

On the occasion of the installation of W. Bro. Colin Penny as Master of the Leigh Chase Lodge.

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

I am delighted to be here this evening and delighted to have the honour of replying to the toast so ably given by ...

We have had a most enjoyable afternoon in the temple and we are enjoying an excellent Festive Board but more than this - it is a delight, and indeed an honour, to be here on the very special occasion of the installation of W. Bro. Colin Penny as Master of the Leigh Chase Lodge.

I say that it is 'an honour' to be here this evening and I do not use the words lightly. We have today seen installed into the chair of King Solomon a man of whom the Leigh Chase Lodge can be justly proud. This installation, Brethren, is not an everyday event.

It is not everyday that a Lodge installs someone with a major theatrical and political background - a man who has shaken hands with the famous and who has discussed matters of high moment with the leaders of our country.

It is not everyone who has emulated Dick Whittington, wrapped up his belongings in a small bag and gone off to find the streets of London paved with gold.

It is not every master who is intimate with Greek shipping magnates and indeed, has successfully competed with them.

It is not everyone who has found himself the love object of perhaps the most famous woman in the world and whose love affair is actually captured on video. He is a man of a deeply romantic nature.

This, Brethren is the measure of the man before you - a man whose secret life may now be revealed.

Brethren, your master was born in Trealow in the Rhondda Valley, surrounded by mountains. You may think that to describe the Welsh hills as 'mountains' is an exaggeration but when you are the size of W. Bro. Colin Penny, even Upminster Windmill looks like the Eiffel Tower.

His political life commenced early, for the man who became Lord Thomas of Tonypany, the speaker of the House of Commons, was his neighbour. As early as the age of five he was asking difficult questions of the noble Lord, such as, 'Can I have my ball back please?'

He was sent off to Cardiff for his education - which was at least a partial success - and then one day, his mother looked around for him - he is difficult to spot in a ground mist - and said that he must go to London to seek his fortune. Wrapping his belongings in a handkerchief and tying it to a stick - he was placed on a train for Paddington. After a small delay, while persuading the station master that he was not Paddington Bear but eating the proffered marmalade sandwich anyway, he set forth into the streets of the big city.

Life was hard. He lived in dingy boarding houses where he found but little comfort, although he did get to know a number of young ladies who only seemed to keep their rooms for an hour or two. He struggled and fought - mainly small boys - but it was fine training for the artistic career that was to follow.

His talent was quickly recognised by the owner of the Saville Theatre who saw in him someone who could work with the famous on equal terms. He very soon found himself dealing with the stars of the entertainment world, including the Beatles, Brian Epstein and Jimi Hendrix for whom he rapidly became an indispensable adviser.

They came to him constantly with questions which he answered with the wisdom suitable to the grand original of the chair he now occupies. It was no difficulty for him to answer such trying questions as 'Hey Shorty, get up some beers, will you?' or 'Why the hell is my dressing room so filthy? Clean it up!' He experienced the thrill of the theatre - seduced by Amy Macdonald in her underwear backstage - and its riches, once earning half a crown from Lord Delfont for getting him a cab.

So successful was this start in show business that he thought of taking up the theatre as his profession. He went to Brian Epstein for advice. Brian thought hard and said, 'Don't give up the day job, son.'

Good advice - but one with a problem in its train. Your WM had no day job.

Undaunted, he walked into the reception area of ICI and demanded to see the Chairman. He was thrown out. He walked into the head office of Unilever - and was thrown out again. He entered the foyer of Burroughs Welcome and was thrown out again.

However, his persistence was rewarded and he soon landed (if you see what I mean) a job in a Greek shipping firm. They did not throw him out for at least six months. This experience was vital to him. He learned how to run a shipping line, how to say 'Evaristo' - in Greek of course - and how to bounce on pavements.

He took this experience to another, equally Greek, shipping line where he fell in love. I have spoken of his deeply romantic nature, have I not?

The receptionist was a beauty - a tall, languorous, dark haired vision with 'curves where a dame is entitled to have curves' - so he fell in love with a short, ugly Greek for the time being.

But the tall, languorous vision of loveliness haunted his days - to say nothing of his nights. It was true love. Her response, when he declared his love, was not all that encouraging. However, our Colin is not, as we now realise, put off by mountains to climb and, investing in a portable ladder, he found the courage to court and embrace her.

Given his good looks - a bit like Dustin Hoffman - it was but a little time before she swooned and fell into his arms, knocking him off his ladder. Picking themselves up, they rapidly got married, moved to Hornchurch and set up their own successful shipping line, renting out boats on Central Park Lake.

Life had only cherries to offer - bowls full of them. His theatrical career was resumed as he starred as Fagin at the Kenneth More Theatre and played a leading role in the King and I - or the 'King versus I' as the reviews rather unkindly put it.

The course of true love seemed set fair and you would expect me to say that they lived happily ever after. After all, they had two fine boys, a successful business and a pleasant home.

But Brethren, your WM's good looks and fatal attraction to women had not left him and - Brethren - danger lurks where women roam. No one could know that his path was about to cross that of the most famous woman in the world and that her passion and lust for him would be aroused in an unbridled way.

A visit to Orlando was the start of the problem. Innocently walking around Disney World, he was seized upon by no less a person than Minnie Mouse. She swooned, fell into his arms (there's a lot of this in Colin's life) and covered his face in kisses. 'My own,' she moaned (she is a bit of a moanin' minnie), 'Where have you been all my life? What have you done with your tail?' But our Colin is a man of steel - or perhaps a mouse of steel - and stepping back, he cried, 'Unhand me woman. I am another's. This passion cannot be!'

This is, of course, the public version. He might have got away with it but, unbeknownst to him, the whole scene was being filmed by the family video recorder, in the hands of his children. They showed it to their mother on their return to the deluxe hotel in Florida, where she was being languorous again in their palatial suite

Close examination of the tape, carried out by the most expensive lawyer in the USA, reveals that what Colin actually said was, 'Hey, sweetie! What's a nice mouse like you doing in a place like this? Fancy a cheesburger?'

Nevertheless, the marriage survived. Forgiveness is Diane's - that is his wife, not another mouse - and is Diane's forte but Colin has had to promise never to speak to another rodent, ever again.

Soon, Brethren, you will have the opportunity to witness them together at their Ladies' Night, an evening of such splendour that

it will make your eyes water. You must all be there. You cannot miss it.

The Beatles, Lord Thomas of Tonypandy, Brian Epstein, Jimi Hendrix, several Greek shipping magnates, the owner of the Saville Theatre, Minnie Mouse and a number of ladies from Colin seedy boarding house days - mainly in heavy make-up and mostly known as madam - will be present to celebrate the special evening of a very special couple.

Well, Brethren, such is the secret life of the newly installed Master of the Leigh Chase Lodge. The Brethren, who voted for him, have chosen well. I understand that the election was a close run thing but I am sure that W. Bro. Colin Penny will uphold the traditions of this fine Lodge and prove a memorable Master - one that the Brethren will *look up* to with pride.

Brethren of the Leigh Chase Lodge - on behalf of all the visitors, I thank you for your wonderful and well-renowned hospitality. On their behalf, may I express the hope that we may be back in the warmth of this great Lodge again soon. May you have a marvellous year under the leadership of a marvellous Mason and may the Leigh Chase Lodge continue to set an example of true Masonry to the other Lodges of this Province.

Just watch out for the cheese!