

ADDRESS BY THE ME PRO FIRST GRAND PRINCIPAL - April 26th 2012

Companions, this is a special day for those of you who have been appointed to Grand Rank or have been promoted. Grand Rank is sparingly awarded and I congratulate you on your achievement. In recognising that the Royal Arch is the completion of pure Antient Masonry, exaltation into the Order should neither be hurried nor obligatory, as not all Craft Brethren will wish to take this final step immediately upon being raised. However, it is hoped that you as Grand Officers will be able to communicate something of the colour; enjoyment and essence of the Royal Arch to committed members of the Craft.

As we move towards the Bi-Centenary of the Order in 2013 we have taken the opportunity further to ensure the long-term future of the Royal Arch. In raising the profile to achieve this, it is important to make sure we are seen as appealing; inspiring and relevant.

To that end, a strategic working party, under the chairmanship of the Second Grand Principal, reported its nine recommendations to me in March. The first of these recommendations in their Report was that the strap line 'initiation to exaltation' be adopted to promote the Order.

The Working Party looked at mentoring and how it should align to the work being done on this in the Craft. Here it was suggested that the Craft Personal Mentor and the Royal Arch Representative actively guide a new Master Mason towards membership of the Royal Arch at an appropriate point in his Masonic journey. Also, that once exalted, the new Companion has a knowledgeable Royal Arch Mason to help him better understand the ceremony and meaning of the Royal Arch and how best to become involved in the Chapter.

The role of the Lodge Royal Arch Representative is fundamental to the promotion of the Order and it is recommended that Metropolitan, Provincial and District Grand Lodges continue to encourage Craft Lodges to make this appointment and to develop the role. It is also considered important that the adoption of the permitted ritual variations, introduced by the 2004 Royal Arch Strategic Working Party, be encouraged in Chapters.

I am aware that the Metropolitan Grand Lodge and several Provinces and Districts are already presenting a letter to the newly-made Master Mason on the merits of the Royal Arch. This practice is highly recommended by the Working Party. Efforts to improve the profile of the Order in all website contexts is underway and will help the potential exalte to have a better understanding of the Order he is about to join.

Two clear outward ways to promote the Order are emphasised. First, the taking of wine with Royal Arch members at selected Craft Festive Boards and secondly, that the wearing of the official Royal Arch Tie be further encouraged. The final recommendation is that Chapters be encouraged to re-engage with Lodges from which they have traditionally derived members.

In order to encourage a greater participation amongst all Companions, as well as lending clarity to the Royal Arch teachings, the Working Party looked at the layout of the ritual books so that the Revised and Permitted Alternative variations adopted in 2004 be encouraged as the standard. I emphasise that nothing is now being suggested which in any way enforces or changes what was introduced by Supreme Grand Chapter in 2004.

A wider participation in the ritual is clearly beneficial in encouraging a deeper understanding of the teaching and by giving the permitted variations of 2004 a greater prominence in the various printed and authorised rituals - for example, Alders gate, Domatic, Perfect and Metropolitan - I trust more Chapters will be encouraged to adopt them and benefit accordingly. For your interest, all these are likely to be reprinted in the next eighteen months.

The celebration of the Bi-Centenary next year will be held on Wednesday 16 October. This earlier date will replace the November Convocation - for that year only. The planned events of the day will begin with a demonstration by the Metropolitan Grand Stewards' Chapter Demonstration Team - in the Grand Temple - to encourage the use of the permitted alternative variations that I have just referred to. This will be followed by lunch in the Grand Connaught Rooms. The main celebration will take place in the afternoon - again here in the Grand Temple, followed by a dinner at the Savoy. You will appreciate that these events will be restricted by numbers. The Grand Scribe Ezra will be briefing Grand Superintendents and Provincial Scribes Ezra on the detail in good time.

The 2013 Royal Arch Appeal for the Royal College of Surgeons is progressing well with over half-a-million recorded so far. This means that we are well on our way to exceeding our target, so that we can then further help the research fellowship scheme, run by the College, by financially supporting additional fellowships. I encourage you to keep up your efforts.

Finally, Companions, on your behalf I congratulate the Grand Director of Ceremonies and his Deputies for the excellent way in which today's meeting has been conducted and the Grand Scribe Ezra and his staff for their hard work in ensuring a successful Investiture. (Applause)