

FENLAND TALES

**A COLLECTION OF STORIES OF A BAND OF
BROTHERS IN DESCENSUS AQUARUM
LODGE 8655**

**WHO TRAVELLED TOGETHER THROUGH
THE LOCKDOWNS OF THE COVID 19
PANDEMIC OF MARCH 2020 TO JULY 2021
PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 2025**

**This was created in July 2021 as a record of
what happened in the Pandemic and
archived. The stories have been updated for
publication as a contribution to the 50th
Anniversary Celebrations in September 2025**



This is a collection of stories of how the Brethren of Descensus Aquarum Lodge 8655 in Ely and their families coped during the lockdowns of the Covid 19 Pandemic of March 2020 to July 2021 and how Freemasonry helped.

The Lodge has decided to publish these as part of the celebrations of its 50th Anniversary. They are a quiet reflection of those testing times as a historical record, and as an example of the Masonic companionship.

They are drawn principally from the contributions made to the On-line Newsletters of that time - The Third Rising.

These Tales are published now as a demonstration of how the brotherhood of Freemasonry is a great help at a personal level. We were all in need of companionship at the time and turned to one another in our daily supplications.

Early in the initial lockdown it was decided by the Lodge to establish a Facebook site and to get together by having zoom gatherings (weekly at first and bimonthly later on), organising a monthly online raffle and publishing the monthly Newsletter. Other events, such as a Christmas quiz were organised in due course.

One common feature for many Brethren was zeal in sorting out sheds, cupboards and lofts (as well as gardens!). An arrangement was concluded with a local auctioneer to auction items which had been sorted out and this added to charity funds.

The then Worshipful Master, W.Bro. Mike Richardson, who served two years, played a key role in facilitating the zoom meetings and in producing a high-quality edition of the Newsletters.

Whilst no-one can argue that the Pandemic and lockdowns were good things, the Lodge found that there were some silver linings to the black clouds. Members had an opportunity to talk and read about one another in ways which are, perhaps, not so easy in the Temple and Festive Board.

An early project was to create a historical archive, which is now stored on the Facebook site. This had been one of those jobs which had been needed but put off because of the time needed to create it in the past.

The money raised by the events, such as raffles, enabled the Lodge to donate significant funds to local charities and hence raise its profile and, indeed, the positive profile of Freemasonry itself. Our Charity Steward in 2025, W.Bro. John Sinclair, recounts the successes he had in getting matched funding which added to the contributions to local charities.

This sense of comradeship and local charity must surely be a very positive asset in future when we recruit. Potential candidates will have a very positive insight into who we are

The stories we share are honest and show a diversity of impacts. Some Brethren, who had retired, were not impacted so much. Some suffered challenging consequences, including becoming infected. Others struggled to keep businesses going and some have been involved in new businesses and worked almost 24 hours a day.

Throughout the period we had serial contributions from several Brethren, including Bro. Colin Every on changes in development planning, Bro Freddie Lawes on the Cambridgeshire Regiment and Bro Leigh Shaw on the Pandemic and vaccination. And we had several 'one off's showing knowledge which we **were not** all

aware of. And some artistic talents emerged.

The Newsletter had news, featured articles, and we did not forget Freemasonry itself..... continuing masonic development ... CMD ! For example, we had serial articles by Jon Cooper, the Lodge Mentor at the time, and by W.Bro. Jon West, then the Provincial Grand Mentor.

The very first contribution to the May 2020 edition was from the then Worshipful Master. with a quote from Martin Luther King

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

I think it's true to say the challenges we're facing today are greater than most of us have ever had to endure in our lifetimes. Many of our comforts and conveniences are not presently available to us. Things we took for granted such as meeting our brothers, conducting rituals, feasting together as equals, friends and companions have been made impossible, albeit temporarily.

My wife and I are finding it particularly difficult not to hug our first and only grandchild who'll be 2 in June and I'm certain we're all in the same situation.

However, modern technology can, and does, help us in these challenging times. I imagine many of you are keeping in touch with loved ones using Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp and FaceTime currently and we have extended the social and discussion aspects of our meetings online as well.

Starting on 21st March, on the cusp of lockdown, we established a private Facebook group which now has 29 members and holds weekly discussion groups every Wednesday at 6:45pm -

details are included at the end of the newsletter. Please do come along and join us if you are able; it's safe and secure and limited to our members and regular guests, so masons only.

In order to make sure we're able to include all members, both on- and offline, we suggested starting an On-line Newsletter and the response has been very supportive and positive. So here is our first edition, please enjoy dispatches from our Brethren (and a few special guest contributions!) which is packed with news, charity updates and other interesting articles.

Finally, I'd like to thank you all for the support you've given in getting these initiatives underway, for the generosity of donations made and a special thank you to Peter for undertaking the hard work involved in co-ordinating and producing this fine organ - a task not unlike herding cats, I would imagine!

Mel and I send our very best wishes to you and yours and hope you all keep safe and well until I can have the pleasure of greeting you all in our Temple and saying "Good Evening, Brethren." to you personally.
Until then, so mote it virtually be!"

Mike kept us together, in spite of becoming increasingly committed to the demands of his on-line business. We all had to grapple not only with the new social dynamics of video conferencing but the technology as well ; we had to get used to Zoom, Skype, FaceTime , Facebook Messenger , WhatsApp and so on (as Bro .Colin Every describes next).

We provided some advice. 'All systems need access to a small camera and audio device. If you have an old, IT system without built in video communications and it has the appropriate sockets you can always buy an add on camera quite cheaply. The Facebook system can be

extended using the Portal devices. You can get system comparisons from the Versus.com website.

For us ordinary folk, the Facebook, Zoom and Skype systems worked well for our video chats with friends and family. But some people did not like the streams on Facebook – so they could do Messenger. But the advantage is that we could have long chats which were free! .

We could video conference more than one person on Facebook Messenger, but it was time limited on Zoom to do so with more than two. Corporate Zoom accounts were more secure and could embrace lots of people; it was better for meetings, not time limited but you had to pay. In our Lodge we used a Corporate Zoom account kindly provided by our Worshipful Master. With Zoom you had to book a meeting time – with the others you just tried people as you do with telephoning’.

Bro. Colin Every contributed a beginner’s insight into being a Zoom Virgin. It was written in May 2020 and Colin said in 2021 that he was coping much better the. Hopefully, he is now an expert!

“Last week, I think Monday 11th May , whilst I was reflectively reading the various eulogies and obituaries of the late Sir Stirling Moss (a lifelong hero) which covered no less than 68 pages in Motor Sport the telephone rang and I was greeted with the dulcet and persuasive tones of Peter Matthews telling me about his idea of a Descensus Aquarum newsletter to be called “The Third Rising”.

As soon as I heard these words, I can remember thinking “I feel a job coming on” and sure enough Peter was ringing to ask me to write a piece for the newsletter on Zoom and my experiences with it. Wanting to be willing and helpful I agreed only to put the phone down and think why

on earth did I say yes, in reality what I truly know about Zoom would comfortably fit on the back cigarette packet and before the 23rd March this year I honestly had never heard of Zoom let alone had any idea of what it did or was used for.

The 23rd was also the date that Boris Johnson took to our TV screens to announce that all UK residents must stay at home to protect the NHS amid the growing threat of Coronavirus, I think the same day there was a furore about the security of Zoom and a threat called “Zoom Bombing” where individuals actually butt in on your meeting and generally cause chaos with all kinds of unwelcome activities. This was shown primarily because the Prime Minister was seen on TV involved on a Zoom Meeting and details about the meeting were actually seen on screen during the program.

My wife was also talking about Zoom and how she was going to have to use it to cover the many meetings she weekly attends, almost simultaneously an email appeared on my phone inviting me to none other than a Zoom meeting. A golf club meeting to which I had already received courtesy invitation to represent the seniors’ section had now become a Zoom meeting and I had about 24 hours to go. So, I got myself in front of my laptop and googled the world of online video conferencing only to find that the profile of Zoom was going up like a rocket as Coronavirus had spread around the planet though Zoom had grown at a much faster rate and almost unsurprisingly, they both originated in China!

In my enthusiasm to be part of this new world and certainly to make sure I was not left behind by my dear wife I signed up to Zoom especially as it was free unless you wanted a corporate membership in which

you start with Zoom Pro and pay £11.99 a month for the privilege.

I duly attended the golf club meeting a complete novice among a group of bright young things who had clearly been using all forms of video conferencing to earn their living and tread their daily path in life. In the ensuing conversation at the beginning of the meeting comparisons were drawn between Teams, BlueJeans, Cisco and Zoom and I became aware that these were but just four of a huge number of such systems in regular use. I sat through the handicaps and competitions meeting, said absolutely nothing (looking back I am not sure if I even had my mic switched on) as a guest attendee I don't think I was expected to say much so nobody was disappointed. I came away slightly wiser about golf's new world handicap system which comes into force this coming November but very aware that if we were all going to be confined to barracks for the foreseeable future, I had to become competent with Zoom and quickly.

Having attended this meeting I was now aware that one does not have to be signed up to Zoom to participate in a meeting, one simply clicks the link in the email invitation, switches on the video and mic and more or less you are ready to go. Over the coming weeks I found myself participating in family get-togethers and a whole raft of meetings which would normally have been face to face and "learning on the job" about the host's personal waiting room, the chat facility, the participants list in which one can put one's hand up to speak with a little blue hand and even a facility which shows a coffee cup meaning you have gone to get a drink, the background feature where you can appear to be anywhere you choose and

the gallery view where you see everybody not just the speaker.

I am still learning about Zoom and have yet to master the screen sharing option, sending an emoji to the host to communicate without interrupting, recoding meetings on my computer, keyboard shortcuts instead of mouse navigation and the beauty filter to touch up one's appearance, I have tried to use this but could not see any improvement, not sure if that's a technology shortcoming or simply an impossibility. It is also brilliant that Zoom can be used on a PC, a laptop, a tablet or a smartphone but now I have hosted a few meetings by far my favourite feature is mute with which I can actually stop people talking and unmute which means I can allow them to speak as long as they are on their best behaviour.

Zoom will, going forward undoubtedly change our lives, why would one drive fifty or a hundred miles to meeting if it can be done just as effectively from home let alone flying to another country. In reality video conferencing has been around for a very long time but in the same way your PC or laptop brought computing into your home Zoom will bring your family, your business partners, your doctor or any other person or group of people you choose into your life with a clarity, speed and ease that for many of us and certainly me was outside our awareness just a few short weeks ago.

I hope when you read it you will find it mildly amusing and be able to relate to it."



Colin looking very relaxed

Colin went on and provided us with a series of articles on changes to the planning system.

Members of the Lodge also kept in touch by Zoom on a monthly basis with members of other Ely Lodges through the Ely United Lodge of Instruction.

But in September 2025 we reflect on how quickly life moves on these days .. Zooming. WhatsApp and Messaging are now part of our daily lives. And Skype has closed!

Turning to our charity work, we now hear from our Charity Steward W.Bro. John Sinclair. We know just how much of his time has been spent during lockdown ... on organising our charity work ... in addition to doing domestic jobs and carrying on his gainful employments!

In the June 2021 edition he said “Brethren, better times are here at last, or are they? We need patience and need to continue to act carefully and considerately to see this pandemic through to its end once and for all, frustrating though it is. The ultimate aim is be back to normal meetings and Masonic activity for the start of the coming new Masonic season. And later Kay and I share some family memories of

the Soham train disaster in June 1944 in which Kay’s father played a key role.

Very early on we organised online raffles to raise money for local charities. Some prizes went direct to winners online, but many were donated physically by Lodge members and then ‘one on one’ arrangements were made for delivery of the prizes between winners and donors.

John wrote ‘One benefit of lockdown is our continuing focus on raising money for local charities. We have donated a total of £10,287 during the lockdown period since we last met in March last year (including the last raffle in June). This includes the support we attracted from Care and Relief, Cambridge City and University Masonic Fund, MCF match funding and MCF Covid funding. This is some achievement, so a big thank you to all who have supported us to enable us to make these donations and making a difference for many causes in our communities.

We can still increase this, as there is an open opportunity with Rowleys, Ely, to offer any items for one of their forthcoming auctions. Just take what you can to them, and state that it is for Descensus Aquarium Lodge, and they will be sold without fees, proceeds being paid into the Lodge charity fund. Please do keep clearing your attics. Please let Peter Matthews or me know that you have taken whatever to Rowleys”

He finished by saying” ‘Thank you to all of you who have supported our fundraising efforts throughout the lockdown period, and I look forward to, God willing, getting back to normal for the start of the new Masonic season, and to seeing you all in Lodge again soon.’

In the meantime, I hope that you have an enjoyable summer, and even get a holiday of some sort, and recharge your energies

for Masonic activities in the Autumn.
Please all keep safe and keep well”.

John referred to the success of the raffles.
‘And at this point we must recognise the key role that Bro Freddie Lawes, our Festival Secretary, has played throughout the pandemic lockdown. The raffle has been run on-line with physical prizes. Freddie acted as the prize collection point and delivered many of the prizes to the winners. Freddie said that lockdown had been really busy for him with many activities, including progressing the Ladies Festival. He has commented that he was far too busy to come out of lockdown! ‘ **And more of Freddie’s contribution later**

In the June 2021 edition we also recounted the stories of the Great Train explosion in Soham in June 1944 in which the father of John’s wife, Kay, Eric Isaacson played a crucial role in the rescue.

And the people of Soham did not forget. When Eric died in 1999, his sudden passing caused a local stir, and tributes were recorded in the local paper.



Soham Advertiser January 1999

Kay and John told us that “The preparation of this article during the pandemic and, indeed, the way we have all pulled together during lockdown makes us realise

that the spirit of Eric and the Soham townsfolk in the aftermath of this disaster is still alive”



John and Kay

We discovered that the family members of W.Bro. Tom Morgan have artistic talent with poems and paintings. In December Tom lifted our spirits with a Christmas poem

Preparing for Christmas by W.Bro. Tom Morgan

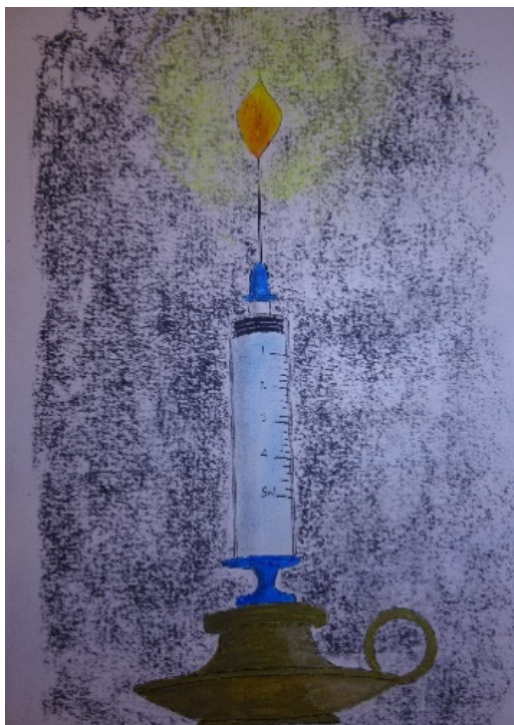
“When September's nearly over, and
October's coming soon,
Shops start gearing up for Christmas,
hoping for the season's boon.
Don't know why they start so early, why
they want to make us fret.
Hallowe'en is not yet on us, nor is Guy
Fawkes evening yet,
Comes December, start in earnest, Advent
calendars abound,
Time to finish buying presents, see what
extras can be found.

At the jewellers in the high street, Lizzie
chose a gold curb chain,
Checked and found it not quite perfect,
found one that's a bit less plain.
Writing cards for friends and family, walk
round, push them through the doors,
Buying stamps to post the rest, then get on
with other chores

Sort out cards and decorations, put up all
the outside lights
On the gables and the fences, to illuminate
the nights.

Four more days to go 'til Christmas. All is
ready now we see,
Presents all wrapped for grandchildren,
placed beneath the Christmas tree
Three days left, and planning dinner, are
the vegetables OK?
Need to buy some sprouts and carrots, get
food ready for the fray.
Two days left, we take a breather, relax, let
ourselves unwind.
All the preparations finished. Still more
little jobs we find.

Then with only one day left it's time to
start the Christmas fare,
Make the stuffing, baste the turkey, roast
the beef – all jobs we share.
Peel potatoes, carrots, parsnips, prepare
sprouts and leeks and peas,
Lay the table, check the wine, plus a
hundred jobs like these.
In the evening, when we're done, we have
a Chinese takeaway,
Try and get a good night's sleep so now
we're set for Christmas Day.”



*And in January 2021 Tom contributed a
poem to accompany a picture entitled 'A
Light in the Darkness'.*

“Covid Recovery

To make a new beginning let us look at
what we've had,
We hope this coming year will bring more
reasons to be glad.
Will we look back on twenty-one as our
coming of age,
And celebrate new hope and our recovery
to stage?
When Covid first came on us in late
Winter of last year
We hoped it wouldn't last long; it had
nothing we should fear
But this virus went from bad to worse and
very soon we heard
We'd been put into lockdown, (if
'lockdown' is a word).
We thought things were improving and
began to drop our guard.
Until the second wave came which was
when we found it hard.
Then through December, over Christmas,
into the new year
A new strain, much more virulent, was
spreading woe and fear.
But now the vaccine is approved and very
soon will start
To sooth our fear and lift our hearts, a new
hope to impart,
So we may meet at lodge and board and
join in the refrain,
“Happy to meet, sorry to part, happy to
meet again”.
We perhaps have a new battery for the
light at the end of the tunnel”



Tom receiving his June 2021 raffle prize

And in the June 2021 edition we had a contribution from Tom's daughter Helen!

"1 year of words

It all started with Wuhan, wet markets and bats

Then coronavirus, covid-19, spreading, numbers and stats

Wash your hands, DO NOT TOUCH YOUR FACE

At the supermarket people lost all grace
No pasta, no sweetcorn, bog roll all gone
BoJo backed herd immunity like a complete moron!!

Furlough, Shielding, No PPE

Socially distant – no longer Free
STAY HOME, PROTECT THE NHS,
SAVE LIVES

Lockdown, work from home, home schooling arrives

R number, isolate, flatten the curves
STAY ALERT, CONTROL THE VIRUS,
SAVE LIVES - reverbs

Lockdown ends, but now wear a mask
HANDS, FACE, SPACE is all they ask!
Don't go out, but you should go out

Stay at home though but eat out to help out!

Contact Tracing to be or not to be?

Rule of 6! 6 people is not many!

Then we have 1 and 2 and 3 tiers

With Medium, high and very high alert fears!

November, lockdown 2, let it begin!

Add on tier 4 – STAY AT HOME again!

Christmas is on! No, it's not! Yes, it is!

Just the one day to see those that you miss
Then back into lockdown and kids go to school

No they, don't yes, they do – make up your mind you fool!!

And so, we enter lockdown the third

Back to home school and work – it's like doing bird!

There are more words that have come along:

WHO, Quarantine, Pandemic, isolation
Unprecedented, new normal, is your temperature hot?

Quarantini cocktail and (my favourite) covidiot!

But better words are to come as the vaccine rolls out

Festivals, holidays, pubs - both within and without

Family and friends who we'll all see tonnes!

Hugs, kisses and time spent with loved ones!!"



Helen Morgan being socially responsible

And inspired by Lis Morgan's artwork we launched the snowdrop challenge in January 2021

"The past year had some benefit. We found all sorts of interests and skills in our brethren and families - from a poet to a military historian and good gardeners and photographers. With 2021 being one year on from the rather dimmed vision of 2020, we looked forward to finding new interests. We launched a Snowdrop Challenge. The February Newsletter was about nature awakening to a better year and what better signal from East Anglia than snowdrops.

We were sure that amongst Brethren there were budding artists, and we wanted them to share sketches of snowdrops. They did not have to be great works of art but shared artistic pleasure. Everyone can draw! We want this opportunity to extend to all our families and so we distributed an outline of a snowdrop cartoon which made it easier particularly for grandchildren"



Liz wife of W.Bro. Tom Morgan showed us her artistic talents



From Monty Shaw, aged 5 son of Brother Leigh Shaw - an excellent return of the cartoon

Understanding what was happening to us, and the new jargon, was very important and we were very lucky to have Bro. Leigh Shaw (now Junior Warden at the time of publication), whose career is right in this area. He provided us with a series of very insightful articles. He shared his family's activities in harvesting their garden produce and contributed his reflections to our final edition in June.

"To be perfectly honest, for me and my family this pandemic has really not been too bad. We have definitely been some of the lucky ones. I kept in steady work throughout, and I confess I very much have what psychologists would describe as survivor guilt. During the first lockdown my wife home schooled our three children, and I really enjoyed having them all at home with me because I work from home so don't really see anyone during the day apart from the postman. It was also nice sunny weather, and we bought one of those pools for the garden, so it felt like a very long holiday at home. I was glad when the kids could eventually go back to school though because they really needed to get to

see their friends again. After the first lockdown ended, I changed jobs in the summer and ended up on a weird cycle where I would spend a week in the office in Paris, quarantine at home for two weeks, have one week of freedom then go back to Paris to start the cycle over again. The strangest thing about that was seeing the airports and flights so empty – it actually made flying kind of pleasant.

It was clear everything was really going wrong in the run up to Christmas with the Kent (Alpha) variant. But on Christmas Eve, guessing we were in for another lockdown (although not realising just how long and bad it was going to be) we went to Hunstanton for the day. The place was completely deserted, and the weather was absolutely appalling, but we went on the beach then to Eric's Fish and Chips at Thornham (our favourite place to go and highly recommended) and managed to eat inside – that is the only time I have eaten inside a pub or restaurant since 5th March 2020. The best bit of news was when it turned out the Pfizer vaccine was so good and then all the other vaccines followed suit. I'd really worried up to that point how on earth we were ever going to get out of this thing. Like many people we also got ourselves a lockdown dog. I don't know why we didn't do it earlier since I've been working at home for four years now, but she is a great addition.

Finally, although I have been rubbish at joining the lodge calls, I've enjoyed following various masonic Brothers on Facebook: I've enjoyed Stephen Teverson's educational and witty daily posts, Mike Richardson's slightly potty coffee obsession, Leslie Murfitt's wide ranging opinions on pretty much every aspect of local and national issues and Bob Page's incredible talent for building/restoring what some (particularly wives) might describe as old junk. I've

also enjoyed the lodge newsletter very much as it has had a great mix of articles and provided an additional way of and provided an additional way of knowing what's been going on throughout, and in fact I think Province and UGLE have done pretty good job of that too. But I am really looking forward to getting back to the lodge now and seeing Carlos' raising, because this whole pandemic does seem to have been going on for way too long now now...."



Leigh with a lockdown friend

So emboldened by Tom's poem and Leigh's wisdom, there was no 'vaccine hesitancy'.

In March 2021 the Newsletter reported that W.Bro. Roy Peacock, the Father of our Lodge and his wife Madge had received their second Pfizer jab on January 6th.

Roy told us that he had no ill effects and that is any brother had any doubts there is nothing to worry about at all. We missed getting a photo but we did manage to capture Hazel King, Roy's sister, and the widow of W.Bro. Philip King, a Past Master, getting her jab the next day.



Hazel with the vital card

But we did not all escape the bug! We were blessed insofar that whilst a number of Brethren and their families were infected, there were no tragic consequences.

We found out what it was like being infected with the virus. W.Bro. Arthur Nuttall, told us in June 2020, a moving story of his experiences. Although he was fortunate not to be so bad as to be on ventilators it was a very challenging experience

“It all began with me suffering a fall in my lounge on March 24th. An ambulance was called and following an examination, I was taken to Addenbrookes Hospital and located in the A&E. Many tests and X rays were carried out. Eventually a doctor came and informed me that I had a slight heart murmur and my medication for high blood pressure would be changed. I was sent home

During the next couple of days, I experienced a number of falls and on March 26th 2020, following yet another fall, an ambulance was called and the team decided to send me to the West Suffolk Hospital, Bury St Edmunds. On arrival at A& E I was located in Bay 13 (not a good omen!) After an initial bed examination. I was moved around by porters for various tests

including an X ray and a nose and throat swab, finishing back in Bay 13!

After a sandwich of dubious origin, I was informed that I was to be admitted and to settle down and try to get some sleep

At about 8 am the following morning a sister arrived at the bedside and informed that I had proved positive for COVID 19, and that I would very shortly be moved to a secure unit. Porters quickly arrived and I was moved to Ward K on the upper floor and located into solitary confinement room 8. This consisted of an area approximately 2m x 2m with a wash basin in one corner, an easy chair in another, a state of the art commode and a bed. The view from my window was that of another hospital building which was about a metre away and consisted of a series of grey and green panels. No sunlight or views of the outside world. I left to my own devices. My only visitors were nursing staff who regularly took my blood pressure and pulse, not once were the results given to me. I did have one very odd experience though. At about 4 20 am one morning, a nurse came and told me of a great concern regarding my readings. When I questioned this, she asked how long I had been a diabetic? After I told her that I was not a diabetic she realised that I was not the patient concerned!!!

Other staff provided food, hot drinks; at least twice daily the room was cleaned the bed changed; my medication was provided at appropriate times. A doctor visited daily and, on the 2nd, or 3rd day informed me that I had a urine infection and to be given medication.

After several days of being bedwashed, it was suggested that I should wash myself in the corner sink. ‘Bliss’, a change of routine? Having been helped of bed I realised how weak I was. Everything demanded great effort.

So the lonely days passed , I became more independent and was allowed to sit in the easy chair .I received visits from the physiotherapist whose task was to get me moving again using a frame ; also from an occupational therapist who ascertained my requirement for ‘home help ‘ upon release plus any medical aids that would be beneficial in assisting my full discharge .I remained in isolation until Monday 13 April (Easter Monday) (yippee free again) .Once outside hospital the feeling of fresh air on my body and seeing green foliage was absolute heaven .

Although I did not experience a sore throat, a heavy cold or other symptoms associated with COVID, I certainly felt very poorly and arrived home 3 stone lighter in weight and feeling as weak as a kitten yet in a happy frame of mind. I could now set my sights to improving I had some help for a couple of weeks but as the mobility got better and was able to do things for myself, the support was reduced” .

Arthur reported that in mid- June 2020 he was independent and improving as each day passes. His story gave real substance to the statistics we heard on television every day and we saluted his indomitable spirit and we gave thanks to the NHS and to the Great Architect

However, one year on Arthur told us that he suffered from his infection and he reported to us that he had become a little unwell. He was on the road to recovery and said that “This 'long covid' does take its toll. They say it could be with me for 3 or 4 years.” And with his wry Fenland sense of humour, he quipped “ Will I last that long!!!!”

And we are pleased to report that in September 2025, Arthur is still an active member

Another Brother who reported being infected was Bro. Jamie Hills (now the Steward and Social Committee Secretary). His first contribution was in May 2020 when he told us about the challenges of running a large retail store with social distancing, based on an article in The Daily Telegraph article written by Marianna Hunt on May 5th .

For the first time in his life, Jamie Hills was actually enjoying his commute. Mr Hills, 49, is manager of Homebase in Newmarket, Suffolk. On a typical day it would take him an hour and a half to drive to the furthest of his region’s stores that he has to visit – now it takes less than half that time. “It’s an absolute joy,” he said.

DIY shops have been some of the first to reopen, however they have had to brace themselves for the rush of shoppers desperate to get their hands on tools for their lockdown projects. “The first day the doors opened there was already a queue of about 100 people waiting to get in by 10am,” Mr Hills said.

But he warned, returning shoppers should prepare themselves for a very different

Homebase, which as of this weekend has reopened all of its stores for business, has had to introduce strict social distancing measures to reduce the risk of cross-contamination between customers and staff.

Its shops, which would usually be filled by hundreds of people this time of year, are restricted to a capacity of 30 customers at any one time. Perspex guards have been installed on the tills, hand washing stations put in aisles, and marshals stationed in car parks to count customers coming in.

Rogue shoppers are an issue that is harder to prepare for. “We ask families or couples

arriving together to only send one person in but some ignore us, split up in the queue and meet up again in the shop,” Mr Hills said. Although this is frustrating, he said that often vigilante members of the public turn out on his side: “other customers will tell them off before we get a chance”.

The staff, too, have had to adjust. Start times have been staggered, employees are no longer allowed to take lunches and breaks together and team meetings are done outside at a two-metre distance. “I have to really shout to make sure everyone can hear me,” Mr Hills said.

Even before the shop reopened its doors, he had been busy at work. While other staff had been put on furlough, he and a few other managers had been kept on to do essential maintenance work and security checks and keep all of the plants alive across the different stores in their regions. “It was surreal: I’d be wandering round a huge, empty garden with just myself and about 2,000 plants to water.” “We feel like we have to turn around and walk the other way”

Haroon Amin, deputy manager at B&Q Stockport, did not spend his lockdown idle either. “My role changed completely: suddenly I was building safety screens, taping signs to the floor and picking up thousands of orders a day for customers to collect,” said Mr Amin, 34.

All B&Q shops are now also up and running, and any staff that do not feel comfortable being on the shop floor have the option to work in the back replenishing stock.

One of the strangest parts, both said, is feeling obliged to do the opposite of what you’re trained to. “The team is so used to approaching people and offering help. Now when we see a customer in an aisle,

we feel like we have to turn around and walk the other way,” Mr Hills said.

Mr Amin said he had been forced to change the way he greets people: “I’m a Muslim so as part of my culture I’m always shaking people’s hands, which of course we can’t do at the moment”.

Although they and their employees are in general very happy to be back, some concerns are hard to shake. “I’m scared to pick things up now,” Mr Hills said. “I’m probably doing about 20 hand washes and glove changes a day.”

But it appears that the new safety precautions are giving customers the confidence to return. “Some have even said they wish they could shop like this all the time. It’s so much calmer,” Mr Hills added.

Jamie looked back in June 2021 on his experiences during lockdown which included being infected

“Well, I’m somewhat ashamed to admit that when the news reports first started coming through about this virus, back in very early 2020, I was quite dismissive of the likelihood of a global pandemic! Surely, all of those in the past (Spanish Flu etc) are from a time when medical science was in it’s infancy and there was little understanding of how viruses could spread. We’ve also had outbreaks of SARS and other coronaviruses from China in the past. They didn’t cross the global boundaries! Little did we know how lucky we’ve been in the past!

Anyway, all in all, I didn’t see the threat! I also didn’t see the lockdown coming..... how on earth could the modern world cope financially with a lockdown.....? Wrong again! Looking back, I think only when the lockdown came, did I realise the seriousness of the situation.

As far as the personal effects are concerned, whilst the company I work for (Homebase), temporarily closed for 5 weeks, I had the opportunity to continue to work. All in all, there were about 50 of us from stores, 20 from I.T. and the directors that continued to work. Everyone else was furloughed. We needed the IT team to keep the website going (sales from which went in to orbit), and we needed people in stores to water plants (the lockdown came at the point in the year our garden centres are at their fullest)! So from a work point of view, I had a quite enjoyable 5 weeks travelling to and from a number of stores (on very empty roads), watering plants, and checking on various building services (fire alarms, intruder alarms etc).

As far as family was concerned, this was a slightly different matter..... Three children of school age..... took easily to learning through various technological platforms, mainly 'zoom' and 'MS Teams', but also found filling their free time quite challenging. It is my eldest daughter and children of her age group, 16 at the time and now about to turn 18, that I feel most sorry for. Not only has their education through GCSE's and A-levels been very disrupted, but their social contact has been very limited throughout the last 18 months, and they have found this very tough. The litter ones have found things somewhat easier in this respect.

Personally, I had Covid back in January, and but for a 10-day isolation, I was fortunate enough to suffer very few ill effects. The fear however was somewhat worse.

As we gradually return to a much more 'normal' existence, I await the post-mortem on the whole situation. The public enquiry which will unfold for many years to come. Was it the right thing to do? Did it come too late? Did it go on for too long? How long will it take to pay back the

government borrowed money? I'm sure there will never be a right or wrong answer.

What is very clear is that we will all be living with this new Coronavirus for ever more, and booster vaccines and vaccine passports amongst other measures, will almost certainly be a way of life from now on.

Homebase in Newmarket is now The Range, and we are pleased that Jamie is still gainfully employed.



Jamie Hills with his June 2021 raffle prize

Bro. Derek Boughen shares his eventful year in June 2021, which included members of his family being infected!

“In the beginning we were questioning if every trip out was ‘essential’. I had a new granddaughter born who I could only see from a distance, and I wasn’t able to hold her for several months. I missed going out for Sunday lunch, getting coffee and meeting and greeting people. We were, and still are, in the middle of re-building our house. The cost of supplies has gone up and so it’s been taking us way longer than expected.

I found out I would need a new hip and so I’m in pain every day and unable to do as much around the house as I would have liked. On the plus side I’ve had plenty of time to get what I could done. With the

introduction of support bubbles, we were able to see, and spend time with, our new granddaughter. We even found a great local butcher with less people inside at one time.

My youngest son and daughter-in-law contracted covid-19 in January, so that was a worrying time with my new baby granddaughter in the house, luckily, they recovered quickly and have had no lasting effects.

I've very much missed the lodge meetings, and I was so looking forward to things getting back to normal and attending the Ladies Festival. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend due to a conflict in dates with a possible hip surgery. I hope a fun time is had by all and I hope to introduce my new granddaughter soon."

As a postscript we are very pleased to report that Derek had a successful hip replacement in July 2021.



Derek with his new granddaughter

We know that lockdown has been tougher for some Brethren than others and next we have a very moving, honest contribution from W.Bro. Glyn Taylor then our Assistant Director of Ceremonies, who found lockdown very difficult. We had a brief contribution from Glyn in the May

edition in which he reported that he was on holiday in Mablethorpe.

Glyn reminded us that he has a huge challenge in caring for his wife who is disabled due to a stroke and osteoporosis but also suffers from dementia and Alzheimer's. He says "I believe that lockdown has exacerbated Mavis' condition. Before lockdown I could take Mavis out in her wheelchair and meet people. But since the first lockdown until our visit to Mablethorpe last week, we haven't even been out shopping, it is delivered to the doorstep. We had been to church every Sunday since 1982, but we haven't been since the Sunday before the first lockdown in March last year, although church services are resumed subject to restrictions, we daren't go, we have no confidence, as simple as that'.

He continued "Mavis and I haven't been away together since 10th November 2019. until we went to Mablethorpe on the first day of lockdown easing on May 17th. Even so we didn't feel confident to go in places. but we enjoyed two meals in a restaurant that was almost empty.

We have not even been able to see anyone, even our son since last July. At 70 years old I find it hard doing all the cooking, cleaning, laundry etc. As well as my own essential tasks, I have to deal with ordering, and administering medications to my wife, also washing, changing and generally caring for her. During lockdown things got on top of me and I appreciated the week's respite when Mavis stayed in a Care Home. I have to be honest and say that dealing with the NHS and social services has been a big challenge for me".

He finished by saying, "I have really missed my Masonic life and contacts with Brethren have been much appreciated and I look forward to resumption, but unless I can find a place in a Care Home for Mavis, it will be difficult for me to be as active as

I would like. But life goes on and I wish the Brethren of Descensus Aquarum, stay safe”

In a note added in August 2025, we are happy to report that Mavis was settled in a care home and Glyn has returned with great vigour to his masonic life as our Chaplain, but as of October, just after publication, she journeyed on to the Grand Lodge above in peace



Glyn and Mavis

For some the challenge was in coping with the demands made on delivery at work particularly in education. In November 2020 we shared an insight into the challenges of teaching during these difficult times. We were honoured to have that insight provided by Shamsa Khokhar, wife of Bro Naeem Khokhar who taught at Swavesey Village College. Naeem has had to resign in 2025 for health reasons

“Return to school has been challenging for teachers and support staff as well as for the students. We face an ever-changing set of rules set out by the government and the school tries it’s best to conform whilst trying to keep the spirits up of our students. I teach at a school where we pride ourselves in a vertical tutoring system but due to Covid, we have had to

make year group bubbles where predominantly, students stay in a particular area of the school for most of their subjects and the teachers go from area to area to teach. This has meant that as a school with a house system, we may not see some of the students in our house for some time which has been more challenging for our vulnerable students. However, we are really trying hard to make sure those pupils are looked after and supported in our new horizontal year group system by trying to liaise with each other and keeping things consistent.

The positive thing about staff walking from lesson to lesson is that we are all definitely getting our steps in😊

Overall, it has been difficult, but I feel we are and have been making the best out of a challenging and fluid situation”

We now have a story from Bro Carlos Jimenez-, included in the November2020 edition. A very challenging pandemic year to learn from and reflect

“On the 17th of March 2020, I was catching my train to Nottingham in the early morning. Little I knew that it would be the last time I would take that train for over a year now and only have been back in my office at the University of Nottingham four times in all this time.

Prior to this day, the University was already preparing for weeks in advance to move into online learning, but nobody expected the email we received telling us to pick up anything that we may need from our offices and not to return as we were moving, if possible, into online teaching with immediate effect.

In my own experience, I have been doing blended working, office and home, for the last 15 years but of course, nothing can prepare you for what we all have been

going through over the last year being fully base at home.

Firstly, it was a rush to move everyone away and more importantly to work out how to deliver the same quality curriculum online in a hurry. Maybe that was the easier part, while looking after students was a gigantic task, to which every member of staff stood to be accounted for. The pastoral service provided by the University has always been outstanding with each Professor looking after around 25 students personally and furthermore, those students closely related to the modules that each one of us convene.

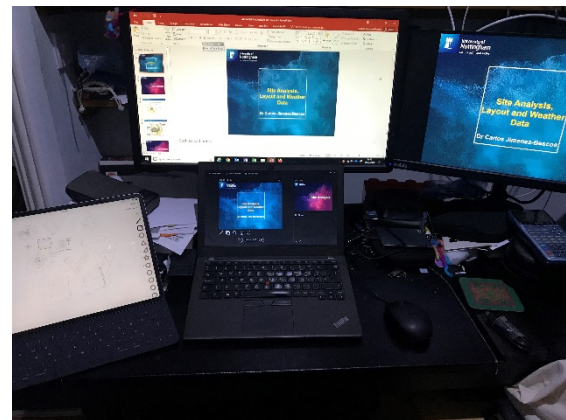
The reality is that, thanks to such a great system and all the welfare infrastructure from the University, we had managed over the last year to look after students, no matter where they were or what situations they were going through. This took a mammoth effort and a massive coordination from all colleagues involved as in no time, we had the task to not only to deliver high quality teaching and research but more importantly to track students all over the world to check their welfare and needs. Some students stuck in quarantine arriving to their countries, others in lockdown and unfortunately many others stuck in their room dormitories without a possibility to go anywhere.

Secondly, this pandemic has shown us that we can achieve so much working online. Many people has woken up to realise that although not ideal, we can run courses, conferences and seminars without being all together in the same room, but using Zoom, Microsoft Teams and so many other software's that would have taken years for us to be using.

Unfortunately, this crazy schedule over the last year, plus my partner being a nurse at

Addenbrookes hospital working in covid wards and home schooling my daughter during the period of the first lockdown, meant that I dropped from freemasonry and so many other activities, which I massively enjoyed. Nowadays, I am trying to work on getting back into a new normal for my own mental health and to help others if I can. Finally last Christmas for a couple of weeks and Easter 2021, I have been able to have a holiday and fully disconnect.

We have lost far too many people during this global pandemic but we will move forward stronger to honour them and built a better future for all”.



Carlos' workplace for the last year .. very familiar for our then Worshipful Master

Carlos was Junior Deacon at the time of publication.

But for others the impact has been less profound it has been a case of 'don't panic keep steady', W.Bro. Tony Goodge answered our question in June 2021, 'how difficult or otherwise it has been over the last 12 / 15 months during the Covid 19 pandemic restrictions?'

“I am pleased to say, we have been very fortunate, we have kept in good health and Chris, and I have hobbies that have kept us busy and entertained, we have not felt too isolated and been able to communicate

using the computer and phones through Zoom and Facetime facility. I wonder what our parents and previous generations would think to this capability and the modern use of computers and iPhone, and they certainly would not understand the current world's situation.

For us it has been disappointing that we have not been unable to go out to the local towns to browse shops, visit tea rooms or have a lunch out, and it's certainly sad that we have not been able to travel into Lincolnshire to see my brother, it is now 15 months since we were together having a meal.

Chris, and I are coordinators for the Ely & District U3A Guitar Plus Group, prior to the pandemic we were meeting and practicing for another public performance, we had booked the Ely Maltings but that had to be cancelled, and we have not been able to meet since our last meeting March 2021. We are now like many organisations, waiting for restrictions to be lifted.

The Pandemic has brought home how important our organizations are to the social wellbeing of our elderly members, providing something to look forward to and aims and achievements'.

In conclusion, the pandemic has disrupted and taken away our freedoms to enjoy ourselves, but we have to consider this as a small price to pay, considering the number of lives that have been lost, the disruption and despair of others and loss of jobs and businesses.

We are all very lucky we live in a Country that has the National Health Service and has the resources to help and protect its people, but we must accept that this will ultimately affect the Countries wealth and realise the burden will fall on our younger generations.

Whilst we lick our wounds, we must not lose site of the effects of the pandemic on other nations around the world who are also suffering and are without resources and vaccination protection. They too need the same vaccination protection, as without it, the cycle will restart with other unknown pandemic variants”.



Tony looking very relaxed

The Winter was wet and there were floods over the Christmas period. It was timely that Tony shared his career and knowledge of local land drainage and flood risk management in January.

Tony has since decided to leave the Lodge

At the same time W.Bro. Les Murfitt, the then Almoner, shared his experiences of the challenges of land drainage in his area over Christmas.



Les' photo of one of his drainage ditches

“Having worked with fenland and farming below sea level ,3m below, land drainage is of vital importance, you can't farm a puddle I was told 'we're not fishermen' ,the importance of the drainage system cannot be over stated ,even in the big metropolis of Ely which if the pumps didn't run and the drainage system work ,from the cutter upwards would be flooded” .

“In the early hours of December 23rd it started raining and by 10 am Christmas Eve we had 47mm ,3mm off 2" , unfortunately due high tides and unexpected amount the pumps on the fen drains had not been turned up enough resulting in a lot of water laying all over drilled and ploughed work, the water couldn't get away, dykes and drains were full to capacity and due to rainfall the weeks before so was the land ,the system works as such , land drains 1m below land drain into dykes , dykes drain into drains and drains carry the water to pumps that either pump water into the Ouse and tributaries or into the 100ft along the wash and into the Bedford wash which in turn pushes the water out to sea through gates and sluices as does the Ouse at Denver”.

“On Christmas Eve at 10.30 am the IDB started the old Rushton pump at Pymore this is an old diesel-powered pump which has been installed for many decades, seldom used but kept in running order, this supplements the electric pumps and over the next few days drained the water at an amazing rate . This didn't cure problems of

laying water as even though drained once water lays it forms a 'bottom' in the laying water which is hard to get rid of but 90% went”

“We owe a debt to the foresight of the Duke of Bedford and to the engineer Vermuyden who enabled this system to be constructed and those that have improved and maintained it .It is yet to be seen if the new ideas from low maintenance and converse flooding Cambridge side of the wash will work ,many acres of land have been purchased and flooded by the RSPB for wading birds and the new 'fen biosphere' project near Oxloode (when it gets finance) will work without interfering with the present drainage system that has worked for so many yrs. . Every farm in the area pays a drainage rate for every acre we farm to finance the work. But it's worth it”

But Les has had an eventful lockdown in the October edition he reported an eventful harvest.



Les harvesting many ears of corn with his family. One Lodge wag remarked that there were no potatoes in sight !!!

This is my 46th harvest from helping and being a nuisance to driving the combine to being head cook and bottle washer! For a Farmer to sum up a harvest it starts at the

point of drilling and October - December 2019 was rain, rain, rain, very few fields planted nice, most were 'mauled' and 'slubbed' in and these days we don't live by the old saying 'drill in slop to be sure of a crop'. By April/May it had turned the opposite and dry was the nature of the day. Besides all the spray and fertiliser that goes on the crop today to produce an acre of wheat the main ingredient is weather, no one can buy or deal in the weather and a good job too. The build up to harvest is exciting, trailers washed and cleaned, sheds swept and cleaned, combine gone through with any faults put right as much as you can then it's washed and cleaned and the most important part, the 'air con' is serviced. The weather this harvest was super-hot and we started August 3rd in wheat and was pleasantly surprised with crop, the satisfaction of seeing wheat harvested and going into the trailer up to the shed is so fulfilling especially if the crop is better than thought, the weather excellent and everything honky dory.

Friday 7th August started as most harvest days except very very hot. I began combining an 18-acre field and for the first time on this Farm our combine caught fire, not an unusual occurrence, several hundred a year but a first for us. I won't go through the torrid affair enough to say the fire crew came but the poor old combine had succumbed to the fire! Now for Saturday - Sunday hot days to not be combining was frustrating. All neighbours doing their own, no combines to be had, they were more like gold dust - going into the week very frustrating and by the 15th of August rain had come. Now rain not only makes the wheat wet, we need it at 15% but also degrades the 'spec' weight. On hectolitre weight, we need a count of 70 or above and Milling wheat needs 76+, with the rain comes wind which blows the wheat out of the ear, so all in all very humbling to see Mother Nature go against.

After finding a combine in Yorkshire and having it transported and also getting help from Julie's cousin, who had done his own, we managed to finish September 11th. Harvest 2020 is definitely one to remember. When you farm you learn that no one can beat back the weather and sometimes no one can help the mechanicals but the old saying of 'it's wonderful to start harvest but much better to finish' and now the work begins to start drilling. This year with all its complications and difficulties will be remembered but we start looking forward to the next. I remember taking tins of food and bags of potatoes to the Church in times gone by all to help the 'needy', where it all went I don't know but with all these problems my wife and I give thanks not only for the harvest and it's safely gathered in, but also for our family being safe when so many others are not. After all we all need to 'KEEP TROSHIN ON'.

But ever the Fenland stoic he contributed to our May 2021 edition by telling us – 'not much changed during lock down for agriculture, we carried on as time and weather waits for nothing, what it did do is make you appreciate technology, yes, we all have mobile phones to live by but to be able to see and take part in "zoom" or friends calls truly showed even if you are on your own you needn't be alone. Technology has definitely made life easier and bearable during this pandemic'.

Les obviously lives by the catch phrase 'don't panic keep calm'

We are pleased that Les is making good recovery from some medical challenges in 2025.

W.Bro. Roy Peacock's daughter Jenny Fletcher, secretary of the organising committee of Soham Pumpkin Fair, also ploughed on – so to speak and told us about this in our October 2020 edition



“The Fair has been running since 1975 and is held annually on the last Saturday in September. The Craft has always supported this event and indeed Members of the Lodge have attended in the past with the Masonic caravan. Jenny, secretary of the organising committee, tells us that “Every year we raise money for local charities, while providing the community with an enjoyable day out. This is the first time in our 45-year history that we have been unable to hold an actual Pumpkin Fair.

2020 has been a year of many challenges and it has been no different for us. However, we felt we could not let September pass without holding our event in some way. So, we opted for a virtual event: all our usual indoor classes – arts, crafts, poetry etc. would be entered online by competitors and then judged. The theme was ‘Our Planet, Our Soham’ (quite apt under the circumstances, especially when you consider that we decided on that before Corona virus). That part went well, and it proved we could manage online entries – something we hadn’t done before.

Everything that is usually weighed or measured was a different prospect, but we finally hit on the idea of a ‘drive-through’ weigh-in/measure-off so we could adhere to covid-19 official guidelines. Everything went according to plan, we didn’t have as many entries as usual which was a shame,

but we had so many lovely comments from people to say how glad they were that we had been able to put on an event albeit in a different format. There were 96 entries. Heaviest pumpkin in show was grown by Mr A Fletcher at 141 kg

Unfortunately, as our event was scaled down this year, we have been unable to raise any funds for our designated beneficiaries –Soham Men's Shed, Cambridgeshire Wildlife Care and Soham Community Uniform Scheme. They will have to be patient until September 2021, when hopefully we’ll be back to welcome you all again!

We would especially like to thank the following businesses who have supported us to be able to put on our alternative event: A & N.J Turner & Sons (Croft House Farm), Isleham Carrot Growers Ltd., Standens Engineering Ltd., Jak Hibs and Soham Books2

The Fair continues with Jenny as Secretary and in 2025 is on September 27th just after our 50-year celebrations.

And sticking to the theme of harvest we celebrated it together in October 2020



Bro Leigh Shaw's family picking fruit

And continuing with our more positive mood of reflection we now enjoy the feedback from Bro. Brent Kiddie and his wife, Debra. Brent was the Senior Warden at the time of publication

“Before Lockdown we were getting ready for and looking forward to a lovely first summer on our boat (Ocean Breeze). Since taking early retirement, we wanted to go away and return whenever we wanted. But then Lock down started, we could not even get to our boat in its mooring or our club to see if all was ok.

Deb decided to apply for voluntary Covid vaccinator and did numerous courses and passed well over 15’. (Brent thought she was training to be a brain surgeon). ‘Once all done, Deb waited to be called, but no one contacted her, even though she chased the system.

But now we are *Coming out Gradually*. we have visited our boat and it has had a really good spring clean, new curtains, and cupboards stocked up with extra nibbles if we ever get stuck out. We are ready for our first function outdoors soon. And Deb has now been offered a new position 1 day a week in a clinic too.

And alongside boats, we have horses! We contacted someone who makes stables and within 4 days it was ordered and delivered and erected all so quickly. The wood was difficult to get hold of and the guy who did it said that the cost had tripled.

They say when you retire you do not find time to relax well. That is pretty true as we do not know where we had time to fit work in before we retired. But the main lesson of retirement in Covid times, is enjoy your time together and with friends, get together more and share a glass or two.’

One of the most notable consequences of the pandemic is that we have been taking

more dogs and cats into our families and Brent and Debra share their adventures in having two kittens join their family ‘We decided we would have two feral kittens to keep the mice down in the stables. They would live in our spare kitchen we have for the stable bits. They arrived at 14 weeks, and we could not get near enough to sex them as they were so terrifyingly vicious and hissing all the time. But we persevered, kept them in and fed them. We let them out after a while, and they got used to the surroundings.

We had named them Eric & Ernie. A few more weeks passed until they needed to ‘be done’. The Vet phoned to say we cannot castrate Eric & Ernie; they are both females and need to be spayed and so this was done. OH! OH! We could not call them Erica & Bernese, so they are we just called them Kitties.

Within 4 weeks of they became tamer and more snuggled round our legs and now they sleep on our laps, and we can pick them up.

The quiet one is the mice catcher, and the other one just looks on. They chase the dog up the road which is hilarious to watch.”



But be vigilant for cat and dog nappers!

But as we said some of our brethren have been really busy during the lockdowns.

Bro. Tim Newton had been really busy in the lockdowns. He explained how he had developed his business over the period. Tim has now left the Lodge to work overseas.

Tim wrote “I worked for a national company for most of my life and although I had dabbled in a few businesses, it was becoming obvious that redundancy was not far away. In December 2018 that reality became fact. So, for a while I skipped the UK for a period of time doing what I love (holidays and holidays), but with my eye on my next move. I had been looking at a number of business that I had in mind. When I returned in Feb 2019, I started the massive search of buying a business which was well set up. I looked at garages, small food shops, post offices and more besides. and came across a flooring company that was looking to expand into franchises across the UK. So, I made my initial enquiry to see where this would lead.

For a number of weeks, I was in touch with a franchise consultant who had experience in multinational franchise set up and spent a long time, talking to him about the opportunity, 5-year forecast and business plan... thinking to myself ... well this seems easy. As I got close to Easter 2019, I had made my decision and I was 75% for - this is for me, as it fitted with my previous retail experience. What could go wrong ?, RIGHT!.

That Easter I flew up to Scotland to meet the two owners and have a meeting in Glasgow and visit their sites to get a flavour of the business ; I liked it that they left me to my own devices to go and talk to their team in all sites and understand a lot about them, how they operated, and what kind of sales they actually took and profit. After a few days in Scotland, I had made the decision that I was in and paid a deposit.

Well this in when it all started; I returned and started the hunt for premises in

Peterborough. Over the coming weeks, I visited agents, knocked on doors, drove round every estate I could think off and searched the internet for leads. After a few weeks I had visited around 70-90 locations and started to narrow my options down after some negotiation with landlords/agents. As I got to the beginning of May 2019, I had narrowed my options down to three. I then proceeded to invite the guys down from Scotland, including the consultant, to view Peterborough with me, looking at competitors and the sites I had picked as possible shop opportunities. By the end of our few days, we all agreed all three sites were perfect, so it was down to me to pick. Within days I had negotiated the site I wanted and engaged a solicitor to act on my behalf.

The end of June became ‘keys day’. Like getting a new house!! Then a bit of reality kicked in, OMG, where do I start!! Luckily, I had a list of everything I needed to buy and went off shopping and a bit like ‘Del boy’ on a market stall, getting the best deals I could. I started to get everything delivered to the shop in readiness for the big fit out, engaged some local people to help me, even our Freddie, to help me paint. The whole process took us six weeks to be ready to open and start to take some sales.

We opened and although I had training in Scotland and had been involved in DIY for over 30 years thinking ...hell, this will be easy. But the reality soon kicked in. How little did I know? I engaged some big companies that could provide me some knowledge quickly: I also had to self-teach on how to do Google and Facebook adverts to get people in to shop. As December progressed, I had found my feet and became a master’s in accounting systems, Google, Facebook and products, as well as getting three competent guys on

board who could fit floors. I thought a holiday over Xmas was well deserved as the business was closed. But as I got close to the end of February 2020, reality was kicking in. I realised that this virus threat was real, and March came and yep, I was shut!

After spending a few days at home and talking to the owners and consultant we hatched a plan. One, to get a transactional website up and running ASAP. Two, to make my warehouse bigger and expand the range and bring in more competitive lines to the big retailers. I suppose the big difference from a small business to a large corporation is that there is no politics in making the decision and getting going!!

Within weeks the website was up, and I bought the equivalent of about forty pallets of stock to hold in the shop as takeaway lines. So, what can I say, statistics show that most small business fail in the first two years; most small business don't have a pandemic to deal with in their first year of trading and more importantly being told to close!! However, I am so glad I decided to invest with a franchise and have a consultant that I can talk with and bounce ideas off on how to keep taking money through a pandemic and set myself up for the future. The truth of the last year has not been the sales, it has been getting the product from countries that have also been closed because of the pandemic, or everyone's favourite word "Brexit" and getting product out of Europe into the UK (and I would even call myself a mini master importer now too).

Although everything has been a bit of challenge, I have quite enjoyed the last year. And anyone ever thought 'should I, shouldn't I work for myself' and ever get that doubt about what, how, who - get a plan and go for it. It is way more enjoyable than working for someone else."



Tim in his corporate wear

But in addition, he was also very active doing voluntary work and in the September 2020 edition Tim shares his experiences.

"As most people started to realise in January this year a possible pandemic was on its way and I had already started to think about what the consequences would be.

Not only from a work point of view but what governments and the general population would do? As I got towards the end of February early March I saw a post on Facebook from our Local ward councillor that covers Cowbit, Moulton & some other surrounding villages stating that he was thinking of setting up a group locally to protect the vulnerable, and was after volunteers to do shopping from the places that they requested, obtaining medication from the Surgery or just having a chat with them on the phone if they needed to talk to someone.

Once I saw the post, I decided to contact the local councillor to have a chat and discuss. Obviously, I agreed with him that I would like to be a volunteer, and he took my details knocked up my letters of engagement and came to my home to deliver my parcel of post, as he did with all the volunteers and each village was divided up into blocks. Each letter introduced the councillor as most locals knew who he was, gave information for what the volunteers would do & then gave our name & telephone number. Each of us had to be properly checked and send

documents in to ensure we were the right people & registered with the local people station.

The following couple of days I then walked each of my areas to deliver the letter to each household, either chat with them whilst I delivered the letter or posted. The following day I received my first phone call, with their shopping request and prescription request, What I found difficult was being able to get into the shop as most supermarkets were not letting non-NHS staff in or under a certain age and talking the surgery to obtain medication at first was painful, but what was great as a group of volunteers we had a chat group to discuss with anyone, or our councillor or chief of police.

Quite quickly our councillor went on a mission talking to all store managers for the supermarkets & engaging the doctors at the surgery to make it a much easier process for us all, allowing us to enter the supermarket at any time with production of our letter and the doctor's surgery held all our details, so we had access to the backdoor (actual backdoor) to obtain the medication.

As a few weeks rolled by, as everyone would know. Getting hold of certain products was an absolute mission, Like toilet rolls, tinned food, pasta and way more, so as a group who ever was in a particular supermarket we would buy what we could and share, as the letter also enabled us to shop for multiple people so we were not limited to one sheet of toilet roll, or two tins of beans and also became a bit more adventurous shopping at local farm shops, or independent's where we could as somethings were very hard to come by.

As May came and seem to go. too quickly supermarkets started to return to normal, and the shopping experience became easier and actually the requests also started to decline as online shopping was much

easier to do (not for all but most) as some didn't have access to tech, and some pharmacies started to offer a delivery service taking away so many frequent visits to the surgery.

Towards the end of June, 99% of my requests had started to dry up mainly because of online and some of the vulnerable had started to decide to venture regardless of the advice, As the village shop for some was a better option as they had limited shopping to one customer only and had already introduced masks before the advice was given.

So too finish did I enjoy my experience, absolutely and I hope I helped local residents through what everyone would say a bizarre experience and spent a number of hours just chatting to a few as they were lonely and just needed to hear a voice to have a small conversation. To be honest and some people that would read this and know me as a person, the one thing I hate the most in daily life is food shopping but actually found it quite gratifying even some of the bizarre requests, to me an apple is an apple, bread is bread. Well, who knew !!!"

W.Bro. Ian Hardman, then Assistant Secretary and Provincial Membership Officer contributed to our continuing masonic development by explaining The Pathway and what other Masonic activities took place in Ely Temple, but in June 2021 reflected on how it had impacted him and how he looked forward to more angling! Ian has now left the Lodge

"Lockdown has been a quite extraordinary experience for me personally. Daily walking my dogs in Ely I have seen the streets become empty, recover, go quiet and finally burst into life again. Although missing masonic meetings, prospective new candidates responding to social media

posts have kept me busy, the interaction having changed from face to face to telephone based and now back to the former. lockdown gave me time to author a number of Cambridgeshire wide masonic documents, some drafts for further input and some complete, these included our membership strategy, our membership service charter, reusable presentations for the Cambridgeshire Light Blues and individual Lodges. A most prolific period for me. Looking forward as the 15th of June approaches, national rivers open again for coarse fishing as do those other waters that observe a closed season. In the winter fishing for Pike, Chubb, Perch, Grayling, Roach and Dace provide good sport along with Game fish whilst with the summer reopening Catfish, Carp, Bream and other species feature. The early season angler will have enjoyed some Tench fishing of course. To be on the riverbank at sunrise and sunset during these idyllic months is part of the great pleasure of fishing, especially when accompanied by friends or family. Wildlife abounds and if you are still and quiet, many visitors in search of a bit of bait, will drop.

And where would we have been without the tireless contribution of then Bro Freddie Lawes, now W.Bro, as the Immediate Past Master at the time of publication.

As W.Bro. John Sinclair explained, very early on we organised an online raffle to raise money for local charities. Some prizes went direct to winners online, but many were donated physically by Lodge members and then ‘one on one’ arrangements were made for delivery of the prizes between winners and donors. And Freddie was a great help in organising this



Bro Freddie Lawes handing over his raffle prize of a bottle of wine to the winner W.Bro. Martin Rose in June 2020 socially distant of course.

The June raffle enabled us to make a donation of £500. Including £250 match funding from the Bethel Scheme run by the City and University of Cambridge Masonic Charitable Trust, to go the Soham Community Association, close to the heart of several members. They provided help and support to the elderly and vulnerable communities who were often isolated in their homes. Until the pandemic struck, they would organise coffee mornings, Sunday lunches and other functions. This has had to stop unfortunately, so they had to change what they do to support

Freddie shared with us how he became involved in freemasonry

“Let me first explain how I was introduced to masonry. Before I took an interest in masonry, I attended some twelve Cornish Lodge Ladies Festivals in Bournemouth, as guests of a couple whose uncle was the Ladies Festival Secretary. Masonry did not mean a lot to me and I always thought it quaint how the evening was conducted.

Maurita and I moved to Witchford, Ely in 2011 living next door to Allan Hunter. Sometime in 2013 Allan and I bumped into each other outside our house at the bottom of his garden and Allan asked if we had many friends locally, to which we

replied none really and he invited us to a local function in Ely. We explained we could not go as it was the weekend; we were due to go to Bournemouth to a Ladies Festival. At this point Allan asked if I was a mason to which I replied .. no. I did say that if there were any other events locally, we would love to go. Sometime later Allan mentioned another event and we said we would love to go.

At this event I was introduced to a number of people all of whom seemed friendly and enjoying each other's company, a good crowd, I thought, and asked if there were any masons at the event. Nearly all I was told, as I drifted into the next question about masons, what was masonry about? I asked, whereon three or four people started to tell me. It was very jolly and

light-hearted and we enjoyed the evening. At the end of the evening, I asked Allan how one became a mason, whereon I was introduced to Jon Cooper, whom incidentally I had been introduced to earlier in the evening, which was a bit of a blur as they are when you are in people's company for the first time.

I duly signed up and was initiated into masonry. The first lessons I learned were the true meanings of trust, fellowship and brotherhood, without understanding of these you would never become dedicated to any masonic lodge and the brethren. The one thing that impressed me was that so many of the Lodge had far more important jobs and much more colourful lives than I had had but all greeted me as a brother and gave me equal time and respect. I guess that is what I considered important as it meant quite a lot to me and left me truly feeling I was amongst likeminded people.

I had been volunteering ever since school so it came easy to volunteer for jobs, causes and a variety of tasks and working with people I could trust and rely on made life so easy, so that none of the jobs and

tasks really felt like work. Everyone was always willing to help you and point you in the right direction making you feel a part of the Lodge, not just a member but truly part of the masonic brotherhood.

Being one of the younger masonic brethren I was never made to feel my age was a barrier to anything I wanted to become involved in. I was always encouraged and helped to realise my achievements and have made very good friends on route.

Not much else to say really, masonry is a very good vehicle to use in helping others that are in need, simply because there is such a wealth of knowledge and expertise to draw on. I can honestly say I find it pleasurable to work hard and contribute to all the efforts of the membership of the lodge in providing help and encouragement to those that need it in our local community and beyond."

And Freddie went on to share his natural enthusiasm across a wide range of contributions during lockdown and helped to make coping with the extraordinary circumstances almost enjoyable!!! . In August 2020 he started series of articles on the history of the 30th (Cambridgeshire) Regiment of the line, which had very strong connections to Ely. As well as the Parade Ground in Silver Street, a number of fields and open spaces in Ely were used during annual training. One of these was a field behind "The Oakery" in Lynn Road, which was known baseveral04 as "The Drill Ground". The home of our current Treasurer, W.Bro. Jon Cooper, is located there now. And the current Masonic Building in Ely had strong connections with the Regiment

He contributed recipes, as a secret chef, oversaw projects for photographic competitions of the best harvest fruit in the autumn of 2020 and speculated in further articles on whether Father Christmas is a

Freemason and on the evolution of warfare from very ancient times.

And we all know that Freddie's enthusiasm and hard work continues to this day. Maurita has now journeyed on to the Grand Lodge above

And our editor Bro. Peter Matthews shared his year with us.

"Like several of the brethren, being retired and having ample living space and a garden certainly helped Lis and I cope. We got lots of long-standing domestic jobs done and I pursued some dormant hobbies. Running the raffle and editing the newsletter added some extra focus and enabled me to get to know many members of the Lodge much better.

As you may know I have some interest in environmental matters, and it has been interesting to see how various Government initiatives to control and confront the Pandemic have taught us some lessons on how difficult it is going to be to change the way we live to rescue us from the impact of climate change.

We are looking forward to 'Freedom', but with caution. As we emerge to confront a more normal life, we feel the same anxiousness as we might after a long period in hospital or a long holiday. The new normal will take a bit of getting used to and that is in addition to the ongoing risks of the persisting pandemic. Like Freddie Lawes I think that I might be too busy to return to the old normal !!. But I am looking forward to getting back on the Temple floor and the social life of the Lodge. Can I say how much I have enjoyed working with the Descensus team and in particular Freddie Lawes, John Sinclair, Jon Cooper and our WM, Mike Richardson. It has been good to be part of the Band of brothers. Oh, and one last thing I have had my knee replacement so Temple working might be a bit easier!

Peter was Worshipful Master at the time of publication.

And the last word belonged to Provincial Grandmaster R.W.Bro. Bill Dastur on our final page, still the PGM at the time of publication, but whose term of office has now finished

Brethren of Descensus Aquarium

The end of lockdown is imminent and, hopefully, when you read this, it might have been finally confirmed. I understand therefore that this edition of your 3rd Rising may well be the last in its current format.

I am sure, like me, you cannot wait to meet up again in person but, maybe when you do, you will not only embrace each other (figuratively, of course) but remember the spirit, camaraderie and support we have experienced during the pandemic. Those qualities and actions should also underpin your future engagement.


Whilst Zoom has been very useful, I hope we shall continue to use it occasionally for efficiency purpose but not assume it is the only way to meet or communicate. How Zoom meetings will play a role in our affairs in future is for each lodge to decide but it has demonstrated its value.

Bringing in new members and holding initiations are now a priority. I should love to join you for such a meeting, if I am available, and my Deputy VW Bro Pat Kilby is equally keen to attend.

From your newsletters, I have been impressed by the range of your charitable activities and moved by many of the stories. The pandemic has given us all the opportunity to support good causes, and I congratulate you for supporting local initiatives through a variety of fundraising activities, including matched funding by

the Province and the MCF. An achievement in excess of £10,000 is fantastic. How you continue to build on this admirable foundation, I leave as a challenge for you. But I am sure you will rise to it!

So, it's back to ritual books, aprons, collars and jewels and, of course, Festival 2023. Please enjoy the resumption, you have earned this, and I look forward to seeing you soon.....at an initiation perhaps?

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bill Lane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a stylized "L" and "A" for "Lane".