

Brethren,

Firstly, I thank you all for attending today; it is wonderful to see so many of you here.

Secondly, I have already introduced our guests to you individually and I now thank them once more for affording us the courtesy of attending today and allowing us to return, in some small measure, the hospitality that they show to us when visiting their Provincial meetings.

As in previous years my address is broken down into the four key areas of focus: Charity, Communication, Enjoyment and Recruitment. All the key focus areas are as important as one another and so for ease I will cover them in alphabetical order.

### **Charity**

This year the Mark Benevolent Fund Festival was hosted by the Province of Sussex raising the magnificent sum of £1,357,663 and I was delighted to see so many of you proudly wearing the Sussex Festival jewel in support of their fund raising efforts.

In June 2020 the 152nd Mark Benevolent Fund Festival is being hosted by the Province of Kent at the Maidstone Exhibition Hall, on the Kent Showground, in Detling on Saturday 13th June. Festival badges for the 2020 Festival are once again available via W.Bro. Ted Lewis, who I'm sure would be delighted to provide you with one. I would like to see as many of you as possible supporting their Festival by proudly wearing their jewel. Should you wish to attend the Festival weekend all the details are available on the website, it would be great to see you there.

The Saturday Night Lottery Bonus Ball game goes from strength to strength and currently 23 games have been launched raising over £6,500. The proceeds are, at the moment, paying for updating your website, producing a new Provincial Mark Banner and also supporting the Blood Bike appeal.

The Berkshire Mark Benevolent Association (BeMBA) last year decided to support the Serv OBN Blood Bike Charity by sponsoring a new Yamaha FJR 1300 specially produced for their needs. The bike will be here later this afternoon and will be formally presented to Captain Kamran Irani, Chairman of the Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire Blood Bikes Association, at the festive board.

I have asked, our new Provincial Treasurer, W.Bro. Jim Payen to form a Working Party to focus on our Charity activity within the Province. To look at what do we do now, can we enhance what we are doing, are we missing anything, how do we make the BeMBA representatives role more exciting and effective etc? It is early days and more of this as the year progresses.

While we are on the subject of charity, Bro. Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies will you please present R.W.Bro. Archie Torrance to me (present cheque for £1000).

Bro. Prov.G.D.C. would you now present R.W.Bro. Anthony Howlett-Bolton, PGM of the Craft to me (present cheque)

and Brethren we will be sending a similar donation to the Province of East Lancashire who will be hosting the 2021 MBF Festival.

### **Communication**

I'm sure you will all agree that communication is key to any organisation being successful; we have made great strides in this area but we can always do more. It is with that in mind I have asked V.W.Bro. Graham Seeman P.G.J.O., Deputy Provincial Grand Master, to set up a Communication Working Party to look at all areas of communication in the Province.

On Graham's behalf I sent an email to all members of the Province asking for volunteers to take part in this working party. I am pleased to say that Graham has had a number of very positive responses and will be in contact to set up an initial meeting in the near future.

I would have liked to announce today that our new website is up and running but unfortunately we have had a few technical issues but Graham assures me that it will be up and running and launched soon. So watch this space.

Our Instagram and Twitter pages are now well established and I'm delighted to be able to tell you today that we have now launched our Facebook page on [facebook.com/berksmark](https://www.facebook.com/berksmark).

### **Recruitment**

To give it its full title Recruitment, Retention and Reinvigoration.

Once again a working party is being organised to look at this key area. This working party is being chaired jointly by Mike Sanders and Steve Berkshire. If you are interested in joining please get in touch.

This year we have Advanced thirty Brethren and welcomed ten joining or re-joining members to the Province. Our members now stand at 473 an increase of twenty above last year. In the Royal Ark Mariner degree we have Elevated ten new members and showing an increase of nine year on year. However, as I say every year, we mustn't lose focus hence the reason for creating a working party. This working party will look at all aspects of the 3 R's, Recruitment, Retention & Reinvigoration. Your Executive continues to hold recruitment evenings but it is the responsibility of us all to encourage our friends to join this wonderful order. In the meantime talk to your Craft and Chapter members about the Mark Degree and speak to your Mark members about the Royal Ark Mariner degree. Always have a copy of the leaflets at hand; it's surprising what response you get when you ask if people are interested. As you know I believe every Mason should be given the opportunity to join our wonderful degree: "The Degree with a Lightness of Touch", the friendly degree. We also need to understand why members are resigning, fifteen this year, and so part of the team's work will be to ensure we understand fully why members have resigned.

Don't forget however that the source of our membership is initially the Craft and so it is imperative that you encourage your friends to join masonry in the first place. Don't be shy in extolling its virtues, be proud of the fact that you are a mason, we have a vibrant Craft Province led by a very dedicated Provincial Grand Master, RW Bro Anthony Howlett-Bolton and a very strong Executive committee who are there to help and guide us all.

Please bear this thought in mind.

We can assume that all is well but we must never forget that such good fortune can be reversed in a few short years. We must be ever vigilant to respond and help a struggling Lodge and experienced Masons should never forget that the strength of our Order depends on the health and well-being of the Craft from which our candidates come.

### **Enjoyment**

The atmosphere at Lodge meetings and the festive boards continue to give me the feeling that you are all enjoying your Mark and Royal Ark Mariner masonry and long may it continue. I firmly believe our Masonry is here to be enjoyed.

The active officers of the year have once again been outstanding in their support for me and, more importantly, the Lodges in their attendance at Installation Meetings. My sincere thanks to you all for a brilliant year.

Congratulations to all those I have appointed today be it to active officer, a first appointment or promotion. If you don't enjoy your year it will be your fault - there will be plenty of opportunity. I look forward to seeing you all visiting around the Province.

More and more members are also attending other Provincial meetings and the Grand Lodge meetings which is wonderful to see (21 attended Grand Lodge on Tuesday).

This year we have had 3 appointments in Grand Lodge, two first appointments, and one promotion. The recipients being on 11th June (please stand as I call your name)

to PAGDC, W Bro Simon Jeffery and  
to PGStdB W Bro Terry Speight

And on Tuesday of this week W Bro Tony Hardiman was promoted to PGJD.

Well done to you all, you have all worked extremely hard for your individual honours and I thank you for everything you have done in the past and what you will continue to do in the future.

I have also had the pleasure to welcome nine of our newly Advanced Brethren here today, I trust you have enjoyed the meeting so far and of course will enjoy the festive board. I trust this will not be the last Provincial meeting you attend, let me assure you all that you will always be welcome.

As some of you may know I have become quite involved in helping to establish Mark Masonry in Romania. We also have here today a number of guys from the Mark Internet Lodge, based in Monmouthshire, who are also heavily involved with this exciting development. They now have eight Lodges in Romania, one of which where I was proud to be the Consecrating Officer. Romania becomes an Inspectorate in October and there will be another five or six Lodges consecrated next year. I will be attending some of them with Margaret, my wife. All information will be circulated - just let me know if you are interested in attending. There will also be other opportunities where Margaret and I will be attending Provincial meetings farther afield, all information will be communicated to you and if you are interested in joining us please do.

The Provincial Travelling Keystone continues to go from strength to strength, it has visited eight Lodges this year, co-ordinated by W.Bro. David Wiltcher, to whom I am most grateful. I am delighted with the support it

has been given, the purpose of which is to encourage visiting and thereby help increase the special bond of Friendship between the members of our Lodges. You saw me receive the Keystone back into Provincial Grand Lodge earlier today and then present it to the Worshipful Master and Brethren of Wilder Lodge of MMM No. 1868 to set it back on its perpetual journey around the Province. It will travel to nine Lodges next year; all the dates are displayed on the website, try to make some of those meetings.

This is the first year when we have invited our wives and partners to this meeting. It is something Margaret particularly wanted to do and while we are enjoying ourselves in our meeting, twenty-two of our wives and partners are being entertained by Tony Strafford, nineteen years a Beefeater at the Tower of London. His subject is Bishops, Sex, Money and the Tower and as he says, four subjects which apparently have no connection with each other – but I can assure you that they do. They will be joining us later for drinks and will then be dining in the Maidenhead room while we are doing the same in the Flavell Suite. Margaret is delighted that she will be entertaining so many of our wives and partners and I'm sure if it's successful she will organise something next year as well.

Brethren, it is truly a privilege to serve you as your Provincial Grand Master and as I move into my 7th year, I look forward to continuing in your service.

May the Great Overseer of the Universe bless and keep you well. I look forward to seeing you all during the year.

Richard J Olliver  
Provincial Grand Master