



Provincial Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of London

Provincial Grand Master's Address 2019

Brethren, I would like to begin my first ever Address, by asking for a very special demonstration of appreciation and affection. There is a Brother who is not with us today. Someone who has not missed a Provincial meeting for over 20 years and quite possibly has attended every Annual Meeting since this Province was founded in 1990. It is through his hard work and many successes, building on the excellent foundations laid down by his predecessors, that we have such a vibrant and expanded Mark Province of London. He is, of course, RW Bro. David Frederick Ashbolt. Goodness knows what he is doing this afternoon! He will be beside himself with curiosity, wondering what is going on here today. I half-expected to see him peeking from the balcony and although he is not here in person I know that his thoughts are with us. Brethren – particularly the members of the Province of London – can I ask you to show your appreciation and thanks for his magnificent past services, even in his absence – by applauding our Past Provincial Grand Master and for that fact to be recorded in the Minutes for him to read in due course.

Deciding what to include in the remainder of this, my initial Address, has been a difficult task. As an expatriate Scot standing in these awesome surroundings – the very heart of English Freemasonry – I did think to seek the guidance of my nearest neighbours – the PGMs in the Provinces of Middlesex and Kent, but as it would appear that the Grand Secretary has been on a recruitment drive North of the Border, they themselves are similarly disadvantaged!

Brethren, today is an important occasion in the life of this Province of London. This Annual Meeting is an opportunity not only to reflect on the year just passed but also to consider what the coming 12 months will bring.

The achievements as at the end of this current year are illustrated by some of the following statistics:-

- Number of Advancees – 115
- Number of Elevations – 88
- Number of joining members (Mark) – 197
- Number of joining members (RAM) – 95

Our total membership (excluding multiple memberships) now stands at,

- Mark – 3229
- RAM – 1913

And then we come to the number of new Units consecrated.

Following on from the spate of Consecrations in the year to July 2018, we have this year consecrated another two Mark Lodges (Albatross and Ralph Reader) and two new RAM Lodges (Italia and Centenary) plus one Reponement bringing our total numbers to 104 Mark Lodges and 84 RAM Lodges. Significant as these numbers might be, they could not have been achieved without the support of the London Brethren, here in such great numbers today. Brethren, on behalf of the Province I salute you and thank you for the level of commitment and loyalty you have shown. As an illustration we have members of the Ralph Reader Lodge here today, resplendent in their Scout neckerchiefs and unique ties. Well done, Brethren But the story does not end there as, amongst the first of my Official duties later this year will be to consecrate 3 new Mark Lodges.

The first one is the Locomotion Lodge – a themed Lodge for Brethren associated with the railway industry. Brethren, we have 40 Founders for this new Unit. What's the chances that there is someone out there today who would like to have the honour of becoming a Founder and making the number over 40? Tim MacAndrews has an application form! Please seek him out after the meeting. Similarly the other Lodge to be consecrated has a theme – rugby. The Spirit of Rugby Lodge where the Founders are supporters, players, enthusiasts of the game of rugby. Once again, application forms are available. John Ellis is the APGM who will gladly take the details and provide more information to anyone interested. And lastly but by no means least we are in the process of gathering Founders for a Lodge devoted to Sikh Brethren – The Khalsa Lodge. More of that later in the year.

All of these previous and planned Consecrations have required a tremendous amount of work on behalf of the Secretariat and the Ceremonial Teams. Work which has been over and above the many and varied routine matters of this large Province. W. Bro. Alan White in particular has been extremely diligent in all the areas of his Provincial Secretariat responsibilities and these Consecrations in particular. He stands down today at his own request to concentrate on other areas of his Masonic interests, as he is off to assist the Grand Secretary by lending his considerable skills and experience to a new project intended to deliver a tool kit of documents and processes to ease the workload on Lodge Secretaries and Scribes; and to concentrate his energies on other Masonic Orders and in particular Metropolitan Grand Lodge, where he has recently been appointed to SLGR, for which also I tender sincere congratulations. Bro. ProvGDC, would you please present W. Bro. Alan White to me.

Alan, you depart from our Executive Team with the very best wishes of David Ashbolt and myself for a job excellently done.

Also standing down today as our Prov Grand Chaplain is W. Bro. the Rev. Michael Seymour-Jones. Those who have been present at our several Consecration ceremonies over the past few years will, I am sure, recollect the wonderful Orations he has delivered on each occasion. These have all been interesting, educational and entertaining. Bro. Prov GDC, would you please present W. Bro. Michael to me.

Brethren, in a Province such as this where there are so many hard-working and dedicated Members, one of the most difficult tasks is to single out a Brother for the PGM's Award of Merit. Bro Michael, I am delighted to inform you that this year the choice has fallen upon you – and so on behalf of RW Bro. David

Ashbolt and the Province, I have the greatest of pleasure in awarding this to you and to present you with this token and this Certificate which has been signed by David to mark his thanks and regard for the duties you have ably and faithfully discharged during your term of Office.

Also retiring today after a stint of 5 years is one of the most effervescent and enthusiastic APGMs the Province has ever boasted – W. Bro. Henry Hobson. Unfortunately Henry has had to rush home to deal with an urgent domestic matter and I will have the greatest of pleasure in investing him with his Past APGM collaret on a future occasion.

Amongst several other Brethren retiring in rotation, are our Provincial Grand Wardens. Sadly Chris James our JW is not well enough to be present today and our feelings of regret that he is absent are absolutely eclipsed by his own disappointment that his convalescence after major heart surgery is keeping him away. During the year he has managed the team of Provincial photographers, supervised the publication of the Provincial Yearbook, The London Mallet and communications in general. He has been very ably supported by his team of Richard Criddle and Andy Bull and I thank them all very sincerely for their hard work. My special thanks also, go to W. Bro. Howard Markham for stepping in to the breach to act as Junior Warden for the Opening of Provincial Grand Lodge and for dealing so admirably with Prov. Grand JW duties. And to David James, our outgoing Senior Warden, an extra thank you for all your additional work in overseeing the content and timely submission of Lodge Summonses: plus special congratulations on being appointed the Senior Warden for the Craft Province of West Kent. That SW's chair in the West, David, most certainly has the imprint of your posterior upon it!

Brethren, not standing down today (much to my relief) is our Provincial Grand Treasurer, VW Bro. Stephen Fenton – now entering his 11th year in that Office. Stephen, your record stands for itself as you safeguard the Province's money so well, by refusing to be parted from it! So I would ask the Brethren of London to show their appreciation for all the good work you do.

And on the subject of money I turn now to charity and in particular to this Province's tradition of presenting a special award, in memory of one of our great, late, Charity Stewards and APGMs, VW Bro. Desmond Bowditch – the Desmond Bowditch Purse goes to the Lodge which has contributed proportionately most to our charities. This year that distinction falls on the Bon Accord Time Immemorial Lodge – the first Mark Lodge in our Province to achieve MBF Diamond Patron Status. Bro. ProvGDC, will you please present W. Bro. Andy Rapley to me, to accept this award on behalf of his Lodge.

Charity, as we all know sits at the heart of everything we do within the Mark Degree and whilst I am happy to commend the efforts of our stalwart Charity Stewards, W. Bros. Attilio Grandani and Marios Stylianides, it is you, the Members of the Province who put up the cash and support their initiatives. On behalf of the MBF and all the individuals and worthy causes who benefit, I extend my thanks and heartiest congratulations for your generosity.

Alongside our charitable activities however there is the important element of Ritual and Ceremony. MMH being the home of the Grand Master's Lodge of Instruction naturally attracts mostly, but not exclusively, London Brethren to its membership. I currently have the great honour to be Preceptor of that Lodge of

Instruction – and over the past few years it has given me great pleasure to support a number of Brethren in their endeavours to strive for excellence in the delivery of our Mark and RAM Rituals. The top award in London for a WM who delivers an excellent Advancement Ceremony for a Candidate, is the Silver Pin and this year's recipient is W. Bro. Richard Roscoe of Irenic Lodge.

Richard not only performed the Ceremony to a first class standard in February in his Lodge, but attended the GMLofI Festival in York in April and performed that excellent job all over again. Bro. ProvGDC, will you please present to me W. Bro. Richard Roscoe so that I may present him with his Silver Pin.

This morning Brethren, I had the great pleasure of appointing and investing the 'Chains', who will assist me in governing this large Province of London. W. Bros Tim MacAndrews, Cliff Sturt, David Lucas, Wes Hollands and John Ellis, all bring to our top table, a wealth of talent and a huge range of experience across the whole spectrum of Freemasonry and I am looking forward to working with them to enhance the enjoyment of the Mark & RAM Degrees for the benefit of the Province in general and all its members in particular.

Also coming on board today, we have a new Provincial Grand Secretary, a new Director of Ceremonies plus a number of other new faces in their teams. Their hard work started many weeks ago in the run up to the organising of this Meeting and I am sure you will want to join with me in thanking them and wishing them every success in these challenging roles, Brethren.

During this day of many high spots Brethren, has been the opportunity this afternoon for me to appoint and promote some 200 of you to Provincial Office. These honours are given in recognition of your services to the Province and also as an encouragement and indeed an expectation for you to consider further support for your Lodges and renewed interaction with the Province.

That can take many forms – joining the Delegations which accompany the Official Visitor on his annual visits to his Lodges, supporting Provincial events and social functions, offering your services to your Lodge or the Province to ensure their smooth and effective operation and I look forward to hearing good reports of your activities as we progress through the year 2020.

I cannot miss out the musicians from this list of thank you's – our Provincial Grand Organist David Cresswell, recently re-appointed by UGLE as Grand Organist (congratulations, David) and our very own London Brass Ensemble, under its conductor Eddy Thompson, has become such a well-known and integral part of the London Meeting – it would just not be the same without you and we all look forward to the medley of tunes which you will play during the alms collection in just a few minutes.

We have continued the London tradition this year of receiving our Processions of Nonagenarians, Masters and Commanders and of course Newly-Advanced Brethren. To the Nonagenarians I say thank you for your many years of service to the Mark Degree. To the Masters and Commanders congratulations in attaining (or re- attaining) the Chairs of your respective Units; and to the Advancees – congratulations on deciding to join this beautiful and important degree in Freemasonry. You are naturally all equally welcome into this,

your Provincial Grand Lodge, this afternoon – but there is one of your number in particular that I would like to single out for a special mention.

Bro. Thomas Clarke would you please stand. Brethren, this young man was only Advanced into Maguncor Lodge at 6pm last night – a mere 23 hours ago and it was my great pleasure to attend and to contribute to the Ceremony. I wish all of our new Advancees a long, happy and successful career in our wonderful Mark Degree.

For the immediate future, Brethren, you should not expect to see any significant changes in the activities of this Province. Our social functions will continue and plans are already in place for the End of Year Party on 6th December and the Burns Weekend at Bournemouth from 17th to 19th January, where we have already sold more than 1/3rd of the available places.

I would like, however, to see some further stimulus in the standard of presentation of the Elevation Ceremony and will shortly be announcing the creation of a new Award for Excellence in the Royal Ark Mariner Ceremony. And Lodge Charity Stewards can sleep easy in their beds for a few months yet, as the Executive has not yet decided on the focus which we will bring to bear on any major charity event – so do use this quiet period to consolidate and recharge your charity account bank balances! But do encourage your Members to sign up to the 500 Club, which we will have to rename very soon as membership is now in excess of 700 – and of course please be ready with willing hearts and hands to buy one of the MBF Festival lapel badges, which are on sale now.

I hope you will all take away many happy memories of this day, Brethren. Thank you once again for your many messages of congratulations. It is a great privilege and honour to have the opportunity to serve you in such a responsible capacity and it is my earnest hope and prayer that together in this great Province of London, we will build upon the foundations – firmly laid by our predecessors in brotherly love, truth and charity, and that all of us will spare no exertion to inspire further generations of Craft and Chapter Masons to join us in the magic of the Mark Degree.

May the Great Overseer of the Universe preserve you all in good health and bless and aid you all in your labours.