

ALEXANDRA CHAPTER

No: 933

150th Anniversary Celebration

2 March 2017.

Most Excellent Grand Superintendent; Excellent Companion Deputy Grand Superintendent; Excellent Companion Second Provincial Grand Principal; Excellent Companions and Companions all.

Very many thanks indeed for the opportunity to address you today on the occasion of the celebration of the One hundred and fiftieth anniversary of your Chapter. It is indeed a great pleasure and privilege to be with you on this very special occasion, and it is particularly special for me as it is my third engagement as Third Principal to our Provincial Chapter, at which I am required to deliver an Oration; and it is the second occasion I have been invited to speak for a celebration of 150 years of the existence of a

Chapter; the first being the 150th Anniversary of the establishment of Derby Chapter which was celebrated on the 28th of September last. With that in mind, Companions, the celebrations may well be said to have occurred in the wrong order, since your Chapter was consecrated on 20 September 1866, and Derby Chapter established some six days later on the 26th day of that same month.

However, Companions allow me to recall again some of the landmark events of history which put some context around the activities and events that were taking place when your Chapter was being established in times that were very different from those we experience today.

In 1865, when your Chapter was in the 'planning stage' it marked the death of John Cobden the radical Liberal Statesman from Manchester – a textile manufacturer and Free Trade enthusiast, who together with John Bright from Rochdale were central figures in the drive to abolish the Corn Laws; that same year also marked the death of Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister - who was

succeeded by Earl Russell; the assassination of Abraham Lincoln took place in America, and Joseph Lister introducing antiseptic surgery for the first time to a Glasgow hospital. 1866, the actual year of the consecration of your Chapter, saw the Bank of England Charter being suspended; and the forces of Prussia entering Austria, which heralded considerable unrest amongst the countries of Europe. On the domestic scene 1866 saw the establishment of the London Fire Brigade, and the SS Great Britain laid the first telegraph cable between Ireland and Newfoundland. The same year also saw the first London Olympian Games take place at Crystal Palace, at which WG Grace won the first 440 yards race – and in the previous month to this particular feat, he had scored 224 not out for the All England Cricket team in a match against Surrey at the end of July.

So there, Companions you have a brief summary of some of the actual events taking place in the reality of the world as it was when preparations were being made, and for the dedication and establishment of your new Chapter in 1866.

Some ten years previously in 1856 a young man named Thomas J Barrett, who later was to become a significant figure in the world of advertising, joined a company which manufactured soap. He argued that posters were the poor man's picture gallery, and he had seen a picture of a small boy that had been painted by Sir John Millais, who went on to become a president of the Royal Academy. The picture was of Millais grandson, blowing bubbles through a clay pipe. The picture was entitled 'Bubbles', and it was purchased by the Soap Company, which was A & F Pears of Isleworth. Towards the end of the 19th Century, the Pears Soap Company published its first Cyclopaedia of General information (actually in 1897). Each edition contained a reproduction of the painting.

In 1957, another small boy had been successful in negotiating his first set of intelligence tests in preparation for his 11-plus examination towards the end of his years in primary school, and his parents bought him a gift to mark that success. It was the sixty-sixth edition of the Pears Cyclopaedia. And just perchance you are

wondering just who that small boy might be, here is the very book! It tells me that at the start of September 1866 a peace agreement had just been signed between Austria and Italy, so the hope for peace in Europe was just beginning to blossom – into something of a false dawn, as subsequent events would later prove!

If any of you have heard me speak in a Lodge or Chapter before, Companions, you will already know that I have spent the vast bulk of my professional life as a primary school headteacher, and I have always tried to encourage my pupils to focus on history, not just as a record of the past, but to consider history to be 'real'. Yes, clearly, history is a record of past events, but it is actually a study of day-to-day "reality" for the people who lived at that time. Today, Companions, we recall the "reality" of one hundred and fifty years of history and uninterrupted service of this Holy Royal Arch Chapter

That century and a half has seen so much change. Today everything we say, write and seek to communicate is undertaken with such speed.

This Chapter began its life when the world was a place of greater innocence. The Founders of this Chapter sought to bring the principles and tenets of our Movement to the people and you Companions keep their flame of hope alive, in this generation, now, today these one hundred and fifty years later.

Now, the world is a different place. The age in which we live is one which desperately needs people with the strength of character and principles of your Founder Members. Today, Companions we should be filled with awe and wonder and admiration for them, and for all those who have kept the Royal Arch torch alive in this Chapter through the ensuing years.

Today, Companions so many people leave to others that which they could relatively easily do for themselves. Many expect others to shoulder the responsibilities which rightly belong with the individual, and within the family.

For many, the struggle for our age is for power and the lust for gold. Yet if we can but seek it out,

life shows us a richness of experience full of wonder and fear on the one hand; full of loneliness and perplexity on the other. Yet, Companions, this is our world, and the reality of our age today. In it we cannot preach love and yet practise power.

My own Chapter, Ben Brierley Chapter 3317 was established in 1936. It is named after a man, born in June 1825, into real poverty in Failsworth Manchester, who taught himself to read, established a school for workers to teach them to read and ultimately he published books and journals. At the end of his life the Manchester Literary Society erected a statue in his memory. There, truly, Companions, was a Mason who actively promoted 'the benefits of education'. Like so many of the members of this Chapter, over its first one hundred and fifty years, he grasped the opportunities which lay before him, and sought to enable others to do the same for themselves.

Companions, Moses, in the wilderness, charged the people to give him 'men of ripe wisdom and quick minds; high in repute among their fellow

tribesmen'. I believe Ben Brierley could have answered that call in his lifetime. I am certain that many of the members of your Chapter, over the last one hundred and fifty years could have answered it equally well.

May you and your successors do the very same, in the years that lie ahead, in the certain assurance that if you live by the principles found working in our art throughout the ages, you too, Companions, will aspire to the angels.

Companions, thank you for your attention. I will now draw this brief oration to a conclusion, and will do so in the words I have adapted from my immediate predecessor as Chaplain to our Masonic Province, the Rev Paul Rolfe, in a role which I left in November 2016:

Companions, congratulations, on the one hundred and fifty years that have passed, and remember, as you look forward to the future and your Chapter's journey towards its second centenary celebrations: "in any venture that is blessed by God, 'the best is yet to come!'"