

District Grand Master's Address – July 2024

Companions, I am delighted to welcome you in such numbers to this, our District Meeting, and to my Installation as the fifth District Grand Master of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire: In taking up the reins of this office, I must, of course, pay tribute to my Right Illustrious predecessors, who have laid such firm foundations for us to build upon, and to pledge myself, with your support, to a faithful discharge of the duties devolving upon me.

I am pleased and gratified that so many of you have taken the time to be present, and I thank you for your friendship and support.

I have already taken the opportunity, on your behalf, Companions, to welcome the Right Illustrious Deputy Grand Master and his team, and I am sure that all have been pleased and impressed with the Ceremonial which has just taken place.

I am likewise very pleased to welcome Companions from other Districts, and I am reliably informed that we have a representative from very nearly every District in England, and some from further afield.

I warmly welcome so many of the Heads of other Orders meeting across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. This includes the Craft, Royal Arch, Mark, and many other Orders. We appreciate that you have made the time in your busy schedules to join us today, and we value, and will support, the interconnection between the various branches of freemasonry in the three Counties, to our mutual benefit.

Companions, I am sure you will understand that time precludes me introducing you all by name on this occasion, but, Companions of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, will you please give all our distinguished guests a warm welcome? (*Applause*).

I thank the outgoing District Officers for their support, and warmly congratulate those Officers appointed for the current year: I do hope that you will be able to take a full part in the District across this masonic year and next. Each year the District Officers of the year make Team visits to at least two Councils within our District, and I ask that, as in previous years, you support these team outings. They are a wonderful way to support host Councils as well as the District, and you will make lasting friendships around the District by taking part.

Likewise, I congratulate those of our Companions who received their first appointment or promotion from Grand Council in April, as well as recipients of the Silver Towel and the Excellent Master Degree. These honours are not only for the work which you have already given to your individual Councils, but also for the work I know that you will wish to continue to do in the future for this Order.

Large gatherings such as this do not simply happen, and I pay tribute to our hard-working District Grand Recorder and his team, the District Grand Treasurer, the ceremonial team and all their helpers for their commitment and effort to make today a success.

Companions, this is not the time for a manifesto – and I am sure that we have all had quite enough of those to be going on with! Nonetheless, I would like to share a few thoughts with you.

Any significant milestone such as this presents us with a number of opportunities. We are enabled to look back, to remember with gratitude the work, witness and sacrifice of those who have gone before us and to give thanks for the achievements of the past: we are also enabled to re-examine – perhaps rediscover - the essential *raison d'être* of the institution to which we all belong and, with a strengthened sense of identity and purpose, to look forward with renewed hope and resolve to the future.

It is difficult, in a brief Address such as this, to capture the special atmosphere of the District and the Order, and what has made so

many Companions, over the last quarter century or more, continue to attend, time after time, often travelling considerable distances to do so, and to contribute so much – both to their Councils and to the District, and in many cases, to the Order at large - but the main themes, I think, are these: a real appreciation of the beauty and importance of our ceremonies; a determination to present them to the highest possible standard as they deserve; and, by no means least, an enjoyment of each other's company, both at work and at refreshment, where lasting friendships are made and nurtured over the years.

We are custodians and trustees of what has been passed down to us, and it behoves us all to do what we can to preserve our Order and to ensure its future prosperity and success. In spite of recent difficulties and challenges, the District has come through recent challenges with its spirit intact - with a strong sense of corporate identity, enthusiasm for our Order, fraternal cooperation and confidence in the future – let's build on that together in the years to come.

Key to this success is, of course, regular attendance, frequent visiting, as far as possible, and a sincere effort to present the ritual to the highest possible standard, but the great incentive to all of these is the recruitment of a steady stream of worthy Candidates.

The question, "Why join the RSM?" ought to be easy to answer: Keith Jackson, in *"Beyond the Craft"*, states, *"....to the serious and understanding Masonic student, they prove to be the essential link between the Degrees of Master Mason and Royal Arch Mason."*

In 1906, R. Ill. Comp. Charles Matier, Grand Recorder, who had played a key role in bringing the Rite to England, wrote that only with the aid of the Cryptic degrees could the chain of Masonic knowledge be rendered complete. He said, *'There can be little doubt as to the necessity incumbent in every Royal Arch Mason*

to receive them, as thereby alone can the overlooked Masonic knowledge be communicated.'

This point was well taken by a number of active and enthusiastic Masons, of whom R. Ill. Comp. Charles Woodward, our Primus District Grand Master, is the sole remaining representative, and their endeavours led to the Consecration of Oxford Council in 1971.

As we know, from small beginnings in the early 1970s, the Order has spread to cover the three Counties which comprise the District, and in spite of some inevitable losses and the recent difficulties caused by the pandemic and the economic downturn, there is much to be thankful for, and to look forward to.

While, as Dr Oliver observed many years ago, "*Great numbers are not always beneficial*", and our Order is, as it should be, comprised of the "*faithful, worthy and select*", recruitment is the key to ongoing success, and this is a duty on every Companion, not just the usual stalwarts.

Any Mason who gives the Solomonic legend any thought at all will rapidly realise that there is a sizeable gap between the end of the Third Degree and the beginning of the Royal Arch, and that that gap of four hundred and seventy years is substantially filled by the Degrees of this rite. Anyone who, like me, now many years ago, was intrigued by Jackson's description of the disquisition in the Royal Master Degree as, "*one of the most enthralling pieces of ritual in Freemasonry*" should be easy to recruit.

Pause to consider that there are over 100 Royal Arch Chapters in the three Provinces comprising our District, many a Royal Arch Companion who is also in the Mark may just be waiting for someone to talk to him, and, if every Companion here recruited just one member of his Chapter, the District would double in size in a short while. Take that challenge away with you today.

As a former District Grand Master said many years ago, “Our degrees complete the story; our rituals are elegant and rewarding for anyone seeking Masonic enlightenment. If suitably qualified, invite them to join this wonderful Order and see for themselves!”

Companions, *“Take due notice thereof, and govern yourselves accordingly.”*

Having completed our labours, it will soon be time to go to well-earned refreshment – Companions, I thank you for your kind attention. May the Supreme Master of the Universe aid you with His Grace, and have you in his Holy Keeping now and evermore.

PJP

18.7.24