

Brother Knights of Essex

Each year at our Annual Priory Meeting in May it seems I always begin my address to the assembled knights with these words: "Once again, as in past years, the last twelve months has proved to be – to say the least – an interesting one in the life of the KT Province of Essex".

This year other factors have meant that it has been impossible to even actually meet on our scheduled date because since the second weekend in March Freemasonry as a whole commenced a period of suspension which we were told will last for four months. Thus, without exception, it seems many of the problems that have occurred in past years fade into insignificance because of the worldwide Coronavirus Covid-19 Pandemic that has swept our daily lives into previously uncharted territory.

Nevertheless, I can still confirm that the past twelve months has proved to be an interesting; as well as at times a challenging one; especially even more so during the last nine weeks whilst Freemasonry has been suspended throughout the whole of the United Kingdom; along with many other aspects of our usual daily routine.

As we continue the task to "self-isolate" in what is either a "lock-in" or "lockdown" environment we should however remember that those of us reading this today are the 'fortunate ones' as sadly there are many who have succumbed to the ravages of the coronavirus disease or likewise other health problems. Many thousands of lives will have been lost during the months since the pandemic first struck; and many thousands more affected in the loss of loved ones taken, often unexpectedly, in tragic and sudden circumstances. To both groups – whether the deceased or those bereaved – I personally can only give some semblance of comfort by expressing my sympathy with the words "*you are in our thoughts and prayers at this time*". When finally we hopefully begin to return to a more "normal" state of existence my dearest wish is that we and each and everyone of our own personal family members and loved ones will have survived. Any privation we will have suffered will have been fine, and in hindsight bearable, if only because we could have the 'golden ticket' – won in life's lottery – of the "get out of coronavirus" card which guarantees that we and those we love will come out alive and kicking at the end. In this global pandemic, that's the only punchline we care about and that's precisely what I wish for you all.

Returning to perhaps more mundane and strictly Provincial Knight Templar matters however, likewise, it has also been not only a rewarding year but if I might say a successful one in many ways.

Last year, at our October Malta meeting a record number of candidates took their Malta Degree in a ceremony that once again showed the excellence of ritual which we have come to expect for many years now in Essex. With some sixteen candidates it was great to see the interest and thus support that Craft and Royal Arch Masons are showing to KT Masonry in Essex. Of course, those who took their Malta Degree that day were just some of the knights within our Order who were completing another stride in their KT journey and thus joined others in the previous twelve months who had taken that step in similar ceremonies at several other Preceptories who work the Degree as well as at the Combined Priorities Malta Meeting held in June at Southend.

Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic virus, once again, I was pleased to see that attendance numbers at the Preceptory of Improvement were continuing to thrive with an even greater increase in the number of those attending when the “new” season started last September at each Sunday morning monthly session. The annual lunch at the Chinese Restaurant following the December meeting was once again a great success.

The Annual Church Service last September was a great success at St. Peter-in-the-Fields and once again we were warmly welcomed by Father Tim Barnes and his team. With a slightly changed format for the service, as the Choir from the Masonic Girls School could no longer be with us; we had what I described last year as – an “older or more senior vocal content” – with the Choral interludes being supplied by the Choir of the Church itself. As before the Service was followed by the usual “tea and sandwich” buffet at the Howard Hall Masonic Centre.

This year the Service is scheduled to take place on Sunday the 20th of September but with the current Covid-19 restrictions it seems likely that we might have to forgo this Annual event for the first time since its inception. Once again it is a decision over which we have no control.

Last October I announced the re-launch of our **“Additional Information for the Knights of the Province of Essex”** Booklet. As I said at the time the original version, first produced in 2014, proved to be a big success and the revised addition with the extra eight pages we incorporated has likewise been well

received once again. Prior to the introduction of the four month suspension of all Masonic activity in the country both Roger and I have been delighted with the uptake of the new edition by many of the newer members of our Order who have joined in the last few years especially those who attend P. of I.

The introduction of the **“Provincial Support Team”** is yet another success story which has proved a great help to a number of Preceptories since its inception. I would like to thank it’s co-ordinator, John Stannard, and the individual members of the Team for their help in supporting those Preceptories as well as the new candidates being received into the KT in Essex. As both the Sub-Prior and myself have said on numerous occasions we should endeavour to give all knights we welcome into the Order the best possible ceremony they can and should receive on the day of their installation and one that makes a lasting impression – preferably a good one – they will remember. With the help and assistance of the Team this is proving to be an excellent addition to what the Province can do to further promote KT Masonry in Essex.

It causes me great sadness that for several months now the official “Team Visits” which I have usually undertaken along with those by the Sub-Prior, the Constables, the Vice-Chancellor and the Chancellor (in the Malta Degree) have ceased. But currently we live in different and difficult times and as we know Freemasonry is a hobby that whilst being enjoyed ; must always become secondary to the needs of our families and other personal responsibilities, and so the insidious disruption by the coronavirus pandemic to our daily lives has meant a totally new “mind set” for everybody.

I would like to congratulate all those Provincial Officers in normal circumstances I would have had the pleasure of investing today whether it was to be a first appointment or a promotion. But please remember your rank actually starts from today so when we do meet again you can display and wear your Provincial Badge with pride. Likewise to those who were to be receiving a first appointment or a promotion in Great Priory next week although that meeting, like all others due to take place in the spring and summer months, has been cancelled. As I have said before and have no hesitation in saying today those ranks are justly deserved by those honoured.

Previously, I have never mentioned by name those who were to receive a first appointment or promotion in Great Priory but I feel it is only right that their names and new ranks are known to all in the current climate. Therefore, I am delighted to say that next week on May 20th both John Greenwood and Michael Robinson are to be promoted to the rank of Past Great Registrar, so they become Very Eminent Knights; whilst Shane Clapham and Tony Masella receive a first appointment of Past Great Aide-de-Camp and Mal Williams becomes a Past Great Warden of Regalia. Congratulations also to three other "Essex Boys" on the staff at MMHall as both Dan Heath has been re-appointed to Assistant Great Vice-Chancellor and Len Millings as Great Guard, whilst Derek Mersh continues his important work in the Masonic Support Team.

Last October I spoke about the necessity that finally we felt there was a need to not only update but dramatically improve our Provincial Website. It had taken some time to address the matter but the urgency to do so had become paramount in an endeavour to not only foster, but even more so, promote the KT Degree in Essex as being a vibrant Order for Craft and Royal Arch Masons to join. Over a period of many months having employed the services of a professional web designer together with the assistance of our Provincial Registrar, Stuart Ross, and others coupled with the dedication of our Sub-Prior to oversee the re-birth this had been achieved. We now believe we have a website that can be better described as one **"fit for purpose"** and from the many complimentary reports received it seems it has been well received by all who have viewed it. Not only that but I was delighted that the site went "live" on schedule as promised. So a big "thank you" to all the team involved in the project. The website address is [www.essexkt.org](http://www.essexkt.org).

Many of you will have heard that on 30th September we shall be celebrating the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Consecration of the Province as a separate entity. I asked Paul Swinge to design a logo to celebrate the fact and it can now be seen on the "Welcome" page when you click onto the website. To say I am extremely pleased with what Paul has produced would be an understatement and I can only likewise thank him for all his endeavours. As you can see from the proposed events planned to celebrate the fact, detailed on the **"future events"** section on the website, we have had to amend certain dates when those events – like many others – have had to be changed because of the "suspension" embargo imposed on all Masonic and likewise related meetings.

However, although one event was originally proposed to take place in June we are hoping that it will now take place in November but as technically it will be a 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year there is no problem if we have to move some events into 2021, as that will still be in the twelve month calendar period of the timescale from this September. When the two main events – which are an Evening Reception and Dinner when we shall entertain our wives and partners at the Hutton Mount Banqueting Suite and a Knight's Banquet (gentlemen only) with a Medieval themed Dinner with entertainment at The Square, Upminster – finally take place I hope you will be able to support them as they promise to be a celebration of ninety years of Essex as a viable separate entity as a KT Province within and under the authority of the Great Priory of the Order of the Temple.

Today – as you will see when viewing the new list of Officers invested – was to see the retirement of Clive Purdy as our Vice-Chancellor and his appointment in a new executive office as Chancellor of the Province of Essex. Circumstances – all beyond the control of a mere Provincial Prior like myself – have conspired and so in fairness to his successor, Chris Smith, Clive has suggested that he will continue to act in both offices until there can be a formal transfer of the office of Vice-Chancellor to Chris – hopefully in October? We all feel this is the most sensible way forward as the office is one that requires an expertise that it would be unfair to place on Chris in the current circumstances and an undue pressure that although he is vastly experienced from his previous other positions in the Craft and the Royal Arch, coupled with his time as a Registrar in the KT, will likewise be a new challenge to all those accumulated administrative skills. However, I have no doubt he will cope with all that is required of him – that is why I asked him to take up the office, but like us all accepting a new position of such importance a smooth transition in the take-over from your predecessor makes life a lot easier. There is no doubt in my mind that Chris Smith will be a worthy successor to Clive and I personally wish him many congratulations on his appointment as well as my sincerest and best wishes for the future.

When my appointment as the next Provincial Prior of Essex, was first announced in January 2013, Clive Purdy as the then Provincial Vice-Chancellor, made a number of suggestions in order to modernise the administration of the Province and since our earliest meetings has become one of my most loyal and trusted colleagues in the governing of the affairs and the ruling of the Province.

His personal knowledge coupled with his administrative skills and his standing amongst his colleagues and others in various Provinces around the country has made my life as the Prior a lot easier to undertake and his advice has always been faultless and sound when sort. His retirement today was to end a term of office as one of the longest serving Vice-Chancellors currently amongst those in any of the KT Provinces in England but circumstances have led to the decision for him to continue to help out and I thank him for that.

As many of you know some years ago I introduced the **Provincial Prior's Award of Merit**. Over the past few years a number of distinguished and worthy Knights have been recipients of the award for their long and dedicated service to KT Masonry in Essex. Today, I wish to add the name of Clive Purdy to that list and thereby acknowledge him as yet another especial Knight who I believe has given distinguished service to the Province and likewise is undoubtedly a dedicated member of this Degree.

I am pleased to confirm that our numbers have remained stable and compare favourably with both individual and multiple memberships in the Province about the same as last year. Once again it is pleasing to report that virtually all our Preceptories have seen a satisfactory number of new candidates which when we look at some other aspects of membership in Freemasonry is a good result in the current climate ; and there are still a number of candidates awaiting to be installed due to the current suspension of all Masonic activity.

Brother Knights of Essex, the disruption to our previously normal daily existence and way of life that we have had to endure over the last few months ; and which it seems will continue for some time to come ; will one day end and hopefully in due time will become a distant memory. Therefore, let us take comfort in, coupled with the support of, our Christian Faith and as I write these final words in the days following VE Day last Friday may we also be fortunate enough to receive a deliverance from the Coronavirus Pandemic that has so affected us all on a worldwide basis. Let us take heart from the words of a song that once was so popular all those years ago and has fired all our imaginations once more in these difficult days : *“Well meet again, Don't know where, Don't know when, But I know we'll meet again some sunny day”*

May God be with each and everyone of you, as well as with your families, and bless you all in your endeavours over the next twelve months.

A.J.H., 14th May 2020.