



In touch > On line

The newsletter for Wiltshire Freemasons

Freemasons support Mental Health Day



October 2020

It's okay to be not okay....

Wiltshire Freemasonry



As we enter October I am reminded that Saturday 10th October is Mental Health Day, hence our use of the strap line 'Freemasons Support Mental Health Day. During the past six months a number of studies have concluded that lockdown, self isolation, and shielding have contributed to a significant increase in mental ill health. In a statement from Lambeth Palace, the Archbishop of Canterbury warned that the UK had developed "national PTSD" and "uncertainty fatigue", while our very own Provincial Chaplain Michael Barratt has used his 'Thought For The Day' homilies to remind us of the need to recognise and be aware of Brethren who may be suffering mental turmoil. The signs are well known - experiencing low mood, symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Sadly, for many people the stigma attached to admitting they may be suffering mental ill health means they are unlikely to seek help, while some will not know where to turn for much needed support.

The Masonic Charitable Foundation (MCF) have contracted a third party provider to offer mental health support to Freemasons and their family members who are experiencing conditions affecting their mental well being. The service is run by an independent team of professional counsellors and therapists who are registered and accredited by the UK Council for Psychotherapy. After an initial telephone assessment, counselling sessions may be available either over the phone or face-to-face. If counselling sessions are deemed inappropriate following the telephone assessment, the service provider may be able to consider alternative support as advised by the assessor such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

Mental health support is available for Freemasons and their eligible family members who are over the age of 17. Support for children below 17 can be considered after discussion with the enquiries team.

A financial assessment is not required to access standard counselling service, however a full financial assessment is required to access other specialist mental health support.

I recall a very relevant quotation which I trust will help someone to take the all important first step to recognise that **it's okay to be not okay**. "You don't have to be positive all the time. It's perfectly okay to feel sad, angry, annoyed, frustrated, scared and anxious. Having feelings doesn't make you a negative person. It makes you human."

If you or a family member feels they need mental health support, contact the enquiries team who will provide the details required to access the service. Tel: 0800 035 60 90 or email: help@mcf.org.uk

The best laid plans of mice and men....with thanks to Robbie Burns.

In the September edition of **In touch > On line** I referred to the special meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge to be held at Chippenham on Friday 16th October. Little did I know the Prime Minister would take an active interest in those plans and introduce new guidance which has scuppered plan B and resulted in the implementation of Plan C. I am pleased to advise that the Provincial Grand Secretary Phil Still has organised a Zoom meeting for the same day at which the Provincial executive will be able to meet with the newly appointed active officers of Provincial Grand Lodge allowing me to welcome them to their new roles. In a very special Zoom meeting on 28th September I was able to thank the officers of 2019/20 for their work in supporting the Province, something for which I am very grateful.



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Vastern Lodge Discussion Group...

The Master and Brethren of Vastern Lodge No.8977 welcomed Dr David West as their guest speaker to the ever popular Vastern Lodge Discussion Group. The group, which meets via ZOOM every Tuesday at 7.00pm has been at the forefront in welcoming guest speakers to their events. Their next guest last visited Wiltshire in 2012 as the guest of Methuen Lodge No.8692 when he was the incumbent Prestonian Lecturer and presented *Scouting and Freemasonry, Two Parallel Organisations*. Tony Harvey makes a welcome return to the Province to tell us *The Seven Habits Of Highly Successful Lodges*.

VASTERN LODGE No.8977
DISCUSSION GROUP
welcomes
Tony Harvey
Prestonian Lecturer 2012
Tuesday 27th October 7.00pm
Contact: pcowiltshire@gmail.com

Promoting Freemasonry in Wiltshire...



In last month's **In touch > On line** I wrote about the incredible work undertaken by many of our Lodges during the Covid-19 crisis. I expressed my admiration for those Brethren who went over and above what may be reasonably be termed 'normal' in promoting Freemasonry in Wiltshire. On Tuesday 6th October Assistant Provincial Grand Master Simon Leighfield will join Provincial Grand Master Philip Bullock and myself when we visit Corsham Masonic Hall where we will present Corsham Lodge with the magnificent Peter Winton Trophy; awarded to the Lodge which, in the opinion of the committee, made a significant contribution to promoting Wiltshire Freemasonry in the local community. In addition the Lodge will receive a framed certificate, together with a copy for their archives.

I offer my congratulations to those Lodges which have been able to meet, either at their normal meeting location, or as in the case of Vastern Lodge No.8977 a new venue, which was 'created' especially for them by Paul Sharp. Thanks to Mark Newman's excellent video, I was able to see the work which had been undertaken to enable the meeting to take place. I am not surprised to hear that in November the Lodge anticipates undertaking a second degree Passing ceremony.

I am certainly looking forward to joining Philip and Simon when we visit Cricklade on the 16th October for what will be a unique and very different Provincial Grand Lodge meeting. My hope is that circumstances will be such that we will all meet together in Salisbury on Thursday 7th October 2021.

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What happened in 1918...

As we enter upon a new round of restrictions affecting the way in which Freemasons can meet, it came as no surprise when an email arrived in the editor's inbox asking whether or not UGLE suspended Masonic activity during the Spanish Flu. An awful virus which lasted from February 1918 to April 1920, infecting 500 million people across the world, in four successive waves.

To get an authoritative answer we asked Susan Snell the Archivist and Records Manager at Freemasons' Hall who advised that there is no record of UGLE suspending Masonic activities during the period of the Spanish Flu pandemic. However, a researcher (a Freemason) who had made a study of the period around the time of the Spanish Flu offered an interesting response. He wrote:-

"I found nothing in the minutes of Grand Lodge or the periodicals for Freemasons even mentioning Spanish Flu. I did stop around April 1922, so there may be some later reference, but I was surprised at how little I found. Indeed one of the few explicit references was from the Prisoner of War minute book [minute book of Lodge of Instruction working in camp in Cappadocia where one of the prisoners, a Freemason, contracted Spanish Flu.

I found plenty of references to the Great War, and found the meeting where they discussed purchasing the freehold for Great Queen Street, but no mention of the epidemic.

I presume that, considering the Great War was still on, and as such there was a news blackout, perhaps the general populous was largely unaware at the beginning that there was a pandemic taking place. Paul Calderwood in his research on Freemasonry and the press, notes that the press were discouraged from mentioning Spanish Flu by the government. Spain being neutral still had an active press, which was the first to report on it in Europe, hence the name Spanish Flu, although the Spanish called it French Flu, thinking it originated there.

Susan observed "The Spanish Flu was very much a pandemic that affected people in their 20's and 30's a century ago. Even post WWI, the demographic of Lodge members may have been an older age group. This Covid pandemic in contrast is affecting an older demographic."

We should bear in mind the prevailing circumstances of the day; starting with the fact that in 1918 the world was still engaged in the first World War. The movement of troops placed large numbers of people in close contact (especially aboard troopships) and living spaces were not only overcrowded but also not of the highest standards with respect to sanitation. Health services were limited, and many civilian physicians were deployed on military service. There was no National Health Service (that came about in 1948) medical technology was very limited or non-existent. There were no diagnostic tests that could test for influenza infection. In fact, doctors didn't know influenza viruses existed, and Influenza vaccines, and flu antiviral drugs did not exist at the time, even antibiotics had not been developed. (Penicillin was not discovered until 1928). Intensive care units came into being in 1950 soon followed by mechanical ventilation, Without these medical countermeasures and treatment capabilities, doctors were left with few treatment options other than supportive care.

It's little wonder that In many towns, theatres, dance halls, churches and other public-gathering places were shut, some for months. Streets were sprayed with chemicals and people wore anti-germ masks. Some factories relaxed no-smoking rules believing that cigarettes would help prevent infection. But Freemasons were still able to meet and dine, and to enjoy a post dinner cigar.



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Returning to Masonic activity....

“It’s definitely different, even a little strange, but once we got going everything fell into place, and we’re glad we took the plunge and held our meeting.” Just one of the many positive quotes from a Lodge which has been able to meet under the ‘Rule of Six’, and there have been plenty of comments just like this one.

Of course no one expected everyone to be comfortable about attending a Lodge meeting, after all, the advice asking the population to self isolate, shield and generally to physically distance created apprehension and a belief that something bad would happen if we did. As a result of these legitimate concerns Masonic Hall Committees have been assiduous in making sure that Covid-19 security measures apply, and that every safeguard is provided in order to protect everyone who wishes to attend a Lodge or Chapter meeting.

In addition Lodges have readily applied themselves to conducting meetings which have included a number of Second Degree ‘Passing’ ceremonies - all within the bounds of propriety and in full accordance with the Government’s ‘Rule of Six’. Different and strange for the Lodge, but for the Brother making progress in his Masonic journey the occasion will be one he will remember forever.

In order to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus please follow the updated advice from the NHS.



Congratulations to ...

The Provincial Grand Master is pleased to announce that Provincial Grand Chaplain Michael Barratt (Sarum Lodge No.5137) has been appointed by The MW Grand Master to serve as a member of the United Grand Lodge of England’s Panel for Clemency.

Clive Emerson (Downton Lodge No.9064) has agreed to serve as a Trustee for the Provincial Benevolent Fund. Clive is also a trustee of the Masonic Charitable Foundation.

Dr David Reed (Remembrance Lodge No.4037) has been appointed Divisional Officer (North) in succession to Ian Dunbar, who is standing down for personal reasons.

Barry Jordan-Davis (City Lodge No.5955) has been appointed Divisional Officer (South) in succession to W Bro Andrew Tiffin, who retires after 5 years in post.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

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