

FREEMASONRY TODAY

CELEBRATING 300 YEARS



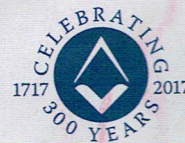
ENSURING OUR FUTURE

A message of strength
and stability from the
Grand Master **p19**

ADVISING
BUT NEVER
INTERFERING

WHEN TO
FLOAT A
NEW IDEA

INSIDE THE
WARTIME
FRATERNITY



THE GUARDIAN OF REGULARITY

Treading a fine line between advice and interference, **Derek Dinsmore's** position as Grand Chancellor is akin to that of Foreign Secretary when it comes to working with Grand Lodges around the world

When did you become a Freemason?

I was initiated in 1970 in the Midlands at Chevron Lodge, No. 6029, where I was also involved with rugby. I played for a club up there and the president of the Worcestershire and Herefordshire Rugby Union proposed me into his lodge. I was in the fashion business and had to come back to London, where I was starting my own business, and I was then asked to go through the Chair. I had control of my own diary, so I was able to go up to their meetings on a Friday. My wife was from Birmingham, so it matched up with weekends when she would go back to see her mother.

In London, I joined the Rose Croix in 1980 and was Grand Director of Ceremonies for 10 years. By that time, I was working with a German company, looking after the promotion of their products in the UK and Ireland. I retired when I was 58 and started to focus more on my Freemasonry. I was then offered the position of Grand Chancellor at Grand Lodge, taking over from Alan Englefield, who was my predecessor, in 2012.

Why was the position of Grand Chancellor created in 2007?

The relationship between our Provinces, Districts and all the overseas Grand Lodges that we recognise used to come under the responsibility of the Grand Secretary. However, with things like the break-up of the Eastern Bloc in the 1990s, the Grand Secretary had to spend an increasing amount of time dealing with urgent external relations as more Grand Lodges sought recognition, sometimes to the detriment of other matters under his care.

The Rulers and the Board of General Purposes therefore decided to relieve the Grand Secretary of the pressure of external relations and created the office of Grand Chancellor in 2007. I'm responsible for overseas relations, not our Districts, and with Grand Lodge now recognising 197 Grand Lodges around the world, there is a lot to deal with.

Of course, I always knew through my days in Rose Croix at Duke Street [in London] of the regard in which the United Grand Lodge of England was held. However, it wasn't until I started doing this job that I realised quite how high a position we have in the world as the 'Mother Grand Lodge'. Each Grand Lodge is sovereign, but we do get asked for advice a lot and we have to be very careful in the way that we conduct ourselves.

On the whole, everybody wants to be on side and wants to keep it that way. Generally, that's the role of the Grand Chancellor – to be seen, to be spoken to, to give advice when asked, and to promote regular Freemasonry worldwide. The biggest problem we've got is not regular Freemasonry but irregular Freemasonry. That's becoming more and more of an issue with things like the internet. With so many voices on the web, people don't know the difference between regular and irregular Freemasonry.

So is your role to make sure Grand Lodges stick to the rules?

There are principles in our Book of Constitutions that we would call 'regularity'. If somebody asks me why does UGLE recognise another Grand Lodge the answer would be because we are happy with



In his role as Grand Chancellor, Derek Dinsmore oversees UGLE's relationship with almost 200 Grand Lodges worldwide



its regularity and that we would be content for our members to inter-visit with their members. However, there are lots of Grand Lodges, or bodies calling themselves Grand Lodges, around the world that don't comply with our rules of regularity. They might have mixed lodges, not believe in the great architect of the universe, get involved in politics or religion – things that we would call 'irregular'.

I'm convinced that the reason that we are going to celebrate our Tercentenary this year is because we've not got involved in politics and religion over time; otherwise I think it would have been the end of English Freemasonry. So we have to be careful, and that's what we're really trying to do, trying to promote regular Freemasonry. If there is more than one Grand Lodge in a jurisdiction that applies to us for recognition then, provided that the two agree to share the territory or jurisdiction, we would consider recognising them as regular bodies.

How do you approach your role?

The best bit of advice I was ever given when I first started travelling for Duke Street, around 16 years ago, was that once you'd flown over the Isle of Wight, forget what goes on in English Freemasonry. It's not about implementing or taking a set of working practices out to other Grand Lodges. Every single one is entirely sovereign and nobody can tell it what to do.

After every trip as Grand Chancellor I make a report. There is also a group of people behind me, I'm not pushed out there on my own. I report to the External Relations Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Board of General Purposes, and I'm also on the Board of General Purposes itself.

If we consider that a Grand Lodge's practices are irregular, then we've only really got two courses of action. One is to suspend relations and the other is, as a last resort, to withdraw recognition. Because of the respect and recognition that UGLE has, just being able to do that does give it power, which is why there is a fine line between advice and interference – you've got to tread a fairly careful road.

What happened in France in 2009?

The Grand Loge Nationale Française (GLNF) was formed more than a 100 years ago, and we never considered its members or lodges to be irregular. It was only the behaviour of the then Grand Master that we felt was bringing Freemasonry into disrepute. We made representations, but nothing changed. We then suspended relations, so members of lodges under UGLE and lodges under GLNF could go to their own lodges but there wouldn't be any inter-visitation.

We hoped that this suspension would fire a warning shot across the bows, but after 12 months we had to withdraw recognition. This meant that those members who belonged to lodges under the GLNF and UGLE had to resign from one or the other. There was a lot of movement within Europe trying to create a confederation within France, and some were trying to open Districts within France.

We said to everyone, 'Look, stand away, it's a problem for the GLNF's members. It's for them to resolve, and outsiders should not get involved.' For us, it was always a question of *when*, rather than *if*, we would re-recognise the GLNF. A new Grand Master ►

'It was always a question of when, rather than if, we would re-recognise the Grand Loge Nationale Française'

'I've been in Freemasonry for 46 years and I'll never be able to put back in as much as I've got out of it'

was elected by the French brethren, a new executive appointed, and peace and harmony returned. After a period of about two years recognition was restored.

How do you interact with other Grand Lodges?

We have open invitations to our sister Grand Lodges to come to our Quarterly Communication meetings. We just ask them to give us four weeks' notice, and we restrict the visitations to three senior members because of space. There's a dinner the night before for the visiting Grand Masters, usually in Freemasons' Hall, where we can talk about any issues, although we try and keep it social rather than business-led.

I also go to annual meetings at overseas Grand Lodges. It gives you the opportunity to talk to everybody and we can resolve most of the issues that come up through face-to-face meetings.

In my business life working for a German company, the common language was English, but sometimes I would be talking at a board meeting and they'd be saying 'yes', but when I looked at them I knew they hadn't understood what I'd said. So I'd go another way to try to get the information across. That's very important for my role, where I am talking to people whose first language isn't English. It's about face-to-face contact and getting a feeling about people.

What does Freemasonry mean to you?

I've been in Freemasonry for 46 years and I'll never be able to put back in as much as I've got out of it. I believe very much in the principles of Freemasonry and I'm happy to promote them. They are as relevant today as they ever were, particularly to younger people.

Freemasonry is a personal journey for the individual and we hope that the lessons he learns will affect his public and private life. But for different people it means different things. I've met plenty of



Freemasons who've become quite esoteric and spiritual but on the other hand you also get those people who meet four times a year with the same group, have dinner afterwards, go home and that's that. There's nothing wrong with either approach, it just depends on what the individual wants to get out of it – after all, it is a fraternal organisation.

For me, it's been about being introduced to some great people who I would never otherwise have had the opportunity to meet. The nice thing about Freemasonry is that, irrespective of who you meet, we've all gone through the same process: we've all been initiated, we've all been passed, we've all been raised, and we've all gone through the rituals. That gives you a level and such a strong base.