

PROVINCIAL GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Thursday 11 May 2017

REPORT OF PROVINCIAL COMMUNICATION OFFICER

Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master and Brethren. I am pleased to submit my report for 2016/2017.

The celebrations to mark the Tercentenary of the United Grand Lodge of England has, understandably, dominated much of the output from UGLE's Director of Communications, W.Bro. Michael Baker and the Communications Advisor and Editorial Manager of *Freemasonry Today*, W.Bro. Susan Henderson. Provincial Communication Officers have received a steady (almost daily) flow of information about high profile events to raise public and media awareness of Freemasonry, our core values and how we not only support charities at home but offer immediate financial aid when national and international emergencies arise.

In turn our own Provincial Grand Master, R.W. Bro. Stephen Allen has been instrumental in arranging and coordinating a whole of series of events bringing together Norfolk masons, their families and friends to mark this unique year.

Inside The Freemasons

This five part documentary series shown on Sky 1 (Ch106) during April/May 2017, has attracted considerable national press and media attention. The decision to allow television cameras to film some of our proceedings including a meeting of Grand Lodge and the installation of the Provincial Grand Master for Bedfordshire was welcomed as further evidence of freemasonry's openness contrary to the belief of some that we are still a "secret society".

For those who missed some or all of the programmes or do not have Sky there will be a DVD box set available to purchase later this year.

2017 Highlights

Nationally, UGLE's celebration of 300 years will culminate with the special meeting of Grand Lodge in the Royal Albert Hall on 31 October, followed by a dinner presided over by the Grand Master, HRH The Duke of Kent at the Battersea Evolution.

Norfolk's Grand Tercentenary Black Tie Ball will be held at the Holiday Inn, Norwich Airport on Saturday 4 November. It is open to non-masonic friends and family and will be another sell-out event.

The service of celebration and thanksgiving to be held in Norwich Cathedral at 3:30 pm on Saturday 24 June, over which the Bishop of Norwich will preside, is expected to attract masons from across Norfolk and fill the Cathedral.

Inviting numerous Norfolk based charities to join the Provincial Fun Day and Teddy Bear's Picnic ("Teddies for Sick Children") at Wymondham Rugby Club on Sunday 2 July is bound to prove even more popular this year.

The Exhibition of Freemasonry in Norwich and Norfolk over the past 300 years being staged at the Museum of Norwich in Bridewell Alley, Norwich will be open every Tuesday and Saturday until the 22 July.

Facebook – Norfolk Masons Private Group

As mentioned in previous reports social media is very much part of everyday life for many people including masons of all ages. Membership of the Norfolk Masons Private Group on Facebook is growing daily and now has well over 700 members. Credit must go to W.Bro. Victor Ling for helping set this up and moderate postings as well as to those brethren who regularly contribute pictures and accounts of meetings. It's free to join and offers an excellent way of welcoming new masons and sharing our enjoyment of visiting different lodges.

Twitter, the other main social media platform, is something the Provincial Media Group, under the chairmanship of Deputy Provincial Grand Master, V. W.Bro. Charles Hall, is keeping under review. As the present time it is felt the Province has sufficient electronic as well as traditional means of communicating information both internally and to the press and public.

Provincial Grand Lodge Website

Work on refreshing and updating of the Provincial Website continues under the leadership of W.Bro. Steve Norris. The home page is now more attractively laid out and provides both visitors and brethren with a wealth of information about Freemasonry, how to join, what we do and where we meet.

It is important that secretaries periodically check the names and contact details of officers displayed on their Lodge pages and notify W.Bro. Norris of any changes.

The New Ashlar

Despite the growth in digital information there are many brethren, myself included, who still appreciate receiving printed magazines. As most brethren know our long established and well respected bi-annual journal *The New Ashlar* now has a new editor in W.Bro. Richard Pryor who has given it a fresh look with more emphasis on picture based content.

W.Bro. Richard's appearance at many Provincial events with his camera has resulted in him being invited to cover more lodge presentations and anniversaries which in turn is increasing the publicity they receive. Like most print publications space is limited but an interesting story coupled with some high resolution pictures stand a much better chance of being included.

Press and Media Coverage

The Provincial Grand Master's encouragement to lodges across the Province to come together in masonic centres to present donations to their chosen local charities and invite representatives to attend open days is proving very successful. Local press coverage has increased and many of the charities have acknowledged the help received on their own websites and in newsletters and magazines.

The Archant Group (Eastern Daily Press/Mustard TV) news editors are regularly supplied with articles and photographs of Provincial events alongside the press releases and e-links issued by Grand Lodge and the Masonic Charitable Foundation. In addition some of our more unusual stories have appeared in *Freemasonry Today*.

Lodge Communication Officer

The welcome involvement of more brethren helping to publicise donations and fund raising activities has led me to suggest that lodges might like to consider appointing their own Lodge Communication Officer. It could be the Secretary, Director of Ceremonies, Charity Steward or an experienced Past Master willing to act as a single point of contact for gathering newsworthy stories and posting these on the Norfolk Masons page on Facebook. They can also be shared with the local press when it is appropriate to do so.

Help and advice is always available when in contact with the press or broadcasters from the Provincial Grand Secretary or myself.

Alan Fairchild MBE, PJGD
Provincial Communication Officer