

Grand Master Mason's Message

by Brother W. Ramsay McGhee

New Zealand Trip 2025

On Monday 24th February I travelled down to London by train to meet up with Grand Secretary for the annual Tri Partite meeting at Grand Lodge in Great Queen Street. The meeting on the Tuesday went well and several topics of mutual interest were discussed.

That evening, Grand Secretary headed back to Edinburgh, and I made my way to Gatwick where I met up with Grand Director of Ceremonies, Brother Ronnie Forbes, for the first leg of our journey to New Zealand, an eight-and-a-half-hour flight to Dubai where we changed onto the flight to Christchurch via Sydney which would take some fourteen hours.

We were met in Christchurch by MEC Alan Raymond Stack whom I was to install that evening as Grand Superintendent of the District Grand Chapter of New Zealand South Island. We travelled to his home where a quick shower and change took place before heading to the Masonic Temple which had been completely renovated after the earthquake disasters a few years ago. It was an absolute privilege to work in such beautiful surroundings. I was assisted in the Ceremony by my Third Grand Principal, MEC Ernest Wong and by Past Grand Superintendent MEC Ronald J Sutherland who originally hailed from Caithness.



It was a grand night, and I was pleased that the Ceremony had gone well. After the Ceremony, we enjoyed an excellent harmony prepared by the wives. It was then straight back, into bed with the alarm set for 05.30 for an early morning flight to Dunedin where I was to conduct the installation of the new District Grand Master, Brother Glenn Reginald Summerhayes the following day.

On arrival in Dunedin, we were collected by Brother Bruce Suszko and taken to our home for the next few days, the Dunedin Club a beautiful and charming nineteenth century building which was only a short walk from the Dunedin Masonic Centre. We were met at the Club by Past District Grand Master, Brother Merv Gilkinson. That night we had a rehearsal at which we explained that their programme bore no resemblance to the recognised ritual used by Grand Lodge today and that the Installation the following day would be quite a bit different. Perhaps the fact that there has not been a District Installation conducted by Grand Lodge in over sixty years has meant that a more localised

ceremony has evolved. However, the scene was set for the Saturday afternoon and the Installation Ceremony was conducted as per the recognised Grand Lodge Ritual and the good news was that everyone seemed to thoroughly enjoy the experience. At the ceremony I was delighted to welcome into Grand Lodge Brother J G Soper, the District Grand Master South Island and Brother W Weir District Grand Master, North Island - English Constitution, Brother G Wrigley, Past Grand Master GL of New Zealand, Brother J N Southwick the Provincial Grand Master of the Irish Constitution South Island along with our own District Grand Master from the north island, Brother Gordon McMahon and other senior representatives from the Irish Constitution and the Grand Lodge of New Zealand. It was good to see all the Constitutions supporting each other.

I was pleased to be assisted in the ceremony by Brothers M Gilkinson, Senior Warden, W S Gardiner, Junior Warden, G W Parker, Grand Secretary, and R E Hudson, Grand Chaplain all well-orchestrated by our own Grand D of C, Brother Ronald Forbes.

At the harmony, we were delighted to witness a tremendous display by the Kapa Haka Group from Logan Park High School. Their precision was first class and how good it was to see so many young people carrying on the traditions of their country.



Included in the menu for a superb dinner was haggis, made by ninety-year-old Brother Gordon Smart. It was delicious and greatly appreciated by all present.

On Sunday 2nd March, accompanied by Past DGM, Merv Gilkinson and our new DGM Glenn Summerhayes, Ronnie and I enjoyed a marvellous tour of Dunedin in glorious weather with the temperature in the mid-twenties.

We were taken to Larnach Castle where we had lunch followed by a walk round the beautiful gardens. From there we travelled to Harrington Point to visit the Royal Albatross Centre where everything possible to know about the birds and other sea life in the area is on display.

On the way back to Dunedin, we stopped off at a country Pub in Portobello to have a pint with Bruce Suszko and his wife, Donna. A truly wonderful day.

Monday morning – time to get the cases packed, off to the airport and a flight to Wellington.

On Monday night, we attended the re-installation of Brother Tony Mansfield in Lodge St John Kilwinning No 662. The Ceremony was conducted by the new DGM, Brother Gordon McMahon who was assisted in his endeavour by Brethren of all four Constitutions that meet in New Zealand. It was a most enjoyable ceremony and good to see all four Constitutions working together. The evening was rounded off with a lovely meal including locally made haggis. Another great night of Masonic harmony.



Tuesday morning - time to get the cases packed, off to the airport and a flight to Aukland.

We arrived in Aukland early afternoon and were taken to the Cordis Hotel where we met up with the DGM, Brother Gordon McMahon and his wife Jacquie and spent a most enjoyable evening in a waterside restaurant.

Wednesday morning, after breakfast, was taken up with administrative matters and catching up on ritual. We were collected in the early evening and driven to Lodge PonsonbyNo708 where we witnessed a very fine working of the EA Degree by the Master, Brother Brian Kidston, and his Office-bearers. The candidate, Bro Nathan Rollings proved to be a very attentive young man and is the latest of a group of young men all joining the Lodge. The Harmony after the meeting was excellent and thoroughly enjoyed by everyone.



GMM, Bro Nathan Rollings, Master – Bro Brian Kidston and DGM Gordon McMahon

On Thursday, I was collected by Bro Bob Russell and driven to the home of Brother Mike Bro Mike Chopping (EC) who very kindly agreed to take us out on his boat, the Colombina, along with three other Brethren - Brian (EC), John (IC) and Charlie (SC). So, it was an international Constitution group that set sail on a bright, warm, and sunny morning.



We were only out less than an hour when we saw a boat homing in on us at speed - it was a Fishery Protection Vessel checking up on us - after some pleasantries with the crew they headed off into the horizon and left us to get on with it.

What a pleasant time we had - dropped anchor and enjoyed lunch and later in the afternoon a great sail back to port in order that I could get back to the hotel, changed and ready to be picked up by MEC Tony Mansfield to head to Ponsonby Kilwinning RAC.

Another great night - three very promising candidates and a degree worked to a very high standard under the expert eye of Past Grand Superintendent Ian Law. The night finished off in grand style with Harmony in the Refectory.



On Friday 7th March the DGM and I had lunch with Bro Jim Watt, GM of New Zealand, his Depute, Bro Paul Chappel and Past GM, Bro Mark Winger. It was a very pleasant lunch at Sails Restaurant at Westhaven Marina during which we discussed a number of topics regarding freemasonry in New Zealand.

That evening we assembled at the Irish Lodge in Auckland, Ara Lodge No 348, the oldest Lodge in Auckland and the biggest. A magnificent building that was to play host to the Scottish District the following day for the Installation of the new DGM. The rehearsal went smoothly and Grand D of C and I joined the DGM and his wife Jacquie, for a lovely meal in one of the many Quay side restaurants.

On Saturday morning, we attended the District Grand Lodge Communication, had lunch and then prepared to install Bro Gordon McMahon as the new DGM for North Island New Zealand. The packed Lodge room with Brethren from all four Constitutions present created a great atmosphere for the ceremony which was well received.

It was good to have three Past DGM's present, Campbell MacFarlane, Bob Russell and Tony Ford.



Bob Russell, GMM, Gordon McMahon, Tony Ford, Grand D of C and Campbell MacFarlane

At the following Harmony, we were well entertained by two excellent singers and their accompanist from NZOPERA which is sponsored by the Freemasons Foundation. Sarah Mileham, a soprano who is of Korean, British and New Zealand heritage, Alfred Fonoti-Fuimaono, a Samoan baritone, and David Kelly the principal repetiteur for New Zealand opera. Their programme consisted of pieces from Puccini, Gershwin and Mozart with Sarah rounding off the performance with Loch Lomond since it was a Scottish District. A tremendous evening.

Our final day in New Zealand started off at 09.15 when Bob Russell collected Ronnie and I to go to the morning service at Holy Trinity Cathedral where I had the honour to read the New Testament lesson. The sermon was in the very capable hands of the Very Rev Anne Mills, Dean of Auckland. The Cathedral is very bright and airy with tremendous stained glass – a beautiful building.



After the service we were taken to the Orbit Revolving Restaurant for lunch before heading to the airport for the long flight back home.

The entire visit ran smoothly, and we were both indebted to the Brethren and Companions, their wives and partners for their warm welcome, their hospitality, and their friendship. A truly memorable visit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ramsay McGhee". The signature is stylized with a long, sweeping underline.

Ramsay McGhee
Grand Master Mason