

Internet Lodge

Chester – Lodge Festive Board

Toast to Absent Brethren

14th August 2010

Brethren, welcome to our Chester meeting. I include in this welcome our distinguished guests and the brethren of the Lodge here at our Festive Board, as well as the many Internet Lodge members scattered over the four quarters of the globe who are here via streaming video for the very first time.

I picked Chester three years ago as a venue for my first meeting as Worshipful Master because of its history. Cheshire, of course, was the first Province to be established by the Grand Lodge of England, and this was the start of the whole system of provincial administration under the Grand Lodge. In addition, Cheshire was the place where it was first recorded that an Englishman was initiated into an English Lodge in 1646.

To commemorate this event, my friend and brother Alan Turton presented a talk today in Lodge on Bro Elias Ashmole, who recorded this historic event in his famous diary. And that was what I was thinking when I picked this venue 3 years ago in my Manifesto for election as Junior Warden.

But history is an interesting thing, because while it is in our past, it is also something that we make every day. And that is what we are now doing. Through the hard work of a few of our members, we are able to make this historic webcast, and include a much greater number of our members in our meeting than ever before.

You may not be aware of this, but we tried to do this about five years ago. At that time, I was prepared to do the reply to the toast to absent brethren. It would have been at 6 am at my home in Canada. As it turned out, the technology of the time would not allow us to go ahead. So I am particularly pleased that this time, I am able, as Worshipful Master, to be the one giving the toast, and we have a brother in an even more remote location at a more inhospitable hour of the day, to respond.

As an aside, we also made another bit of history with this meeting. We were scheduled to meet today at the Queen Street Masonic Hall in Chester, but some structural problems with the building caused it to be unusable by us, and three weeks ago the booking had to be cancelled. That would have been the first time since Internet Lodge was established, that we would have cancelled a meeting, and that would have been a bit of history I wouldn't care to be involved in making. Fortunately, some of our hard working officers were able to find this great facility and save us from disaster. I thank them sincerely for their quick work.

So now on to the toast to absent brethren. In a normal lodge, this is done at 9 o'clock in the evening. They tell me the reason for this is that the hands of the clock are at a right angle, in true Masonic fashion. Well, Internet Lodge, which always meets in the early afternoon, tries to give this toast at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the other time at which the clock hands form a right angle. This is also a toast which has a great deal of meaning to Internet Lodge. In addition to remembering our members who have passed to the Grand Lodge Above, (and we have had too many of these during our short time as a Lodge), it also gives us the opportunity to think of our many members all over the world, who rarely or never have the chance to meet physically with us.

Our membership comes from over 30 countries around the world, and from 80 different Masonic jurisdictions. There are many whom I have never met, and many whom I expect I will never meet. They are, of course, involved in the Lodge through our e-mail message list and our web site on a daily basis, but we never get to meet face to face.

While this webcast lets them at least see and hear us, and is by no means a two way communications medium, I hope it is only a start in our use of technology to add value to everyone's membership in Internet Lodge.

This will perhaps serve as a reminder to all our brethren out there that we are in fact thinking of them at every meeting, and we wish they could all be here with us.

Brethren, please rise and join me in a toast to absent brethren.

Internet Lodge

Response to the Toast to Absent Brethren

Lodge Festive Board - Chester

Saturday 14th August 2010

Worshipful Master, Honoured Guests, Brethren All – and especially my fellow ABSENT BRETHREN around the World who might be tuning in to this broadcast - it is truly a great honour and privilege for me to Respond to the Toast to Absent Brethren.

Maybe it would be courteous for me first to introduce myself – mainly for those who don't know me! My name is David Holder and I live in the Northern Beaches area of Sydney, Australia – about 40 kms north of the famous Opera House and Harbour Bridge.

But as you've probably gathered already I'm an Englishman, not an Aussie – well not yet anyway! After a few years dividing our lives between Australia and England, Shirley and I emigrated from the UK last November to be close to our son and his family who live here.

I've been a member of Internet Lodge since October 1998 and up to the time we left the UK Shirley and I were 'regulars' at Internet Lodge meetings and events in the UK – and we've enjoyed the Lodge visits to Florida and Holland along the way and made many lovely friendships.

So leaving the UK meant sadly that we were likely not to see our Internet Lodge friends as much as we'd been used to – it was one of the 'negatives' of our decision to emigrate and start a new life Downunder.

I really couldn't have imagined when I joined the Lodge almost 12 years ago in England that I would be sitting here, 10,000 or so miles away at 10'clock in the morning in an Aussie mid-winter responding to the Toast to Absent Brethren!!

But Brethren, back to the task in hand!

Firstly, Worshipful Master, Bro. Alan, thank you for the warmth with which you Proposed this Toast – and Brethren for the manner in which you received it!

I must admit to feeling a little like Neil Armstrong at this moment – when he first stepped on the moon and uttered those immortal words 'ONE SMALL STEP.....' – in our case maybe it's ONE SMALL STEP for Internet Lodge but perhaps the beginnings of one giant leap for Freemasonry!!

And this Toast – has anyone EVER responded to the Toast to Absent Brethren before? Like many of us, I've lost count of the number of Toasts I've either Proposed or Responded to in the 20-odd years I've been a Freemason – but this is a first I am sure!!

Absence implies 'not here', 'away', 'non-presence', 'being elsewhere' – but Brethren HERE WE ARE – by the magic of technology my fellow 'Absent Brethren' and I are here and are able to join you, LIVE, at the Festive Board in Chester on this day Saturday 14th August 2010!

Well, not for me of course! It's now Sunday in Sydney – a little after 1am to be precise so if I sound somewhat less 'sharp' than I usually do it's because it's really past my bedtime!!

Actually there are probably only a few of us this close to the International Date Line and therefore 'ahead' of the rest of you, so to speak! I think the closest to the Dateline will probably be Bro. Juris Gulbis in Fiji who I had the pleasure to Propose for membership of IL last year – if you happen to be listening Bro. Juris, good morning!!

I was looking at the 'Where in the World' section of our website earlier and including 8 of us here in Australia there are only 15 members of IL in the Southern Hemisphere – which I found quite surprising. We're rather interestingly classed' as 'REST OF WORLD'!!

Worshipful Master, Brethren, a unique occasion such as this presents quite a few new challenges! It's not only 'WHAT SHOULD I SAY?' but 'What should I wear?', 'Do I sit or stand?', 'Should I tidy the house up first?', 'What should I drink – at 1am?'!!

But seriously, I want to use this occasion and on behalf of all Absent Brethren today to thank successive Worshipful Masters for the excellent way in which they have led us over the past 12 years and for those other Brethren who day in, day out do so much to make this Lodge such a special one. Brethren we thank you for all you do.

So Brethren wherever you may be in the World at this minute I greet you and end by saying good morning, g'day or maybe simply goodnight!

And with acknowledgements to our Bro. Orator:

As Internet Lodge meets in Chester,
Our Fraternal Affection we gladly share,
So before the day passes,
We lift high our glasses
"To Our Lodge" -- we wish we could be there!

Please join and raise a glass with me Brethren: To Our Lodge!!