

R.W. Provincial Grand Master, Grand Officers, brethren, all.

I bid you all a warm welcome to this Mess night.

However, what, you might ask, is the Mess night? Well, it's a wonderful tradition that allows us to come together and share in an important part of our heritage as Essex Mark Master Masons. Well it's a pottage of part ribaldry, with a little bit of dare thrown in, with heaps of humour, the sombre remembrance of absent brethren and left to simmer!

As some of you are aware I was surprised to find myself being in this position for this evening, I was equally surprised that I was asked to pay for my meal, they tell me Masonry is "free", which brings me onto another subject.

As most of you know, I supported three Provincial Secretaries during my period of office as the Prov. Asst. G. Secretary, and when I looked on today's dining list, I was surprised to see how many brethren I have got to know over the years, some of whom have become good friends and others, of course, I have learned to tolerate!

I was also somewhat surprised when the PGM said at the last Installed Mark Masters meeting that he wanted to have a word with me after the meeting. My my initial thoughts were, what have I done wrong? Is Tony Goater stepping down and will I be asked to step up or was I in for a severe lecture for getting Michael Spencer's starter wrong at the festive board! Well, nothing was not further from the truth, he asked me to become the Provincial G. Junior Warden which left me speechless (for once!) for was this was either a promotion to get me out of the way for doing a bad job, or thanking me for the work I had done for the Province over a number of years. Thankfully, I shall believe it was the latter!

So, after a short recovery period, I thanked him and the executive for the consideration they have shown to me and that would have no hesitation in accepting this office in the Province. After a couple of weeks I started to realise that I would have to write a president's speech for this function which is not my natural comfort zone brethren, and, having been to many such meetings, and listening to my predecessors where most referred to the qualities and history, and rightly so, of our Provincial Grand Master throughout his career from riding the cruel sea in the "Cod War" when he was on Royal Naval duty, to catching criminals whilst working in the police force, and then moving up the ranks in Mark Masonry. Well, I felt that enough hot air had been blown previously so I made my mind up to enlighten you of some of the items which have occurred during my years of office as the Provincial Asst.G. Sec. So, although I have assisted three Provincial Secretaries, the constant in all this was Tony Goater who was always there to mull over issues and made the work very rewarding, even though "some" of the Lodge Secretaries were difficult to move in the right direction. Being an Active Provincial officer you will also be part of the PGM's team when visiting Lodges which supports those Lodges where numbers might otherwise be low and on many occasions the Provincial Officers have outnumbered the regular incumbents, and we have all been to those meetings where you are posed with the question, "would you mind standing in as the..... Or there is a spare overseers seat free!"

This has made many meetings most beneficial to the Lodge atmosphere, especially when there was a candidate for Advancement , and also assisted in raising a few extra coppers for the Lodge's treasury.

In getting the Provincial Officers to confirm attendance at PGM meetings along with any special dietary requirements they wish to make, has been trying at times but, to get money from them for their meals, heaven forbid you would think I was trying to rob their piggy banks! However, as I look out there tonight brethren, I think it was more like your pension funds! Still, all in all, it was very enjoyable work and, as I said before, I have made many new and good friends.

So, Terry, your gastronomic delights and choice of menus have sometimes baffled us, but on occasions when you have visited the Northern Star Lodge you are the only one who has fried bread and on the occasions when you are not in attendance I am always bombarded with "can I have the PGM fried bread" but please come again soon as I can promise you your fried bread will be waiting!

Your attention to the left over chocolates which accompany the coffee after the meal, has also been noted as you always say, "if any brother does not want their chocolate (to be fair, even if they do!) please give them to me". Your luck for winning raffle prizes is also noted and taking home on many occasions boxes of Quality Street chocolates, on the pretence that you are taking them "home for your wife". I do wonder how many of the chocolates actually arrive at their intended destination. So please brother secretaries, to ensure we keep our P.G.M. in good condition don't let him win any more chocolates.

These days he prefers Vodka!

Sir, you have also on occasions viewed the deserts as some gastronomic delight, and when we were at St Katherines Lodge in March this year you attempted to consume 3 portions of apple pudding and custard, I do not know where you put it.

I have accompanied you to many Lodges throughout the last five years as the Asst. Sec. and have sometimes wondered if I have walked into a Charles Dickens story, particularly Oliver Twist or, as I put it, walking into Fagin's Den with his band of Pocket Pickers!

We had "Mr. Bumble" (Alias Mick West) who, in the story, you may remember as the person who keeps everyone in order before, during and after the meeting and in the Dining Hall. Where, as Mick tries to coerce all the Provincial officers to comply with his commands, move in file, sit in the right seats, in order to get a slick and co-ordinated meeting, with the occasional cry of "be quiet" when we are waiting to go into the temple. Well it did work sometimes and he never did threaten to exclude second helpings

We are then followed by Bill Sykes, alias Peter Steel, who with his broad shoulder physique gently sidled up to you and asks "do you wanna buy a bonus ball?" and, having convinced you on the merits of having one, (only £10.00 a go) ,even though you may have already bought a ticket he insists that "two are better than one!". I think he got that slogan from Aldi, unfortunately a Tesco BOGOF was never mooted!

A little later we may be confronted by the Artful Dodger, alias Peter Maloney, who ends up on your shoulder surreptitiously and presents you with the latest jewel from Kent, Surrey, Lincolnshire or whatever is in vogue at the time whilst rubbing his hands saying “only £10.00.each!”, when, if you “politely” remind him that you have already got one, he insists that “having another one” would stop you from switching your jewel from one jacket to another! Don't tell him I have 3 jackets!. Still he is worth tapping up for a mint during the meetings.

Now, what about Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin, these were the good characters the story and are represented by Richard Goodwin and Steve Joslin (I will let you decide which of those is Mrs. Bedwin) they also convince you that you should be supporting Rory the Lion being the 2030 Festival Mascot, by the way if any brother would like one I have several to give away at just £8.00 each! They then continue with the new 2030 Mark coin and don't forget the 2030 Commemorative Festival Banner of members' Marks, (only £10.00 a shot each!), plus all the latest initiatives in support of our 2030 Festival.

Then, last but not least, there is Fagin himself! Or, as we say, R.W.Bro. Terry Sheern, who is co-ordinating his band of pick pocketers and, whilst eagerly awaiting the results of the nights work, he convinces me he is not on commission when flogging me the (just!) £100 2030 Festival Jewel. Have I been robbed, pocket picked or what?.

They did say masonry was free! Then, and more to the point, where is Nancy??
Some say she moved to Lincolnshire!!

By the way, I have also heard a rumour that Fagin will be taking to the skies next year on top of a plane in order to get a better view of those brethren who have been missed by his crew of pocket pickers so be aware brethren they are coming

Talk about a change in the times, Fagin has now gone upmarket by employing an advertising executive in Mr. Grimwig who's essentially good-hearted, and as a character helpful if a little slow, this of course must be Dave Todd who will garner from your pockets additional shekels, by advertising several forthcoming social events in aid of the 2030 Festival and to ensure you are fully up to date with the events in the Province. Of course Dave has lots of time on his hands to think up the advertisements, whilst travelling around the country in his oversized Mercedes Benz mobile office. So, look out brethren, for the next exciting episodes in his (thankfully spell checked and edited) bulletins.

By the way, after all this you may be asking “who is Oliver?”, well of course he is represented by the rest of you who have not yet succumbed to Terry's pocket pickers! On the way home, after having been relieved of many shekels during the evening, my mind turns towards the show “Fiddler on the Roof” where Topol sings “if I was a rich man”, which makes me aware that all my departed shekels have gone to good causes. and would give more if I could. I have mentioned just a few of the team who are working hard to get your money and we should say that a big thank to all those brethren who spend a lot of their time in promoting all the activities and especially the 2030 Festival which we hope to be a

huge success for the Province and make the Mark Masters of Essex the Premier Mark Province, so brethren, I ask for a round of applause in recognition for their efforts.

Terry, having accompanied you as part of your Official Provincial team to many Lodges I always felt slightly embarrassed that when you address the W.M you always borrow his gavel, so I thought if you had your own gavel you could politely refuse and say "that's all right as I have brought my own!". So, I should like to present you with this gavel, so that on future occasions you may rest assured that this embarrassment would not happen again.

On non-masonic occasions you may use it to tenderise steak or even smash your nuts at Christmas time, or at any other time you may feel the need, or simply add this base, put it onto your desk at home and use it as a mobile phone stand. The gavel was made by me with wood given to me by Rodney Bass from the acacia tree in his garden. The supporting base has been made from oak from a redundant Master's Pedestal which stood in the Tollesbury Masonic Hall since 1966 so both already have some history.

I did say at the beginning of this speech that I would not make any further reference to your Navy career but, in light of a recent outing at the Essex Armed Forces Lodge, Robert Needham and myself noticed you were supporting a rather crude manifestation of a military war medal, a piece of paper depicting a Cod attached by a safety pin, so Bob sought out and created a better example which I would like to present to you today. In view of your Cod War service. which was not recognised in the normal way, the medal depicts a die cast silver coloured Cod attached to a ribbon which you can show off with pride when you next visit a Military Lodge.

And lastly, on another occasion, whilst waiting for Mr Bumble to call us into the Temple to take photographs, you asked if anyone had a mint and I was the only one to indicate that I had one, as it was the last mint in my pocket I looked at you, you looked at me, I looked at you again, and when you looked at me in a most disarming way, I capitulated and gave you my last mint. So, in order that you have a plentiful stock of mints for future meetings, please accept this small supply so that when I have forgotten to bring mine I can ask you for one of yours without any compunction.

Thank you brethren for your kind appreciation and can I ask you to raise your glasses for a immense and stupendous toast to Fagin sorry I mean R.W. Bro. Terence Sheern, Provincial Grand Master!