

Feature

‘An organisation founded on principles of integrity, charity, friendship and respect’

Jersey’s Freemasons have agreed a three-year deal to supply a range of organisations who support vulnerable people with the JEP. **Terry Neale** finds out more about the work of the traditionally low-profile group

IN an age when headlines and even newspapers in their entirety are available while on the move at the touch of a screen icon, it is somehow reassuring to know that there are still many who prefer to update themselves on current affairs in a more leisurely manner.

Perhaps it’s a generational thing but there are some for whom sitting back with a newspaper spread open before them remains both a pleasure and a trusted source of information. Of course, in common with any other product added to the supermarket trolley, a daily paper is just another commodity and, sadly, one than can be sacrificed when the shopping bills become too high.

So, it is very good news that one Island organisation has joined forces with the JEP to ensure that the luxury of a newspaper can remain a certainty for vulnerable members of the community who might otherwise have found themselves deprived of their traditional reading material. What may come as a surprise, however, is the revelation that the body behind this generous act is not one that normally grabs the charitable-giving headlines. It is, in fact, Jersey Freemasons.

‘This is a sponsorship opportunity that

was noted by one of our members,’ said Tim Dallas-Chapman, the Provincial Grand Treasurer of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Jersey. ‘We have agreed a sponsorship deal of £13,000 a year for three years, enabling the JEP to provide newspapers to various care homes and other charitable organisations, allowing people who like a daily paper to continue receiving one.’

In total, 940 copies of the JEP will be delivered each week divided among Age Concern, Cheshire Homes, Jersey Hospice Care, Maison La Corderie, Meals on Wheels, the Salvation Army, Stuart Court and the Shelter Trusts in both Kensington Place and Roseville Street.

‘In care homes there is likely to be more than one reader per copy,’ reasoned Mr Dallas-Chapman, ‘while the Meals on Wheels service will be able to deliver a paper as well as food.’

‘By reaching out into the community, it may also have the knock-on effect of promoting interest in Freemasonry.’

This is a key point. For the majority of Islanders, the only visible evidence of the Freemasons is the impressive Masonic Temple in Stopford Road, while what happens within its columned façade is



■ The Masonic Temple in Stopford Road Picture: JON GUEGAN



■ Graham Spence, Provincial Grand Master, and Tim Dallas-Chapman, Provincial Grand Treasurer, open the doors of the Temple Room Picture: JON GUEGAN

shrouded in mystery. But there are nearly 500 Freemasons in Jersey spread across 11 lodges and knowledge of the good work in which they engage is deserving of a wider audience. For Graham Spence, the Provincial Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Jersey, this is an important objective.

‘Ours is a progressive organisation. Our members move on through the different offices, assuming that they are both willing and capable of doing so,’ he explained. ‘It can be both a major time commitment and a personal financial commitment. It is far more than a hobby. However, how much time that you give to the organisation is a matter of personal choice.’

It is estimated that the combined time given by Island Freemasons to voluntary work amounts to some 12,000 hours every year – and that is a conservative estimate. Work undertaken extends right across the board, from service with the honorary police to Meals on Wheels. Equally vital are the donations made to a variety of Jersey charities and individuals, along with the speed with which needs can be met.

‘In Jersey the Provincial Grand Lodge

Fund of Benevolence is registered with the Jersey Charity Commissioner. The majority of funds raised will stay in the Island and we continue to build strategic relationships with local charities,’ said Mr Dallas-Chapman.

‘We are currently streamlining our ability to meet needs quickly,’ added Mr Spence. ‘This was prompted by the Covid pandemic, which caused a change of thinking. For instance, we were able to significantly support Shelter Trust and Jersey Outreach at a time that saw an unprecedented increase in demand for their services, and more recently to support the Bailiff’s Ukrainian Appeal Fund with a £10,000 donation within a matter of days of launch.’

‘In adapting in this way, we are updating rules and regulations that had probably existed for 100 years or more.’

Given the complexity of the work undertaken by the Freemasons, it comes as no surprise to discover that many of its members are drawn from professional backgrounds.

Mr Spence, who was born in Kent, is a chartered engineer who, having served



■ Mr Spence and Mr Dallas-Chapman Picture: JON GUEGAN



■ Mr Spence and Mr Dallas-Chapman in the Temple Room Picture: JON GUEGAN. (34464385)

an apprenticeship with a south London engineering company, joined the British Gas Corporation working on natural gas conversion, a project that ended in late 1976.

‘I then undertook a degree in mechanical engineering which led to my becoming a chartered gas engineer and chartered mechanical engineer, with a licence to operate in Europe. I stayed with British Gas until 1994 when it was split into separate private companies following a Monopolies and Mergers Commission review.’

He then took on the role of engineering manager for a large civil engineering contractor and was instrumental in winning a £200 million contract to introduce natural gas into Northern Ireland, making the move to the province in order to oversee the project. In 1998, he headed to Jersey and the post of distribution manager for Jersey Gas.

‘I later became engineering manager and stayed with the company until I retired in 2016,’ he said. ‘However, I still do some work as an independent consultant engineer.’

Mr Spence’s association with the Free-

masons began in 1984 and his position as Provincial Grand Master was a direct appointment made in 2020 by the Duke of Kent, the organisation’s Grand Master.

‘I have a Patent of Appointment, a beautiful vellum document which effectively outlines my job description,’ he said. ‘I can stay in the role for a maximum of ten years.’

For Mr Dallas-Chapman, who has been an active Freemason for 23 years, a finance industry background equipped him for his role as Provincial Grand Treasurer. Retiring in 2019, he spent nearly 40 years as an investment manager and stockbroker. After starting out with Barclay Trust, he then moved to Le Masurier, James and Chinn before joining the investment division at Collins Stewart.

With other investment professionals, Mr Dallas-Chapman established the Stockbroking and Investment divisions within Spearpoint Limited before that business was sold to Brooks Macdonald in 2012. As a chartered member of the CISI, his career was punctuated by many significant changes within the sector.

He said: ‘We witnessed the computerisation of trading known as “Big Bang” and as members of the London Stock Exchange, the transfer of regulation to the Jersey Financial Services Commission. It used to be the case that your word was your bond; but the new codes of conduct simply put this practice into law – it gave clearer guidelines to all regulated entities and put the interests of the client first whilst promoting the Island as a well-regulated jurisdiction.’

It was certainly a fitting foundation upon which to build his current treasury role within the Freemasons.

‘To do a treasurer’s job correctly, you have to devote time to it,’ he said. ‘As a result of my investment experience, I was recruited to help set up an investment platform for the Masonic Charitable Foundation, a UK-registered charity with funds in excess of £400m and which celebrated its sixth birthday in April 2022 having distributed more than £110m in just 72 months. This was a great experience and provided further evidence that, through charitable activities, Freemasonry and its members are able to make a real difference in society.’

The figures involved in the charitable efforts by local Freemasons are also truly impressive and go some way to explaining

why the time is now perceived to be right to raise the organisation’s profile.

‘Through our grass-roots collections in Jersey we have made grants of £100,000 a year – with a little help from the Masonic Charitable Foundation – every year since 2014,’ said Mr Spence.

A major beneficiary is a charity called Lifelites which provides hi-tech equipment for children with life-limiting conditions. The support is channelled through Jersey Hospice Care with the Masons funding the technology and necessary training.

‘That’s a financial commitment of £50,000 for a four-year period – and then we start all over again as the technology moves on,’ said Mr Spence.

‘We have supported some 50 Jersey charities – some big, some small – since 2014,’ added Mr Dallas-Chapman. ‘It encourages and enthuses our members in their efforts to further support the local community.’

The various lodges organise fundraising events but the majority of contributions come through standing orders, collections and raffles held at meetings and other similar initiatives.

‘In one way or another, then, the majority of funds are generated by members,’ said Mr Dallas-Chapman, ‘which is an underlying principle of the organisation. There is no pressure on members to contribute, but they are encouraged to provide help in whatever way they can.’

But while the charitable aspect of Freemasonry makes the organisation, in Mr Spence’s words, ‘a real force for good and more open, which is what it used to be’, the ceremonial side is of equal importance. And much of that is centred on personal improvement.

‘In the same way as you take a rough rock from a quarry and fashion it into something that will fit a building, Freemasonry empowers members to be the best they can be – it’s about building character, supporting members as individuals and helping them make a positive contribution to society,’ said Mr Spence.

Modern Freemasonry grew out of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason; a period of free-thinking principles when people began to look in a much broader sense at the world around them. It marked the end of religion as a dominating factor as people started to develop more as individuals, shunning an establishment that told them what to do and to think.

‘It is an organisation founded on princi-

ples of integrity, charity, friendship and respect,’ Mr Spence said. ‘It also inspires confidence in oneself through membership. I would certainly have gone nowhere near a microphone in the past, but now I am quite happy when it comes to making presentations and, indeed, in speaking to the media.’

Freemasonry provides a structure for members to come together under these common principles, enabling members to make new friendships, develop themselves and make valuable contributions to charitable causes. Membership is open to men over 18 from all backgrounds.

Next year is one of special significance for Freemasons, as it marks the tercentenary of the Book of Constitutions.

‘This is basically our book of rules, which was published in 1723,’ Mr Spence explained. ‘Those fundamental rules and principles have not changed but they have been added to. It is really all part of a natural progression for Freemasonry.’

Mr Spence concluded by saying that anyone wishing to know more about Freemasonry in Jersey should check out the organisation’s website: Jerseymason.org.uk.



■ The Temple Room set up for a lodge meeting Picture: JON GUEGAN

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■ Objects in the Masonic Temple's library and museum Picture: JON GUEGAN