



ASHLAR HERALD

SPRING 2022 NEWSLETTER



Brethren,

We hope you are finding the Ashlar Herald an informative and worthwhile read. The Board of Directors are committed to sharing as much information as possible to all the members, after all, Ashlar House is a building that we all have an interest in, we are merely the current custodians for future generations.

This edition covers the finances of the Hall Company, new bar offerings, details events that have recently taken place and some information regarding the Order of the Secret Monitor. With the recent pandemic, the AGM was postponed as we were unable to meet. With restrictions now lifted, the AGM has been called for 31st March which your Lodge Secretary will have been notified of and distributed to members. The WM of each lodge has the right to vote, but we are encouraging members to attend where there is the opportunity to ask questions of the Directors.

Finally, please help us shape this newsletter. It is designed to update brethren regularly on everything happening at Ashlar House. If you feel we are missing anything, please let us know.

With restrictions lifted and better weather on the way, we are hoping for a more prosperous year as lodges return to their pre pandemic levels and Ashlar House has a busy feel once again.

Paul Rayner

Chairman's Report



Brethren, this Report concludes my first full year as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Masonic Hall Company.

During this period, I am delighted to say that the Board has been further enhanced by several experienced

brethren, who have agreed to join the Board. These include Paul Rayner, Karl Hottt and David Barker together with Nigel Gregory (our Group 3 Representative), who has also joined us as a non

executive member, all of whom bring a wealth of experience and knowledge.

After having served five years as a Director, Oliver Coote recently stepped down and our grateful thanks go to Oliver for all the time and effort which he has contributed during this period.

As you can imagine, the last two years have been a very turbulent time for the Masonic Hall Company, brought on by the ravages of the COVID 19 pandemic. This has caused not only the abandonment and cancellations of our meetings but, additionally, the loss of most of our external bookings. Inevitably, this has led to a dramatic fall in our income. Throughout this period, our aim has been to stabilise the

Chairman's Report Continued

finances. This has been significantly helped by government support, by way of Small Business Grants and Furlough Payments. Consequently, we have been able to offset some of the losses of income, as well as to retain and support our valued staff during this time of uncertainty.

Hopefully, we are now starting to see the end of most, if not all, of the restrictions with which we have been living over this extended period and this will, undoubtedly, have the positive effect of an increase in both external bookings and attendances at our meetings over the coming months. However, it is anticipated that this will, inevitably, be a very gradual process by way of a return to the pre pandemic levels which we previously enjoyed.

Despite these difficulties, I am pleased to be able to tell you that, throughout this period, the Board has been able to continue with all the essential maintenance and repairs previously outlined in the Ashlar House Herald. In addition we have seen the completion of the newly constructed Remembrance Garden. All these projects would not have been possible without the help of many volunteers generously donating their time and skills.

Without doubt, the main challenge which the Board has faced has been the refinancing of our borrowings totalling £427,796.50, including interest payable.

Brethren will, no doubt, recall that both the original purchase price of Ashlar House and the subsequent development costs were funded by the sale of the premises in Churchgate Street, together with generous loans made by a number of members.

A large proportion of these loans became repayable in May 2021, with another large repayment falling due in May 2022. As a direct result of our inability to trade, we lacked the necessary funds to enable us to make payments as we had envisaged. We therefore engaged an Independent Financial Adviser to investigate the possibility of arranging commercial funding to meet these obligations. However, this did not prove successful, owing to our continuing inability to trade.

Nevertheless, I am now delighted to be able to tell you that we have been able to secure a single loan on the same terms as our previous loans, over an eight year period which has enabled us to fully repay our existing creditors. Our sincere thanks go to all those brethren who made loans enabling our vision of Ashlar House to be realised.

Going forward, it is our intention to keep you all fully updated on our outstanding financial commitments. In addition, we hope that, following the conclusion of

the Festival, both individual brethren and Lodges and Chapters and all those masonic bodies using the facilities will be keen to help us to discharge our borrowings and to further enhance our wonderful facilities, for the benefit of all of us. We can all help in that regard. Please watch this space!

Other developments have included the engagement of an external Marketing and PR resource to devise and implement a marketing plan for the next 12 months, concentrating on advertising via social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), together with press releases via magazines and targeted email marketing campaigns, with the mandate of increasing our exposure and thus the levels of our external bookings.

Our website is currently being upgraded and this will also see a rebrand of our logo. Together with the introduction of a secure members' site, which will provide helpful information and regular news from the Board of Directors, these updates are scheduled to go live very shortly.

Last year saw the reintroduction of the Social Committee, headed up by Nigel Gregory. The first event, a Summer BBQ, was a huge success and very well attended and further functions are now planned. Please do support them!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Directors and Board Members for their invaluable support throughout the year, in particular, Mike Helliard (Company Secretary), Ian Gray (Treasurer) and members of our Social Committee for their help in organising the social events, all of which, I would like to stress is entirely voluntary.

I would also like to place on record my thanks to Camilla, Jane and Gary and all at Roff Caterers for their hard work and continued support at Ashlar House.

Any organisation is only as good as its membership, and your support is always needed. You can help us to grow to by volunteering in so many ways. We always need assistance with all year-round garden maintenance, general maintenance within the building, repairs to the shared masonic equipment and furniture, attendance at social events and promotion of our wonderful venue to family, friends and work colleagues. All of this will ensure our future success, to the benefit of us all.

Finally, the Board Members are always keen both to welcome and encourage your suggestions and to answer any queries which you may have. Please do not hold back!

Message from our Group 3 Representative, Nigel Gregory

Once more, I am delighted to have the opportunity of penning a few lines in this Newsletter.

The various efforts of Board members continue and once again our thanks are due to each of them for their time and expertise in dealing with a myriad of matters to keep Ashlar House in good shape, both physically and financially.

With a bit of luck; a fair wind; common sense and a few jabs; 2022 should be considerably different and less problematic than the last two years so we have much to look forward to in the coming year.



Other than a return to our usual masonic meetings and activities, a further Group 3 BBQ is penciled in for Sunday 24th July. Last years event was a great success and let's hope this year will be even better.

I look forward to seeing you all as soon as possible

Nigel W.G.Gregory

Group 3 Provincial Representative

Burn's Night Supper

Friday 21st January 2022 witnessed, not just a celebration of Robbie Burns, but another steady and sensible return to normality at Ashlar House with a superb meal and entertainment under the auspices of a Burns' Night Supper.

The menu provided by Roff Caterers, followed the traditional fare for a Burn's Night and was superb in both quality and quantity and much enjoyed by the many members and guests who attended. The fare was worked off in quick fashion by traditional style dancing to the Reelers folk band – I'm not sure that anyone made it through to the Strictly Come Dancing auditions, but a great time was had by everyone.

With grateful thanks to William McColl and his team, the Reelers and past members of the Caledonian Society who also joined us.



David Barker

A little over a year ago, I was asked to join the Board of Directors of the St Edmundsbury Masonic Hall Company. At that time, COVID had taken a real hold on all of us and Ashlar House was suffering not only because of a serious loss in income caused by the restrictions but also by the fact that a new Board of Directors was still finding its feet.

All members of the Board of Directors have something to offer in terms of experience and, apparently, it was felt that my profession as a Solicitor, prior to my retirement, might come in handy!

My Masonic journey started in May 1991 when I was initiated into Abbey Lodge No 1592. I was installed as Master of that Lodge in 2000, having the honour to be in the Chair at its 1000th meeting. I was delighted to be appointed as a Provincial Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies in 2008 and then as a Provincial Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies in 2013. I was subsequently greatly honoured to be appointed the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies in 2015 and then to Grand Rank in 2017. I am also a Member of White Rose Chapter No 1008, a Past Provincial Grand Steward and an Honorary Member of The Sportsman's Lodge of Suffolk, all of which are very dear to me.

Over my four year tenure as Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies, I travelled the length and breadth of our Province, visiting all our masonic venues on nearly 150 occasions. Not only did I meet very many wonderful brethren but these visits also gave me the opportunity to experience the different styles of venue and the Lodges who use them and how they are owned, managed and supported, an immensely enjoyable and invaluable experience, resulting in a knowledge base which I sincerely hope will benefit us all.

The challenges which we have all faced over the last two years are, of course, well-known but they could not have come at a worse time for the Board of Directors, charged with the maintenance and development of Ashlar House. I have been enormously impressed by the dedication and skill offered by my colleagues and sincerely hope to be able to contribute to the future success of our wonderful venue.

Despite a serious shortfall in income, the Board of Directors has succeeded in retaining all the staff who support us, maintained the premises to a high standard, developed the garden areas, ensured that all equipment and fixtures have been regularly serviced and, most importantly, restructuring our borrowing so as to put us on a firm financial footing for the foreseeable future.



Work is taking place to promote our venue by advertising and marketing, including the development of a new, much enhanced website and plans are afoot to enhance the premises themselves. All this takes place behind the scenes but is done voluntarily and willingly by those members who have so generously offered their time and experience.

I am greatly honoured to have been invited to join these brethren who work so hard on behalf of us all.

New Bar Offerings



With Dry January thankfully now behind us, the Directors decided to look a bit deeper into what has become a current trend of low alcohol drinks. Historically, these have been pretty terrible, with zero alcohol lagers tasting nothing like their counterparts. However, over the last couple of years this market has changed rapidly.

The bar has offered 2 of Adnams low alcohol beers, Sole Star and Ghost Ship, for a while now. Whilst the Sole Star was first to arrive, the low alcohol Ghost Ship has definitely been a winner with the brethren and is one of our best sellers. The fact these now taste far better than before means the brethren have a real choice in what to drink if they are driving or simply want a break from alcohol but fancy a good 'old fashioned' pint.

The wine and spirits world is now starting to catch up. The bar will now be offering low alcohol 0.5% red and white wine and low alcohol Gin. Many of you at this point may have already disregarded the gin if you have tried some of the no alcohol versions on the market, and we wouldn't blame you, most are awful.

We have, however, discovered a new type, distilled by Adnams. The Gin is 50% abv, at which point you may ask how can that be low alcohol? The answer is that they have upped the botanicals 10x, much like a vanilla essence works. Therefore, you only need 2.5ml of gin to a normal amount of tonic which gives you a

drink that tastes like a gin and tonic but is only 0.6%abv (0.1 unit of alcohol), a perfect low alcohol alternative.

Next time you are at Ashlar House and would like a G&T but have the car, why not try one and tell us what you think. We have tried it and the opinion is that it really captures the G&T taste and feel.

You may also see that last year we had a Coke dispenser fitted and all new bar pumps and lines. Thankfully this hasn't cost us anything and has also meant that we have brought in our very own Ashlar House branded Compass Craft Lager along with some new premium lagers. The real ale pump remains, and we will look to bring in new beers where we can. Another addition late last year was our new bean to cup coffee machine offering espresso, latte, hot chocolate and more.

We feel these changes have given a wider offering for both our Masonic meetings and for the functions that are held here. As ever, we are always happy to hear your feedback on these changes and any ideas for the future.



Grand Officers 'raid' Abbot Baldwin Lodge



The Abbot Baldwin Lodge regular meeting of Monday 7th February was 'raided' by no less than seven Grand Officers after VWBro John Rice PDPGM PGSwdB (Eng) conceived the idea with two aims; supporting Lodges as they emerge from the pandemic and enhancing the relationship between Grand Officers and newer members of Lodges. This daring plan was 'executed' by WBro David Barker PAGDC (Eng) with the assistance of WBro's Keith Huxley PAPGM PSGD (Eng); Traver Scarfe PJGD (Eng); Roger Nash PAGDC (Eng); Peter Gosling PAGDC (Eng); Nigel Gregory PAGDC (Eng) and Paul Rackham PAGStdB (Eng) who were aided by the attendance of four active Provincial Officers and three Masters from Royal St.Edmund's; Magna Carta and Solea Lodges.

Despite the 'raid' Abbot Baldwin Lodge Past Masters tried their best to impress and entertain all visitors and members with a double ceremony of Passing for Bro's John Martineau and Jeff Dearsley.

Once things calmed down a little; the 'protagonists' were captured and allowed themselves to be photographed

Unfortunately, VWBro John Rice was struck with a medical issue at the eleventh hour and admitted to the West Suffolk Hospital for treatment. His absence was sorely missed but he was fondly remembered in traditional style at 9pm.

The whole experience was greatly appreciated by all Abbot Baldwin Lodge members and guests and especially so by newer members and guests who were delighted to see such Grand Officer, Provincial and visiting Masters support.

The Order of the Secret Monitor

Once you have taken your Third Degree in a Craft Lodge it sets about your interest in the other side orders that exist, so you want to explore and join something that will broaden your knowledge and additional friendship. You will meet several members in your lodge that will say you must join this or must join that, which doesn't particularly help with your decision making. I am in Craft and also in Chapter, and over the period of time since my initiation in 1989 I have only tried one other side order.

Although it is somewhat challenging to write about an order that you have little or no knowledge on, it is hoped that over the months ahead I can offer you some pointers that might help you with your decision making to give you extended enjoyment during your masonic years.

Order of the Secret Monitor

The first known references to the Order of the Secret Monitor are known to be Dutch in origin, being first mentioned in 1778 as the Order of Jonathan and David in connection with an Order of Jesus Christ. However, the Masonic degree as we know it today, arose around 1850, under various titles – "Brotherly Love," "Jonathan and David," and finally "Secret Monitor", as a side degree.



All Master Masons are eligible for membership of this Order but must be invited by a member. The Order meets in Conclaves, each with a Supreme Ruler at its head. There are three degrees in the order, as practised in the UK. The first degree, the Secret Monitor in which the legend of David and Jonathan is acted out in the ceremony of induction. The second degree, Prince, the admission ceremony is derived from the Book of Samuel. The third degree is the ceremony of installation of Supreme Ruler and is normally carried out once a year at the installation meeting.

It has many similarities of Craft in the respect that the Conclave has an opening, it initiates candidates, it has risings and also a closing ceremony. The significant difference and uniqueness of OSM is the Visiting Deacon role (replacing the Almoner in Craft). When you are admitted into the Order you are placed in one of four groups. They are numbered 1 to 4, no fancy names like Chapter. You never leave your group and will be cared for by the Visiting Deacon for your group. Since those Deacon roles are progressive,

when you are going through those offices over a period of 4 years you will get to know every member of the Conclave personally and well, and that equips you well for what is to come when you leave VD1 and go to the first principal Office.

By the time you reach that position you will know your VD colleagues far better than ever a WM gets to know his officers. One of the current members gave me a lovely description of how he came to be a member: "My lovely old friend, invited me to join him in OSM, which I did. I was immediately impressed with the friendship and brotherly love which was generated by all the members. Much more so than in the Craft.

I realised the structure of an OSM Conclave was much more geared to caring for each other and the role of the Visiting Deacon brought contact much closer and more friendly than anything I had experienced with a Craft Almoner".

Apparently, the St Edmunds Conclave 352 in Bury St Edmunds is a small unit (less than 30 members) that meet three times a year and the installation is one of those, they are a happy and enthusiastic group. You are likely to be encouraged to develop your career and serve every Office on your way to the Chair. What is more is that Provincial appointments come much faster in OSM, compared with Craft, provided you have worked for them. There are no LOIs and often no rehearsal either. The festive board is a happy occasion with the toasts you will recognise from the Craft toast list.

The structure of the officers, starting from the top:

- Supreme Ruler
- Counsellor
- Guide
- Visiting Deacon 1
- Visiting Deacon 2
- VD 3
- VD 4
- Guarder = (inner guard)

A year in each office, then you move up one, so typically its 10 years to the Chair!

If you think that this sounds like something that will appeal to you, whilst you climb the ladder to the WM Chair in your lodge, then don't be afraid to ask any member of your Craft lodge who you should speak to that would be able to advise you!

COME AND JOIN US!

GROUP 3 - BBQ

FROM 12 NOON SUNDAY 24TH JULY 2022

@ ASHLAR HOUSE



BBQ will include:

**Marinated Chicken Pieces
Locally Made Burgers and Sausages
Vegetable Kebabs and Burgers
(Vegetarian option pre ordered)
Mixed Seasonal Salad, Coleslaw
Sliced Cheese, Fried Onions and Sauces
Assorted Rolls
& Dessert Table**

**Open to all members ; wives, partners,
family & friends**

Adults £20 – Under 12 £12 – Under 5 Free

**THERE WILL BE A RAFFLE IN AID OF THE ASHLAR HOUSE BUILDING FUND AND ANY
DONATION OF PRIZES WOULD BE MOST WELCOME.**

**FOR YOUR ADDED COMFORT PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN GARDENS CHAIRS &
SMALL TABLES IF YOU WISH**

Please confirm your booking to: Grp3Rep@suffolkfreemason.org.uk
or by post to N.Gregory c/o Ashlar House, Function Suites
23 Eastern Way, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP32 7AB

