W. Bro. Phil Renney, please place our celebrant before me.

Brethren, fifty years in Freemasonry is a huge commitment and speaks to a lifetime of friendship, fellowship, charity and service. It is always a pleasure to gather to mark such an occasion.

Jeff, this evening we celebrate not only the 50th anniversary of the date of your initiation, but the whole of your journey to this anniversary – including, as we shall hear, your family life, your work and, of course, your half century of service to this Order.

Setting the Scene

Brethren, we will begin at the beginning. Let us turn the clock back to 1949, when Britain was still in the grip of post-war austerity. Clement Attlee was Prime Minister; King George VI was on the throne and rationing remained part of daily life. The National Health Service was barely a year old, NATO had just been founded, the Berlin Blockade had just ended and Germany was being split into East and West.

It was a year of economic turbulence. Just two days before Jeff was born, the Government devalued the pound from four dollars three cents to two dollars eighty – an attempt to reduce the country's post-war trade deficit with the US an a signal of the changing world order – big events - I am sure, though, Jeff, that your Mum and Dad had other things on their mind.

It was into that world, on Tuesday 20th September 1949, that you were born, at the Firs Maternity Hospital in Leigh, the younger of two brothers.

Your father, William, was a police constable, the village constable at Lower Ince, near Wigan and your mother, Irene, kept house until, after the family moved to Hutton, she took a job at the Vehicle Licensing Office in Preston. A policeman's family goes where the job goes: from Lower Ince to Wigan, then to Clayton-le-Woods and, when you were four, to Bamber Bridge.

You started at Bamber Bridge Methodist Primary School and it is fair to say that your first day was <u>not</u> an unqualified success. By lunchtime you had already

decided that school was not for you, so you decided to go home. You escaped. You were tracked down at the level crossing, heading for the railway station and promptly returned to the playground.

Another boy, known to us here, started school that same day: Mick Woods. As young boys, the two of you became firm friends, then lost touch. You met again many years later at Wellington Park, when you discovered Mick was a member of Cuerden Lodge.

School and Sport

In 1961 you moved up to Hutton Grammar School. In your first year the journey from Bamber Bridge meant very early starts, but before long your father was promoted to Sergeant in the Criminal Records Office at Hutton Police Headquarters, so the family moved to Hutton and you were then able to ride your bike to school.

Sport was and has remained, a constant in your life and you have been quite the sportsman. An able rugby player, you played for the 2nd XV at Hutton up to the fifth form, then moved up to the 1st XV at fly-half.

You also excelled at cricket. You were in the 1st XI from the third year – a very young player (the standard was high - the Captain was Michael Staziker, who went on to play for Lancashire and later spent sixteen consecutive seasons as the professional at Lancaster). In your final year, you captained the side yourself.

Not everything at school ran smoothly. You recall that you and the Headmaster, Mr Nelson, did not see eye to eye - he even tried to stop you and you from playing after some trouble with a referee at an away game. Thankfully, the gym Master, Dick Shepherd, a genuine character who, as a 2nd WW airman had won the French Croix de Guerre, stood up for you.

Hutton left its mark in another way too: six or seven of the teachers who taught you there later became members of Old Huttonian Lodge, which you were to join yourself in 2004.

Sport continued long after school: rugby at Preston Grasshoppers, cricket at Penwortham, then Enfield in the Lancashire League and football and cricket for the Lancashire Police. You even played for the Lancashire Constabularies cricket team at Headingley, where you took great pleasure in sitting in Geoffrey Boycott's chair. Yorkshire, sadly, thrashed you soundly on that day.

Ann

In the meantime, at the age of fifteen, on a joint youth club trip, you met Ann. Five years later, on Saturday 19th September 1970 - the day before your twenty-first birthday - you were married at St Mary's Church, Penwortham, the family church, where you had been a choirboy and where your children were later christened. You were at college at the time, but left to earn some money, thus beginning your quite varied career.

Early Working Life

Your first job was as a van salesman for Cadbury cakes — all of it on sale or return — driving the 'Summer Run' around the Fylde and the Southern Lake District. You then followed in your father's footsteps and joined the police. You went to Bruche, finished top of your class and were posted to Accrington in 1971–72.

You didn't settle in the police, though and you moved on to Jonas Woodhead, selling commercial vehicle spares from a van. By then, you and Ann were living with her parents and Ann was pregnant. You called at home on your way to deliver some spares to Southport. You discovered that Ann was in labour, but you told her she would have to "hang on a bit" while you went to Southport and back. By the time you returned, Ann was in hospital and the baby was on the way. Not surprisingly, you were never allowed to forget it!

After a further spell as a rep in a similar spares business, you took a job at the then new Fulwood Leisure Centre, helping to prepare it for opening. On the opening day, the first person to dive into the pool suffered a heart attack from the shock of the cold water and it was you who gave her the kiss of life. I am glad to say that she survived.

You were soon made a supervisor and then moved to Longridge Leisure Centre as Assistant Manager, but the unsociable hours were not kind to family life so, in 1976, you found your way to Leyland Garage, the Ford dealership, where your father-in-law, Harold Sumner, was a director.

You spent thirteen years there. The business grew quickly and, in the late 1980's, at Ford's insistence, moved into larger, custom-built premises. Things seemed to be going well, but, in 1989, you came back from a holiday in Greece to find that you and everyone else had been made redundant, because the company could not make its loan repayments to the bank. After thirteen years, it was a complete shock.

You knew all the customers, though, so when some of the others formed a new company, they asked you to go with them, which you did. The company initially traded as Leyland Ford Specialists, but Ford objected, so had the name was changed to Garage Services Ltd. Garage Services Ltd is still trading today, thirty-seven years later - a fine testament to what you and your colleagues built out of very difficult circumstances.

Family and Travel

In parallel, your wife Ann had a distinguished career. She became Vice-Principal of Runshaw College, later worked for Ofsted and then built her own business as a consultant, helping schools to improve their standards.

You and Ann have two children, and 2 grandchildren, who live locally. I know that you are very proud of them all.

As a couple, you and Ann liked to travel. For your twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, you visited India: Goa, New Delhi and the Taj Mahal. In Agra, you spotted a jeweller's Masonic ring. He turned out to be a member of Lodge No. 84, the Star of Agra and you are still in touch today.

You retired in 2010 and retirement gave you and Ann the chance to travel more, so you would visit your daughter in Cyprus, then spend time wandering the Greek

islands by ferry, totally unplanned, playing it by ear and taking each day as it came – it sounds idyllic.

Sadly, those trips were cut short when Ann died unexpectedly in 2016, the day before your forty-sixth wedding anniversary.

You knew, though, that Ann would have wanted you to keep going and, in 2017, to get away from it all, you took up an invitation to visit some old friends who had moved to Cape Town. You went on your own for four weeks, taking in South Africa against Sri Lanka at Newlands. You are trained as a scuba diver and, on a five-or-six-day tour you hoped to go cage diving with Great White sharks *[Invite Jeff to tell the cage-diving story (Hermanus; Orcas arrived and scared the Great Whites away).]* but the trip was cancelled when Orcas arrived and scared the Great Whites away.

You returned to SA in 2018 and 2020 and in Cape Town saw the charity tennis match in which Roger Federer, partnered by Bill Gates, took on Rafael Nadal.

Freemasonry

And so, Jeff, we come to your Masonic journey.

It began with a family connection. Your father-in-law, Harold Sumner, was a member of Leyland St Andrew's Lodge. He began by taking you along to his "special club" on Friday nights, sitting you in the bar while the lodge practiced at the old Leyland Masonic Hall.

In those days practices were so well attended that there were enough members to run three of them at once. You went every Friday for a couple of years before you asked to join.

You were Initiated into this Lodge, Leyland St. Andrews 7391 on Tuesday 26th October 1976. James Callaghan was Prime Minister and Concorde had just begun commercial flights.

On the evening of your initiation, when the blindfold came off, you were surprised to find several familiar faces in the Lodge room — not least Charlie Walsh, the wicket-keeper in your cricket team at Penwortham.

Your father-in-law, Harold, took the chair for all three of your degrees. You were Passed on 22nd February 1977 and Raised on 22nd March 1977.

You were Junior Warden in 1986, Senior Warden in 1987 and in September 1988 you were installed as Master, a busy year in which you made life-long friends. The Ladies' Evening you and Ann hosted during your year was the last that the Lodge held in the old Leyland Masonic Hall.

You then served as Chaplain, Assistant Director of Ceremonies and, for five years from 1992, Director of Ceremonies. After a spell as Tyler, you worked your way up through the Deacons' chairs and returned as Director of Ceremonies for another three years. Then came a second term as Master in 2008, a third in 2010, a fourth for two years from 2015 and, only a few weeks ago, you handed on the gavel after a fifth term (6th year) as Master of Leyland St. Andrews.

Your service has not been limited to one Lodge; you joined Old Huttonian Lodge in 2004, served as Charity Steward and were Master in 2007, then Director of Ceremonies for six years and, since 2021, Mentor. Today you are the Lodge's Membership Officer.

In 2017 you joined Dona Conferentes Lodge, where you were Master in 2022 and are now Director of Ceremonies.

Overall, you have spent 8 years as Master in three different Lodges and, if my maths is correct, your Adelphi record show, since 1985, a total of 56 years of service in the various offices you have held in West Lancashire Craft Lodges.

If you add in the fact that, from 2014 to 2020 were also Group Charity Steward for Leyland, that is 62 years of service. You immensely enjoyed being Group Charity Steward and, in that role, you took part in a series of Giving Days, championed by Stewart Seddon, then an Assistant Provincial Grand Master, involving around twenty-five charities and greatly raising the profile of Freemasonry in the local area. You are and have been for some time, also a Trustee of Teddies for Loving Care.

And it goes on… since 2018 you have been a Senior Visiting Officer and, as a volunteer at the Provincial Office, you look after archiving, dispensations and principal guests. You remain a prolific visitor to lodges in both Lancashire Provinces and further afield. Freemasonry has taken you to Banffshire, where the whole Province has only thirteen lodges; to Cape Town, where the Masonic centre hosts meetings under four different constitutions; and you even visited a lodge when on holiday in Cuba.

In the Royal Arch you were Exalted into Carnarvon Chapter on 14th March 2001 and served in the chair of Most Excellent Zerubbabel in 2020 and 2021 (during the Covid pandemic). In 2022 you joined Cuerden with Withy Chapter, where you have served as Scribe N and are now Charity Steward.

Overall, you have an exemplary record, which few can match. That record has, I am pleased to say, been recognised by Provincial Honours from four different Provincial Grand Masters:

- Past Prov Senior Grand Deacon in 1996, from Kenneth E. Moxley.
- Past Prov Grand Superintendent of Works in 2004, from Colin Penty Wright.
- Past Prov Junior Grand Warden in 2010, from Peter Hosker.
- Past Prov Senior Grand Warden in 2022, from Tony Harrison (the rank you hold today).

In the Royal Arch, you were appointed Provincial Grand Standard Bearer in 2024 by our current Provincial Grand Master and Grand Superintendent, Mark Francis Matthews.

Closing Brethren, fifty years in Freemasonry is an achievement worthy of real celebration. Jeff, you have been a sportsman, a husband, father and grandfather, a friend to a great many and a dedicated Freemason. It has been our privilege to share in your journey this evening and it now gives me great pleasure to invite W. Bro. David Bishop PPGSwdB, Chairman of the Chorley and Leyland Group of Lodges & Chapters, to read a certificate marking the Province of West Lancashire’s appreciation of your fifty years of service.