

Provincial Grand Master's address to Provincial Grand Lodge 10th June 2010

Brethren,

I have already welcomed our official guests; can I now welcome all our other guests and members here today – thank you for your support.

Berkshire Mark is in good heart and although we continue to attract new members, an average of two per Lodge, retention is a continuing concern. Thank you for all your efforts in attracting new members but we must all make sure that once in the Mark and Royal Ark Mariner degrees they do not drift away. Economic constraints play their part and the increase in Grand Lodge dues by approximately £6 per annum will not help. Brethren, one does not need a qualified accountant to confirm that the fees in the Grand Lodge of MMM needed to increase; that is self-evident from the accounts. There are probably many questions, some yet to be answered, about how we arrived at where we are, but we must deal with the current position, however painful. On Tuesday in Grand Lodge the increase in dues was confirmed, including the one off levy, which, in effect raised them for the current year as well. Rather like the new government's proposed ratio of spending cuts to tax rises, it was announced on Tuesday that there would be cuts in Grand Lodge expenditure of approximately £500,000, twice as large as the increase in fee income.

We all love and value this important degree in the Masonic family, it would be wrong to do other than support it wholeheartedly.

Also on Tuesday several of our members were promoted in or appointed to Grand Rank. Ken Harvey was promoted to Past Grand Senior Deacon, Peter Hughes appointed to Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies, resplendent with his chain. Peter Atkins to Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies and Ian Thomas to Past Grand Standard Bearer. Congratulations to them all. Also in December Grand Rank in the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Royal Ark Mariners was conferred on Alan Halewood and Wink Davis; well done to them.

My congratulations and thanks to all the Provincial Officers I have invested today. Your appointment is in recognition of past services and an encouragement for your future efforts in the Mark and Royal Ark Mariners degrees.

This year we have had two good Provincial visits - to Valentia and Jersey Lodges - where we had nearly a full Provincial team. I am also delighted with the support the Provincial Officers of the year have given to all the Installation meetings around the Province, it is good fun and the Lodges appreciate the visits. In fact on October 27th this year Valentia are celebrating their centenary at Wellington College so I hope many of the Provincial Officers will attend that special occasion.

BeMBA, and brethren please call it that, has again expended more than its income so I urge your continued support – it is your charity and will no doubt have continuing claims on its resources during this difficult economic period. Today the Secretary, Ken Harvey, has retired after 10 years in the position and my thanks and those of all the other members go to him for his efforts over the years. My thanks go also to David Fisher for taking over as Secretary.

Today's meeting does not take place without a considerable amount of work by the secretariat. Out thanks must go to W Bro Dick Olliver and his deputy W Bro Roy Richardson for all their efforts, plus my personal thanks to them for their support throughout the year and advice (not always heeded). Thanks too to our Provincial Director

of Ceremonies, W Bro Alan Smee, who is retiring today after 3 years in the office, and his team. Alan has fulfilled the office in his own quiet, dignified, enthusiastic way and we thank him.

I really do enjoy this Mark Degree and I hope my enthusiasm infects others. Brethren let your enjoyment show and spread the word and let it encourage others to join us.

Thank you for your attendance and attention today; have a very good summer break and enjoy the football!