

Ladies, gentlemen, brethren and companions,

Good evening, and welcome to the West Lancashire Freemasons' 165th Annual Ball, a night where the only ritual we're strictly observing is having a good time. This is our Provincial Grand Master's Ladies Night, and I would like you all to say a huge West Lancashire Freemasons welcome to him and his lovely wife Debbie.

Our Province is a remarkable place. From the bright lights of Blackpool to the proud streets of Preston, from the docks of Liverpool to the shipyards of Barrow, West Lancashire has a character all of its own. And if you ever doubt that, just try driving from one end of the Province to the other without encountering roadworks, a tractor, or a brother who insists he 'knows a shortcut'.

But what truly defines West Lancashire isn't the geography, it's the people. It's that brother from Blackpool who can survive a force-nine wind on the prom without spilling his pint, that's Michael Tax! It's the Preston brother who can turn any conversation into a proud history lesson about the Guild, that's Peter Littlehales! It's the Liverpool brother who brings enough humour to power both football stadiums, that's Frank Umbers, although the blue one does shine a little dimmer! And it's the Barrow brother who insists he lives 'just five minutes away', even though it's clearly in excess of 25. Is that you Barry Fitzgerald?

It's a pleasure to see so many familiar faces, and some new ones who've clearly not been warned about the Grand March! Tonight is all about celebration: of friendship, of charity, and of the remarkable community we've built together across this proud Province.

Tonight, would not be possible without the wonderful organisation of the Provincial Ball Committee, notionally headed up by myself and Ezra, but really it is Shaun Brookhouse, that shy retiring person he is, who has led it in his own inimitable style. Thank you so much Shaun for all the work and effort you and the other members of the committee have put into making this evening such a wonderful and spectacular occasion.

So, whether you've travelled from Preston or Prescot, Liverpool or Lancaster, Barrow or Bolton we're united not just by geography, but by the values we all hold so dear: Integrity, Friendship, Respect and Service.

So let the music play, the laughter flow, and the wine be poured (fairly responsibly, of course). May tonight be filled with joy, connection, and just enough mischief to make the next lodge meeting interesting. Thank you all for being here, let the festivities continue and enjoy yourselves!