

District Grand Master's Address – July 2025

Companions, I am delighted to welcome you all to this, our District Meeting, and I must say how time has flown since my Installation as the fifth District Grand Master of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, last year. There have been a number of highlights, not least, the wonderful result of the Sesquicentenary Appeal: thanks to all who supported that so generously.

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 Most Illustrious Grand Master and his Grand Director of Ceremonies, and we are delighted to have them with us today.

I am likewise very pleased to welcome Companions from other Districts, and thank them for the warm welcome and generous hospitality I have received, when visiting their Districts. I also 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.

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 re-appointment, first appointment or promotion in Grand Council in April, and will they please stand and be recognised?

V. III. Comp. James Hilditch, Grand Treasurer

R. III. Comp. Graham Seeman, GDC

V. III. Comp. Richard Floyd, promoted to Past Grand Lecturer

III. Comp. Paul Kiefer, first appointment to Past Grand Standard Bearer

III. Comp. James Payen, first appointment to the active rank of Grand Steward.

Companions, let's give them a round of applause.

We also had a number of recipients of the Silver Towel and the Excellent Master Degree, and hearty congratulations to them as well. As you would expect me to say, 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.

I made a number of points in my Address last year, and I think some of them bear repeating.

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, with the use of books avoided as far as possible - 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."*

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. From those small beginnings, the Order has spread to cover the three Counties which comprise our 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.

I am particularly encouraged to note that we have had some 13 Candidates this year, and some joining or re-joining members, and that several Councils have at least one Candidate and sometimes more in the pipeline.

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.

To assist with recruitment efforts, our Deputy District Grand Master has re-designed our publicity leaflets and business cards, and these are readily available – if you have not got any, please talk to him. In addition, we have an excellent promotional video on our website, and the cards contain a QR code which links to this. We will also be taking up the invitation to address up to 60 Berkshire Light Blues in September here at Sindlesham, as part of their series of, “Beyond the Craft” presentations. This could be very productive, and we would be very pleased to hear of any similar opportunities for spreading the word in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

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.”*

Finally, 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.

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

17.7.25