

Response from the Worshipful Master, W. Bro Guy Hammerton on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary meeting of the Lodge.

Grand Lodge Officers, Officers of Provincial Grand Lodges, Holders of London Grand Rank, Officers and Brethren ...

Sixty years - yes it is a long time. But, there again, perhaps it is not that long. It is, after all, contained within the adult life of W. Bro. Cyril Self, with whom I had the pleasure of sharing the Chair of King Solomon this afternoon. Cyril was there at the Consecration and he has been able to tell us of it and about the personalities involved. Thus, our history is still a living one. It still has an oral tradition. I hope and trust it will remain so.

So we have reached our 60th anniversary. Brethren, anniversaries are important but they do happen a lot. Perhaps we should think of why they are important, what place they have in our lives. Personally, I believe that they are part of our theme for today, continuity.

I think that many of you know that I have an interest in historical affairs and I would like to spend just a little time with you this evening, thinking about anniversaries. Today is a marvellous and important occasion. I am proud and lucky to be the Master for this occasion and I thank our distinguished guests for sharing it with us. I thank in particular the representatives of our 'ancestor' and 'family Lodges' for being with us today.

However, Brethren, we are not alone in finding 1995 a special year. Let us also send our congratulations and best wishes to other Lodges, also celebrating anniversaries. There are a number of them.

This year, to take some examples:

The Hope and Unity Lodge No 214 celebrates 200 years. The St John's Lodge No. 1343 (here with us today) celebrates 125 years as does St Mary's Lodge at Braintree. This year the West Essex Lodge, No. 2561 is 100 years old. The St George's Lodge No. 4117 celebrates 75 years.

There are five Essex Lodges who share our Diamond Jubilee. We heard from our Secretary this afternoon of the building of the town of Upminster and four meet in Upminster. One is the Chafford Lodge, No 5510, warranted immediately before St Laurence, No 5511.

There are four other descendants from The Lodge of True Friendship, who are celebrating their Golden Jubilee this year, one of whom is, of course the Abbots Hall Lodge, No 6205

Brethren, this is a only partial list of the important anniversaries happening in the Province this year. So what are anniversaries about? I we think of them only as an excuse for a party and an opportunity to invite honoured guests, we may miss the point. Let me give you my theory.

Anniversaries provide us with an opportunity to sit back and take stock - to remember the good times, to overcome and smile at the bad - and to remember that our future is always the result of what we do today and the result of what our past Masters have done before. It is that matter of continuity again.

The future of St Laurence, and all Lodges, is based in their traditions. What earlier Brethren have left us, is part of what we are. So how we manage the affairs of the Lodge, will affect the way that our, as yet unborn, Centenary Master will be able to manage the Lodge in his year. So, perhaps, Anniversaries are really an opportunity to think about the obligations that we have all taken and about the brotherhood that we have all found as a result ...

... and to ask ourselves what we need to do to ensure that our future brethren will enjoy the same sense of fraternal warmth as we do today.

Masonry is going through a difficult period. True, it has happened before and the Institution has recovered. No doubt it will happen again. Yet perhaps now it needs our active help. Masonry, in general, has suffered a decline in membership over the last 10 years. Initiations have reduced from around fifteen thousand in 1985 to eleven thousand in 1994, a decline of 26%. Since there are here are more Lodges today than in 1985, individual Lodges have experienced an even steeper decline than this. Why has this happened?

There are many ideas advanced - the public attacks on the Craft, the political agenda of some misguided people, the economic cycle, the attraction of many so-called leisure alternatives and so on. Some people have argued that Grand Lodge, in de-mystifying the Craft and making changes to the ritual, is reducing us to just another Men's Club. Others point to the demographic changes in England, the reducing birth rate and the consequent decline in the number of men of the right age to be interested in Masonry. Some have argued that we have become a little staid - that our ceremonies are in danger of becoming repetitious. Perhaps all of these reasons contribute to the truth. Perhaps there are more or different ones. I do not know.

What I do know, however, is that it is up to the ordinary Mason, East- or West-Enders as he may be, to solve the problem. The strength of Masonry is in its Private Lodges. This is where it lives. This is where its values are safe guarded - here at St Laurence, at Priory, at Engayne or at Upminster Hall. We, in our Lodges, create the day to day life of Masonry and it is our company and fraternal love that candidates will seek or reject. Brethren, we have to face up to this challenge - if continuity is not to fail in our hands.

Brethren, this is what an Anniversary ought to be - a thoughtful opportunity to accept that responsibility and a commitment to ensure that we are part of the History of the Future - just as the historic Lodges represented by our most welcome guests are part of the History of our Present, here in St Laurence.

On this happy occasion of our Diamond Jubilee, let us rejoice in the continuity of our Institution. Let us rejoice in the continuity of all our Lodges. Let us reinforce the warmth of our welcome and ensure that brotherly love - so distinctive of our Institution - will continue to be a power for peace, charity and all that is good in our land.

Brethren, I thank you for your attention..