

District Grand Master's Address – July 2026

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, in 2024. There have been a number of highlights in the last couple of years, 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 am very pleased to welcome our Past Deputy Grand Master and many Companions from other Districts, and thank them for the warm welcome and generous hospitality I have received, when visiting their Districts. Companions, on your behalf, I have visited 19 other Districts in the past year, and there is no substitute for this, in building up the close and cordial friendships we enjoy in this Order. I thank those Companions who have, on occasion, supported me, and would welcome any who would like to join me on these visits. You are guaranteed a warm welcome.

I have also made some 23 visits to individual Councils, both in this and other Districts, and have been pleased to see, and often to take part in, the ceremonies for a very respectable number of new Companions, as well as those receiving their subsequent degrees.

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.

In that connection, I have been trying to push the Order as much as possible, and to encourage all our members to do the same; this was a theme of my Address at District Grand Council last July.

As some of you will know, Buckinghamshire Craft has a large Light Blues Club, which meets regularly for breakfast on a Saturday, and they have recently been hosting “Beyond the Craft” presentations. We were invited, along with the AMD, to make a presentation about our Order in September last year, and I thank my Deputy and all who assisted him on that occasion. Some 50 Brethren attended. This meeting has already produced a Candidate for Wokingham Council, and I am told that there are others in prospect.

On 26th November, at the Invitation of the Grand Superintendent of Buckinghamshire, who turned out his whole team for the event, all the local Heads of Order attended Pegasus Chapter in Aylesbury for a Companion Orders Awareness Presentation. This was very well attended by local Companions and others. After a very engaging presentation, there was a convivial and ample buffet, and all the Orders had set out their stalls with posters, leaflets, regalia etc. The feedback from this event has also been really positive, and expressions of interest are being followed up. I would be pleased to take part in any similar ventures in Berkshire or Oxfordshire.

As part of the initiative to recruit new members and as a vital communications tool, the R&SM website www.rsmobb.co.uk has been reconstructed and revitalised, largely due to creative work done by my Deputy, both in his present capacity, and formerly as District Grand Recorder. He acts as Website Content Manager and we now ensure that photographs are taken after each District visit and other events, to ensure that the content is always lively and up to date. Please give him every assistance in this regard.

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?

R. III. Comp. Graham Seeman, GDC

V. III. Comp. James Hilditch, Grand Treasurer

V. III. Comp. Alan Baverstock, promoted to Past Grand Lecturer

III. Comp. Frank Hinchcliffe, promoted to Past Grand Captain of the Guard

III. Comp. Hugh Hopkin, promoted to Past Grand Conductor of the Council

III Comp. Eugene Gratwohl, first appointment to Past Grand Standard Bearer

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

We also had a number of recipients of the Silver Towel - III. Comp. Chris Hodges of Wokingham Council in July 2025, and III. Comps Stephen May of Bearwood Council No. 134 and Graham Ellis of Oxford Council No. 105 in April 2026. I congratulate our local ceremonial team, ably led by V. III. Comp. Ron Bridger, on the standard of work achieved in those ceremonies.

Three Companions received the Excellent Master Degree at Grafton Council of Anointed Kings No. 16 in February – James

Hilditch (representative Candidate), Philip Kavanagh and Peter Sands - and I was very pleased to have been part of the Ceremonial Team on that occasion; 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 referred earlier to our charitable efforts in respect of the Sesquicentenary Appeal, and, while we all have many calls on our charity, I would like to encourage every Companion of this Order to support the Grand Master's Keystone Fund. Our colleagues in Derbyshire recently archived Keystone District Status, and their District Grand Master, present with us today, is proudly wearing the permanent collarette and Jewel. Some of our Companions are already individual members, and are wearing the distinctive breast Jewel.

For those who are unfamiliar with it, The Grand Master's Keystone Fund (GMKF) was established to celebrate our Grand Master, M. W. Bro. HRH Prince Michael of Kent, having given forty years of service to Mark Masonry.

The purpose of the fund is to grant awards to individuals to offer encouragement and financial support with their educational, vocational and sporting achievements.

The GMKF is administered by the Mark Benevolent Fund Board of Trustees. Donations to the GMKF can be made by individuals and Councils.

To achieve Keystone District status, we need to make a donation equivalent to at least £10 per member, which approximates to £1,500 – we have about a third of that in our Charity account already, so I would encourage you all to give generously in the retiring collection, using the gift aid envelopes, if at all possible, in aid of this very worthy cause.

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

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. As noted by our District Grand Recorder, we end the year with a net increase of nine Companions, which is very positive, but no slacking in this regard, Companions!

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.”*

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 outgoing 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

16.7.26