

Right Eminent Knights, Very Eminent Knights, Distinguished Visitors and Brother Knights of Essex

Twelve months ago I commented on what I believed had been once again another successful year in the history of the Knight Templar Degree in Essex. So much had happened in the previous twelve months not only since the previous Malta Meeting in October 2018 but following on from the Chapter of Provincial Priory in May 2019.

Last October we had invested a record number of sixteen candidates taking their next step in their own personal development as a Knight Templar Mason. Our Church Service in September had been a great success once again. The Preceptory of Improvement was likewise going from strength to strength with record numbers attending and coupled with the then new edition of our "Additional Information for the Knights of the Province of Essex" Booklet and our "Provincial Support Team" initiative as well as the proposed launch of our updated "Provincial Website" things were progressing I was pleased to report in a very positive manner. Furthermore, we also had a number of candidates for Installation as new knights which would also swell our numbers.

However, as I said on a previous occasion "the best laid plans of mice and men and even Provincial Priors" can quickly be thrown into chaos in the great scheme of things and life in particular.

Brother Knights, we live in difficult, challenging, changing times some even might describe them as precarious and threatening as well as unsure for many who are classed as vulnerable. The last eight months have been life changing for the majority of us without exception. Whether the destruction of your lifestyle has meant you have been furloughed in working from home instead of from an office, self-isolating due to age and or health restrictions, or because of numerous other reasons our lives as Freemasons and Knights Templar have never experienced, in our own lifetimes, anything that could have prepared us for what has become known as the Covid-19 Pandemic.

You have heard from the Sub-Prior in his reports of what we had planned to do to celebrate the Ninetieth Anniversary of the Consecration of Essex as a sovereign KT Province and how those proposals have been changed, updated,

amended, modified, revised, and altered since the initial stages, when various ideas were first talked about. Needless to say a number of those involved have spent many hours working to make the Anniversary a memorable one when those events finally happen circumstances permitting, I hope you will be able to support as well as enjoy as many of the various events as possible.

Although as many of you know our annual Church Service had to be cancelled but we as a Province did not forget Father Tim Barnes and his Parishioners or the choir at St. Peters - in - the - Field at Bocking. I am pleased to say that we increased our usual donation by 50% to £750 to the finances of the Church, as well as donating £100 to the choir, in what were difficult times during the "lockdown" as no services could take place for several months which resulted in no collection plate donations from the congregation during that period. We received a letter of grateful and appreciative thanks from Father Tim. Likewise, our commitment to the Eye Hospital at Jerusalem once again was shown by a further donation to their cause via Great Priory at Mark Masons Hall. I am also pleased that many of you, by your own donations, have supported the 2020 Appeal for the Eye Hospital that our Most Eminent and Supreme Grand Master launched earlier this year. According to Freemasonry News@86 around £35,000 has been raised nationwide. Those who donated can now wear their Swift Lapel pin with pride.

I said twelve months ago that In this changing world we live in, nothing seems to remain the same for too long when I referred to the ending of the long association there had been between the Masonic Girls' School Choir and ourselves. This had resulted in a new arrangement that meant music and singing could continue to bring a rousing enjoyment to the proceedings at our Church Service. Little did I realise that the reference "*in this changing world we live in*" would once again focus in my speech today as the Pandemic has engulfed and threatened our daily existence.

Some Preceptories have managed to meet on the odd occasions at their scheduled meetings that restrictions - whether imposed by the Government or under the regulations and directives we received from the Chancellery at Mark Masons Hall - when lifted or relaxed fell into those periods, whilst some others have now made history whilst holding virtual meetings via the zoom platform. Much new language and technological terminology has become the order of

the day during these stressful and trying times as we endeavour to continue to practice our Freemasonry.

During the past eight months, in spite of all that has happened the Executive of the Province have not been idle in hopefully ensuring that when we have begun to return to what something is approaching what was once our "*normal*" way of life in the early part of 2020 we will be prepared to once again move on for the better of us all. I cannot thank too much two individuals in particular for the fantastic support I have received since Freemasonry was suspended in mid-March in what I have endeavoured to do in my capacity of your Provincial Prior. My Sub-Prior Roger and our new Vice-Chancellor Chris Smith have worked tirelessly to ensure that we remain a vibrant and stable organisation. Chris has settled into the office of Vice-Chancellor and has been a rock solid addition to the team. Other members of the Executive have all played their part in implementing the plans for the future.

I must here thank Clive Purdy who retired last May as Vice-Chancellor - an office he has held with distinction over the last eight years. During the days and weeks following the announcement of my becoming the next Prior of Essex and over the following intervening years Clive's sound advice, help and assistance have been invaluable in aiding myself and others to facilitate the changes I felt were needed to progress the development of our Province in what have been some difficult as well as testing times.

When it was decided to mark the 90th Anniversary of the Province with various events we decided to write a history of the KT in Essex over that period of time. For many months now E. Kt. Brian Wright - who volunteered to undertake the task of re-searching the project and writing the initial draft - has been doing a sterling job in collating a mass of material. From the initial sight of his progress so far it will be a truly fantastic piece of writing. On his behalf I ask all the Registrars of the Preceptories and well as all our other Knights to delve into their archives and submit information and pictures which you believe will or could add moments of interest that will enhance the edition. Please contact Brian himself or Chris Smith and even the Sub-Prior or myself with any items that will embellish the project. We are endeavouring to publish the book during 2021.

Lastly, I thank you all for your kind attention and take this opportunity to be the first to wish you all the compliments of the forthcoming Christmas festive season. As members of this Christian Order let us not forget the hour of 5 o'clock on Christmas Day when we should find a few minutes to be on our own and say that special prayer in which we remember our fellow knights not only in our own Preceptories but also around the Province in general, as well as throughout the world.

Finally, may God bless you all, and especially each and every individual member of your own families. May you all have a Merry Christmas and a Happy but as importantly, a Healthy and Peaceful New Year during 2021, when hopefully we can once again meet together in peace, love and harmony and in groups and numbers where there are no restrictions. Stay safe, stay well and most importantly be very careful.

AJH

23rd October 2020.