

Companions, welcome to our first joint meeting of Provincial Grand Chapter and Provincial Grand Lodge, I hope that you all enjoy your day with us.

I will start by thanking the outgoing Companions of the active Provincial Team who have given great support to the Province and to me during what has been a busy eleven months since our last Provincial Convocation. In that time we have had no less than eight visits to Chapters when the Team performed the ceremony of exaltation, using Savage ritual. On three of those visits the ceremony was a double exaltation. The highlight of the year no doubt was the Consecration of the Sir Isaac Newton Chapter No 9801 at Nailsea in September, the thirtieth Chapter in the Province and our first daylight Chapter. Your support throughout the year has been exemplary, I have enjoyed your company and I hope that you have all enjoyed your year. I would especially thank E Comp David Maddern who is standing down today after two years as our 3rd Provincial Grand Principal.

Congratulation to those Companions appointed to, and promoted in Provincial Grand Chapter today. This is your day, I hope that you all enjoy your new ranks and I look forward to working with you. Remember that your new position is not solely a reward for past services, it is also for what we are expecting you to contribute to your Chapter and the Province in the future. Welcome to the new active team, like your predecessors you too are in for a busy year. There are three team visits this month alone, one a triple exaltation at Brotherly Love Chapter in two weeks time! Your support is welcome not only at team visits but I would urge you to support the Membership Challenge visits for both the Royal Arch and as a Royal Arch representative at Craft MCVs. The dates for all visits are available on the Provincial website, together with instructions as how to book your attendance.

In the three years since my appointment as your Grand Superintendent much has changed, both in Supreme Grand Chapter and in the Province. From SGC, we have had, One Journey - One organisation, the Membership Challenge, the joint registration fee and of course Archway.

The use the Savage ritual by the Provincial team when performing exaltations has had a very positive effect. Nine Chapters in the Province are

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now using that ritual, a further eight are in the process changing to over to it. The combination of ritual sharing and a simplified ceremony that doesn't remove any of the drama or changing it's meaning has proved a great success, making the Royal Arch in Somerset more accessible and interesting.

The one journey one organisation message promoted in the Craft together with the use of Savage ritual in the Royal Arch has helped considerably in increasing the membership of our Chapters. I hope that trend will continue and that by the end of this year we will once again have more than 900 Companions in our Chapters across the Province. That would be a six percent increase since December 2022.

In the coming year the Craft will continue to offer extensive support for the Royal Arch, as it has in the recent past. But as always Companions there is more that WE can do.

Well presented ritual, be it Savage or one of the many other rituals, always impresses the candidate and the visitor, it is essential to the success of your Chapter. As we meet less frequently than Craft Lodges, so the opportunity for rehearsal or practice is limited. Chapters should consider having extra rehearsals for exaltations to make sure that they do produce a positive experience for the candidate and for their visitors.

Retention is also vital to our continued success. There are Chapters that have yet to appoint a Mentor, although I first asked you to do this three years ago. We need to look after and involve new members so that they stay, appointing a mentor should help ensure that this happens. Likewise succession planning is essential to enable your Chapter to thrive. Every Chapter should have an agreed succession plan in place, there are tools on Archway to help you do just that.

I have made mention in the past of a large pool of unattached Royal Arch Masons in our Province who are no longer subscribing members of a Chapter but remain a member of their Craft Lodge. Most left because they had decided that the Royal Arch wasn't for them. The advent of Savage and ritual sharing has changed the landscape, many Chapters are now very different to the one that those companions left. I would urge you all to

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contact those members who may have resigned your Chapter in the last ten years or so and encourage them to rejoin. The membership Challenge continues in the Royal Arch and the Craft.

The Third pillar of the Grand Lodge strategy, community engagement, is just as important in the Royal Arch as it is in the Craft. Last year I announced our support for the charity Young Somerset, This organisation helps young people and their families across the whole of our Province by supporting young people who have high levels of need, risk and vulnerability, helping them to build their economic, education and employability skills alongside their personal and social development. I am pleased to say total donations now exceed £5000. Achieved by a combination of Chapter donations with assisted funding by from the Province. We will continue to encourage Chapters to support Young Somerset throughout 2025 by offering assisted funding from the Province.

The following Companions will be appointed or promoted in Supreme Grand Chapter on the 1st of May.

E.Comp Graham Puddy, 2nd Provincial Grand Principal, who will be appointed PGStdB, E.Companions Graham Jeffrey and Tony Guthrie both appointed to the rank of PAGDC. While E Comp Neil Hawes will be promoted to Past Grand Assistant Sojourner.

I'm sure you will join men in congratulating them.

Having both the Craft and Royal Arch meetings on one day was never going to be easy, my thanks go to E.Comp Richard Dredge who has headed the coordinating team, together with Provincial Scribe E, Charlie Barker, the Provincial director of ceremonies Mark Golding and their respective teams for making this meeting a success. The Principals and Companions King Alfred and Inkerman Chapters for supplying the Royal Arch equipment and the companions of Adair Chapter helping to set up the Chapter. Our organist, Companion Barry Renwick and our sound engineer, Excellent Companion Toby Hammond. If I have missed anyone please accept my apologies.

In a similar vein, it isn't possible to run a Province without a great deal of help and work from others. In addition to those already mentioned, my special thanks to my deputy, Neil Hurcum and my Co-Principals Graham Puddy and David Maddern for your support.

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Companions of Somerset, thank you all for being here today, it is your meeting I hope that you have enjoyed it and that you will enjoy the Craft meeting and the lunch that will follow. Thank you also for your warm welcome and hospitality when I visit your Chapters.

To our guests, thank you for joining us today, some of you have travelled considerable distances to be with us, I will introduce you all during the Craft meeting but I should mention here the Cornwall contingent who can't stay with us for the Craft meeting.

The Most Excellent Grand Superintendent, E Comp Jonathan Arnold

The 2ndPGP - E Comp Jeremy Benjamin

The 3rdPGP - E comp Robin Clowes

The PrGTreas - E Comp Michael Rees

Companions we appreciate your presence and the generous hospitality we receive when we in turn visit you, thank you for coming and have a safe journey home.

Finally Companions there is a realisation in most Chapters that Royal Arch Masonry must adapt if it is to flourish and I am encouraged by that and of course by our initial success in the Membership Challenge. I wish you well in your continuing membership challenge and remember, the Provincial team and I are here to help you succeed.

Thank you for your attention Companions and may the TALGMH keep you all safe.

Ray Guthrie, 3rd April 2025