W. Bro. Ian Robert Neil Heyes

Celebrating Fifty Years in Freemasonry

W. Bro. Gregory Pinnington, Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies, please place our celebrant before me.

Brethren, fifty years in Freemasonry represents far more than the passing of time. It is a testament to loyalty, friendship and service, and it is always a pleasure when the members of a Lodge can gather to mark such an occasion.

Ian, this evening we celebrate not only the anniversary of your initiation, but the whole of your journey. You not only have half a century of service to the Craft but, as we will hear, you have not only been shaped by Masonry, Masonry has also been shaped by you.

Setting the Scene

Let us begin by turning the clock back to 1952.

King George VI had died in February, and the country was only a few months into a new Elizabethan age under a young Queen who had yet to be crowned. Winston Churchill was back in Downing Street, rationing was still part of daily life, and Britain was slowly finding its feet after the war. Only five days before you were born, on 2nd May, the world's first passenger jet service took off from London for Johannesburg aboard the de Havilland Comet — a glimpse of a future that must have seemed a long way from the market gardens of Lancashire.

Interestingly, 1952 was also a Guild year in Preston, in that case the first for 40 years, rather than the usual 20, as 1942 had been cancelled due to the war.

It was into this world, on Wednesday 7th May 1952, that you were born at Sharoe Green Hospital in Preston.

Early Years

Your parents were Robert and Mary. Your father was a nurseryman, like your grandfather, also Robert, who was a landscape gardener as well. The family business, R.E. Heyes and Son, had been established in 1894.

When war broke out, although your father was in a reserved occupation, he joined the RAF. He trained at Invergordon and went to France with the RAF Signals on D-Day plus three. After the war he met your mother, who was secretary to the Principal at Hutton Agricultural College, and they were married at St. Paul's Church, Farington, in 1950.

Your grandfather was a landscape gardener, but a rather old-fashioned one, perhaps a little stuck in his ways; he insisted on travelling everywhere by bus, with all his tools, lawnmower

included. Your father wanted to modernise, so he struck out on his own as a grower of flowers and pot plants.

You were the eldest of three: your sister Carole arrived eleven years later and your brother Andrew six years after that, so there are seventeen years between you and Andrew.

The family lived first in an agricultural house on Coutts Lane and later on Chain House Lane.

School Days

You attended Middleforth Junior School and then Penwortham Secondary Modern. Your last year at Middleforth is remembered for a dare, a stink bomb, and a visit to the headmaster. (One of the other children dared you to let off a stink bomb in the classroom, the classroom was cleared and your punishment was, memorably, two strokes of the cane on each hand.)

Out of school, you and your friends played in Walker's Tank Field, where surplus tanks and armoured cars from the Second World War were stored — a boy's paradise, and very much a sign of the times. You were also a fine cross-country runner, second in the senior race at fourteen, though a fall from your bike in your final year, and a badly cut leg, cost you the chance to win it.

Although you have always enjoyed outdoor pursuits, you were never a Scout, but you had friends who were, and you often joined them at a boathouse on Windermere, to spend time "messing about on the lake". On one trip, aged seventeen, a few of you set off across the lake in thick fog in a small boat with an outboard motor, convinced that if you kept the tiller straight you would reach the opposite bank. Sadly, you were mistaken – you didn't allow for the current and two and a half hours later you found yourselves, I imagine, with some relief, at the YMCA jetty at Newby Bridge, although you had, but then, broken the propeller on shallow rocks. This escapade is particularly worthy of mention because one of those Scout friends later became your best man and is now a Freemason in Lincolnshire - you are clearly a man whose friendships endure.

The Family Business

When you left school at sixteen, joining the family firm was the natural thing to do and you did that alongside two years' day release at Hutton Horticultural College.

The family nursery was Kirklands Nurseries on Chain House Lane at Whitestake, where you grew bedding plants, pot plants and cut flowers. At one time you were growing 20,000 chrysanthemums, which you personally planted by hand, with a billy goat to guard them. Unfortunately, the billy goat escaped and was found tethered to a post box by the village shop.

You also grew five acres of vegetables and, in the glasshouses, tomatoes and cucumbers, all sold from the family stall on Preston Market, which in the days before supermarkets was

hugely popular. In 1972, another Guild year, the stallholders selling foodstuffs were obliged to move into the new market hall, and the stall moved inside.

In the early 1980s, at your mother's suggestion, you became the first in Preston to supply flower arranging materials — dried and silk flowers and so on — just as flower arranging classes were taking off. It was very successful.

Things are always changing, though and, when the popularity of the market began to wane, you supplemented your income with garden maintenance and landscape gardening, being also contracted by the station manager at Preston to provide hanging baskets and planters. That grew over about twenty years until you were supplying every main station between Stafford and Carlisle, and for the last five years you also looked after the trees, shrubs and grass cutting.

The market stall was sold in 2004, but the garden maintenance and landscaping business continues. In 2014 your youngest son Chris joined you and, with your support, he now runs the business that has, in various guises, been in the family for more than 130 years – that sounds like a success to me!

Diane and Family

Your father was a member of Leyland Lodge and from about the age of five you went along to help when he provided flowers for Masonic Ladies' Evenings. It was that, you say, that inspired you to take up ballroom dancing and, in 1973, you began lessons at Wally Hopkirk's Dance School at the Adriatic Ballroom in Preston.

After each lesson there was general dancing and the ladies outnumbered the men two to one, so there was a 'queue dance', in which the ladies queued to take their turn with a partner. Two young ladies caught your eye: Diane and her friend Pauline. One was very confident and outgoing and the other shy and quiet. You decided to go for the challenge and asked out, Diane, the quiet one – that proved to be a good decision. You courted for four years and were married in 1978 at St. Mary's Church, Penwortham.

Interestingly, the vicar who married you was Diane's next-door neighbour, you were married the Reverend Peter Grime, who went on to become Provincial Grand Chaplain and also happened to be Diane's next-door neighbour. Your best man was that Windermere Scout friend. Diane's father, Sid Sharples, was a member of Leyland St. Andrews Lodge, so there was Masonry on both sides of the family. Together, you made your first home at Lostock Hall and later moved to Penwortham.

You and Diane have three children. We have already mentioned Chris, who runs the business.

Very sadly, your daughter, Donna, died suddenly of meningitis in 2013, aged just twenty-five, leaving her son Jack. Since her death you have raised approximately seventy-one thousand

pounds for meningitis charities, a remarkable and fitting tribute. Your grandson Jack stays with you and Diane at weekends; I understand that he loves snooker (and is very good at it); the two of you are very close.

I am delighted to say that your son, Simon, is celebrating with us today, having travelled from Buckinghamshire, where he lives with his wife and their two sons.

As Simon is in the room with us, it is simple to conclude that he is a Mason, but the interesting story behind that fact is that, for several years, you and your family holidayed at a hotel in Perranporth, where the then children, Simon, Donna and Chris made friends with the other regular holidaymakers. Simon and one of the other boys, Jimmy, became such firm friends that Jimmy was a guest at Simon's wedding, when he mentioned to you that his father was a Mason and that he would like to join. Simon chipped in that he would too, so you lost no time in contacting your good friend, Peter Taylor, who put them in touch with the Earl of Clarendon Lodge in Watford, where the two young men were Initiated, Passed and Raised together in double ceremonies. Simon is now the Immediate Past Master of that Lodge, Jimmy is the current Master and I understand that the lodge is thriving.

Away from work and Masonry, you enjoy fellwalking, ballroom dancing, game shooting with your spaniels, and clay pigeon shooting.

Freemasonry

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

As we have established, Masonry was part of your life long before you joined. Your father, Robert, was a member of Leyland Lodge No. 4249, and you were helping at Ladies' Evenings from the age of about five. Despite your father's membership you had to apply formally. You still have the reply from the Lodge Secretary and after your interview you waited five years, because the Lodge was full.

You were proposed into Leyland Lodge by your father, who had told you very little beforehand - he didn't even mention that the newly initiated candidate is toasted and has to reply. You were seconded by Tom Schofield who, sadly, died while you were waiting to join.

You were Initiated on Thursday 23rd September 1976. *[Invite lodge sec. to read minutes.]*

You were Passed on 25th November 1976 and Raised on 24th March 1977.

You were installed as Master of Leyland Lodge in 1989, at the age of thirty-six. You formed many lasting friendships during that year, particularly, of course, with fellow Masters and notably, with Peter Taylor and Trevor Bamber, Masters of that year, are both with us this evening. During your year, you took them to visit Arlecdon Lodge No. 1660 in Cumbria – a lodge you visited for more than 30 years. Your connection to that lodge had its roots in a

chance encounter some years before with a local farmer, known as Jobby, who recognised you as a Mason.

You have been a member of the Low Gillerthwaite Field Centre since you were seventeen, and after a walk over Great Gable you were chatting to the locals in the Stork Hotel at Rowrah, where you met a hill farmer known as Jobby. Jobby, it turned out, was a member of Arlecdon Lodge, and the two of you remained friends for thirty years.

In 2014 Leyland Lodge amalgamated with Hesketh Lodge No. 986 to become Leyland Hesketh Lodge, you were Senior Warden in 2015 and returned to the Chair as Master in 2016. You have been a member of this Lodge, Old Huttonian, since 2012. You were Assistant Director of Ceremonies from 2014 and Director of Ceremonies for five years from 2021, then, this September, you we invested as Senior Warden, so we look forward to your being installed you as Master of Old Huttonian Lodge next year.

In 2023, Kirkham Lodge was struggling, so was repurposed and renamed as Country Pursuits Lodge of West Lancashire, an idea put forward by its secretary, who was involved in the Provincial shooting competitions. A lodge celebrating country pastimes could hardly have suited you better; you joined in January 2023, were Senior Warden that year and Master in 2024 and you serve there now as Assistant Director of Ceremonies.

In the Royal Arch, you were Exalted into Old Worden Chapter No. 5366 on 5th February 1985, served as Haggai in 1996 and as First Principal in 1997, and spent many years as Chapter Director of Ceremonies. You are also a member of Setantia Chapter of First Principals and the Provincial Grand Stewards' Chapter of West Lancashire. In the Royal Arch, you were appointed Provincial Grand Steward in 2003, Past Provincial Grand Sword Bearer in 2007 and Past Provincial Grand Scribe N in 2013.

Your extensive service to The Craft has, of course, also been recognised at Provincial level. In 1998 you were appointed Past Provincial Senior Grand Deacon, and in 2005 promoted to Past Provincial Grand Superintendent of Works.

Now, there is a bit of a story behind your latest Promotion to Past Provincial Junior Grand Warden, in 2017:

The Clay Pigeon Shooting Society

Going back a bit, in about 1983, the then PGM of Cumberland and Westmorland invited Tom Blackburn to form a play pigeon shooting team to compete against his team. That competition was a success, so the first of many, and you joined the West Lancashire Masonic Clay Pigeon Shooting Society at the start of the 1990s.

You were then on the organising committee for the first National Inter-Provincial Shoot, held at Houghton Towers in 2002. Fourteen Provinces were represented; I'm pleased to say that West Lancashire won and you were one of the top five guns. You served as shoot captain for

eleven years, winning around twelve local and provincial trophies, and you moved from Captain to Vice Chairman and then to Chairman in 2019, which you still are.

The highlight came in 2017, the Tercentenary year, when you took a team to Suffolk to compete for the Tercentenary Trophy, donated by the Pro Grand Master, Jonathan Spence, who was unable to stay for the presentation. The trophy was awarded to the Province of Surrey, but a diligent member of the West Lancashire team spotted that the scores had been added up wrongly, so trophy was reclaimed by your team, the rightful winners, after the Competition Chairman had left.

Then, when the Provincial team visited the following installation meeting at Euxton Lodge, you presented that Tercentenary Trophy to the Provincial Grand Master, Tony Harrison. He, in return surprised you with a new collar – a field promotion to PPJGW – a lovely surprise!

The Society has also been generous: its £10,000 cheque to the Province's 2021 Charity Festival was the largest single cheque presented.

Closing

Ian, fifty years in Freemasonry is an achievement worthy of real celebration and the best of it, as you say yourself, has been the lifelong friends you have made. It has been our privilege to share your story this evening and it now gives me great pleasure to invite W. Bro. David Bishop, Chairman of the Chorley And Leyland Group of Lodges and Chapters, to read a certificate marking the Province of West Lancashire's appreciation of your fifty years of service.