

**Down Masonic Widows' Fund**  
**(Registered with Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Number NIC 100079)**

**Chairman's Report**  
**for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025**

Brethren,

At our last Annual General Meeting we were delighted to have in attendance our Patrons the Most Worshipful the Grand Master Most Worshipful Brother Rodney McCurley, Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master of Down, Right Worshipful Brother Brian Gardner and the Most Excellent District Grand King of Down, Most Excellent Companion Roy Humphries. I was also delighted to welcome over one hundred brethren to our Annual General Meeting. Brethren, your presence, and participation help make our Annual General Meeting a resounding success and we deeply appreciate your continued interest and support. Thank you all.

Sadly, since writing my report, one of our patrons The Most Worshipful the Grand Master, Most Worshipful Brother Rodney McCurley died on the 18<sup>th</sup> February 2025 following a short illness. He was laid to rest on the 26<sup>th</sup> February. The size of his funeral reflected the respect and high esteem members of our order held him. We have lost an exceptional mason and human being and on behalf of the Trustees and all present I would like to convey our deepest sympathy and sincerest condolences to his wife Mary, daughter Nicola and son David and his family on their sad loss.

In the year ending 31 January 2025, the Fund received donations of £69,259 (2024 - £69,562), from our 5 District Masonic Charity Committees and collection at our AGM, plus additional tax relief on gift aid donations of £18,320 (2024 - £16,467). Gift Aid is a vital and continuing source of revenue, and I would appeal to you all to use the gift aid schemes including the small donations scheme operated by our 5 District Masonic Charity Committees. The performance of our District Charity Committees has been outstanding, and I would like to thank them for their wonderful efforts during difficult times and a continuing reduction in our membership.

In addition to these donations there were donations received from other masonic bodies and individuals of £9,900 (2024 - £10,245). These donations including gift aid from our 5 District Masonic Charity

Committees did not fully finance the annuities and grants paid to our widows. This left a deficit of £37,622 compared to a deficit in 2024 of £48,797.

However, the surplus income from the Fund's portfolios of property and investments met the deficit of donations received and created a surplus of £158,390 compared to a surplus in 2024 of £148,685.

In view of this the fund continued to meet its objective by helping our widows by paying the following annuities/grants: -

110 Widows received annuities of £113,280 (2024 – 117 widows received £130,870).

35 Widows received bereavement grants of £17,500 (2024 – 26 widows received £10,420).

The administration of the Fund continues to operate at minimal cost as well as providing an excellent and efficient response to bereavement and annuity claims. This is due entirely to our diligent officers.

### **Property Portfolio**

The Trustees continue to look for potential properties to add to the portfolio. Unfortunately, the retail property market has become extremely difficult with properties in good areas becoming overvalued. During the year, a property was offered to the Trustees and after conducting extensive due diligence and surveys we decided not to proceed with the purchase of it.

Regarding the management of our existing properties, I would like again to thank our Managing agents Fraser Kidd and our solicitors Carson McDowell, with whom we have excellent working relationships, for their assistance regarding the Fund's property portfolio.

### **Investments**

As well as investing in property we also invest in the stock market using Quilter Cheviot's specialised Charity Investment Fund Account and the Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities which as we can see from the accounts have performed very well. In view of this the Trustees decided to invest a further £100,000 into Quilter Cheviot's specialised Charity Investment Fund in January 2025.

The Trustees' objective of building up these investment portfolios is, should a suitable property be found, we will be in the strong position to purchase it with no or minimal financial assistance from our bankers.

The overall financial position of the fund has also strengthened, and I am pleased to report the balance sheet shows a strong position of £2,339,638 compared to £2,181,248 last year.

### **Examination of Accounts**

The accounts of the fund are independently examined by R. Savage and Company Limited, Certified Public Accountants based in Saintfield with whom we have a long standing and excellent working relationship. I would like to thank the Managing Director Noel Gibson and Tracy Kearney Director and Senior Tax Consultant and their team for their assistance with the examination of the accounts and for their on-going advice.

### **Afternoon Teas/Lunches for Widows**

I am pleased to report that all District Charity Committees within the Fund's area of operation held afternoon teas or lunches for their widows. From feedback the widows have and continue to thoroughly enjoy these afternoon teas. It is important that District Charity Committees source good venues which can provide good quality food at a sensible cost.

### **Thanks**

I would like to thank our three Patrons of the Fund, the late Most Worshipful the Grand Master, the Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master of Down and the Most Excellent District Grand King of Down for their continued support and encouragement, for raising awareness and emphasising the importance of our Fund to the brethren of the Province and District of Down.

I am very conscious and indeed humbled of the wonderful work that goes on in our Lodges, Chapters, Councils, Preceptories, Prince Masons and District Masonic Charity Committees in promoting and raising money for our Fund as well as the important work of visiting our widows.

As we move forward with confidence and optimism, I would ask for your continued support to maintain and where possible increase your financial support to the Fund. Your financial support is vital to ensure the Fund can meet its financial obligations for the near future and beyond.

In addition to financial support, I would also ask for your continuing work in identifying widows and ensuring that the information and details recorded on application forms is accurate, so that we can help quickly where assistance is needed. Sadly, I feel that in some instances Lodge Almoners could be more proactive in these areas.

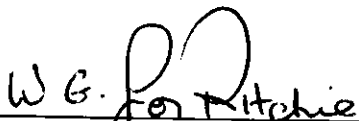
On behalf of the Trustees and Officers of the fund I would like to convey our sincere thanks to the following for their wonderful generosity and hard work.

- District Charity Committee representatives and officers.
- Representatives to our Fund.
- Lodge Almoners, Stewards of Charities, Secretaries and Treasurers.
- All the brethren in this part of our Province.

Brethren, the Trustees and more importantly our widows deeply appreciate your hard work and efforts.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Trustees, President Right Worshipful Brother Des Smith, Right Worshipful Brother Sam Snodden, Worshipful Brother Gerry Anketell, Right Worshipful Brother Ian Kirkpatrick who looks after the maintenance on our properties, and our exceptionally hard working officers, treasurer Right Worshipful Brother David Woodrow, secretary Right Worshipful Brother Noel Sufferin, and assistant secretary Right Worshipful Brother Eric Williamson, for their support, dedication, enthusiasm, and their hard work and efforts during the year to ensure the Fund continues to meet its obligations and objectives.

This year our President Right Worshipful Brother Des Smyth celebrates 40 years+ and our Secretary Right Worshipful Brother Noel Sufferin celebrates 20 years+ of devoted and loyal service to the Fund. This is an outstanding achievement by both these brethren who have contributed so much to the success of the Fund. In recognition of their service and contribution I would be most grateful if we could show our appreciation to them with a well-earned round of applause.



W.G. Ian Ritchie PPAGM  
Chairman and Trustee  
24<sup>th</sup> February 2025