



Address of the Pro Grand Master
M.W. Bro. Raymond J. Smith
Annual Assembly of Royal Ark Mariner
Tuesday, 12 December 2017

Brethren, it is a great pleasure to welcome you all to this Annual Assembly of Royal Ark Mariner. To have so many members present today indicates that support for this delightful Order in our Masonry is as strong as ever.

My first duty, however, must be to bring you fraternal good wishes from our Most Worshipful Grand Master. His duties keep him as busy as ever but he is always aware of our proceedings, indeed his interest remains unabated and during next year he has agreed to be with us on several important occasions. We are indeed most fortunate to have him as our Most Worshipful Grand Master.

This annual meeting of our Order is important, but to those 159 Brethren who have received appointments to Royal Ark Mariner Grand Rank, most of whom have been invested today, it marks a most significant milestone in their Masonic life. They have shown their dedication to Masonry in general, and to this Royal Ark Mariner degree in particular, having succeeded in extending their Masonic knowledge so successfully to have warranted their appointment to Grand Rank in this Order. Congratulations to all of you and it has indeed been my great pleasure and privilege to have invested you today.

All of you who have received preferment should rightly be proud of your achievement and both here, in this Grand Assembly, and in your Provinces and Lodges, your appointment to this high office will rightly be recognised. I hope, however, that having achieved such high office your dedication will not diminish but that you will continue with your commitment to this Order and will encourage others to follow in your footsteps.

Whilst most administrative developments are reported at the meetings of Mark Grand Lodge it is a long period between the meeting in September and the following one in March; too long a period for nothing of importance to have happened.

Our Grand Secretary and the dedicated team of staff that we are most fortunate to have at Mark Masons' Hall, have made great progress with new developments. We see this today with the advance information provided to all of us attending this meeting, in respect of seating, dining and general advice on where to leave regalia and, most importantly, which bars in the Grand Connaught Rooms serve beer and which don't! That development is but the tip of the iceberg in respect of progress.

The Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons' website build is progressing well. The roll-out will take place in the first quarter of 2018. I had a preview last week and it will be a very impressive aid to all the Orders administered from 86 St James's. We are most grateful to V.W.Bro. Bill Divall and Bro. Julian Trought, for the time they are spending on this project.

Our commitment to progressively introduce enhancements to the Keystone Online database continues. Last week phase two was released which sees installation returns go online, thus further reducing the amount of paper that flows from the Provinces and Districts into Mark Masons' Hall.

The Grand Secretary has now completed his planned changes to the structure administering all the Orders at Mark Masons' Hall, the last part of which will bring about a much shorter lead time to all our year books and other publications.

Our busy Grand Secretary and the team are working with Provincial and District Grand Masters to establish a working party charged with shaping a coherent recruitment and retention strategy which will enable us to share best practice throughout the Order. Brethren, I am certain you will be pleased to know that all the Orders are showing a net increase in membership which places us in a strong position for 2018. Grounds for optimism and confidence, but not complacency.

The Mark Benevolent Fund partnership with St John Ambulance is progressing well. The first three vehicles have been handed over, the most recent being in Cumberland and Westmorland on 3 December. On 17 December, North & East Yorkshire will receive their vehicle, a lovely Christmas present for the team there; and Durham is scheduled to receive its vehicle early in the New Year.

From the proceeds of the very successful parks walk back in the spring, applications from those teams for blood bikes are being assessed and we hope to announce shortly which areas will receive funding.

Over the past three months it has been my very great pleasure to install two Provincial Grand Masters:

for the Province of Middlesex, R.W.Bro. Eddie Garty, following R.W.Bro. Richard Gan.

for the Province of Warwickshire, R.W.Bro. Philip Wills, following R.W.Bro. Roger Mac.

Both are here today and I hope are settling in well in their new office and in congratulating them we also thank the retiring Provincial Grand Masters who have rendered great service to our Order.

It is now my pleasure to welcome on your behalf our distinguished visitors and members from our Districts overseas:

Firstly, I welcome heads of other Orders:

R.W.Bro. Paul Clement, the Most Eminent and Supreme Grand Master of the Great Priory of the United Religious Military and Masonic Orders of the Temple;

R.W.Bro. Kessick Jones, Grand Master of the Grand Council of the Order of Royal and Select Masters;

R.W.Bro. Andrew Sweeney, Grand Supreme Ruler of the Grand Conclave of the Order of the Secret Monitor and Grand Summus of the Grand Senatus of the Ancient and Masonic Order of the Scarlet Cord;

R.W.Bro. Michael Herbert, Past Deputy Grand Master, Grand Master of the Grand Priory of the Knights Beneficent of the Holy City – an Order which I had the privilege and delight of being admitted to very recently in a ceremony that was most memorable and impressive;

W.Bro. Christopher Maiden, a Grand Senior Deacon this year, Grand High Priest of the Grand College of Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests and Order of Holy Wisdom;

V.W.Bro. John Paternoster, Supreme Magus of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia.

R.W.Bro. Alan Englefield, our Senior Warden and Sovereign Grand Commander of the Ancient and Accepted Rite;

R.W.Bro. Sir Frederick Crawford, Lieutenant Grand Commander of the Ancient and Accepted Rite;

R.W.Bro. David Williamson, Grand Chancellor of the Ancient and Accepted Rite and Past Assistant Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England.

Brethren, we are missing R.W.Bro. Thomas Jackson, Grand Master of the Grand Council of the Order of the Allied Masonic Degrees. R.W.Bro. Jackson had a nasty fall just a week ago on his way home from a Masonic meeting. Badly bruised and feeling sorry for himself he is making a good recovery and I know we all wish him well.

Why traditionally they are left to the end of this group of welcome, I am not sure, but we have with us three of our Past Pro Grand Masters, all of whom I rely on for advice and guidance and who I am delighted to have with us today: Most Worshipful Brother John Hale, Most Worshipful Brother Ben Addy and Most Worshipful Brother Richard Wallis, together with our Past Grand Secretary, R.W.Bro. John Brackley.

Brethren, we welcome from overseas:

From Germany, R.W.Bro. Michael Cooper, with two members of his District: W.Bro. John Mackinnon, R.A.M.G.R., Deputy District Grand Master, and W.Bro. Daniel Lim.

From Hong Kong, W.Bro. Herman Tsoi, W.Bro. Ying Ko and Bro. Joseph C. W. Lee.

From the Netherlands, R.W.Bro. Cornelis Van Putten, District Grand Master, with four members of the District: W.Bro.'s Herman Lioe-A-Tjam, Peter Kirpensteijn, Ernst van Splunter and Herman Huiskamp.

From Singapore, R.W.Bro. Justice Rubin, District Grand Master.

From South and East Caribbean, R.W.Bro. Stephen Cobham, District Grand Master, who is accompanied by W.Bro. Gill.

From Spain, R.W.Bro. Barrie Mansell, District Grand Master, who is accompanied by four members of the District: W.Bro. Rodney Hales, Deputy District Grand Master, W.Bro. Stanley Crawford, a recipient of Grand Rank today, W.Bro. Vicente Valero and W.Bro. Ian Crawford.

We have present almost all of our Provincial Grand Masters, together with five District Grand Masters; thank you all for your support and the leadership and dedication you provide to our Provinces.

Brethren, always here, always supportive but not always acknowledged, we have an abundance of Past Provincial Grand Masters spread about on the dais behind me. Brethren, we will include them in your very warm welcome and appreciation of all those I have just introduced. Brethren, please show that appreciation.

Before I close this meeting, I wish to thank the Grand Secretary and the whole team from Mark Masons' Hall. Not just for their work preparing for today's meeting but for their sterling service and dedication over the past year.

My thanks also go to the Grand Director of Ceremonies and the Deputies, both past and present, for their work today and for all the support they have given to me, the Deputy Grand Master and the Assistant Grand Master, since our appointments. All of them, together with all the other active Officers of the year, give such dedication and commitment supporting us on our visits to Provinces and Districts, often involving nights away. It is very much appreciated.

Brethren, it has been an enormous privilege, delight and pleasure to preside at this meeting of Grand Assembly. Thank you all for your presence and support, but so that we can move from labour to refreshment I shall end by once again congratulating all who received preferment today.

On behalf of myself, the Deputy and the Assistant Grand Master, we do wish you and all your family a very happy Christmas, and may the coming year be a healthy, peaceful and enjoyable one for all of us.

Thank you and may God bless you all.