

Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge – 11 March 2026

Address by RW Bro Sir Michael Snyder, Deputy Grand Master

Most Worshipful Pro Grand Master and Brethren,

In just over a year from now, we will reach a moment of great significance in the history of Freemasonry in this Constitution: the Centenary of this great building. The foundation stone of Freemasons' Hall was laid on 14 July 1927, and as we look forward to that anniversary we are reminded, not only of what was built here, but of why it was built: as a peace memorial to those who gave their lives in the Great War.

For almost a hundred years, this glorious Art Deco masterpiece has been the home of English Freemasonry throughout the world. However, we should never forget that what we enjoy today is the fruit of the gifts of those who went before us. It was not inevitable that this building would exist; it exists because our predecessors believed that English Freemasonry deserved a home worthy of its purposes, and because they were prepared to sacrifice so that future generations, including ours, might inherit something of lasting value.

Across the Constitution there are Masonic halls of every scale and character: some purpose-built, and some adapted. Each of those Masonic buildings should be, to the Brethren who meet there, a place they will want to return to, meeting after meeting. Our halls should be suitably well-resourced, not only to host Masonic meetings, but to be able to support our Lodges and Chapters who want to use the buildings for the benefit of their local communities.

Many of those buildings, just like this one, now need investment if they are to be used appropriately in modern times. Accessibility, energy efficiency, safety, flexibility of use, and the practical demands of hosting both Masonic and community activities – these are not luxuries; they are increasingly the difference between a hall that struggles and a hall that thrives.

And so, as we approach the Centenary of Freemasons' Hall, it is an entirely appropriate time to do something about this: deliberately, ambitiously, and for the benefit of the whole Constitution.

To set the right tone, it is worth recalling the example of the 1920s: the Masonic Million Appeal was launched in the years following the Great War, in a period marked by economic depression and uncertainty. And yet, the response was simply extraordinary. The sum raised was considerable, especially for that era, and it demonstrated that, when asked to do something worthy and enduring, our predecessors answered the call. Their generosity did not simply fund a project; it created a legacy.

As you are all aware, the Worshipful Masters of those Lodges that were particularly generous in that appeal are entitled to wear a Hall Stone Jewel. What you might not know is that individual Brethren who donated certain amounts were entitled to wear certain breast jewels – of course, there is now no living member of the Craft entitled to wear those individual jewels. Even if you are not from that particular area, you may be aware that Buckinghamshire is the last remaining Hall Stone Province or District, owing to the generosity of their Brethren in the Masonic Million Appeal. The jewels worn by individual Brethren, Masters of Lodges, and the Provincial Grand Master for Buckinghamshire became a mark not of privilege, but of gratitude and recognition from the rest of the Craft: a visible sign that the wearer had played their part in a great work for the benefit of Freemasonry as a whole.

Brethren, with that history in mind, and with the Centenary now approaching, I believe the time has come to renew that spirit in a way that speaks to the needs of the present day. I am therefore announcing today that we are launching a new appeal that will support not only Freemasons' Hall, but Masonic buildings across the Constitution.

It will be called the Centenary Hall Stone Appeal.

Its purpose is simple: to raise funds to support Masonic buildings throughout the Constitution – helping them to survive, to thrive, to modernise for today's use, and, where appropriate, to open their doors even wider to the communities around them. The appeal's target will be £100m, to reflect the one-hundred-year anniversary of this building, and it will be raised over a ten-year period.

The appeal will be launched across Provinces, Districts, and Metropolitan Grand Lodge at an appropriate time for each area, recognising that different parts of the Constitution have different calendars, different commitments, and different established ways of fundraising that work well locally. This will not be a one-size-fits-all exercise; it will be a Constitution-wide endeavour, delivered locally, in ways that make sense in each region.

Within the appeal there will be an opportunity for Lodges to become Centenary Hall Stone Lodges, with an associated Centenary Hall Stone Jewel to be worn by the Worshipful Master. And for those Hall Stone Lodges from the original Masonic Million appeal of the 1920s, there will be a way for that historic contribution to be honoured again, through a distinctive Centenary recognition that reflects both the original generosity and a renewed commitment as we enter the second century of this Hall.

There will also be recognition at an individual level by way of breast jewels, and area-level recognition for Metropolitan, Provincial, and District areas, whose fundraising targets will depend on the size of their membership. The aim is not only to reward generosity, but to create momentum, to encourage participation, and to make it easy for Brethren to see that their contribution, however given, is part of something much larger and lasting.

The Grand Master has taken a keen interest in the design of the new jewels for this appeal. Indeed, it was at his personal request that the dates of the Centenary of Freemasons' Hall, 1927 to 2027, were included in the design.

In the spirit of "One Journey, One Organisation", there are also plans to involve Royal Arch Chapters in the Appeal, subject to the approval of the First Grand Principal.

A Fundraising Advisory Committee has been working on the details of the Centenary Hall Stone Appeal for several months. The committee will be circulating further details and guidance regarding the Appeal to Metropolitan, Provincial, and District executives, via a Rulers' Briefing email, this afternoon. The Fundraising Advisory Committee will remain in place as a central source of help and guidance to Metropolitan, Provincial, and District fundraising teams as they launch the appeal locally.

Now, if we are asking our Brethren to contribute, it is only right that we also put in place the structures that ensure funds are used properly, fairly, and transparently, and that those who need assistance in applying for funds have access to help and guidance.

Two committees have been created to approve applications from Masonic halls for funding.

The first is the committee responsible for what will be known as the Centenary Buildings Fund, or CBE. The key point about the Centenary Buildings Fund is that, although a ring-fenced fund within UGLE's accounts, it is not a charitable fund. As such, it will support works that contribute to the day-to-day operation and sustainability of Masonic halls, including matters such as essential upgrades, operational improvements, and the practical changes that make a building viable in modern times.

The Centenary Hall Stone Appeal is for the benefit of the Centenary Buildings Fund, and although this is a very worthy cause, the fact that it will be funding general works on Masonic buildings means that it cannot operate as a charitable fund. Of course, this means that gift aid cannot be claimed on donations to the Centenary Hall Stone Appeal.

However, there is a second fund that has been set up: the Community and Heritage Buildings Fund, or CHBF. This “Heritage Fund” is a charitable fund, and it will support works with charitable, community and heritage attributes: those projects that preserve historically or architecturally important elements, improve community benefit significantly, or otherwise meet charitable purposes.

In addition, in order to help halls succeed in applying for support, the Masonic Halls Assistance Group has been formed, chaired by an Assistant Grand Master, RW Bro Steven Varley. The Assistance Group exists to assist Masonic halls in becoming “application ready”: to issue guidance, to help identify what needs to be in place before an application is made, and to support those cases which require more complex preparation. In other words, the Assistance Group is there to make it easier for halls to bring forward well-structured, well-evidenced proposals, to maximise the chances of success for worthy recipients.

It is also important to explain how funding eligibility will work in practice, because our Masonic halls and their projects will vary greatly in nature.

There will be charitable and non-charitable qualifications for buildings and for elements of projects. Some works will plainly meet charitable criteria; for example, conservation of historically or architecturally significant features of a building, or works that enhance public accessibility in a way that enables broader community use.

Other works will be plainly non-charitable but still vital to a hall’s survival and success; such as repairs and renewals that keep the building operational, upgrades to kitchens and back-of-house areas that enable sustainable dining and hospitality, essential service upgrades, and changes that improve the day-to-day use of the building by the Masonic units that meet there.

However, and this is key, there is a single application form covering both funds, and therefore Masonic hall companies will not have to decide between funds when applying. It is entirely possible, and indeed expected in many cases, that certain parts of a project could qualify for charitable funding from the Community and Heritage Buildings Fund, while the remainder could be supported by the Centenary Buildings Fund. The application process is designed to make this straightforward and to avoid unnecessary complexity at local level.

This afternoon, a joint letter from the Chairs of both funds and the Chair of the Assistance Group will be published to all Metropolitan, Provincial, and District executives, via a Rulers’ Briefing email, along with the Centenary Hall Stone Appeal information I mentioned earlier. This letter will contain the practical details of how to apply, including the application form. I am sure there

will be many questions, but that publication will cover a great deal of the detail. A frequently asked questions document will also go out to all members via a First Rising later today.

Brethren, let me also explain, clearly and simply, where the money for each fund will come from.

For the Centenary Buildings Fund, the vast majority will come from the new Centenary Hall Stone Appeal, supplemented by the generous seed contribution approved at Supreme Grand Chapter in November, and other funding from the Board of General Purposes.

For the Community and Heritage Buildings Fund, it is expected that the majority of funding will come from the Masonic Charitable Foundation, supporting those projects that meet charitable purposes and deliver community and heritage benefit in the proper way. The MCF has already made a generous donation of three million pounds to the charitable Heritage Fund, and it is anticipated that they will continue to support this worthy endeavour, while taking care to ensure that strong MCF support remains both for external charities, and also for looking after Freemasons and their dependents.

At the same time as everything I have mentioned so far, we have also had a separate group working on how to improve Freemasons' Hall itself – because we have a responsibility not only to preserve this building, but to make it appropriate for the needs of 21st Century Freemasons – and to do so in a way that respects its heritage and its standing as the headquarters of English Freemasonry.

Full originating kitchens will mean that all food can be prepared on-site for the first time ever, and the current Café and Bar area will be transformed into a dining space for up to 640 people. These improvements will allow Freemasons' Hall to offer enhanced dining for Lodges and Chapters, as well as the ability to host large-scale, catered events; for example, dining at Quarterly Communications and Metropolitan and Provincial meetings.

The courtyard will be split into two levels and covered with a glass roof, converting it into an all-weather space to be used as a new bar area. We will also take this opportunity to upgrade to eco-friendly and money-saving heating throughout Freemasons' Hall.

We have engaged one of the most experienced and reputable heritage architectural practices, Purcell, to work with us on our vision for this project. Planning permission and listed building consent is not yet obtained, but we have agreed the direction of travel to enhance Freemasons' Hall.

Brethren, having briefly outlined what is proposed for Freemasons' Hall, I want to make absolutely clear the principle at the heart of today's announcement. We expect that around 90% of the

Community and Heritage Buildings Fund, and around 70% of the Centenary Buildings Fund, will be used to fund Masonic halls other than Freemasons' Hall. I really do mean it when I say that these funds are to support Masonic buildings throughout the Constitution.

In order to ensure that all the committees and groups continue to pull in the same direction, the Pro Grand Master has asked me to continue to oversee the work of the Centenary Buildings Fund committee, the Community and Heritage Buildings Fund committee, and the Masonic Halls Assistance Group, as well as Chairing the Freemasons' Hall Enhancement Project; I also personally chair the Fundraising Advisory Committee. The work of all these groups has been going on for some time behind the scenes – I am most grateful to all the members for the considerable work they have done so far, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with them in the years to come.

Brethren, I am sure there will be many questions. The publication to Metropolitan, Provincial, and District executives this afternoon will cover a great deal of the detail on the Centenary Hall Stone Appeal and the application process for funding from the Centenary Buildings Fund and the Heritage Fund. The First Rising frequently asked questions document that will be sent to all members later today will keep them updated as well.

Brethren, I hope that you will agree that this is an exciting opportunity to improve our Masonic experience, to show that we are a generation of Masons who appreciate what we have inherited, and who give generously to provide a legacy to our successors, as well as enjoy the benefits of improved facilities ourselves, and the opportunity to share them with our communities. Brethren, we have an opportunity, indeed, I believe, a responsibility, to honour our inheritance by leaving a legacy for those who will follow us. I am sure that we can rise to this challenge, with satisfaction to ourselves, and lasting service to our Order and our communities.

Thank you, Brethren.