

OCCASIONAL REPORT FROM THE DEPUTY GRAND MASTER

Dear Respected Brethren,

In this newsletter I wish to keep you abreast of some of the projects currently underway within the fraternity, and which by necessity is most important that you are fully aware.

GRAND MASTER'S MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

For the first time in years our membership is growing! We are on the cusp of a 5% increase – unheard of anywhere in Australia. It has not just happened but it is the result of a sustained effort by the Membership Committee – group of talented men who have marketed Freemasonry to the wider community using various medium, including the enhanced web-page, Facebook, radio ads on Cruise 1323, and publicity via the great work by Masonic Charities.

While most of the new applicants have been drawn from the city, there have been some from country areas and hopefully the new buses provided to the Riverland and to Port Lincoln will contribute to more enquiries from young men. I understand the Port Lincoln bus is currently in Adelaide being fitted out and embellished with our emblems and signs.



GRANDVIEW MEMBERSHIP DATABASE

After considerable research and investigation Grand Lodge has introduced an American membership database known as 'Grandview', which will transform the way lodges undertake much of the tedious bookwork – moving away from 'pen and quill' to a fully automated system. Lodge secretaries will update the membership data of their respective lodges, input lodge reports and a myriad of other opportunities which will enhance our operations and bring the fraternity into modern day operations. This will be complemented by the installation of a new telephone system at Grand Lodge this month, which will be a great step forward in the work to further improve our office management. The new system will also incorporate the other Orders – Mark, Mariners and Chapter and training for the new system will begin soon. Additionally, Freemasons Hall is currently being connected to the 'Ten Gigabit Adelaide' revolutionary high-performance fibre optic data network which will enable GL and tenants to share and receive high volumes of data at phenomenal high speed.

STREAMLINING OUR RITUALS VIDE COVID RESTRICTIONS

The Rituals and Procedures Committee has undertaken the long task of interrogating our rituals to enable degree work and installation ceremonies to occur within the COVID stipulations. It is possible with some agility and thought and to follow the guidelines which have been distributed to happily conduct our ceremonies. While we cannot shake hands for example, I do not consider that the transmission of that ancient symbol of our teachings is vitally crucial to our way of life. I ask you – when was the last time you needed to test whether a man was indeed a brother, by the handshake. It is the spirit of the meaning and understanding of our ceremonies which are the prime importance. Over the last two Sundays the GL Ceremonial Team has been rehearsing Installation ceremonies to be ready for the forthcoming batch – and despite COVID restrictions, ways and means have been found to perform the ceremony quite adequately and smoothly.

OVERHAUL OF THE REGULATIONS

Over time the Regulations of our fraternity have been amended piecemeal and as a result now embrace corporate as well as the guidelines for lodge administration into what is a rather unwieldy document. It is also undertaking the objective of the Grand Master to enable postal/electronic voting of major decisions which will enable the entire membership to participate in the decision-making rather than say the 70 members who physically attend a Communication – and for the first time enable country brethren to participate.

The Regulations Review Committee is well advanced in its review and will bring to the April 2021 Grand Communication a raft of amendments which again will advance our management towards modern corporate management to which we should all aspire. While our organisation is the most ancient of men's fraternities, we should not manage it in an arcane manner or abiding by outmoded management processes.

RECEPTION FOR SIR ERIC NEAL

On Friday last I was present with the Grand Master and others to welcome Sir Eric Neal to the Grand Master's suite to honour a highly distinguished Freemason and to recognise his 75 years' service to our Craft. Sir Eric was accompanied by his son WB Peter and recalled the various lodges he joined over the years in SA and interstate. He is of course a former Governor of our State, former chairman of Westpac and Boral and rightly considered one of South Australia's greatest 'sons' and a Captain of Industry. Following the reception Sir Eric was taken to a recording studio where he participated in a Podcast concerning his life as a Freemason and what Freemasonry meant to him. The Podcast will be linked to the GL website, Facebook Page and on to YouTube. It is expected that the Podcast will be the first of many interviews of prominent Freemasons, and as such is part of the current programme to 'take the light from under the bushel'.

CAFÉ TO OPEN AT GRAND LODGE

Given the extraordinary work undertaken to restore our Craft to financial stability and to 'break even' after many years of rolling deficits, the body blow of COVID has been very damaging owing to the inability to hire out the Freemasons Hall. In order to compensate for this unfortunate circumstance a café is about to open in the basement area. A well known and successful entrepreneur Greg Hobby is about to open the café and it will be complemented with a second-hand bookshop in the same area of the basement.

LIVENING OF LODGE MEETINGS

With the influx of record levels of new brethren entering our membership, it is crucial that we do everything in our power to make sure these new brethren gain a positive experience within the Lodge. This is characterised by collegiality and an aura of joy and happiness abounding. Cast aside all matters of negativity and make sure you always embrace the principles and tenets contained within our little blue book. And whether it is the first, second or third degree, make sure explanations are extended either during or after the delivery of set pieces of ritual. Don't follow the old way of rapidly delivering ritual so that the poor candidate stands there on the floor of the Lodge wondering what he has got himself into! We must make sure our meetings are interesting and not lose new members after a year

or so as so often happens. Another suggestion used by some lodges is to have the Entered Apprentice give a presentation on a simple matter associated with something from the ceremony soon after his initiation.

MULTI-FAITH MEETING

In an endeavour to reach out to men of other faiths, several meetings have recently been held with representatives of the Jewish, Muslim, Bahai, and other groups under the All Faiths Association of SA in the hope that by building relationships with these groups a better understanding of Freemasonry will take place and lead to more interest from adherents to those faiths. It is worth noting that Australia is now home to a wide range of nationalities and we can no longer claim to be Anglo-Australian as we were from time immemorial. Our nation has undergone a significant demographic change but we have failed to make an impact among those groupings, by way of targeting men especially those from nations where Freemasonry is particularly strong.

REMEMBRANCE DAY CEREMONY

For the past year or two the Grand Master has stressed the importance of remembering the fallen on Remembrance Day, 11 November. On ANZAC Day in 2018 and 2019 brethren marched along in regalia, from Freemasons Hall to the State War Memorial. The significant YouTube presentation of Freemasons SA&NT shown extensively on ANZAC Day this year has attracted widespread acknowledgement. At Port Lincoln of course two wreaths are laid by our Lodge, one from our brothers from Lincolnshire and the other from our own Lodge. To commemorate Remembrance Day this year the Grand Master has arranged for another video presentation to be created, which again strengthens our fraternity's close association to the Great Wars of the 20th Century.

MASONIC CHARITIES

The great work performed by Masonic Charities continues to attract wide media coverage and contributes I believe to the growing interest in Freemasonry. As a Director of the company I can attest that a lot of work goes into the decision making of the large corpus (\$64M) held by the Trust. Morgan Stanley Investment Management is responsible for the 'wealth management' of our fund, and despite COVID and the downturn of the economy our investments in Australian and international stocks are faring very well indeed. I noticed that Morgan Stanley held the No. 1 position in The Australian newspaper's list of best performing wealth managers – which augers well for the future. While the work of Masonic Charities extends across all of our Districts, I note there has been an absence of projects from Whyalla, Port Augusta and Port Pirie – and this must be addressed.

FUTURE OF FREEMASONS HALL

Without being critical of past administrations, it must be said however that our iconic Freemasons Hall has been neglected since our centenary year of 1984. Without regular repair and upgrading it has seriously deteriorated and now requiring several millions of dollars to restore it. Over the last couple of years through cutting of staff, careful management of GL budget, throwing open the building for hiring of functions and the like, we are slowly breaking even. The Grand Master's Task Force No.1 is responsible for the restoration of the building, in line with the Dilapidation Report. Work is being currently undertaken in relation to replacing the guttering, electrical work, replacing fire and security alarms. Much of this work goes unseen of course, but is vital nonetheless. Work is continuing regarding opportunities for development of the rear block and several options are under investigation. Bookings for social functions, weddings and other activities are now being received with the relaxation of COVID restrictions.

MY IMPRESSIONS

As I move around the Lodges and Masonic events, I am impressed by the renewed confidence expressed by so many brethren concerning the reawakening of Freemasonry in the wider community, and the exciting projects underway. Long may this continue Brethren.

Malcolm Schluter

Deputy Grand Master