

Provincial Grand Lodge of Herefordshire
Provincial Grand Chapter of Gloucestershire & Herefordshire

<https://herefordshiremasons.org.uk>

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"Christmas Message"

Dear Brethren and Companions,

On this last weekend prior to Christmas, I greet you all well and hope that you may find some enjoyment over the forthcoming holiday period despite the difficult circumstances. For many of us, it will be a different type of Christmas to what we are used to and indeed hoped for. Who would have thought that when the Grand Master suspended Freemasonry for 4 months last March, that at the end of the year we would still be in the throes of this terrible pandemic and still uncertain as to when we may return to any semblance of normality? Since then, we have had ever changing scenarios both in our personal and masonic lives as to what we can and can't do, how many people we can be with, whether it's inside or outside and all dependent on where you live. Some of our Lodges and Chapters have chosen to meet in compliance with the regulations and guidance, whilst others have decided not to. Needless to say, it's been frustrating and confusing, but we have weathered this together and I thank you for your understanding and support during what has been such a challenging year.

In my last Christmas message, I mentioned that this is the time or year to reflect on our achievements over the last twelve months and to set our goals and ambitions for the year ahead. Some of you may think that there are not many achievements to reflect on in 2020, but that is not the case. Although our meetings and social events have been disrupted, Freemasonry has continued to do what it does best, to care for each other and those less fortunate than ourselves.

Since March, our Craft Province has donated over £165,000 to worthy causes throughout the county. This figure includes sums provided by the MCF from the Covid Relief Fund as well

as donations from individual Lodges and the Caeruleum Club for new and young masons. Likewise, the Royal Arch Province has made several donations to various charities throughout Gloucestershire and Herefordshire over and above those made by the Craft.

On a national basis, the MCF initially distributed over £1 million to good causes to assist in coping with the first wave of Covid-19 and has recently made donations of another £850,000 to assist those who are homeless. Another substantial care initiative from the MCF is now in progress and further information on this will be communicated in the new year.

Some other accomplishments in 2020 include the formal launch of the Caeruleum Club, and although its members have not been able to enjoy the masonic and social programmes they had planned, they have been keeping in touch with each other, increasing their membership and as previously mentioned, contributing to various charities in the community, including the Wye Valley NHS Trust.

On the 6th April the first copy of "The Craftsmen," (a newsletter initiated by the Brethren and Companions of the Ross-on-Wye Masonic Centre) was published. Tomorrow will see the release of its 38th consecutive edition. A truly remarkable achievement and one which all the contributors under the talented leadership of WBro & EComp Andrew Moore can be proud of. If you have not read any of them yet, then I really encourage you to do so. All editions to date can be found on both the Craft and Royal Arch Provincial websites.

In October, I was invited to attend a dedication service in Hereford Cathedral for the new altar and benches we donated towards the refurbishment of the Booth Chapel, in memory of our late Provincial Grand Master, the Reverend David J Bowen. Both the Craft and Royal Arch Provinces made donations to this cause as did other Provinces and Orders and it is a great pity that more people were not able to attend the service, which was conducted by The Bishop of Hereford, the Right Reverend Richard Jackson. However, it was wonderful that David's widow Jill, and their son and two daughters were able to be present that day to enjoy the special occasion.

Before I close, I must mention that despite all of the restrictions and changes to legislation, we did manage to hold our annual meetings for the Craft and the Royal Arch Provinces, albeit both under the "Rule of Six". I know it is disappointing for those of you who have received active rank this year to have not yet enjoyed your positions to the full. Nevertheless, I am confident that in due time, you will have the opportunity to do so, both individually and as part of your respective Provincial Teams.

Let us hope and pray that the vaccination programme proves successful and it will allow us to return to normality again soon. In the meantime, my wife Christine and I wish you and your loved ones, a joyous and peaceful Christmas and a happy, prosperous and healthy new year.

Michael T Holland
Provincial Grand Master & Most Excellent Grand Superintendent