

MEZ's address – WFPC September 2025

Companions, we apparently now come to item 8 on the agenda – ‘my slot’ quaintly called “the MEZ will deliver his inaugural address”. *His* because these are my thoughts alone and no one else’s – hopefully only I will get burnt at the stake for any heretical views I might express in the next few minutes. I am, of course, hoping that the Grand Superintendent will be kind to me, especially as Yenton is in a smokeless zone and it is not yet November 5th. Plus, of course, he has already stood me down as Provincial Second Grand Principal or, as EComp Howard Smith not so eloquently put it, “sacked” us both.

Inaugural address you’ll be pleased to know means that this is a one-off position we find ourselves in! So please kindly sojourn with me if you will. I apologise in advance if some of what I am about to say will fall on stony ground (in accordance with the Gospel of St Mark, Chapter 4, verses 5 & 6).

The preamble to the Chapter By-laws I have just received says that this chapter has been formed for the furtherance of knowledge and understanding of the Royal Arch and to assist in maintaining a high standard of rendering the ritual in the Province of Warwickshire. No pressure there then companions!

My theme this evening is the difficult task we all face of respecting the past whilst embracing change within our Royal Arch chapters. Our meetings need to be fun (I know companions, the dreaded F word used in open chapter – how appalling am I)!

Talking of open chapter:

Companion Scribe Nehemiah (or, as some parts of this Constitution insist on saying, Scribe Neheemiah), what is the hour?

It is the hour of meridian splendour, Most Excellent.

Summon the companions from the vault for rest and refreshment.

Companions, it is the command of the Most Excellent that you leave the vault for rest and refreshment.

Well, that was something different for most of you I suspect. When I asked him for guidance, EComp John Saint told me I needed to do a certain amount of research for this paper and give you something different so you did not

nod off within the first few minutes. So, for your information, that was a tiny bit of Domastic Ritual. 'Calling on and calling off' are items that we do not currently have within our own Warwickshire ritual.

It is therefore perhaps an appropriate moment for me to address a few remarks concerning our own very special Warwickshire ritual. You will all be aware that on the first page of our current ritual (2018 edition) it says that it was first printed in 1906 from a manuscript dated circa 1860. I understand that a few years ago, EComp Rex Lowin gave this very chapter a whole address on the origins of our ritual. I am sure that you all agree that I am not worthy to try to emulate EComp Rex's presentation.

But I do wonder if any of you have ever actually seen said manuscript. Seeing is believing so here it is! It is a little fragile so I won't be passing it around for you to inspect. It now lives in a fireproof, locked safe in these rooms. That is how much it is held in high regard by us all.

The last time I mentioned this ritual was at a meeting of this very chapter at Rugby when I ended up creating the spectacle of two Past Grand Superintendents holding different recollections over some of the events surrounding Supreme Grand Chapter's decision allowing us to carry on using it. Fortunately, only one of those two worthy companions is with us tonight. What they did however both agree on was that alcohol and fine dining, plus the best endeavours of EComp Michael Price, were involved in Operation Hands Off Our Ritual!

I understand, in 1997, EComp Richard Wallis was able to 'convince' EComp Bob Morrow, the then Grand Scribe Ezra, that our ritual was ancient and second in age only to the Oxford Ritual. Companions, perhaps we should promote our ritual more than we do for that very reason. It is still used in other parts of the known world, although I understand Shropshire now has their own version.

I spent a few interesting hours last week reading this original manuscript and must say that what it does contain is very much a mirror image of what we still have in our 2018 edition. Indeed, I could only find one minor difference that being that we now say "pickaxe, *crow* and shovel" whereas the original talks of "pickaxe, *crowbar* and shovel".

I think we should all have great sympathy for our current Grand Superintendent as the lot is his to be the defender of the faith when it comes

to protecting and paying homage to our own special ritual. I use the phrase 'defender of the faith' intentionally as many of you are of generations when history was indeed taught in all our schools, and will be aware that Henry 8th was given the title of 'Defender of the Faith' by the Catholic Pope only a year or two before embarking on the Protestant Reformation! Incidentally, our current King, I understand, has amended the phrase to 'Defender of Faiths'.

Before you all quite rightly rear up on me, I must point out that there have been numerous changes imposed on us by London over the centuries. Depending upon how you count them, some say there have been well over 150 changes since 1813. The recently produced "History of the Provincial Grand Chapter of Worcestershire" written by EComp Dr Alan Robertson (incidentally a member of our own Apollo Chapter in Alcester) lists at least 26 *major* changes.

I personally fear that our own Warwickshire ritual is now not as perfect in every particular as it might be. We have a huge number of unattached Royal Arch Masons in this fine Province. One of the most common reasons given for resigning seems to be "I do not understand Royal Arch/I do not get it". Should we therefore consider reforming our beautiful ritual by minor tweaks? Our British track cycling team apparently achieved amazing success in competition by what was termed as *marginal gains*. Apparently, according to Sir David Brailsford, our wheels were rounder than those of the French! Nothing revolutionary, as such, but the French of course have always gone in for bigger and better Revolutions than we have! I think that we got bored of them as long ago as 1688.

What sort of things am I suggesting, I hear you say.

Perhaps more modern versions of our current biblical readings? These, apparently, are already in vogue in certain Warwickshire chapters. They should perhaps remain nameless at this juncture, is that not right, EComp Paul Buck?

There is at least one John Harris Royal Arch tracing board outside the chapter room door at Victoria House in Leamington Spa. Are many of you aware of it I wonder? I would venture to suggest that tracing boards (as in the Craft) are an excellent visual aid to explain to those who do not get the Royal Arch as to the layout in Jerusalem during our ceremony of exaltation and indeed of the chapter room itself.

Some chapter have the five platonic bodies on show but many in this Province do not. Why? Plus, they are rarely referred to.

There is a form of words for investing officers in our ritual book but we rarely hear them used, and I am guilty tonight of that more than of any incoming Z.

Many of you by now will have heard of that apparent knight in shining armour called the *Savage Ritual* (members of KT now wake up?). Some Provinces even already have chapters adopting it wholesale. I understand the exalte enters the chapter room and stays in throughout the whole ceremony – so none of this repeated coming in and going out that we do, which surely on occasions just starts of the process off in the minds of some exaltees of not understanding what is going on despite the use of what is termed ‘the janitor’s cards’ and the extra pages now included in the back of the 2018 edition regarding sharing the work.

Now looking at the bigger picture:

I wonder whether we would benefit by having more variety within our chapter meeting, including within our Festive Boards. The MEGS of Buckinghamshire once said that every Royal Arch meeting should be planned so that it is not just a meeting but a memorable event for all present whatever the labour might be. I am not suggesting that at our AnCons, our VIP visitors should be greeted with a Mexican wave as has been known to happen in Buckinghamshire!

Some of you may have been at the Masters’ and Wardens’ Dinner last week when unusual activities at themed Festive Boards were highlighted and praised by the ProvGM. Hawaiian dress including grass skirts and a very tall Worshipful Master apparently having better legs than the Senior Warden’s wife! Who knew, or indeed wanted to know, that fact? That an Elvis impersonator could sing the Master’s Song without losing the gravity and meaning of that song. It cannot just be a coincidence that the said summer lodge has been dramatically turned around with numerous joining members and initiates.

Is this the sort of thing some of our chapter might wish to consider emulating?

Clearly there is a view that, on occasions, the lunatics have taken over the asylum and I am probably more guilty of falling into that category than most

of you. Besides, for all our virtuous endeavours to make good men better, to encourage high moral standards and considerations regarding our own relationship and understanding with our own Supreme Being, Freemasonry must realise that to survive and thrive, we must have one foot firmly in the entertainment industry. We must send our companions home with memories of having enjoyed themselves and looking forward positively to their next Royal Arch encounter.

Temperance Chapter at Wretham Road how regularly has an opening address and a closing address, so something different from the standard Warwickshire ritual. It seems to attract visitors as the offering is different. More visitors mean more vibrant meetings.

Athol Chapter No 74 does, of course, do its own old Midland Workings and Trinity Chapter has its own peculiarities.

By coincidence, when I was preparing this address, we had what I would call a thought-provoking example of what we might want to consider doing. In response to the visitors' toast at St Alphege and Charity Chapter on Tuesday, a Glaswegian visitor stood up and gave us a fine rendition of the Bony M song 'By the Rivers of Babylon'. Many of you will know that this is very much based on Psalm 137. According to EComp Wikipedia, it is a 'communal lament about remembering Zion and yearning for Jerusalem while still dwelling in exile during the Babylonian captivity'. Not only was it sung in tune but I would suggest that it was very much on message. Scottish Masons are, of course, more used to *harmony* at their Festive Boards than we are – but why not?

Anyway, I have inflicted enough upon you, so...

Companion Scribe Nehemiah, what is the hour?

Past the hour of meridian splendour, Most Excellent.

Summon the companions from rest and refreshment.

Companions, it is the command of the Most Excellent that you cease rest and refreshment and return to the vault.

EComp Nigel Hawkins