

As the District Grand Chaplain, I wish to take a few moments of your time to establish the purpose of this occasion, and the reason for banners in general.

A banner, in its simplest form, is a flag bearing emblems, symbols and often dates and numbers.

It is, however, the symbols or emblems that are the most important. It has been called, in some cases, a "rag on a stick", but is it? I would say "No". It shows signs of allegiance to a cause, a nationality, a regime or a principle. Banners and standards are carried by nations, regiments, churches, trade unions, protest groups, schools, monarchs and yes, even Freemasons.

To march with or under a standard serves as a rallying point, to indicate that you are a follower, a supporter which, in turn, serves to create a sense of belonging, a sense of awareness. We have often heard the expression and saying "to nail ones colours to the mast" which simply means that one is declaring an interest or intention of making your views known to all and sundry.

If we look to the Old Testament, in the Book of Genesis Chapter 49, we will see that Jacob called his sons together and formed them into the Twelve Tribes of Israel, each of which were preceded by the Lion of Judah. The first four standards of Israel bore the devices of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle, all of which appear on the seal of UGLE. In our own Order, we parade under the Grand Banner of the Order.

The Ark of the Covenant, although not a banner of flowing flags as we know them, is a solid effigy and born on carrying staffs, though not to be worshipped but only as a guide to follow and assemble. It was the visible focus of the Jewish Tribes. Whenever it moved, the Israelites moved. When it rested, the Israelites rested. In battle, the Ark was always in the thick of the fray, the rallying point and the inspiration of the fighters. In the Book of Numbers we read that whenever the Ark set forward, Moses said "Rise up oh Lord! May our enemies be scattered. May your foes flee before You" and when rested he said "Return oh Lord the countless thousands of Israel".

The Roman legions carried standards, a golden staff surmounted with an eagle, below which was a plaque or board bearing the letters SPQR and their legion number. Cohorts and centuries each had their own version of standard.

The emperor Napoleon was well known for issuing his armies and regiments not only with flags or banners, but those he considered superior, a Regimental Eagle to go into battle and into occupied lands. One of those Eagles was captured by the British during the Peninsular War and was immortalised by Bro Bernard Cornwall in his novel "Sharp's Eagle" which is based around this fact.

In more recent times, the USA issued banners to its cavalry regiments eg 7th Cavalry and guidons to its various troops, one of which was reputedly to Company C, and this was the only thing left upright after the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876.

The finest light cavalry the world has yet to equal, the Native Americans of the Northern Plains, carried their own style of banner – a lance which could be used in battle, decorated with eagle feathers, wolf or beaver tails, each being distinctive to the tribe, clan or war band.

However, the whole point of a banner is not to have it hidden away but to display and carry it with pride, pomp and ceremony at meetings or rallies just as the host council banner showed when it was paraded in this morning. So remember the history and heritage of the organisation. Freemasonry is no different in this respect.

The banner that we are to dedicate today, highlights the Ark of the Covenant (the first known recorded banner) as well as the White Rose of Yorkshire.

We commenced the ceremony of dedication with an opening prayer being conscious of the importance of Banners and their origins and with His blessing, our actions will serve for nothing.

Hopefully it will remind future members of the District of North and East Yorkshire of the affection and pride that present members have for those Order in its aims, teachings and objectives and, above all, for the enduring friendships which are formed.