremonies, and Communication teams, as well as those Lodges under whose banners we are meeting today, the Gooch Lodge No.1295, the Corsham Lodge No.6616, and Lodge of Brothers in Arms No.9540.

I also take this further opportunity to thank our distinguished guests for taking the time and trouble to be with us today. I and the rest of the Provincial executive are always made welcome at their Provincial meetings, and it is always a great pleasure to be able to reciprocate in some small way. We have thoroughly enjoyed your company today and I hope you have enjoyed the day with us.

Finally, Brethren, I once more thank every one of you for your support over the last year as well as your attendance here today.

As always, I look forward with great optimism to serving this wonderful Province as your Provincial Grand Master in the year ahead.