



Address to Provincial Grand Lodge 2026

Brethren, It is always an enormous pleasure to welcome so many of you to Provincial Grand Lodge and I am delighted to do so again today. I have mentioned before, that the timing of this meeting, right at the start of the new masonic season gives a perfect opportunity to reflect on the last 12 months as well as looking forward to the coming year. I am delighted to report an increase in members in both Mark and RAM. The growth is quite modest, but it is our fourth year of nett growth in the Mark and the 5th consecutive year in RAM and, what is even more pleasing is that, in both cases, the rate of growth is ahead of the national average. I know that finding new members is not easy so I do congratulate you all on the effort that I know will have gone into bringing those new members into your lodges. Four years ago I commented on the looming 'cost of living' crisis. Well, not only did that predicted crisis become reality but it is still very much with us, which makes that overall growth even more remarkable. Some of our newly Advanced brethren are here today attending their first Mark Provincial Grand Lodge. Brethren, you should have found on your seat in the Temple a small gift from the Province and, far more importantly, a 'chitty' for a free drink at the bar after this meeting. I hope you will enjoy your Berkshire Mark masonry and I look forward to enjoying your company. Of course, we can never be complacent and, like all Provincial Grand Masters, I am greedy and always want more members. We have a great masonic offering in the Mark degree and, as always, I urge you to make sure that as many Berkshire brethren as possible have the opportunity to experience it. On Monday of this week I attended a superb Advancement ceremony. The Senior Deacon who guided the candidate was the Craft Provincial DC and the Junior Deacon was the Deputy Provincial Grand Master. The Working Tools were presented and explained by the Inspector General of the Ancient and Accepted Rite. Now, there aren't many lodges that can match that – but the key thing is that ALL the officers, from the Worshipful Master down were well prepared. Everyone knew their words, and the floor work, and absolutely all lodges can do that. The Province is always happy to help fill offices and deliver ritual and we would be pleased to do so. I refer you again to the words of our Grand Secretary that we should seek to offer quality candidates a quality ceremony, delivered in quality lodges. That is, and should always be, our aim. As I promised last year, the Travelling Keystone has been re-launched and you have seen me receive it back from Hungerford Lodge and send it back out again via Wantage Lodge. I wish it well on its travels and I would like to thank W.Bro Graham Parker for devising the schedule of visits for the coming year. We continue to have monthly Heads of Orders meetings and I and the other Heads of Orders really value these opportunities to talk about Berkshire masonry in general and how the orders can support each other – and we certainly do do that. You have seen the support we have today from the Craft and Royal Arch Executives and from all the Companion Orders. It is one of the things that makes Berkshire so very special – and long may it continue. Before I leave last year behind and look to the future, we have had no fewer than FIVE members celebrate their 90th birthday in the last 12 months. Two of them are present with us today and are both not just well known but hugely popular and much loved brethren of the Province. They are W.Bro Alan Spearman and W.Bro. Raymond Head. Congratulations brethren and it is lovely to have you both with us today. (Applause) I would now like to thank all the outgoing Provincial officers for their support over the last year. Brethren, it has been an outstanding year and your commitment and dedication has surpassed all expectations. I truly hope that you all enjoyed your year – you certainly deserved to. You have set a very high bar for the incoming Provincial Officers and yet I have absolutely no doubt that they too will rise to the challenge. I am genuinely excited about the year ahead and the team of Officers we have put together and I heartily congratulate all those who have been appointed or re-appointed to active Provincial Grand rank today and welcome you all to the team. You don't need me to tell you that the more you involve yourselves the more you will get out of your year in office and I do look forward to your company. I also congratulate all those who have received their first appointment to, or a promotion in, past Provincial rank. Brethren, there is no topic that exercises the minds of the Provincial Executive and leads to more energetic debate amongst us than Provincial appointments. Your honours have been well earned and you should feel justifiably proud. They do, however, also carry with them an expectation that you will continue to be

active in your Mark lodges and also in promoting the Mark in your Craft lodges and Royal Arch Chapters, and I have no doubt that you will. Berkshire brethren have once again been honoured by Mark Grand Lodge and we have again done very well this year. I am delighted to tell you that we have had THREE first appointments and TWO promotions. Brethren, when I mention your names could I please ask you to stand. W.Bro. Julian Pacey and W.Bro. Kevin Dodd both received first appointments to the rank of Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies. W. Bro. Brian McCormack, our very hard working Provincial Grand Charity Steward, was appointed to the active rank of Grand Steward and it is great to see you here wearing your chain Brian, and congratulations (I think!) on being overwhelmingly elected President of this year's Board of Grand Stewards, we think it is the first time that has happened in Berkshire and we are very proud of you. Just two days ago, at the annual promotions investiture, W. Bro. Ted Lewis was promoted to Past Grand Junior Deacon and our Provincial Grand Secretary received a thoroughly well deserved promotion to Past Grand Junior Overseer, making him a Very Worshipful brother! Anyone who has the misfortune to be my Provincial Grand Secretary deserves a 'Very Worshipful' title as compensation for that alone! All those Grand Ranks have been well earned and are thoroughly well deserved and I offer you my most sincere congratulations and I think we should give them all a round of applause. (applause) Our Provincial charity BeMBA continues its excellent work and I thank the lodge representatives but, above all, the dedicated and hard working BeMBA Executive, under the Chairmanship of the Deputy Provincial Grand Master, for all that they are doing to further the charitable endeavours of this Province. As well as local good causes, BeMBA also supports the work of the MBF through the Festival system and I am delighted that we are continuing to do that as it is most important. Bro Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies, will you please conduct to me W.Bro. Ian Belsham, the Assistant Provincial Grand Master for Warwickshire. *** Presented with £1,500 for the 2027 Festival ***. Bro Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies, will you now conduct to me the Provincial Grand Master for Somerset of RW Bro Tony Guthrie. *** Presented with £1,500 for the 2028 Festival *** Bro Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies, will you now please conduct to me W.Bro. Brian McCormack. Brian, you are highly visible around the Province and you do an excellent job in 'persuading' the brethren to part with their money both for BeMBA and for the MBF. However, it is very important that the brethren realise that you most certainly practice what you preach and you are most generous in your own support of the charities. Indeed, as proof, that you quite literally 'put your money where your mouth is' I have enormous pleasure in presenting you with a certificate and a collaret from the MBF as a Grand Patron DIAMOND award! I believe this is the first such individual award in Berkshire. Brian – thank you!! (applause) Brethren, before I close this address, let me share a thought with you. I have always thought that it is most fitting that the keystone is the symbol of the Mark degree. It indicates that the Mark is not a mere adjunct to the whole masonic structure, but a central and indispensable part of it. However, just as an arch cannot exist without a keystone to lock the other stones in place, so the keystone cannot do its job without the support of the other stones on either side of it. The future of the Mark degree depends on the strength and health of Freemasonry in general, but particularly of the Craft. As Mark Master Masons I regard you as senior members of your Craft lodges and I expect you to play a leading role in them and demonstrate that commitment, especially in supporting the newer members of the lodge. A healthy Craft Province is the only way to build a healthy future for the Mark and, indeed, the other companion orders for some of which, membership of the Mark is a pre-requisite. Brethren, our future as a Mark Province is in YOUR hands. I know how much you love the Mark. Not only because you all tell me you do, but because I see it when I attend your lodges, and enjoy your company on days out such as Mark Grand Lodge on Tuesday. As I always say, don't keep the Mark to yourselves. Talk about it. Enthuse about it and encourage others to join us so that they can see what they have been missing, and make sure that you give them the very best experience at their Advancement ceremony. This annual meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge doesn't just happen as if by magic and a great deal of work goes into its organisation. I give my grateful thanks to the Provincial Grand Secretary, the Deputy Provincial Grand Secretary and those who have assisted them for handling the administration so efficiently and patiently and for dealing with all the headaches that inevitably present themselves, quite often at the last minute, and also to the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies and his team for ensuring that the ceremonial aspects run smoothly and in the traditional Berkshire manner of which we are all justifiably proud. Brethren – thank you, ALL of you.

Brethren, thank you for your kind attention and may the Great Overseer of the Universe grant you all good health to enjoy this special degree for many, many years to come. Thank you.