

Good evening, brethren

I have had the enjoyment of attending many celebrations over the last sixteen years as a member of a Group Executive, but it is certainly one of the special privileges of an Assistant Provincial Grand Master to be invited to take part in the celebration of a brother's special anniversary.

Brethren it is said that the greatest happiness a man can have is to you know that he is loved, and the very fact that there are so many brethren here this evening who have made the journey to take part in this evening's celebration only serves to reinforce that statement and shows the high regard that our celebrant is held in.

But to do that I must first tell you (as if you didn't already know!) who that person is. Brother Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies can you please place David WILKINSON PPJGW, on the floor of the lodge before me and ensure that he is comfortable.

So let us think back to 1944 and what was happening in the world, well it was the sixth year of World War II and the year would see some momentous events: Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle begin a two-day conference in Marrakech in January 1944. The two-year Siege of Leningrad is lifted. The 16th Academy Awards Ceremony is held, the first Oscar ceremony held at a large public venue, Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. Casablanca, directed by Michael Curtiz, wins the Award for Best Picture. The 'Great Escape': 76 Royal Air Force prisoners of war escape by tunnel 'Harry' from Stalag Luft III this night. Only 3 men (2 Norwegians and a Dutchman) return to the UK; of those recaptured, 50 are summarily executed soon afterwards, in the Stalag Luft III murders. The German navy's Enigma messages are decoded in England almost in real time. More than 1,000 British bombers drop 5,000 tons of bombs on German gun batteries on the Normandy coast on 5 June, in preparation for D-Day. D-Day 6 June: 155,000 Allied troops shipped from England land on the beaches of Normandy in northern France, beginning Operation Overlord and the invasion of Normandy. The Allied soldiers quickly break through the Atlantic Wall and push inland, in the largest amphibious military operation in history. This operation helps liberate France from Germany and weakens the Nazi hold on Europe. Adolf Hitler survives the 20 July plot to assassinate him led by Claus von Stauffenberg; he and his fellow conspirators in this and Operation Valkyrie are executed the following day. Allied troops attempt the largest airborne military operation in history (at the time) when the Battle of Arnhem (Operation Market Garden) begins on September 17th. The purpose of this operation was for Allied paratroopers to land in the Netherlands and take control of key bridges near the Rhine River from German forces. This was so that Allied troops could push through Germany and end the war much more quickly if successful. Unfortunately, for the Allies, German troops were aware of their arrival ahead of time and had the time to organize against them and destroy many of the bridges prior to the paratroopers landing. Some Allied forces made it to the Arnhem Bridge, but they were short on supplies and forced to abandon their plans, leaving Germany in control of the Rhine River at that time.

Some very famous people were born in 1944 including, Danny DeVito the movie actor, Diana Ross the singer, Jerry Springer the TV Show host, George Lucas the film director, Michael Douglas the movie actor, Jimmy Page the guitarist, Gladys Knight the singer, Gary Glitter the singer, Joe Frazier the boxer, Frank Sinatra the singer and probably the most famous of them all David Wilkinson.

David was born in May 1944 in Bury, Lancashire to his parents Frank Wilkinson, a power loom overlocker and trade union general secretary and mother Norma, a housewife. David is one of five children having three sisters, Marjory, Cathleen, Barbara and a brother Arthur. David spent his formative years growing up in Bury attending several schools at primary and secondary level. He left school at the age of 16 with five O-Levels and one 'A' Level. It was whilst at school that he decided that a career in the Police Service was attractive, and he successfully applied for and was accepted and enrolled as a Police Cadet with the Lancashire Constabulary in 1960.

David spent a very happy and successful time as a Police Cadet, he enjoyed a variety of activities, especially when he attended an Outward-Bound Sea School during the early summer of 1962. At the conclusion of his cadetship, David was attested and sworn in as a Police Constable in Lancashire Constabulary and was posted to Ashton under Lyne. David recalls that amongst many incidents he attended, the most striking was in December 1963 when on his first Saturday night of his night duty week, he was despatched to take a report of a missing boy from home from an address in Smallshaw Lane. The missing person was a teenage boy named John Kilbride.

David spent most of his watch search for the missing child, visiting premises including school buildings and searching isolated places including being lowered into an excavation near to the missing boys' home where repairs to the sewerage system was being undertaken. Unfortunately, his efforts proved unsuccessful. The enquiries to trace the child were referred to the CID and subsequently included a full search of the town under the direction of Detective Superintendent Horace Teasdale, who coincidentally later became master of Lodge of Equity No 1384 at Widnes.

However, as the child had not been found, the Missing Person file was returned to David. David called at the Kirkbride home on a number of occasions but did not have any information to impart to them. In 1965, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were arrested for the murder of several children in the local area and enquiries indicated that several possible burial sites were located on the nearby Saddleworth Moors. Lancashire Constabulary continued searching the area and ultimately a group of officers discovered the body of a child buried in the moor. The body transpired to be that of the missing boy, John Kilbride. Interestingly, one of those police officers who found the body was a well-known and much missed Widnes Freemason, Nat Killen.

Brady and Hindley, who by this time had been dubbed 'The Moors Murderers', were convicted of the murders. David was called to the Kilbride address around midnight on the date of their conviction responding to a report of domestic violence and upon his arrival saw Mrs Kilbride and her children in the street surrounded by her neighbours. Mr Kilbride, the boy's father was agitated and drunk and being in a violent mood had thrown his wife and children out of the house and was now leaning out of a bedroom window after having been refused entry to Chester Crown Court due to his intoxicated state. David assisted by colleagues managed to defuse the situation and Mr Kilbride retreated inside his home whilst his wife and children were accommodated with neighbours. As David stated, sadly, he had attended at the home of John Kilbride on both the first and last night of the investigation.

David subsequently went on to have a varied and successful career in the police, serving in uniform and the Criminal Investigation Department, and, as was the system in those days, being posted all over the southern area of Lancashire Constabulary, including Widnes, especially as he rose through the ranks. David retired from the police, in what was now Cheshire Constabulary, in December 1995, in the rank of Chief Inspector, his last position being the Chief Constable's Staff Officer. Not being one to sit still, David was then employed as a Civilian Administration Manager at Warrington and subsequently retiring as the Northern Area Accountant in 2011.

Moving to his family life, on 26 February 1966, David married the love of his life, Ruth. The union has been blessed with twin daughters, Rachel and Rebecca. Outside of his professional life, David has enjoyed being involved in the local Rotary Club and was successful in obtaining an International Scholarship which involved a Group Study Exchange Scheme in which he, as a Team Leader, spent six weeks in Utah and Idaho in the USA, giving presentations etc. on the local culture, life and industry in those two States on his return to the UK. David retired from the Rotary Club of Widnes in 2018.

David let us now turn to your Masonic journey, which began when whilst at work in Widnes Police Station, which used to be right next door to the Masonic Hall, he saw a friend Bill Carter entering the hall and upon quizzing him, his interest was piqued. Ultimately David was proposed for membership by Bill Carter and seconded by his colleague John Waring. David was initiated into Victoria Lodge No 4629 at Widnes Masonic Hall on 20 May 1976. Brother Secretary please read an extract from the minutes of that meeting.

David was passed to the degree of a fellowcraft on 17 March 1977 and raised to the sublime degree of a master Mason on 19 January 1978. David rose through the progressive offices of the lodge and was installed as master of the lodge on 19 October 1989, and he has been a valued and active member of the lodge, serving as the lodge secretary from 20 October 1994 until 19 October 2002.

David recalls an example of the universality of Freemasonry when on one occasion whilst en route to a family holiday in Australia he stopped off at Singapore to meet with an old friend who worked for Kellogg's Cornflakes and had been posted to Singapore, who was also a Mason. His friend suggested they meet on a Saturday and attend a lodge meeting. Despite not having any regalia he was kitted out as a fellow craft and upon being quizzed on his lodge name and number, a ledger was examined and revealed that L4629 was the lodge of a brother Halliwell who had been a regular visitor to the Masonic hall many years before.

The agenda for the meeting included a lecture from a brother from Pakistan, who explained the connection of Islam with Freemasonry and how the two are interlinked. David recalls that the main topic of conversation at the

festive board was the hanging of a criminal gang leader for several murders at 12 noon and just before the lodge meeting started. The miscreant had donated his organs for transplant to people suffering serious conditions and which were removed immediately after his execution. The consensus was: "Well there must have been some good in him".

Back home in Widnes, in David was appointed the Victoria Lodge member on the Board of Widnes Masonic Hall. In the second year of his tenure, the incumbent board chairman became seriously ill. There were no vice chairman and the group chairman who attended the meeting asked for a volunteer. There was an ominous silence. To move things on David offered to take up the post to fill the void and was proposed, seconded and elected in a flash. He remained the board chairman until 2018 and in that time initiated various changes to increase the hall revenue without relying on increasing the capitation paid by members. The hall was able to hire the car park to Royal Mail for nighttime parking of vehicles and provide daytime parking to Halton Council employees whilst changes were made to the Council parking facilities. Use of the hall by other groups also brought in welcome income. This enabled improvements to be made to the Hall including new lighting in various rooms, work on the floor of the main hall and a much-improved fire alarm system. Without the additional revenue that came from hiring the hall, the costs would have fallen on the members.

David's services to his lodge and Freemasonry were recognised by the Province of West Lancashire when he received his first appointment to Provincial Grand Rank in the rank of Past Provincial Senior Grand Deacon on 5 May 1998, followed by a promotion to the rank of Past Provincial Grand Superintendent of Works on 18 October 2007 and then to his current very high rank of Past Provincial Junior Grand Warden on 12 May 2016

David was exalted into the Royal Arch in Widnes Chapter No 2819 on 21 November 1978. He progressed through the junior offices and became the chapter's first principal on 29 May 1996. David's services to his chapter were recognised by the Province of West Lancashire when he received his first appointment to Provincial Rank as Past Provincial Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies on 24 April 2003 followed by a promotion to his current rank of Past Provincial Grand Sojourner on 12 October 2017.

David, I'm sure I speak on behalf of everybody present that we are absolutely delighted to see you here this evening to celebrate your 50th anniversary as a Freemason and even more so that you have allowed us to celebrate your special evening with you. David such is the importance of your own golden jubilee that our Provincial Grand Master Mark Matthews has caused a certificate to be struck to mark this wonderful achievement which I shall now ask the group vice chairman John Gibbon to read.

David, on behalf of everyone here, I thank you for your service and I congratulate you on achieving this milestone in your Masonic career and I hope that you continue to enjoy your freemasonry for many years to come.

John P. Murphy,  
Past Senior Grand Deacon  
Assistant Provincial Grand Master