

Brethren

Thank you all for attending, taking time out from your busy schedules and supporting this special meeting.

The Annual Meeting is an occasion when we celebrate the successes of the year past and look forward with positivity and excitement to the year ahead.

Firstly, I would like to thank Worthy Brother Paul and his wife, Margaret, for their help and support over the last three years. Your support has been invaluable, and I'm sure the members of the Province will join me in thanking you.

I would also like to thank Andy for accepting the role, and I look forward to driving the Province forward with you.

Brethren, this year has been a very positive year, and I'm now sure the hangover from Covid has finally gone.

This year, we have gained 20 new members through Inductions and Joiners, and I make that an overall increase of unique members of seven, in spite of some of our sad losses.

We continue to find some excellent candidates, which gives the Order and the Province a positive and optimistic future.

One of the highlights of the year was the reintroduction of the Friendship Meetings, and the one held at Wrexham was the culmination of a lot of hard work by many of the Provincial Officers and members, resulting in a membership attendance from across the Province of 24, who accompanied 14 non-OSM members.

Every one of them provided very strong feedback, and the evening has already resulted in two new members, with certainly more to follow.

We have a couple more events planned for the year ahead, and I look forward to your support once the details are released.

We had 42 Conclave meetings during the year, with an overall average attendance at meetings of just over 20, which, again, is a fantastic average, and better than many Craft Lodges.

The best attended meeting was last July, when we had a second degree ceremony in this very Temple, when 21 visitors joined the 13 members to put on an excellent display for three new Princes.

Average membership attendance in all Conclaves has grown to 70% of members, which is a delightful statistic, demonstrating that our members want to attend their own meetings when they are able.

The reason for non-attendance as reported by the Visiting Deacons has significantly reduced the 'Other Masonic Business' excuse, which did upset me as it shows the member has a greater priority than us, albeit understandable for some.

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.

Attendance at our Conclave meetings by visitor numbers frequently matches or exceeds the attendance of members, making for a friendly and enjoyable atmosphere, so everyone looks forward to the next meeting with anticipation and 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.

We've had a little reshuffle in the attendance stakes this year.

Worthy Brother Trevor Simcock finished second to me, with 29 out of a possible 42 meetings attended, closely followed by Worthy Brother David Ainsworth, our Assistant Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies, and Alan Harrison, our Provincial Grand Recorder, attending 28, and Graham Kirby, Provincial Grand Visitor, scoring 27. Alan, as neither Trevor nor David are with us this morning, that puts you at the top of the list for the year. Thank you for your enthusiastic support.

Another highlight of the year was the fiftieth celebration of Semper Fidelis Conclave, No. 50, when Worthy Brother Bill Caren put in a tremendous amount of work to create an in-depth history of the Conclave, and it was a great honour for me to be invited by the Supreme Ruler to present an extract of the history and join in the celebrations.

Another aspect of the Province that is growing is my Arch of Steel. Worthy Brother Philip Rose and Brother David Ginger, the Commander and Deputy Commander, are doing a sterling job in recruiting new members to the Arch, and I'm hoping that, one day, I will feel safe in their presence!

We again supported two small charities this year:

Your Space (Marches) in Wrexham, a small charity supporting children with autism, and it was a delight to learn, yesterday, that the founder, Rachel Hancocks, received an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours list;

and Save the Family, another small charity providing help and support for homeless families who have multiple and complex needs.

It was a delight to visit both of these charities and present them with £2,500 each, thanks to your generous support, details of which can be found on our display board.

Our fundraising continues to be boosted by our annual Balloon Race, organised by Worthy Brother Barrie Billinge, our Provincial Grand Guarder, last year raising £1,000.

The virtual balloons will be launched on 5th October and will finish on 12 October, when the results will be announced at the Sunday Lunch. Everyone has an entry form in your welcome pack, so please give your entry and cash to Barrie during today.

This year, the two nominations, again both small charities, are:

The Children's Adventure Farm Trust, nominated by Verney Clayton Conclave No 45, which is a charity based in Altrincham that provides trips, residential breaks and seasonal activities for children across the North West,

and

Leeswood Under Fives Playgroup, nominated by Maen Achwyfan Conclave No 514, which is a small pre-school playgroup where one of our members has a family connection, and they actually promote the use of the Welsh language.

The final person for me to thank at this time is the one who continues to contribute a vast amount of 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.

I trust that the Almighty Friend of all Friends grants us all the health and strength to continue to enjoy our Freemasonry, especially within the Order of the Secret Monitor.

Thank you.