

From the Most Excellent Grand Superintendent

Companions and Brethren, thank you for attending our Provincial Grand Chapter Meeting today.

What special and exciting times these are. Here in 2026, we are enjoying our Bi Centenary Celebrations for our fine Province. To date we have held a Provincial Church Service together with Group, Chapter and Lodge Celebrations. Debbie and I have thoroughly enjoyed the celebratory events that we have attended so far. Thank you so much for all of your efforts in that regard.

Of course there are even more celebrations still to come before the end of the year. Of particular note, we will be holding a Special Bi Centenary Celebration Provincial Grand Lodge here at the Winter Gardens on Friday 27th November 2026. This will be somewhat different to the usual May Provincial Grand Lodge. I recommend that you put this date into your diaries now.

As we approach 2027, we will be commencing a five year Festival, ending in 2032. Our Festival Team have been working extremely hard this year in preparation for what is to come next year and beyond. More information will be released periodically.

I ask that you prioritise your future charitable giving towards the Festival. I am most grateful to our West Lancashire Freemasons Foundation (previously WLFC) for supporting the focus of our charitable giving, moving from them to our Festival. We have the WLFF to thank for the complementary PSA test kits that have been distributed to everyone today.

Companions I thank all of our chapters and lodges for your work in progressing the Membership Challenge launched by the Pro Grand Master in 2022. Your work in conducting multiple and additional ceremonies to initiate and exalt men into our lodges and chapters has been commendable. I'm pleased to report that we have a high number of candidates who will be joining our chapters and lodges before the end of December this year. With many others having been allocated dates in 2027.

As I mentioned in May at our Provincial Grand Lodge Meeting, unfortunately we still have a high number of prospects allocated to lodges for initiation, who have not yet been allocated an initiation date. Please assist me by prioritising the initiation of these men into our membership. As we all know if a man is left waiting many months or longer to join us, there is a likelihood that he will find another potential new interest and be lost to us.

In terms of our Royal Arch Membership, it continues to grow and flourish. It currently stands at over 43% of our Craft Masons are members of the Royal Arch.

Companions in the true spirit of The Craft and The Royal Arch being one organisation, you will recall that for the first time in our history in 2025, the theme of the 164th Provincial Grand Ball at the Bolton Football Club Stadium was Royal Arch and the wearing of Royal Arch regalia was encouraged and in many cases worn.

The 166th Provincial Grand Ball will take place on Friday 5th March 2027. This great occasion will also be themed towards the Royal Arch. Whilst the wearing of Craft regalia is totally fine, I would encourage you to wear your Royal Arch regalia.

You will have received a notice from the Provincial Ball Team inviting early bookings at a reduced cost. Recent Provincial Balls have been fully attended and hotel accommodation has been in great demand. Please put this date in your diaries and book early to avoid being disappointed.

Turning now to Community Engagement. There is a massive amount of outstanding work taking place to work with and support our local communities. I see so many examples of our Armed Forces, veterans, hospices, youth organisations, homelessness and local people in distress. All of this work, together with our masonic buildings being used as hubs for community activities and engagement, makes me extremely proud to be a member of the Province of West Lancashire.

I take this opportunity to pay my appreciation to our Light Blue Clubs and those who manage and drive them. You are doing wonders in furthering our membership by supporting, involving and keeping our newer masons informed. In many respects the retention of our newer Royal Arch and Craft masons is as important as

recruiting them. Four years ago the loss of new Craft masons in our Province within their first 3 years was 16%. That is now significantly reduced at 4%.

I have no doubt, that you will have noticed the much improved increase over the last 4 years, in the attendance at both our Provincial Royal Arch and Craft Meetings. This has undoubtedly been assisted by the enhanced attendance of our newer Companions and Brethren. As I travel the Province, I am often spoken to by those newer members regarding how much they have enjoyed their trips here to Blackpool. Thank you to our Chapters, Lodges, Groups and Light Blue Clubs for encouraging and supporting our newer members to attend our Provincial Meetings.

To our Companions who are today receiving an Acting Rank, a First Appointment or a Promotion, well done and congratulations to you. Thank you for all that you have done to date and for all that I know you will continue to do in the future.

Companions I thank Peter Taylor, Mick Southern, Violet, Shona and all of the Provincial Office Volunteers for their work in organising today's event.

I thank Ian Halsall our Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies and all of our Deputies for keeping us on track and ensuring that everything has run so smoothly.

I also thank the South Fylde Group for providing our Stewards who have marshalled the day so well and safely for us.

To those who are dining later, I look forward to your company at the Banquet. If you are leaving after this meeting, have a safe journey home.

To conclude, Companions, keep asking good men to join the Craft. Keep encouraging non-Royal Arch Masons to join or re-join a Chapter. Most importantly, keep enjoying your Royal Arch and Craft Freemasonry and.....May the Red Rose continue to bloom!

Mark Francis Matthews,

Most Excellent Grand Superintendent