

Supreme Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons
of
South Australia and the Northern Territory

Grand Installation 2010

Address of 1st GP

Ladies, Gentlemen Brethren and Companions

It is most humbling to consider that, as you will see from your program, amongst my predecessors in this position have been some of the most influential individuals in the State's history, including many Governors General and It is a great honour to take my place amongst them.

I begin this address by affirming the loyalty of this Supreme Grand Chapter to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and the Commonwealth of Australia.

I would also like to acknowledge that we meet on the traditional lands of the Kurna people and that we respect the spiritual attachment they have to the country.

To our Grand Master, M W Bro Ray Clarke, I pledge the allegiance of all Royal Arch Masons of this Constitution - to our Grand Lodge.

I look forward to working with you and the Grand Master of Mark Master Masons, MW Bro Alan Pearson, to further the interests and influence of Freemasonry in this constitution.

It would, at this point, be remiss of me not to acknowledge the skill and dedication of my predecessor. I have certainly enjoyed my apprenticeship as his deputy and I know that he, like the other holders of this office, will be ready with any advice and counsel which may be required in the times ahead.

Our visitors will have been formally welcomed at the opening, however I would like to add my own appreciation of the attendance of leaders and delegations from all States and Territories of the Commonwealth, and of course our Companions from across the Tasman. I will couple this with the name of the Provincial Grand Scribe Nehemiah of Surrey, who has travelled from England for this special occasion. The fact he is my brother is of course purely coincidental.

Our visitors have come from the East, West and South of here and I am sure those visitors would indulge me in acknowledging those also from the North. Companions of this constitution who have travelled many thousands of km themselves.

But it's not just Freemasons we welcome – I would like acknowledge the wives, partners, family and friends who have come here today. Some have come to witness, some to experience, and some to support - I would like to extend my personal welcome to you, each and every one of you, Whilst this ceremony, these formal proceedings, are the purpose of the exercise, I hope you will find time to relax and enjoy the other activities that have been arranged in support of this Grand Installation. Whatever your expectations I hope they are well and truly met and that you will enjoy your time in Adelaide and take back fond memories of this occasion.

Of course an occasion like this does not organise itself and I must acknowledge the work and dedication of everyone who has contributed thus far. Whilst it is never fair to single

out individuals but I do hope you will forgive me for mentioning my own wife, Allie, who as a professional conference organiser has done much of the background work for this event, we thank you.

I would like to congratulate my Companions in Grand Office. Especially the new appointments. We all look forward to serving this Supreme Grand Chapter, and in doing so enjoy the intellectual stimulation and good fellowship it brings. Those with ceremonial roles will, I have no doubt, enjoy their sojourns amongst the companions in the private chapters that we visit during the year.

Brethren and Companions, I contend that we are here today, not just in celebration of our Grand Chapter, but of Royal Arch Freemasonry as a whole. I would like you to ponder on that important point, as it is one to which I shall return.

We enjoy our Freemasonry in this constitution. Many of us especially enjoy our Royal Arch Freemasonry. The percentage of us who do so is pretty much in line with the rest of the country, and indeed those constitutions near to this Supreme Grand Chapter who share the same English Masonic heritage as we do.

It is however an interesting fact that a large proportion of Freemasons have not felt inspired to delve into the mysteries of the Royal Arch.

But can that be right? Can the Order - the Supreme Degree of the Ancients - considered by many to be the "*completion of the third degree*" fail to appear attractive to so many Craft Freemasons?

It goes deeper - can it be that so many of them are not only willing to believe that our central legend concludes, unresolved, on the steps of the Temple; but that, philosophically speaking, substituted secrets are quite acceptable to their minds.

Another question is this: Why is it that, over recent years, we have had an extraordinary rate of attrition? This is not just through the retirement of our older companions – but increasingly we see new Companions join the order and then drift away. Whatever the cause, it is safe to assume their expectations have not been met. Whether those expectations are or were reasonable is, of course, another question.

Clearly if this Order is to have a future, we cannot carry on in the same manner in which we have been. We must recognise that Brethren and companions possess differing talents and interests have varying resources to put at the disposal of their Masonic activities. Whether it be wealth, time or skill, no two Companions have the ability or indeed, the inclination, to contribute to Masonry in the same way many have done in the past.

I often hear it said that the Chapter is "Too Hard". This only serves to highlight the concern felt by some, perhaps many, that there is a fundamental lack of understanding; of the degree in general and of the rites and ceremonies we observe in particular.

I contend that, to a certain extent, it is a cultural problem – as increasingly we comprehend a society demanding instant gratification with little or no work required.

The rites and ceremonies in Royal Arch Masonry hold multiple layers of meaning. Multiple layers which interact with each other to create a vector. A point from which we may truly evolve our own understanding of the nature of existence – and the relationships between God and man.

My predecessor embarked on an ambitious enterprise to deliver a meaningful education course and I shall certainly be continuing that work and hope that our education team will show by precept and example that the desire to delve deeper into the mysteries of the order and making a concerted endeavour to seek understanding, is far better than stand in the shallow end demanding the delivery of gift wrapped answers.

Let me return to that point concerning Chapters of Royal Arch Masons.

We do meet of course in our private Chapters and indeed in this Grand Chapter, but I believe we are all the poorer for the increasingly casual use of the word "Chapter" as an all encompassing word for our activities.

I believe that which is lost is the fundamental recognition that we are first and foremost Royal Arch Masons.

If we recognise this; if we take ownership of the term; take pride in that position; I believe that simple move can bring a change of mindset and I hope our members will not lose sight of this important fact.

Further, if we contend that the Royal Arch holds the key to intellectual Freemasonry, it necessarily follows that it is something to be studied. Something to be cherished, certainly something to be valued.

This is important because if we don't value it, we won't look after it. If we don't look after it we are in serious danger of losing it.

Please consider Companions: Are you simply in Chapter? Or are you a Royal Arch Mason? I sincerely hope you will be proud to call yourself the latter.

We must also recognise that Royal Arch Masonry does not work in a silo. It does not exist in isolation.

It is, and always has been, and must be in the future, an integral part of the whole Masonic structure and must continue to be regarded as such.

It is all too easy in our enthusiasm to promote our order for us to become competitive with other orders in Freemasonry. I put it to you that any competition for membership should be with the Profane and our membership efforts are wasted unless they are directed at the outside world where they should be designed to encourage more good men to become Freemasons.

We must also recognise that we do not have a 'one size fits all' style of Freemasonry, and we should not be offering Candidates 'another order', another jewel, another night out.

We must endeavour to create a culture which gives the aspiring Mason an informed choice so that he can make his own decision about his Masonic path and come to understand the value of study, of discovery, and of the pursuit of excellence.

I think it was Mark Twain who said "Loyalty to petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a soul."

It is obvious that we need to take a long hard look at where we are, and where we are going. Clearly, this Grand Chapter is going to have to adopt some new and different ways of conducting its affairs if it is to survive.

Our average age is now well over 70, and the prognosis is not good: and whilst I enjoy the company of all of my Companions, it doesn't do much for the long term. I still want to be a member of a vibrant Royal Arch Chapter when I'm in my 70s.

I don't have instant answers, neither do I have pre-packaged solutions, but I do believe that we can, and must, go forward with an open mind and not be afraid to try new things.

The argument 'this is the way we have always done it' is very powerful in Masonic circles, but I put it to you that it is an argument which has no validity if we are to survive.

I am sure it will not be easy, but fear of failure must not prevent us from trying.

I certainly do not propose change for its own sake, however I do believe that we must look at some alternatives to the status quo.

Not, I hasten to add, by disrupting fine old Chapters which are plodding along - more a case of encouraging progressive Chapters who are keen to try new things, to do so.

Evolution not revolution. Whatever the future brings, I know that Royal Arch Masons will continue to make an important contribution to the Masonic life and structure of this constitution.

Change will come when we, all of us, leave this place full of enthusiasm – and take that enthusiasm back to our Lodges and our Chapters.

Enthusiasm that will inspire others to embark on a journey of renewal.

Enthusiasm that will show your Brethren in your Craft Lodges that an affinity with Royal Arch Masonry should be an essential component of their Masonic life.

Enthusiasm that taken into your daily lives will not only show the world the happy and beneficial effects of our ancient and honorable institution but, importantly, your friends and colleagues in the uninstructed and popular world will see Freemasonry itself as a desirable enterprise.

The commitment and enthusiasm of Royal Arch Masons in their own Craft lodges is our greatest asset. We need to hold our heads high, Be proud of our Chapters, and say yes, the Royal Arch is different. Yes, it can be difficult, but it is rewarding, It is stimulating, in short, It is the very essence of Freemasonry.

Companions, let me close with a note of buoyant optimism and also a word of caution.

Royal Arch Masonry is not always on trial, but we, as Royal Arch Masons, are.

The attitudes and opinions we take forward from this place will mould our future.

There is no doubt that we have great opportunities and challenges ahead of us, and with your support the Grand Principals - and this team of Grand Officers are looking forward to meeting them, head on.

Thankyou for your attention.