

Alex Purves – 70th year Certificate from the Grand Lodge of Scotland
4th April Broad Forde Lodge, Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire.

Brethren, Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening.

I thank the Lodge for their courtesy and, for me, the honour of attending tonight and presenting this certificate which marks 70 years of Masonic membership which began for Alex in the Grand Lodge of Scotland.

This is a most pleasurable opportunity to reflect on the last 70 years of the life of Alexander Lamont Purves, a dedicated public servant, a Father, grandfather, masonic brother and a good friend.

So, who are you...??? What made you...???

Alex will be 90 on the 25th May born in 1932 in Leith, Edinburgh, family was Mum and Dad and 5 siblings – 4 elder brothers and 1 sister. Dad worked for a Distillery Company and Mum, like most Mums then, kept house and looked after 5 children and a husband in an apartment consisting of a kitchen, one other room – and a rare luxury, a WC. The home had a single gas ring, a fire and a cold tap.

Your Father had joined up in 1914 and was enlisted at 19 in the RAMC, he was attached to the 7th ([Leith](#)) TA Battalion, the [Royal Scots](#) and on 22nd May 1915 they were heading for [Gallipoli](#). Two trains of soldiers headed South for that deployment and the first was involved in the catastrophic train crash at Quintinshill, near Gretna Green the worst in British railway history, that earlier train was destroyed – of 500 soldiers on board, only 58 men and 7 Officers were on roll call the next day. Over 200 had died.....Luckily, your Dad was in the later second train which was halted and avoided a similar fate. You strikingly recall the story recounted by your Granny, you said that she had a faraway look – it must have been a deep sadness as she would have known so many on the train, they were all local lads and the town was in deep mourning. Now we have names and help for these things – PTSD etc but then, they had to get on with it.

In the Second World War your second brother joined the army and was posted to Singapore and was lost believed killed in action, yet another brother joined the RNVR before transferring to the first request for volunteers to form the Commandos of the Royal Marines. He had an active war at Anzio and

supplying equipment to partisans in occupied Eastern Europe. Even your sister tried to join the RNVS but Dad objected, he had lost a son and could not bear to lose his only daughter.

This is a family of service.

Mum had died when you were just 2 and during the war you were evacuated to Alloa. Upon return was primary school, Leith Academy and at 15 to work in an electrical engineering company. University was not an option due to your father having remarried and the birth of a younger brother which stretched family expenses.

National Service followed and you joined the RAF – a Senior Aircraft Man (SAC) and you were posted to Germany. This posting led to a turnaround in your life and you were set to take another course, at the conclusion of your posting you made application to join the Hong Kong Police.

After a grilling from a high-powered interview and selection panel of the Crown Agents you were selected for admission and after a two day journey by plane journey – 1st class mind you, via Switzerland, Beirut, Calcutta and Rangoon you arrive it what was to be the dominant part of your life and career – Hong Kong.

Along with all new recruits to the Officer class you were a Probationary sub-Inspector for 3 years when you were expected to pass all relevant courses, which you did and Inspector Purves, fluent in Cantonese, had his own platoon of men and led by example.

I have known a few Hong Kong policemen and invariably they gravitate as soon as possible into the CID or the famous HK Special Branch, you did not, you worked on the streets, with your men, and got to know the real people, how they lived and worked and you began to develop your strong sense of their history and culture.

In 1959 massive floods hit Hong Kong, 12000 people were made homeless in your division and you led your officers from the front, at one point you fell down an open well and were rescued by your team and on another occasion the senior Superintendent pointed out a house on stilts half way up a steep and muddy hillside – ‘go and have a look’ you were told and off you clambered with a few constables. On arrival, what looked derelict actually contained a glamorous young lady who did not want to be rescued and as she was bundled down the

hill, to safety, you learned a few more Chinese expletives to add to your language skills !!!

On another occasion, with your platoon, in full riot gear, tin hats and long battens, you were deployed to the site of the construction of the famous and iconic Hong Kong high rise apartments, but this had of course meant the clearance of poor neighbourhoods – one man's slum is another's home. For three days you kept the peace, but no food or drink was supplied to your men, so you dug into your own pocket and supplied them for the duration. At the end and back in Kowloon, they insisted that you join them in their mess, a massive honour, (against the rules...) and they bought you two bottles of Carlsberg – the most expensive beer in Hong Kong.

What examples of humility, leadership and loyalty – Alex such loyalty and admiration from those we lead can only be earned never demanded.

You did spend 2 years in Special Branch but in 1962 after 7 years in the police you took an opportunity to diversify your career and applied for the post of Assistant Trade Officer in the department of Commerce and Industry. Your skills with Chinese people and interviewing were crucial here.

As part of the Hong Kong Civil Service, you were posted to represent the Colony abroad, you spent time in Sydney, London and Brussels. In Brussels, you were 1st Secretary for Hong Kong Affairs situated in the British Embassy. I can tell you that a 1st Secretary in any Legation is as near to God as it is possible to get... !! In 1983 you were back in Hong Kong as Dep director Industry and in later years accepted the position of support to the new Chief Secretary of Hong Kong – an exalted position.

Finally in 1988 you were made Director of Urban Services a wide-ranging role which entailed managing everything in Municipal Services from toilets and bins to swimming pools and libraries. It is as if you had been preparing for this through your career, being able to care and support 3.5 million residents of Hong Kong, they were indeed fortunate to have someone who understood their needs and was able to do the job well.

You retired from Colonial public service in 1988 and was awarded the Imperial Service Order (ISO).

The **Imperial Service Order** was established by [King Edward VII](#) in August 1902. It was awarded on retirement to the administration and clerical staff of the [Civil Service](#) throughout the [British Empire](#) for long and meritorious service

And, here it is.....

Congratulations to you Alex.

Amongst all of this you married Margaret in 1960, you met whilst on home leave, she was a SRN at Colchester Hospital and then she went for midwifery training at Leith – where you met.

She joined you and you were married on November 19th in the Masonic Hall in Hong Kong, no family were present of course but police friends supported you and the Assistant commissioner gave the bride away.....

She helped you in playing an active part in the community and at one point she ran the Red Cross Blood Collection Service, she was so popular that you were known as the husband of Sister Purves and she even got letters from American sailors asking for a date when they returned.....!!

The two of you were also blessed with the adoption of your beloved daughter Kirsty who is with us here tonight, she has been with you on your life's journey and it is lovely to see her with you now.

However this Certificate talks of 70 years in Masonry....

You joined on 13th December 1951; you were Initiated into your Fathers Lodge Trafalgar No 223.

In Hong Kong you visited the Masonic Hall – the famous Zetland Hall and Joined the Scottish Lodge St Andrew in the far East. From there you joined other Orders – Rose Croix, Knights Templar, AMD, SRIS and the Royal Order of Scotland.

You were ultimately made the District Grand Master for the Scottish Constitution and held that position for 10 years looking after Lodges in Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan. A remarkable achievement.

Back in UK, you settled in Fife and in 2016 you both moved here to be closer to Kirsty, Margaret was not well at this time and sadly she passed away soon after moving. You have made your home here and joined this wonderful Lodge.

Alex, your story is one of service, commitment, care and love. You have achieved so much, and your legacy is a distinguished one.

This plain certificate is awarded for being a member for 70 years but the value in this piece of paper is what lies behind it.

I am proud to call you a friend and honoured to be able to present this certificate on behalf of the Grand Lodge of Scotland and provide some explanation of the man behind it.

On behalf of all of us here today, Alex, thank you for your Public Service, thank you for your Masonic Service and thank you for being a friend.