

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 WBro Robert James Winch PPrGSuptWks, on the floor of the lodge before me and ensure that he is comfortable.

In 1943 we were of course well into the Second World War, but some notable things occurred in that year: -

- the Battle of Stalingrad took place when the Soviet Union encircled 22 German Divisions, 175,000 troops were killed, and 137,650 troops were captured.
- The Pentagon building used as America's Armed Forces HQ was completed.
- US General Dwight D. Eisenhower becomes the supreme Allied Commander
- On the 16<sup>th</sup> / 17<sup>th</sup> May 617 Squadron of the Royal Air Force carried out the Dam Buster Raids which saw the Mohne and Edersee Dams located on the Mohne River breached, using the famous bouncing bombs created by inventor Barnes Wallace.
- John F Kennedy a young PT Boat captain, had his boat PT-109 sunk in the South Pacific, the rescue of his sailors, made him a war hero. He would go on to be the 35<sup>th</sup> and youngest President of the United States in 1961, before his assassination on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1963 in Dallas, Texas.
- Italy surrendered to the Allies.
- the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) was created during May by Chicago Cubs owner Philip K. Wrigley.

Also, some very famous people were born in the persons of Chevy Chase the actor, Christopher Walken the actor, Ben Kingsley the actor, Eide Sedgwick the model, Arthur Ashe the tennis player, Blythe Danner the actress, Billie Jean King the tennis player, Robert Fischer the Chess Grand Master.

But the most famous of them all was, Robert James Finch born on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1943, to his parents Frank Winch a butcher and Margaret Winch nee Coslett a housewife, residing at 22 Abbeystead Road, Childwall, Liverpool. Bob was the second child to Frank and Margaret, who had been blessed with a daughter Diane some two years earlier in 1941, and a younger sister Patricia would follow in 1945 to complete the happy family unit.

Bob would attend Mosspsits Lane Primary School in Wavertree, Liverpool, and after passing the Eleven plus would go to the Holt High School also located in Wavertree, where he would graduate having attained five General Certificates in Education in the subjects of English, Mathematics, Chemistry, Geography, and Woodwork. Whilst at School Bob was also an active member of the 4<sup>th</sup> Wavertree Troop of the Boy Scouts, and thoroughly enjoyed his time undertaking all the outdoor activities membership afforded him.

After leaving school Bob took up the opportunity of becoming a Butcher, an occupation that both his father Frank and his father before him had worked as.

It was whilst working as a butcher that Bob met his future wife Beverley Evans, and they would be subsequently married on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1966, at Holy Trinity Church in Wavertree. Many of you will of course remember 1966 as that famous year when England won the World Cup and Everton won the FA Cup. Bob and Beverley would go on to have four children, Gary the eldest who is married to Collette and live in Childwall with their one child; Glen who is married to Gill and live in Widnes with their two children; Gay who is married to Steven who live in Halewood with their two children and Gina who is married to a lovely Irishman Thomas Quinn and live in San Diego, USA with their three children. This means that Bob has eight grandchildren from his four children.

Bob continued to work as a Butcher for Dewhurst's a famous butcher's chain in the North of England until 1975, when he decided it was time to work for himself and he opened his own Butchers Shop on the Trees Estate in Huyton. Eventually Bob would branch out into also running a very successful outside catering business and a mobile bar business.

He recalls that it was during this period that as well as catering for the usual birthdays, anniversaries, and weddings etc., he also catered for many masonic ladies' evenings, masonic half nights and catered for the Lady freemasons in Liverpool, when they met at the Devonshire House in Toxteth and had a full meal following their Installation meeting.

In about 1989 Bob decided that he had butchered his last meat carcass and catered for his last outside function and having sold the shop and business he decided to have a career change. This decision would lead to working for Link 51 designing and selling industrial metal shelving and other metal products such as mezzanine floors. Bob knew he could sell from his previous occupation but had to attend college to learn the basics of CAD drawing, and then in his own words learn the rest from the mistakes he made in his early designs.

Bob recalls that to meet the yearly sales targets he needed to have at least one good repeat customer and for him that was the Wylfa Nuclear Power Station on Anglesey who as well as shelving took three full mezzanine floors from Bob over the year, which he designed from scratch to fit the various locations in the plant.

Bob also recalled that the most difficult mezzanine floor that he had to design and have fitted was for a Church in Manchester where the floor had to be free standing and not touch the walls of the Church at the request of the Church dioceses. The eventual insertion of the mezzanine floor led to the inside of the Church becoming two story office accommodation.

In 1994 sadly Bob's marriage to Beverley ended in divorce, he again took the opportunity to change careers again and decided to become a Coach Driver, working for several companies in the local area such as Anthony's Travel run by at that time Tony Bamber who Bob recalls was a true gentleman and great boss, the company still exists today and is run by Tony's son Richard. The final company that he worked for was Selwyn's of Runcorn, and he was very happy working as a coach driver until eventually retiring in 2015 and told me that this was the most rewarding of his three career choices.

In 1995 Bob was living in Halewood, Liverpool when he met Linda Whitehead on a blind date arranged by his then next-door neighbour. Well brethren what a blind date it must have been, as Bob was clearly knocked off his feet and smitten by love as he and Linda have been together ever since. In fact, after twenty-seven years together they got married on the 30<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

Linda has two lovely and now grown-up children who Bob adores, Maxine who is married to Marcus and have one child plus two from Marcus's first marriage, and Andrew who is married to Natalie who have two children. This means that from his second marriage he has five grandchildren, making a grand total so far of thirteen grandchildren.

Brethren I also have four children with my wife Amanda and currently have three grandchildren from our two sons, but at Christmas our two daughters informed us that they are both expecting, and another two grandchildren will hopefully arrive in July, yes thankfully just outside the active masonic season I hear you think. Well Bob I will leave the buying of thirteen Birthday and Christmas presents to you as that would be too many for me.

Bob had several interests and hobbies over the years including playing five-a-side football when he was young, which caused him to need a cartilage operation. He then took up riding motorcycles, but I understand that he kept falling off in the early days and this led to him having a pair of dodgy knees.

The next hobby for Bob started off initially just as the chauffer for his two sons to the Skin Deeps Scuba club as they had taken up the sport, but they soon persuaded Dad to get in the water and have a go; Bob of course thoroughly enjoyed the sport and continued with it for many years, long after his sons had given it up. Bob went on to become a first-class Scuba diver.

After meeting Linda in 1995 Bob again took up motorcycling and had several large bikes selling his last in around 2000, Linda rode pillion and they used to go out and about in the summer. Bob told me that he only stopped riding when he needed a new Hip and could no longer get his leg over the seat!

Following retirement from paid work Bob found that he could not just sit around at home, especially as Linda works as a part-time nurse in Halton Haven Hospice. Bob has now volunteered for eight years at the Hospice undertaking clerical duties and assisting the ward clerk with her duties. Bob finds his volunteering very rewarding and fulfilling and currently works about fifteen hours a week.

Bob is to be congratulated for his volunteering at such a worthwhile cause, and brethren you may be aware one of our four guiding principles has now been renamed as service instead of charity. This is felt by the Pro Grand Master to better reflect what so many freemasons do for their local community. It is not always about providing money in the form of charitable giving, but it is also the hours we as freemasons can volunteer our services and this is just as appreciated as our charitable giving by many organisations in our local communities.

When not Volunteering, and if Linda is not on duty working, Bob enjoys spending time with Linda at their caravan in North Wales, or when the weather is so brilliant during the autumn and early spring months and holidaying abroad somewhere hot. In fact, Bob was telling me that in early March they are both off to Cape Verde and in late September to Dubai.

Let us now turn to Bob's family connections to Freemasonry, as far as we can ascertain it started with Bob's grandfather Jim Coslett who was initiated into Knowsley Lodge No.3581 on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 1924. Bob's father Frank was proposed into Knowsley Lodge No.3581 by his father-in-law, Jim and was initiated on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 1942, although Bob informs me that his Grand lodge certificate shows it as August.

Brother Jim then proposed his son in law and Bob's uncle Henry Moore into Kingsway Lodge No.3581, he was seconded by Brother Frank and was initiated on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 1951. The next family members to join Kingsway Lodge No.3581 were Bob's cousins David Moore and Peter Moore, they were proposed by their father Henry and seconded by Jim their grandfather and they were initiated in a double ceremony on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1967. In fact, they were also passed together on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 1967 and raised together on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1968. Peter served the Lodge as WM in 1978 and brother David was WM a year later in 1979, being installed by his brother.

Bob's father Frank also proposed his daughter Patricia's husband Geoff Pugh into Kingsway Lodge No.3851 and then in turn he proposed his son-in-law Mark Parry into the Lodge. Unfortunately, brother Mark left the lodge after his father-in-law's death and moved away to Oxford.

Sadly, none of Bob's sons have been particularly interested in Freemasonry.

Bob let us now turn to your personal journey in Freemasonry, you were proposed into Kingsway Lodge No.3581 by your father Frank and seconded by your uncle David, being initiated on the 18<sup>th</sup> February 1974, the ceremony being conducted by your father. Unfortunately, brethren we do not have a copy of the minutes as they were returned to United Grand Lodge of England for safe storage. Bob you were passed on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1974 and raised on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1975, both ceremonies also conducted by your father.

Bob worked his way up the progressive offices of the lodge becoming its WM on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1986, the ceremony again conducted by your father. Unfortunately, the following year the senior warden of the lodge had to move away so you continued as WM for a second year. After his year as immediate past master, Bob took on various roles and offices in the lodge including preceptor, assistant director of ceremonies and director of ceremonies. You also took on the role of Lodge Festival Representative for the Masonic Boys and Girls Festival in the late 1980's and early 1990's, in fact the festival would run for 10n years, the longest festival in the history of the Province of West Lancashire.

Bob was recognised by the Province of West Lancashire on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1993 when he was appointed to the acting rank of Provincial Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies.

Bob you again took the office of WM of Knowsley Lodge No.3581 on two further occasions the 18<sup>th</sup> March 1996 when it was again your father Frank who conducted the ceremony, and again for the fourth time on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

You were again recognised by the Province of West Lancashire on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2001 with a promotion in provincial rank to the high rank of Past Provincial Grand Superintendent of Works when he was appointed to the acting rank of Provincial Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies.

Sadly, due to falling membership Kingsway Lodge No.3581 decided that it needed to amalgamate with another Lodge and so on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2006 it amalgamated with Widnes Lodge No.2819 to become the Widnes and Knowsley Lodge No.3581. Bob told me that the Lodge retained the Knowsley Lodge number so that they could celebrate that lodge's centenary in 2011, for which Bob was given the honour of being WM again for a fifth time

being installed on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2011 and serving during the centenary year and its celebration in March 2012.

Unfortunately, the newly amalgamated Lodge only survived for a couple of years and was erased on the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013, you became a joining member of Lodge of Equity and Appleton No.1384 and not being someone who can just sit on the back benches and do nothing you have served as the lodge chaplain from February 2016 to February 2020, junior deacon from February 2020 until February 2021, junior warden from February 2022 until February 2023, and senior warden since the February 2023. Does this mean you will be the WM again in February 2024?

On the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2001, Bob was exalted into Knowsley Chapter No.3581, but unfortunately, due to falling numbers the Chapter was erased on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2003, probably not the start anybody would want to their Royal Arch journey.

Bob became a joining member of Chapter of Equity No.1384 on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2010, he progressed through various offices and became its First Principal on the 11<sup>th</sup> February 2014. Following his year as Immediate Past First Principal he has undertaken the offices of First Assistant Sojourner from February 2016 until April 2019, Scribe Nehemiah from April 2019 until April 2020, Second Assistant Sojourner from April 2022 until April 2023, and Principal Sojourner since April 2023.

Bob also became a joining member of Bold Chapter No.7583 on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2008, resigning on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2010. He also became a joining member of Loyalty Chapter No,897 for past First Principals on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016, resigning on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

Bob was recognised by the Province of West Lancashire on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021 when he was appointed to the rank of Past Provincial Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies.

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.

Bob such is the importance of your own golden jubilee that our Provincial Grand Master Right Worshipful Brother Mark Francis Matthews has caused a certificate to be struck to mark this wonderful achievement which I shall now ask the Group Chairman David Atkinson to read.....