

PROVINCIAL PRIORY – 2023

Well, we're now on to the next item where it's my pleasure to address you and I'm delighted to do so.

I formally extend a warm welcome to each and every one of you, especially those who are attending our Provincial meeting for the first time, or who have been away for a while. As I said earlier today, we are all truly honoured to be gathered here in this inspiring setting. The address in our Service this morning was given by Bishop David Court, and delighted us all, I'm sure. And I thank our Prov. Prelate, V. E. Kt. Leslie Retford for the important part he played in the Service.

I also extend a special welcome, and thanks, to the Knights who have joined us as part of the Malta delegation. This longstanding tradition continues to bring us great joy and camaraderie.

In thinking beforehand about this address and reflecting on those I've given over a number of years now, I am aware that they often consist largely of expressions of praise or gratitude. However, these thanks are a well-deserved recognition of the exceptional effort and commitment that benefit our entire Order. My first words of gratitude on this occasion go to, what to my mind, is a very special group of Knights - those who have joined our Order in the past year. Their interest and commitment are vital to the future of our Order. It's the infusion of new blood that keeps our collective spirit alive and thriving. I also wholeheartedly thank all the Knights who proposed and seconded our new members. While we all strive to attract suitable candidates, statistically, and for understandable reasons, relatively few of us actually manage to do so. To those who have been instrumental in bringing in new members, I say well done and thank you.

Earlier this year, in May, several Lincolnshire Knights travelled to London to attend the meeting of Great Priory.

Three Knights of our Province received appointments in Great Priory Rank.

V. E. Kt. Tim Kelsey achieved the rare distinction of promotion to Past 2nd Great Constable.

Our Provincial Sub-Prior, V. E. Kt. Mike Carter received promotion to Past Great Registrar, thus elevating him to the rank of a V. E. Knight.

And E. Kt. Bruce Goodman received a well-deserved first appointment to Past Great Aide-de-Camp.

Let us extend our warmest congratulations to these worthy Knights, whose accomplishments merit our customary round of applause.

Sadly, I wasn't there at the meeting in May. Owing to the normal train from Lincoln not being available, I together with E. Kts. Reg Brittan and Terry Coffey set off by car early in the morning, full of good cheer, to catch the train at Peterborough, only to grind to a halt on the A1 due to the Police having closed the road. After 2.5 hrs of almost complete standstill, we eventually managed to turn off the A1, but too late to attend the meeting - we just came straight back to Lincoln. Hopefully we'll have better luck in November).

And, looking ahead to that, the usual Malta meeting of Great Priory will be held on Tuesday, 21 November. The Knights who received honours in May will receive their equivalent Malta ranks and I hope that other Knights from our Province will be able to attend and show their support.

(If you're catching the train though, I don't recommend driving down the A1 to Peterborough).

The meeting also provides an opportunity to witness a first-class Malta ceremony, during which one very fortunate Knight will receive his Malta degree.

Well, turning our attention to the main focus of our meeting today, I would like to offer my warmest congratulations to all the newly appointed and promoted Provincial Officers. Your dedication and commitment have earned you these well-deserved advancements, and I am confident that you will continue to contribute to the success of our Order.

I would be remiss of me, if I did not take a moment to acknowledge and express my gratitude to the retiring Provincial Officers.

Over the past year, we've conducted six Team Visits, and I'm deeply grateful to all the Provincial Officers and the Bodyguard who joined me on these visits.

They turned out in large numbers, keen, willing, full of enthusiasm; it really was a joy to be part of such a vibrant and engaged group of Knights.

I especially commend, and thank the two Provincial Constables, E. Kts. Adrian Moseley and Tim Cox – They did a tremendous job, visiting extensively on their own account within our Province and attending the annual meetings of several other Provinces, too. Well done both of you!

Among others stepping down is our Vice-Chancellor, V. E. Kt. Martin Levick, who deserves a well-earned break after the exceptionally challenging period of the past three years or so. You helped the Province navigate through some stormy seas, Martin.

Another one stepping down after 7 years in the office is our Provincial Treasurer, E. Kt. Steve Halberg. He too has done an outstanding job and deserves the praise of all of us. Thank you, Steve.

We had several highlights in our activities over the past year. Amongst these was the Bodyguard Mess, a Sunday Lunch held in February. The presence of our ladies and other guests made this event even more delightful. This annual gathering continues to grow in popularity, and this year, we had a record attendance of nearly 80 and I congratulate the organisers, E. Kt. Ivor Hallam and Kt. Mark Drifill. They also arranged a similar evening event in August, which was an equally great success.

We've also been busy dedicating new Banners & Standards. In May, at St Pauls Preceptory No.466, we dedicated two new Malta Banners, provided through the generosity of one of its members, E. Kt. Keith Appleton. Well done to you Keith.

Another noteworthy occasion was the consecration of the Preceptory Banner for our newest Preceptory, the Aslackby Preceptory No. 718 in March. It was a pleasure to see the Banner being proudly paraded alongside others earlier in our meeting here today. And I'm very pleased to

congratulate the Preceptory on its continued success in attracting new members.

Turning to the topic of charity, I express gratitude on behalf of the Jerusalem Eye Hospital and this glorious Cathedral for your ongoing and generous support. Your willingness to contribute to these worthy causes is deeply appreciated.

In connection with this, I again commend the work of Lincolnshire Pre-loved Regalia. In the two years of their existence, they have raised a total not far short of £20 000 for charities supported by Orders in this Province, in our case, the Eye Hospital. Well done to them.

Next, a few words about the important matter of membership - how has that fared over the past year, you may be wondering.

Well, the answer is - we've had a rather lean year, in fact. Resignations were higher than is typical, but all of them for perfectly understandable reasons. But also, and very sadly, we had an exceptionally high number of Knights being called to a higher service. As a result, our actual numbers, or swords, reduced by just over 3%.

So - in the coming year we need to redouble our efforts to attract suitable new members. This should be a shared concern among all of us, but I particularly urge Preceptory Constables to prioritize this matter in preparation for their future leadership roles.

Similarly, for Knights who are regularly absent, they should be in no doubt that they are missed. We should strive to encourage their return, and find appropriate ways to facilitate this, and to re-engage their interest.

The good news though, is that some of our Preceptories are already reporting a surge of interest from potential candidates, and I feel confident that others will soon follow. As we all know, the addition of new members significantly enhances the vibrancy of a Preceptory. The emphasis is of course, on suitable, good quality candidates – it's most certainly not all about the numbers.

Bro. Knights, today is an occasion when, once again, I become acutely conscious of what a fantastic team effort it all involves. So many Knights, all working their socks off to make it a happy and successful day for all the rest of us.

So now, on behalf of us all, I express our appreciation to all those Knights who gave so willingly of their time and effort. To mention a few of the main players :

Our Provincial Vice-Chancellor, now Ex-VC, V. E. Kt. Martin Levick – thank you Martin. Martin was greatly assisted by his successor in office, E. Kt. Chris Bradley. Thank you, Chris, and you've at least gained a tantalising glimpse of the pleasures that now await you.

I also thank our Provincial Marshal, E. Kt Mark Thornton, and Deputy Marshal, E. Kt. Iain Dean. Well done to both of you.

A special thank you goes to all the members of the Provincial Bodyguard, led by their Commander Kt. David Carter and Deputy E. Kt. Mike Lock. Well done and I look forward to our upcoming Team Visits together in the year ahead.

And, additionally, we are all indebted to the members of St. Pauls Preceptory No.466 for their assistance in setting up for today's meeting as the Host Preceptory.

Many other Knights have worked tirelessly to ensure the smooth running of today's meeting. A big thank you to all of you.

On a personal note, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks for the warm friendship, kindness and unwavering support you've all bestowed upon me as your Provincial Prior. I also pay tribute to all of you for the enthusiasm and commitment you all demonstrate, making membership of our Order in this Province, such a truly joyful and gratifying experience.

Finally, I want to thank each and every one of you for being present here today, as well as for your patience and resilience in listening to this address. And may the Great Captain of our Salvation bless you all.