



## PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SUFFOLK

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Provincial Grand Almoner – Jamie Gwatkin

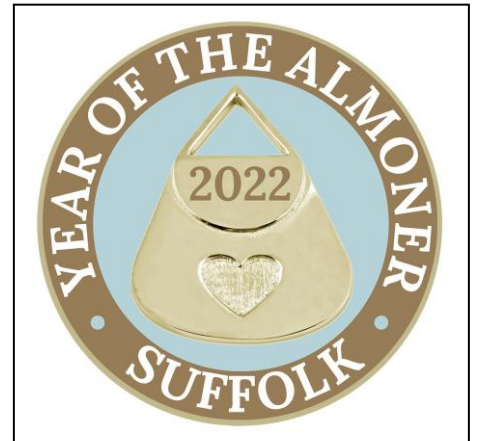
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### REPORT OF THE PROVINCIAL GRAND ALMONER

RW Provincial Grand Master and Brethren. I am pleased to present my report for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022.

The last 12 months have been busy for the Almoners in Suffolk as Freemasonry emerged out of the COVID-19 lockdown and resumed normal activities. The main emphasis at Provincial level was centred around the “Year of the Almoner 2022” initiative, which was aimed at raising the profile of the role of the Almoner and the tremendous amount of unseen work that is undertaken when delivering pastoral care to all within our Masonic Community. This was delivered via visits to nearly 70% of Suffolk lodges by the Group Almoner Team; to recognise the lodge Almoners and their supporting Brethren and to thank them for their sterling work over the previous 24 months. The remainder will be visited in the first part of 2023.



The initiative gained recognition in London when the Grand Secretary Dr David Staples tweeted “*The Almoner is a very important role within Lodges and I’m glad to see that @pplsuffolk have designated 2022 as the Year of the Almoner*”. Following this, I was asked to present our work in Suffolk at the National Almoners Conference in Bristol which was held in October 2022. This received a lot of favourable comments, and several Provinces are considering replicating what we do. I can say that we have shone a light on our Province within UGLE in 2022.

The scope of support offered by the MCF has been widened over the last year. A new mental health support service to children and young people aged from 5 to 15 years was soft launched in autumn 2022. This adds to the comprehensive wellbeing package offered via the Counselling Careline and the Enhanced Mental Health (EMH) service which is offered to adults. The MCF delivered less support to our Suffolk community in 2022. A total of 56 awards (down from 85) were made totalling £171,000 (down from £302,000) to 68 recipients, which reflects the reduced demand post COVID. At the point of writing this report, the support from the RMBI to Suffolk residents in our Care homes is unavailable. The importance of vigilance remains uppermost, as we experience the cost of living crisis and a period of great uncertainty.

Emergency help from the Suffolk Provincial Benevolent Fund was also available and used over the last year. The Fund balance increased by £1,043 even after one grant award in the year, thanks to seven donations to the charity. My sincere thanks go to Lodge of Dawn, Abbey Lodge, Suffolk 250, Christchurch, St Luke’s, St Andrew’s, and Selig for their support. The Fund value at the end of 2022 stood at £20,392 which was just over 50% of the £40,000 target to make the support mechanism sustainable for the long term. If any other lodges wish to donate to the Fund, please contact your Group Almoner or myself.

Provincial Group Almoner Team was slightly changed and strengthened in 2022. The team was sorry to see the retirement of W. Bro Nick Wiseman as Group 3 Almoner, who was replaced by W. Bro Steve Williams. W. Bro Joe Greiner joined the team as the Elderly Care Lead, to provide expert knowledge on caring for our senior citizens. Unfortunately, Joe has moved onto pastures new in Scotland so we will be looking for a replacement in 2023. W. Bro Melvyn Eke demonstrated significant knowledge in this area & therefore he will also be the Elderly Care Lead within the Group Almoner Team. The full team is now published in the Year Book and includes a woman (Caroline Wales) for the first time ever. On 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022, the team visited the MCF headquarters in London (the first such visit in UGLE) to strengthen the relationship with the MCF. The visit included presentations on the MCF support and strategy, the MCF grant application process, and two charities The Not Forgotten and The Ruth Strauss Foundation about the work they do for military veterans and families pre-bereavement (see later).

On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2022, the Province held its annual Almoner Conference at Ashlar House, Bury St Edmunds; attended by 124 delegates. The audience, including several present and past military veterans, witnessed the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant by the PGM on behalf of Suffolk Freemasons and Air Vice-Marshal The Honourable David Murray CVO OBE DL on behalf of the military. The Armed Forces Covenant pledges to acknowledge and understand that those who serve, or who have served, in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives and focusses on helping members of the Armed Forces community have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen. The PGM explained *"By signing the covenant on behalf of all of the Freemasons in Suffolk, I am delighted to pledge our support to the Armed Forces. In the memory of all our Brothers that served, let us support this year of the Almoner and something, so close to our very hearts and being, the Armed Forces Covenant"*. Air Vice-Marshal Murray said *"The Freemasons are really leading the way in signing the Armed Forces Covenant and showing their support for the Armed Forces community - both the serving and veterans - in Suffolk. They have certainly set an excellent example for other organisations and individuals to follow"*

The Conference laid the foundations for potential new partnerships in the future. Delegates received a talk from The Not Forgotten military charity which provides support to any serving man or woman who is wounded, injured or sick and any veteran with a disability, illness, or infirmity; whatever the cause and whenever it arose. The Conference also heard about the work of the Ruth Strauss Foundation in supporting families facing the death of a parent & driving the need for more research into non-smoking lung cancers. It is hoped that further joint activities will be developed over the next 2 years, for the benefit of our Community who may have been forgotten in recent times. I particularly liked one piece of feedback after the morning which read *"Wonderful day all around, one you couldn't buy"*

The imparting of knowledge and awareness continued in 2022. A new publication "A practical guide to finding a Care Home" was launched at the Conference. The PGM sanctioned an alternative investiture ritual for the Lodge Almoner (as part of the Year of the Almoner initiative) which was distributed in April 2022 to all Worshipful Masters and delivered in Lodge during the autumn installation meetings. If any Master would like a copy of the investiture ritual, please contact their Group Almoner. The Group Almoner Team designed a poster campaign which was distributed to all Masonic Halls in the Province. The "Pee-Pee Poster" promoted some thinking for all Brethren to consider supporting their fellow Brother and his family. The Provincial Almoner webpage (<https://www.suffolkpgl.org.uk/support/almoners>) has been updated with all information and contacts. This includes all MCF briefings which were circulated throughout the year.

A new Almoner Induction Training Module was developed during the summer and launched in November by Bro. Andy Hunt (Training Lead). This online resource will fulfil the objective “that all Lodge Almoners are fully briefed about their role and feel confident where to get help and support....No one should feel they are in the dark”. One of the first recipients of the training commented afterwards “*Thank you for the most interesting presentation yesterday. Very informative and helpful*”. I am grateful to Andy for his hard work on this initiative, which may make a real difference in the future.

Support for our Widows was advanced in the year. The Felixstowe Widows Group restarted on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November with a fellowship Tea (sponsored by the Province) at Felixstowe Golf Club for the Group 8 lodges. It was organised by W. Bro Dougie Paine the Group 8 Almoner and Widows lead. 18 widows attended from Felixstowe and Ipswich and had a great afternoon of chat, cakes, and refreshment. Caroline Wales (AST from the MCF) attended and briefed everyone on the support offered by the MCF. New friendships were made, and it was pleasing to see that diaries were out throughout the event, planning visits galleries and other venues. Further gatherings are planned in future. The Province would like to repeat this event in 2023 for other potential widows groups.

Other initiatives were continued during the year. W. Bro Bill Dotesio-Eyers in his capacity as Provincial Junior Grand Warden (and Group 5 Almoner) publicised the “Very Good Friend” project, which links Brethren who are struggling with a particular health or other problem, with those Brethren who have experienced the same issue with a successfully outcome, and who will happily talk and share their journey. Since the launch, the database of Brethren willing to share their journeys and support is gathering pace. Examples where matchings have made a difference are coming through. If any Brother wants to join the database, please contact W. Bro Bill Dotesio-Eyers or your Lodge Almoner.

Bereavement support was needed by several recipients during 2022 and I am very grateful to W. Bro Jon Neill for all his endeavours on this front. The bereavement cards continued to be well received, and coverage has increased after the introduction of the automatic notifications from Hermes. Mental Wellbeing interventions were maintained throughout the year, and my thanks go to W. Bro Tony Wooderson for his efforts in providing this valuable resource.

Cornwallis Court and the RMBI maintained an extensive care package for their residents throughout lockdown and beyond. The restrictions on face coverings prohibited visiting during 2022, but the Friends of Cornwallis Court completed the remodelling of the courtyard, which was opened on 18<sup>th</sup> August and provides a unique area for residents and families to share quality time together. The coffee mornings are scheduled to restarted in February 2023 on the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of each month. Visitors will be more than welcome, and the residents would appreciate contact with other Freemasons.

In May 2022 there was also an unexpected surprise, when one of the Group Almoner Team showed a hidden talent. We now call W. Bro Dougie Paine our *Poet Laureate*, after he drafted the following poem which encapsulates everything about the Lodge Almoner:

*The Almoner who's he.....*

*It's the year of the almoner  
So, who is he?  
An officer of the lodge but why  
Let's try to see*

*Appointed by the Master  
Into his annual team  
Patience, time and understanding  
Vital requirements it seems*

*The work is based on welfare  
And not just within the lodge  
Extended to brothers, dependents  
And widows not to dodge*

*To carry out support  
From the Masonic Charitable Foundation  
With grants for financial help  
And medical intervention*

*Dependant children's education  
Also, in the mix  
With grants for those  
With broken hearts and learning to fix*

*Mental health and wellbeing  
After COVID set as priority B  
Sign post to Counselling  
MCF provide for free*

*Finally, the RMBI care homes  
Are there to help you when time is running out  
To look after, care and support when  
Health and age leave you in doubt*

*So, the almoners role is busy  
Masters please be aware  
When selecting your almoner  
Can he do the role of providing your welfare*

In summary, the last 12 months have been busy but productive and fulfilling. It has moved pastoral care forward in Suffolk. I would like to thank my Provincial Group Almoner team, Mrs Caroline Wales (AST from MCF), the Lodge Almoners and their supporting Brethren for all their help in delivering the above. We can all be proud of our achievements.

The plan for 2023 will be to consolidate on the foundations laid so far. The MCF and RMBI will be publishing their 2023-2030 plans over the next year. UGLE has also just launched "The Strategy for Freemasonry 2022 and Beyond". Suffolk will concentrate on aligning with these strategies and ensuring that every Lodge Almoner knows what support is available, how it can be accessed, and how caring fits into the UGLE objective "To cement our reputation as a force for good in our communities and society at large, and as a thriving organisation that people aspire to join". We will look at ways to communicate the benefits and enjoyment of being a Lodge Almoner throughout the Province, to increase the desire to take on this vital work within our Masonic Community. We will build in more support for the existing Almoners to protect this vital resource

W. Bro Jamie Gwatkin  
Provincial Grand Almoner