



## **PROVINCIAL GRAND SUPREME RULER OF CHESHIRE & NORTH WALES**

*The First Two weeks - a personal reflection*

Having spent two years as Provincial Grand Visitor, two years as Provincial Grand Guide, followed by one year as Provincial Grand Counsellor then five years as Deputy Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler, I didn't expect much to change, but I was wrong!

When I was appointed Deputy, one of my new colleagues said to me that it was the best job in Freemasonry; the Deputy got all of the fun whilst the Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler had all of the pressure.

I approached my new position with apprehension.

The members of the Province that I spoke to all said they would support me, but I was taking over a Province not really in the best of health. We were just coming out of the worst two years we had all ever faced, and whilst the pandemic hadn't affected the membership as much as we had originally feared, the consequences were now starting to bite, with losses, both permanent and medical, plus an underlying fear for some members with a reluctance to return.

At my Investiture, I announced that my immediate target was to consolidate what we had, to make sure that our fourteen Conclaves built on what remained and grew in strength in the coming months.

My focus was happy gatherings, based on the concept that if we enjoyed our meetings, that enjoyment would spread into our other Masonic activities, up to a point where our Masonic colleagues would begin to question the

source of our developing enjoyment in Freemasonry, eventually leading to increased membership.

And so it began.

Day one, the day following my Investiture, was a morning meeting of Carreg yr Wyddfa Conclave No 633 in Bangor. Just the third meeting of the Conclave in the far western boundary of the Province. My lift, from a Right Worthy Brother, collected me at 8:30 in his electric vehicle, having calculated that it would cost less than £2 to take us there and back.

We arrived in plenty of time to hear the first challenge of the day, the Supreme Ruler had been struck down with a bad chest infection, which prevented attendance.



My new Deputy, in his first appearance, volunteered to take the Chair, and delivered a wonderful Induction ceremony. Of course, unable to sit quiet on the sidelines, I explained the Weapons of the Order to our newest member, and presented him with a tie of the Order. The absolute delight was our newest member was born in 1997, making him just under 25, and undoubtedly lowering the average age of the Province quite significantly.

I was delighted to be accompanied by 17 other members of the Province who were not hung-over after our meeting 24 hours previous. Our newest Conclave continues to grow local strength, thereby assuring its future.

Day two, Conclave two, another trip to Wales to visit Maen Achwyfan Conclave No 514, our second-newest Conclave, to welcome the Grand Visitor.

Another Induction, and one this time I wasn't involved in. However, delighted that the Grand Visitor offered to deliver the Address to the Candidate, in an excellent manner.

Another well-attended meeting with 18 other members.

This job is starting to grow on me. I'm having fun.



Next comes a weekend off. Chance to catch up on some correspondence and reflect on the last 3 days.

Monday brings a diversion. A Provincial Team Visit in the Scarlet Cord to Mercia Consistory No 72 in Macclesfield. I am the Provincial Director of Ceremonies, and also acted as the Consistory Director of Ceremonies for one First Grade and and four Second Grades.

Another highly enjoyable evening, and with it being a team visit, lots of members of my Province present as well.

Tuesday, is it only day three? Back to work properly this time as it's my mother Conclave, Norton Priory Conclave No 226 meeting in Runcorn, where I am Secretary.

We were scheduled to have two candidates for Induction, but one tested positive for COVID on Sunday, so just the one.

Another excellent ceremony; another visitor from outside of the Province and a prospective joiner, another well-attended meeting with 18 members from across the Province.

The best part of the evening was when, as Secretary, I reported on various communication, and expressed concern about how difficult it was to perform as Secretary and PGSR, and received a volunteer to take on the role of Secretary from the Installation.

I'm really having fun now!

Five days break. No Masonic meetings, just time to catch up on correspondence and work, and reflect on the journey to date.

One week in the job.

Three Conclave meetings.

Three new members.

Perhaps it is working.

The following Monday brings another morning trip to Wales, this time to visit Dewi Sant Conclave No 457 for an Installation.

I had delegated the Commission to my Deputy, and I was only really going to support him and because it was another Conclave I wanted to visit in my new capacity.

Plus, our new Hall Manager at Runcorn wanted to travel to other Masonic Halls to see how they operate. This represented an ideal opportunity to visit Elwy Hall, as Dewi Sant were inviting Ladies to Lunch.



My now Provincial Chauffeur collected me 9:00 and we had a good journey into Wales, leaving in the rain and arriving in the sun.

I had been in contact with the Secretary the previous evening, who was decrying the absence of the Director of Ceremonies due to COVID. I offered, as I wouldn't have him or the Conclave struggle on such an important occasion. He apologised the following day, as he'd felt guilty allowing me to do it, but I'm all for getting stuck in and enjoying myself.

An excellent and well-attended ceremony, witnessed by 19 members of the



Province, with many being involved in the ceremony.

The Festive Board luncheon was boosted by 14 ladies and three future candidates, and an highly delightful 8 course menu was enjoyed by all, especially the liquid courses! Having left home at 9:00 am, I felt that returning home just before 7:00 pm, an ten-hour meeting represented a rather long though enjoyable day. I'm just glad I wasn't driving.

Meeting five, a trip to the Provincial 'home' at Chester, for a meeting of Christleton Conclave No 504.

This would be a difficult one. At their previous meeting they had put forward a notice of Motion to suspend their warrant due to falling membership and attendance. I had been at that meeting and expressed a desire that between us we could address the situation. My predecessor had closed his reign by the consecration of a new Conclave, and I didn't want to start mine by closing one. I had worked with them to try to address the situation, but the item still needed to appear on the summons.

The meeting started well, with the Supreme Ruler and Counsellor stuck in a traffic jam on the M56 car park, resulting from a three-car pile up.

Fortunately, a 'willing' volunteer in the shape of our Provincial Grand Recorder stepped forward and offered to take the Chair in what he thought would be the interim. As it turns out, it was for the entirety of the Princes Ceremony, and what an excellent job he did.

The Conclave had offered to host two Princes ceremonies on behalf of Carreg yr Wyddfa Conclave, and between the officers of the two Conclaves and visitors a wonderful ceremony was performed, a fact endorsed by the

candidates standing during the greetings to thank everyone who partook, stating how much they had enjoyed the ceremony.

The Supreme Ruler arrived just before the end of the ceremony, and was invited to take his seat once it was concluded.

He was then able to conduct the business, including dealing with the agenda motion, which was withdrawn due to applications received from five joining members and two candidates. An absolutely wonderful result.

Enthusiasm for the Conclave's future was clearly demonstrated by the attendance of 27 Brethren from across the Province.

So, two weeks in.

Five Conclaves attended, each with a well-above average attendance.

Now sitting on the 'side-lines', delivered the Weapons three times and the Lecture once.

Three new members.

One new Supreme Ruler, with a further three new members to bring in.

One saved Conclave, enhanced by five joining members and two new members for their next meeting.

It all seems to be going rather well!

The Order of the Secret Monitor is a wonderful Order, and the members of the Province of Cheshire and North Wales are gathering around to ensure that each meeting is a happy and joyous occasion.

We seem to be achieving my early target, and I am riding on a wave of euphoria.

Sadly, we now have a domestic break until September, when I look forward to it all starting over again.

I will, of course, be visiting other Provinces in the interim.

Tony Stringer  
Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler  
Cheshire & North Wales  
Order of the Secret Monitor

30 June 2022