

Brethren

Thank you all for attending and supporting this special meeting.

Not only are we celebrating the successful year past, and the contributions of all of the Provincial Officers and members who made it so successful, and looking forward positively to the year ahead, we are also celebrating fifty years of the Province of Cheshire and North Wales, but more of that later.

This year, we have inducted 11 new members, which is slightly down on last year. We couldn't have expected to sustain the level of Inductions over a longer period, but I'm delighted that the numbers joining us continue to be reasonably high, and they are good quality candidates.

I am also delighted that we have several candidates waiting to be Inducted, so the coming year will continue to be fruitful and busy.

New Inductions, of course, mean we have several Princes ceremonies to conduct, which will ensure most of our Conclaves will continue to be busy with ritual throughout the coming months.

Despite losses, some significant due to death, our Province has grown by eight members, and we have also increased our unique membership, so the growth is real

We had 43 Conclave meetings during the year. The average attendance of members was 65%, with an overall average attendance at meetings of just under 20, which, again, is a fantastic average, and better than many Craft Lodges.

Whilst we had 22 members who didn't attend any meetings, I am delighted that the Conclave Visiting Deacons, or someone else from the member's Conclave, managed to make contact with most of the missing members and establish genuine reasons for non-attendance.

We trust that this contact will encourage all of the members to return to us when they are able.

Whilst the average membership attendance in Conclaves is two-thirds, this is almost matched by the number of visitors at each Conclave meeting. The numbers in attendance at each meeting makes for a warm and enjoyable atmosphere, making sure that members and visitors look forward to the next meeting with enthusiasm.

Of course, all Conclaves are supported by our Provincial Chancellor's Support Squad, who visit all Conclaves whether they are needed or not. I would like to thank Worthy Brother Jim and all of the team for such strong support, and look forward to their continuing company in the year ahead.

Likewise, I would like to thank all of the Provincial Officers for their support during the year, and look forward to working with the new team.

Worthy Brother Derek Gaskell, Provincial Grand Counsellor, has agreed to continue in the role for another 12 months. As well as being responsible for recruitment strategies, Worthy Brother Derek has acted as Provincial Visitor when one sadly had to step down due to family issues.

This has meant that he has finished second in the attendance stakes (behind me, of course!) attending 33 out of a possible 43 meetings, just beating Worthy Brother Trevor Simcock, who managed 28 meetings, but loses a point for taking his wife to the Cheshire Show today!

The Provincial Grand Recorder, Alan Harrison, finished third, just in front of the Provincial Grand Guide, John Owens, and the Provincial Grand Chancellor, Jim Tang.

Worthy Brother John topped the attendance table last year, and was very disappointed that illness prevented him taking the honour again. He now retires from his arduous role as Provincial Grand Guide, and has done a wonderful job in trying circumstances over the last two years, and I know your successor will be able to rely upon your support, when you are able, during the year ahead.

Brethren, I maintain attendance records so I can understand what is happening with the membership of my Province, and announce attendance at this meeting as a bit of fun, but thank you all for your commitment and dedication to support me, the Conclaves, the Province, and the Order.

Brethren, I've mentioned the Support Squad. This team travel around to support Conclaves and to ensure an excellent and enjoyable ritual is delivered to all of our candidates. The squad is not there to replace acting Officers, but fill in where a gap unavoidable appears.

If you develop and learn a particular portion of ritual as your party piece, our Provincial Grand Chancellor will be pleased to hear from you, so he can add you to his team.

I am delighted that all but two of our Conclaves have grown or remained stable during the year. My talks to Craft Lodges, planting seeds and raising awareness, is slowly bearing fruit, and I look forward to continuing to deliver the Presentation at your Craft Lodge in the future.

I have a couple of planned excursions at the moment, and we also have a couple of Friendship Meetings planned for the future.

Following a suggestion by the Grand Supreme Ruler at the Annual Grand Conclave Meeting, when we have an Induction Ceremony, I have been asking for the Muster Role to be deferred until after the ceremony, then explain to the new member what it all means. This appears to have gone down quite well, and all candidates said they understand our Order a little better, so that is something I will be continuing.

It is great to see so many members of the Arch of Steel present and assisting today, and I was delighted to finally be able to invest the new members. The collarettes have been a bit of an issue, but thanks to Worthy Brother Andy Tong these are now in hand and on the right necks, and thanks to Philip Rose, the Commander and Dave Ginger, his Deputy for keeping the Arch controlled and in order, so I can feel safe when passing under their swords.

Once again, we were able to support two local charities: Claire House Children's Hospice in Bebbington and DORIS, a Vale of Clwyd MIND project in Rhyl. This project particularly impressed Darren Coleman-Heald, the Grand Charities Manager, when he visited for the presentation.

We were able to give both of these charities £2,350 each, thanks to your generosity, a contribution from the OSM Benevolent Fund, plus a bit extra from our Provincial Balloon race.

This raised an extra £700 for the charities, and thanks to Worthy Brother Barrie Billinge for coming up with the idea and driving it through to the conclusion. After a short rest from blowing up those virtual balloons, we've launched the 2024 version of the race, and entries are available today via a form in your envelopes. Please return these today to Barrie, not to me. The winner will be announced at the Provincial Sunday Lunch on Sunday 13 October.

This year, the charities we will be supporting are:

Your Space (Marches) in Wrexham, nominated by Seal of Solomon Conclave, which is a small charity supporting children with Autism;
and Save the Family, nominated by Christleton Conclave. This is another small charity providing help and support for homeless families who have multiple and complex needs. I look forward to us supporting both these deserving charities in the year ahead.

The final person for me to thank is the one who has done the most work, especially organising today. Our Provincial Grand Recorder, Worthy Brother Alan, is invaluable in assisting me to run this wonderful Province, so thank you, Alan, for everything you do.

Brethren. I mentioned earlier that today we are celebrating 50 years since the consecration of the Province of Cheshire and North Wales.

The Province had been created in 1969, following a decision by the Grand Supreme Ruler, Most Worthy Brother Lieutenant Colonel John Walter Chitty, MBE, that the Order had grown to such strength that three Provinces could be created. The Province of Lancashire and Cheshire was the first of these to be set up.

Right Worthy Brother Arnold Moreton was invested as the first Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler.

In 1974, Arnold Moreton was appointed Deputy Grand Supreme Ruler, and the Province of Lancashire and Cheshire was split, and the Province of Cheshire & North Wales was created, under the leadership of Right Worthy Brother Frederick Arthur White.

Since then there have been eight more Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler's invested, and it is a honour to see two of my predecessors with us today.

Over the last 50 years the Province has grown and flourished, and it gives me tremendous honour to be able to preside over our fiftieth celebration.

Worthy Brother John Thomson has worked tremendously hard to compile a booklet of the history of the Province. Unfortunately, something has gone wrong with production, so I will ensure, somehow, that you all receive a copy of the Provincial History in the near future.

Brethren, the Province of Cheshire and North Wales has grown during fifty years to be where we are today, healthy and strong.

It gives me immense pleasure to contribute to that development and it is a great honour to lead the Province into the next fifty years and towards our undoubted centenary.

I trust that the Almighty Friend of all Friends grants us all the health and strength to continue to work as far as we can towards that milestone.

But first, we look forward to lunch.

Thank you.