

Provincial Grand Lodge of Somerset

Annual meeting of the Charity Organisation Committee 25th March 2010

Report of the Provincial Grand Almoner

I have much pleasure in presenting my 12th and final annual report as Provincial Grand Almoner.

The effect of the recession has taken a little while to work through but in the past few months there has been an increase in the number of applications for financial support made to the Masonic Charities on behalf of those Brethren and dependants affected. The applications have been to both the Grand Charity for grants to support day to day living expenses and to The Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys to assist with the maintenance of children. With the continuing recession I would ask all members to be aware of those who may not be regularly attending lodge meetings without good reason. It just may be that their financial situation is precluding them from attending and that they may be in need of financial support and that the Masonic Charities can ease their situation. This support applies to those who for whatever reason may have resigned from the Craft so it is important that wherever possible contact with these former members is maintained.

Again I must point out that **on no account** must application forms be completed by the applicant's themselves. The Lodge or case Almoner must see documentary evidence of the figures being included on the application form and must be satisfied that all information being provided is accurate.

All members should by now be aware of the further developments in the area of support in the Masonic Samaritan Fund and in particular the area of expenditure delegated to Provincial Grand Almoners. There are likely to be further developments during the next year so it is important that everyone reads what is sent to them and ensures that partners and dependants are also made aware of what is happening.

In my report last year I may have raised expectations with the launch of the Almoners Handbook. Unfortunately it has taken longer to finalise than anticipated. I am, however, pleased to be able to say that after a number of further meetings and a review by an independent publisher the Handbook will be formally launched at a national conference of Provincial Grand Almoners at the end of June. It will be in loose leafed format (so that it can be more cost effectively amended) and an electronic version will be hung off of the Grand Charity website. It has not been easy to cover all the different processes and procedures adopted by various Provinces so to that extent it has not been possible to draft a 'one size fits all' handbook. The loose leafed format will enable individual Provincial Grand Almoners to design inserts to explain procedures appropriate to their Province. Hopefully it will be seen as a 'one stop shop' and include all relevant information required by Lodge and Case Almoners without the need to refer elsewhere. You will be asked for feedback so the end product will be a living document capable of being amended as required. At the same time as the launch of the Handbook a training programme will be made available to Provincial Grand Almoners. This will be in a module format so can be adapted to meet individual needs. I have no doubt that with the support of the Training and Education team a series of training workshops will be designed and rolled out.

The collocation of the 4 main Masonic Charities into Freemasons' Hall is already reaping benefits. There is a visible sign of more of a working together environment particularly with regard to applications for support. This is relevant where for example the Grand Charity receives an application for a Masonic Relief Grant and the information provided shows that there are dependent children. The sharing of this nature of information will almost certainly generate an enquiry from the Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys and will speed up the process of providing needed financial support.

Lodge Almoners may like to know that consideration is now being given to having a single generic application form for The Grand Charity, Masonic Samaritan Fund and the Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys.

Financial and other support from the Masonic Charities

A summary of grants awarded by the 4 main Masonic Charities in the year ended 31st December 2009 and comparison with the previous year is:

	2009 £	2008 £
Grand Charity (Masonic Relief Grants)	35445	39000
Grand Charity (Transferred Annuities – ex RMBI)	2600	3170
Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution	45751	49470
Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys	109474	56793
Masonic Samaritan Fund	44508	45512
Total	237778	193945

The Freemasons' Grand Charity

9 grants were made to meet day to day living expenses (compared with 12 in the previous year) and 3 grants were made for the supply of mobility equipment or adaptation to property for the more disabled. The Transferred Beneficiaries Fund continues to make regular payments towards daily living expenses (eg rent, food, heating) to former beneficiaries of the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution Annuity Fund. We now have only 2 beneficiaries.

The Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution

The data provided by the RMBI suggests that there are 11 members and/or dependants from the Province accommodated in RMBI homes and the cost to the charity for those who are not self funding is £45751. With the change in the application process over the years it has not been possible to identify those accommodated in the homes and the provisions of the Data Protection Act preclude the Charity providing names etc. If you are aware of any member and/or dependant of your lodge who is accommodate in a RMBI home then please let me, or W.Bro. Peter Hodder, know.

The Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys

In total 28 young people are being supported by the Trust. This compares with 20 in the year ended 31st December 2008. I am awaiting a decision in 1 further case.

The increase in financial support is to some extent due to those children who were being financially supported by grandparents (father is not a Mason) and because of, for example, reductions in investment income are no longer able to do so.

Masonic Samaritan Fund

In total 5 grants were awarded from 13 applications made and a further grant amounting to £9050 was made in January 2010. As well as grants for knee and hip replacements there was a grant for the supply

of digital hearing aids. In the main the applications not proceeded with were those where treatment was made available by the NHS.

Please ensure that potential applicants are reminded that surgery or treatment should not be booked or undertaken before written agreement has been received confirming that the Fund will support the application. Early contact with the Fund is therefore essential. The Masonic Samaritan Fund provides financial help in support of Medical Care and Treatment, Dental Care and Treatment and Respite Care

Somerset Masonic Widows Association

A number of branches could do with more support although I appreciate that not all widows necessarily want to be involved – however they may well do so in the future. The liaison officers are doing a fantastic job and I would ask every member to support them when they can.

Association of Friends of Cadogan Court

The magnificent effort of the Province to raise over £6000 for the Summer Fair in 2009 enabled the Committee to support the Home Manager with the purchase of equipment not provided by the RMBI. The Fair in 2010 will be on 12th June and the Somerset stall will again will be master minded by V.W. Bro. Peter Layzell. Can we better the 2009 contribution?

Unfortunately during the year one of the members of the committee, W.Bro. Rob Williams of Perpetual Friendship Lodge No. 135, was called to The Grand Lodge above. He was instrumental in acquiring the new mini bus for the residents use. He will be greatly missed. In due course he will be replaced by W.Bro. Alan Baker of Fidelity & Sincerity Lodge No. 1966. Bro. Chris Dyer was re-elected in 2009 for another three years.

During the year I have received obsolete regalia from members of the Province. This has been passed to the Home Manager for the use of the male residents. Most now have craft regalia that they can wear at Lodge meetings.

If any lodge would like to hold a meeting at Cadogan Court please contact the Home Manager, Helen Mitchell. She is also keen to visit lodges to tell members, partners and guests of the work of the RMBI and in particular Cadogan Court.

Finally

As I said at the beginning this is my last report as Provincial Grand Almoner. The last 12 years have just flown by, no doubt a sign of age. I have had the privilege to support many people but this would not have been possible without the support of Lodge Almoners and other members of the Province. I have been able to visit lodges and have always been well received and I hope to be able to continue to do so in my new office. As Almoner I have always had the support of Lin, my wife, who has taken telephone messages while I have been out and ensured that I always have a clean shirt to wear. Without her help and support it would have been almost impossible for me to continue to effectively discharge the responsibilities of the office for so long. Brethren we must remember to include our wives and partners in our enjoyment of Freemasonry because they are key to the future success and growth of the fraternity.

I have no doubt that you will provide the same support to my successor, W.Bro. Peter Hodder. Peter will be on a steep learning curve for some time so will not immediately have all the answers to the questions, in which case he may have to refer to someone who may know. Needless to say I will be here in the background if he needs me.

John Winston PJGD
Provincial Grand Almoner