

**Address by W.Bro. Brian Lown on the Middlesex Masonic Sports Association
at the Middlesex Grand Officers' & Provincial Grand Officers' Club
on Wednesday 21st March 2007 at the BA Club, Cranford**

BACKGROUND:

The MMSA was formed 1953 with its first meeting taking place at The Bonnington Hotel Southampton Row. The founding members included Norman Moore and the then Deputy Provincial Grand Master and subsequently Provincial Grand Master Philip Bull. The earliest recorded minutes inform us that donations were recorded in guineas and indeed an Honorarium of 35 guineas was received annually by the secretary.

OBJECT:

To establish and provide sporting opportunities for members of the Province to enjoy and at the same time to generate charitable funds for Masonic and non-Masonic Charities. In the beginning there were only two sporting sections, Bowls and Golf, however over the years other sections were added and we now operate six sections within the Association.

CHARITY:

Since its inception the Association has raised the magnificent sum £175,000 for Masonic and non Masonic charities.

Masonic charities have been supported to a total in excess of £85,000 and have included the following:

- RMBl.
- New Masonic Samaritan Fund.
- Provincial retirement Home.
- Foundation for the Aged and Sick.
- Middlesex 98 Festival Appeal.

Non- Masonic Charities have received over £62,000 and have included:

- NSPCC.
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf.
- Mencap.
- Our largest beneficiary the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation, now known as "WheelPower".

In 1948 Dr Ludwig Guttmann a neurologist at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital was convinced of the rehabilitation advantages of patients with spinal damage or disease who participated in sport and the Paralympics Games was born. The games are now international and operate in tandem with the Olympic Games every four years.

British Wheelchair Sports Foundation was established in 1971 to fund and help disabled athletes compete by providing the support needed in terms of training, courses and the use of the excellent and recently redeveloped facilities at Stoke Mandeville as a result of a 5.24 million Sport Lottery Grant. As a Masonic Sports Association "WheelPower" make a perfect partner for us and we have supported this excellent charity to date with a sum of £33,000.

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In 1992 two athletes, Tracey Lewis and Anthony Peddle were partly sponsored by the Association for the games in Barcelona and in fact both came to our AGM dinner where they were presented with gold pens to commemorate our involvement.

Our support, however, to help disabled men, woman and children like these to be given every opportunity of appreciating the challenge of competitive sport even to highest level is ongoing, with a firm aim for us to participate meaningfully in the sponsorship of athletes for the forthcoming Beijing Paralympics games in 2008.

So how has this money been raised?

- 1) A number of Lodges and Chapters' have for many years paid an annual bloc subscription for all of their members. While this in the past has been most helpful and appreciated, because the subscription has remained the same for over twenty years it now fails to cover the administration costs incurred by the association and this has been reviewed for this year.
- 2) The other has been by the sale of the Association membership cards, which most of you can recall purchasing at your Lodge at some time or the other and indeed if you are a regular visitor to other Lodges in the Province then like me you invariably ended up with five or six each year.
- 3) Charitable contributions from each individual section, sometimes, a small element of the cost of the competition or match fees, raffles, auctions and other similar fund raising activities.

Brethren thus far I imagine that you would have been reasonably surprised by the record of the association and I would suggest that my next statement will also surprise you although sadly for the wrong reasons when I tell you that the Association today finds itself at risk.

Why?

There are many reasons that could be attributed to this and because of time restraint I do not intend to expand on them tonight except to say that many of them I am sure could be applied to explain why freemasonry and other fraternal organisations find themselves in a state of general malaise. However, there is one reason that has become very apparent to me and it is also something that we can do something about and that is to promote the MMSA properly and more effectively to our members and clearly over recent years we have failed to do that. As an example, I sat recently next to a Master at a Lodge meeting and during our chat I discovered that he was a golfer, moreover, there was a large number of golfers in that Lodge and that they also organise their own annual Lodge golf day. When I mentioned the MMSA and the Golf section he told me that he had vague recollections of the Association had no idea that the association was in any way active in the promoting and playing of sport in the Province and when I mentioned the Sports Association Membership cards he recalls possible buying one but he had absolutely no idea where or to whom the money went to. In fairness to that Brother I do not believe that was unique in his thinking and the current position of the Association I suggest would certainly reflect just that.

So what is the current state of affairs in terms of the six individual sections?

BOWLS SECTION – If you recall earlier I mentioned that Bowls was one of the very first sections operated by the Association at its commencement in 1955. Moreover of the two, the other being golf the bowls was by far the most successful at the time having a Bowls representative for each of the various Masonic centers in the Province. The section has come along way since then, unfortunately in the wrong direction and last year we were unable to provide a Provincial team for any of our usual fixtures. I am personally staggered that in an organisation with an accepted aging profile and bowls

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traditionally being a game often played by older folk we can not produce a Provincial team and we haven't done so for the last two years. Mike Mercer has now decided to step down as Bowls Secretary and Malcolm Smith will be taking over and if he is to succeed then he will need all the support possible. The section has agreed to play Berkshire at Thatcham on the 13th June 2007 and I think it vital that we are able to meet that commitment with a full compliment and hopefully get a result. Brethren there has to be at least two teams in this room and remember the section will in the future encourage ladies to play as well so there is no need for anxiety when match day comes around. So please if Bowls is your game or something that you would like to take up in future, make sure that you tick that bowls section when you complete the form in front of you.

GOLF SECTION – Brethren before I present this section I was warned that to include my own Golf swing in the Power Point Display could be considered egoistic, so as you can see in this instance I have used somebody else who in my opinion is comparable. Over the years the section has stood up well in terms of members and support. However, the last five years had witnessed a change in those fortunes and there was a need to re-energise and re-vitalise and we fortunately found just the man in our new Secretary, Scott Lawson. Scott together with Brian Lund the Treasurer have already organised a full golfing dairy for this year in terms of our inter Provincial matches, competitions and fun golf days for all standards and I can confirm that our Provincial Golf Day will be played at Northwood on Thursday 7th June 2007. Brethren, I know that among you are a large number of golfers as we have many lodges in the Province who hold their own golf days and I would particularly ask that you please join and support the section and put your name down for the Provincial Golf Day as well, so please make a point of seeing Scott after the meeting.

CRCKET SECTION - Here, sadly a tale of woe, the section has been so poorly supported over recent years that we have been unable to muster a full team and it has been seriously contemplated to close the section down completely. Now that would be a great shame because the association's involvement in the game of cricket has not been un-substantial over the years. At one time, the section had a representative team at each of our centres and played one another on an annual basis to include the Norman Todd and the Ken Reed trophy. The association paid £3,000.00 for the Cricket pitch to be laid at Provincial Home and on the Saturday before the Fete each year we organised a very successful six a side cricket day at the home. Brethren, enough of the past now to the present Paul Sulley has kindly offered to take over as the new secretary and he is determined to give it his best shot in an attempt to rejuvenate and bring the section back to its former glory. Paul is here this tonight and would be delighted to meet cricketers of all standards and qualified Umpires

ANGLING SECTION – The most popularly enjoyed outdoor sport in this country, the facilities available to our membership are really fantastic. Located at Ottershaw, the section operates from its own exclusive 5 acre woodland site with a 1.5 acre lake stocked with various fish to include Carp up to 18 lbs. The lake has 24 pegs and the section has its own clubhouse and boatshed. I would imagine the envy of most lake fisherman anywhere. Yet the section also find itself at risk ironically through its own success as some years ago the section opened its doors to non Masonic members who are now in the majority and the section now risks being taken over by them and in the process of losing our own unique Masonic identity. So all you Masonic anglers please support the section, fill in the form, come along and enjoy some of the best lake fishing in the area.

BRIDGE SECTION – Established in 1999 by our present Pro Provincial Grand Master David Cons and meeting at Cole Court every Monday Morning at 10 a.m. this new section has made steady progress and now regularly has over forty participants each week. Barry Bannister is the Bridge Secretary who I am sure would be very pleased to welcome new any members and one must comment that with the recent refurbishment of Cole Court one could not wish for a more perfect venue.

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CLAY PIDGEON – The newest section in the association and with very early success as in only the second year of its existence the Middlesex Provincial team traveled the North of England to win the National Masonic trophy at Withenshaw and here we see our Deputy Provincial Grand Master receiving it. Brethren as with some of the other sections the ladies are more than welcome and I am sure that our Deputy Provincial Grand Master would permit to mention that his own wife participated and proved herself to be a rather excellent and an accurate shot, whether he now finds this fact comforting or not, I am unsure!

Brethren, those are our current six sporting sections and I am sure that collectively they provide something for everybody. But their ongoing success is reliant on one commodity, members and without them in sufficient quantities they will inevitably struggle to achieve their future targets. All the efforts of the various section secretaries and organizers are designed to provide the best facilities, fun and enjoyment for all who participate but never forget that their roles also carry a further responsibility and that is maintain one of the founding principals of the association as agreed by the founders in the Bonnington Hotel all those years ago and that is charity. The association is very proud of what it has achieved in the past but we still have and maintain great ambitions for the future.

The high point of our year is our annual Sports Association Dinner, which is usually attended by the Association's President, R.W.Bro. David Cons and last year was no exception when he attended with his partner, Georgette. We often use these occasions to present the fruits of our labours to our principal non-Masonic charity and here you see last year the previous Chairman Alan Severn presenting the British Sports Wheelchair Foundation with a cheque for £10,000.

We generally always have a speaker and last year we enjoyed tremendously some very amusing cricket anecdotes courtesy of our guest speaker for the evening Simon Hughes who regularly commentates for Channel 4's cricket coverage.

Brethren, in front of you will find a form, which I would ask you all please to complete and indicate the sporting section for which you have an interest and with this you will find a membership card for this year, which I am also going to ask you to purchase. This membership card carries a nominal value of only £1.00 but when you consider that all the money raised tonight will go to the Charity "WheelPower" then I would suggest that at the very least it is worth the usual price of a raffle ticket at your Lodge.

Tonight Brethren, there will be no prize, no bottle of whisky or box of chocolates to take home but simply the thanks and appreciation of all those less fortunate than ourselves whose quality of life will be enhanced and improved by your generosity.