

Most Eminent and Supreme Grand Master, Right Eminent Knights, Very Eminent Knights, Distinguished Visitors and Brother Knights of Essex

Brother Knights, It was exactly three years ago this week that I was last standing here and was able to welcome visitors and distinguished guests from not only other Provinces but also Great Priory. Little did we realise then that events that took place thousands of miles away on another continent would affect our lives in such a traumatic as well as a life threatening manner, just after the dawning of a new year in 2020. So today I hope we can celebrate once again a re-awakening of the bonds of fraternal friendship that so epitomise our beliefs and unite us all in the precepts of this Degree as once again we meet at our Annual May Meeting.

Those of you who have previously attended our meetings know that it is my custom at this time to give a summary of what has been happening within the Province, often behind the scenes, in the previous six months. So this is my latest update.

Although for much of the last two years, Freemasonry in general has suffered from periods of inactivity by the disruption of what can be best described as a physical "face to face" contact ; the members of the KT Executive in Essex undertook a number of projects ; some of which we believe have been not only to the enjoyment of our members but also to the benefit of our charitable endeavours, whilst others being unveiled and or displayed today will be to the enhancement of our future Provincial meetings.

In September 1930 Essex was consecrated as a separate sovereign entity and so as 2020 approach it was decided that we would celebrate the 90th Anniversary of that fact. Some might say that notable anniversaries are only usually celebrated on 25th, 50th,

75th or centenary occasions or multiples thereof. I'm enough of a realist, especially so at my age, to believe that to wait until 2030 was not an option, that I or others of us perhaps might envisage or contemplate seeing.

As for many, many years we have always had to borrow, from one of the Preceptories within the Province, an Altar Cloth for our Annual gathering it was decided to have a purpose one actually made. Thus today we are able to see that new **Altar Cloth**, unveiled for the first time, which also celebrates that 90th Anniversary. Likewise, there has also been purchased a dedicated Altar Table to support the Cloth, as well as a new Crucifix, Candle Sticks and Vases together with another Crucifix for the Sepulchre as seen here today. All these items have been sourced by Roger Smith after an extensive search. At some time in the future there will be a Dedication Ceremony to formally celebrate the occasion.

The other events that had been scheduled for the 2020 anniversary finally took place in 2021. As I announced last October the **Medieval Banquet** with 50 Knights attending was a great success, as was the **Celebration Dinner** that took place in **November at Hutton**, where many knights entertained their wives or partners to an enjoyable evening with musical entertainment. The profits from both these events, together with those from our **Essex Knights Templar History** hard-back cover books, as promised, will be donated to the Eye Hospital at Jerusalem. Likewise, the projected profits from the soft-cover copies together with those from the 90th Anniversary engraved Glasses and Glass Coasters, incorporating our Provincial Crest, will also be donated to that worthy cause.

Although technically not part of the Anniversary Celebrations the **Annual Church Service** held last year was likewise a great success after an absence of two years with over one hundred gathered in the Church and around 90 afterwards at Howard Hall for the afternoon tea that followed.

Many would say it has been a bumpy ride since the pandemic first struck, and I think we all now accept that the effects of Covid-19 will continue for years to come. Just a week ago I received my fourth injection - a so called "booster" jab. I now understand having read a newspaper article that having a fourth jab makes my immunity level one of the highest in the population. I cannot wait therefore to receive my fifth and sixth "booster jabs" in the near future!!! Maybe then I will be around to celebrate that next "big" anniversary event in 2030 ???

Our monthly meetings of the **Preceptory of Improvement** commenced last September and it is pleasing to see that once again numbers attending have gradually increased to those experienced before the Pandemic struck. The P of I is so important to the lifeblood of our Order in Essex as new knights not only learn the correct way to handle a sword, but as well an understanding not only the ritual but the importance of the meaning of what the ceremony itself conveys and hopefully instils in every new candidate. It is very gratifying to see that many newly installed knights are attending our Sunday morning P of I meetings within a few weeks of becoming members. It is important that senior members in each Preceptory encourage new knights to attend as they are the lifeblood of the future of not only a particular Preceptory but the Order in general.

Today sees the retirement of our Provincial Marshal Peter Hickford. During the last couple of years Peter has suffered greatly with mobility problems due to his having to wait for a hip replacement. After a number of delays he was finally able to have the operation just four weeks ago today and was discharged during that same pre-Easter bank holiday Thursday evening. During his recuperation since then he has helped our new Marshal, assisted by the Sub-Prior, to plan for today's meeting. His input has been greatly appreciated by us all and although he cannot be here today ; due to the rigorous regime he must follow to aid his recovery ; his commitment to the task has been second to none. Eight years ago Peter became the Deputy Commander of the Bodyguard and since then his commitment to the P of I and the other high Provincial offices he has held, together with his commitment to various Preceptories, I felt deserved recognition. As he had already been recognised with a Great Priory rank I was therefore pleased when he accepted a promotion within Essex to Past First Constable today.

Pre-Covid our membership stood at around 510 individual Swords. Since then following on from the resumption of Masonic activities we have had 22 new knights admitted with 4 Joiners from other Provinces. As you heard earlier sadly a number of knights have died and we have experienced some resignations, mainly due to health or financial reasons. However, there are currently 28 further applicants awaiting to be installed as knights. This will mean that inspite of all the difficulties linked to the Pandemic within the next few months our total membership at around 530 individuals will be even greater than it was at the start of 2020. If memberships in Essex 441, the Bodyguard Preceptory and similar dual and triple memberships are included there will be over 700 multiple swords in our Order within Essex.

Next week at the Annual Meeting of Great Priory Eminent Knights Terry Sheern, Brian Foulkes and Brian Wright will receive a first appointment to a past rank whilst Stephen Smith will become an active officer for the ensuing year as the Great Chamberlain. Congratulations to them all and the continuing work they do on behalf of our Province within their individual Preceptories.

Brother Knights of Essex, please remember that any items of interest that occur within your Preceptories should be forwarded to our Vice-Chancellor so that they can be put onto and viewed on our Provincial Website, especially so if accompanied by a photograph or two to complement the event. Some already currently being displayed have also been forwarded for inclusion on Mark Masons' Hall's own Freemasonry News@86 weekly communication in the past.

All these aspects that impact upon our Knight Templar existence in so many different ways show what a rich heritage we have and thus are able to bring into our daily lives a sense of fulfilment which hopefully enrich our daily commitment both Masonically as well as in a personal way.

However, I would just endorse and re-iterate one very important point that I have emphasised on previous occasions that *"nobody should feel compelled or pressurised to resume attending Masonic meetings until he feels that the time and circumstances are right for him"*. Therefore as I said before it is up to every individual to decide whether or not they will attend a meeting.

Finally, may God bless you all and as importantly every individual member of your own families. Stay safe, stay well and most especially be very careful and let us all continue to use our

common sense in the coming months.

AJH

12th May 2022.