

Annual Meeting of District Grand Council, Sindlesham, 18th July 2019.

District Grand Master's address to the Companions.

Companions All

I welcome you to our Annual Meeting here at Sindlesham. Companions of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire this is your meeting and I am really delighted to see so many of you here today. On your behalf I have welcomed our distinguished guests, many of whom have travelled long distances to be with us. I reiterate that welcome and say how pleased we are to enjoy their company.

Companions of OBB, in nearly 5 years as your Deputy District Grand Master I have had the pleasure of visiting your Councils on many occasions. I thank you for the warmth of your welcome and for the tremendous companionship that you have shown. I have made many wonderful friends.

We have suffered a sad loss in the passing of R III Comp Nick Murzell, who was a rock in the District. He lived respected and died regretted.

As you will know, and many of you were here, in May following the meeting of Bekenesfelde Council (held at Sindlesham for various complex reasons) a meeting of District Grand Council was opened. The Grand Master, the Deputy Grand Master, the Grand PCW, and the rest of the Grand Team were admitted and the Grand Master installed me as your District Grand Master in an exemplary ceremony. That was, and is, a tremendous honour for me, and I will do my very best to live up to the Grand Master's faith in me, and to emulate the work of my distinguished predecessors (one of whom is here.) I thank all those who were able to attend on that very special day.

I then had the tremendous pleasure of Installing V III Comp Phillip as my Deputy, and V III Comp Peter as our PCW. They have both hit the ground running (perhaps pursued by the army of the Chaldeans?) and I thank them both for their tremendous enthusiasm and commitment; and for the benefit of their experience and their invaluable advice.

Companions of OBB, you may well be asking, is everything now going to change? The short answer is no. The long answer is that some changes have been forced upon us and some would have occurred any way, but it will be evolution not revolution. We have a District with ten Councils

all working with purpose; with tremendous companionship within, and between, the Councils; with excellent ceremonies; and always a delight to attend. Let's maintain that and enhance it.

I am a mathematician, so you will expect some numbers. The number of companions (bodies not memberships) in the District increased by 3% in 2018 to 180. The national average saw a slight decline, so we are doing well. We have here some 70 members of the District, so well over a third of our companions are present, 38.9% in fact. On a Thursday afternoon that is a splendid turnout, and very heartening. And Companions, you will be pleased to know that the District Dues are 32.9% below the national average. A testament to our hard working Treasurer, but I hope also an encouragement to support the District 100 Club.

At Grand Council in April a number of our Companions were honoured by the Grand Master. I will request those present to stand, and ask you to keep your applause until the end of the list.

- V. Ill. Comp Graham Seeman Re-appointed President of the Executive Committee
- Ill. Comp Richard Skym Appointed Deputy Grand Organist
- R. Ill. Comp Bob Morrow Promoted Past Grand Chancellor
- Ill. Comp Mike Long Promoted Past Grand Conductor of the Council
- Ill. Comp Eric Mitchell Promoted Past Grand Conductor of the Council
- Ill. Comp Silverio Ostrowski Appointed Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies
- Ill. Comp Neil Coleman Appointed Past Grand Sword Bearer

Congratulations to them all.

In addition, two of our Companions have received the degree of Excellent Master at Grafton Council in London. This is the sixth degree in the Order and only conferred on a limited number of Companions who already have the Silver Trowel. Our two worthy recipients were Richard Floyd and Richard Owen, although it's not essential to be named Richard!

We have had two Team Visits this year. In February we went to Oxford Council, a meeting remarkable for seeing three Companions take the Royal Master Degree. R Ill Comp Charles Woodward was acting as Conductor of the Council. There was a report on the door and Charles' face was a picture when the Grand Director of Ceremonies was announced. Outside the door of the Council was the Grand Master, who demanded admission. Later in the meeting the Grand Master presented R Ill Comp Charles with a Certificate to mark his 50 years as a member of our Order. Many congratulations Charles, I hope that it was a pleasurable surprise. 50 years is a tremendous record, and one which few will emulate.

The second visit was earlier this month when the Team visited Eliot Council at Winslow to mark the Council's 10th Anniversary. Various understudies were required since the District Sword Bearer is the TIM of the Council, and even Philip cannot open a Council whilst brandishing a sword. We witnessed two excellent ceremonies, learned a little of the history of the Council, and enjoyed the renowned Carvery at the Bell Hotel.

I should like to thank all the outgoing District Officers for your sterling work during the past year. I hope that you have enjoyed it, and your support is much appreciated. I also thank those District Officers who have represented us at various District Meetings around the country. It is always a delight to enjoy the companionship of our Sister Districts.

Moving to this year, it has been a delight for me to invest the new Officers with the collarettes of your office. I thank you for the commitment that you give to your Councils and to the District. There will be three Team Visits in the coming twelve months and I shall be delighted to see you at any of those meetings which you are able to attend.

We are delighted to welcome the Grand Chancellor, R III Comp James Newman, to today's meeting and thank you, James, for your very lucid and informative talk. Companions you will all appreciate the amazing work done by the Masonic Charitable Foundation. As you will know Companions, all three of the Craft Provinces that constitute our District are in Festival mode. So, Companion DC would you and your Deputy and Assistant, please conduct to me, Comp James Hilditch, the PGM for Oxfordshire; Ill Comp Peter Sands, Deputy PGM for Berkshire; and Ill Comp Graham Dearing, DepGSupt for Buckinghamshire. (Presentation)

Companions we will continue to support the Festivals over the next three years; and of course the Oxfordshire Mark Festival for the Mark Benevolent Fund in 2025. Thank you for your generosity in contributing to our Alms collection. If you are able to Gift Aid it then the Chancellor makes a valuable contribution from his coffers (not the Grand Chancellor, I hasten to add!)

Companions of OBB in one way you will see as much of me as you have previously over the past five years. However, I'm also hoping that you will see a lot less of me. It is my aim to follow in the emaciated footsteps of R III Comp Chris Lewis and lose some weight. I have hitherto adopted the ostrich policy and do not weigh myself. I am proposing to have a weigh in at Unity Council, our Past Masters' Council, next Thursday. I will then invite you to sponsor me for any pounds shed over the year, in memory of our dear Companion Nick Murzell, and to support the Murzell family's chosen charity of Cancer Research.

Companions, I am up to 1,296 words already and I must conclude.

In doing so, I should like to thank Berkshire for allowing us to meet here in Sindlesham and enjoy the facilities of the Centre. Thanks also to Thame Council for the use of their equipment.

My grateful thanks to all those who have been responsible for ensuring that today's meeting has run so smoothly. In particular, our new DC, Ill Comp Tim Weller; and all his Team; and the District Recorder, Ill Comp Malcolm Summers; the Assistant Recorder, Ill Comp Simon Jeffrey; the District Treasurer; Comp Ray Head; and all their helpers.

Companions, I thank you all for attending. Many of you have travelled great distances, and you have all given up your valuable time to attend our meeting. Perhaps in future this will all be done remotely in a virtual meeting with holograms. However, for today I look forward to seeing you all shortly in the bar.

May the Supreme Master of the Universe aid you with His Grace, and have you in his Holy Keeping now and evermore.