



Address to Mark Grand Lodge 08 September 2026

Brethren, first, may I offer you a warm Mark welcome to this very special meeting of Mark Grand Lodge and say what a great sight it is to see the Grand Temple so well attended. The Grand Master will be particularly pleased to know this. Before I go any further, I must bring you his apologies for not being with us today, but he does ask that his best wishes be brought to us all with his congratulations to all the Brethren receiving promotion in Grand Rank. These promotions are a celebration of the services you have given to your Lodges and Provinces, and I hope will be an inspiration and encouragement to carry on with all that good work. So, on behalf of us all, well done, you are a credit to the Order and I join with the Grand Master in wishing you well in your new ranks. The Mark Degree, along with all the Companion Orders, is enjoying a high profile in our Masonic structure and a close relationship with United Grand Lodge, something which my predecessor, M.W.Bro. John Prizeman, worked so hard to achieve and maintain. It is more important than ever for us as Mark Masons to ensure that the dignity and standard of our ceremonies are such that will enable us to attract, and retain, candidates of the highest quality. As custodians of the Ceremony of Advancement, it is our duty and responsibility to deliver that impressive ceremony in a manner that will leave a lasting impression on the minds of candidates, for all the right reasons. This means encouraging our Officers to learn their work to the best of their ability, do all in our power to eradicate the use of books during those ceremonies, with Secretaries and Directors of Ceremonies working together to ensure that Offices are covered with capable stand-ins, should the need arise.

My vision for Mark and Royal Ark Mariner Lodges is 'quality ceremonies, for quality candidates', keeping us at the forefront of progressive and select Freemasonry and securing a healthy and productive future for all our Orders. Just over six weeks ago, many of us gathered at a very impressive venue in Hampshire to celebrate the 158th Mark Benevolent Fund Festival. Raising 1.9 million pounds, the Festival was a resounding success and the Province and all its members should be congratulated on a magnificent achievement. The highlight of the evening for me personally was hearing the President of the Mark Benevolent Fund announcing that we are to fund the purchase of a lifeboat to be stationed at Hamble in Hampshire to be named 'The John Prizeman'. What a fitting tribute to the memory of a man who, among other things, served as Deputy President and President of the Fund. He touched many lives and his namesake will now undoubtedly save lives.

I now turn to welcoming our Brethren from Districts and Lodges overseas, who I know we are all delighted to have with us today. May I please request that you reserve your applause and welcome them together at the end of the list:

From Belgium, R.W.Bro. Jean Verbist, Dist.G.M., and 12 Brethren;

From Germany, R.W.Bro. Michael Cooper, Dist.G.M., and three Brothers;

From Ghana, W.Bro. Ofori Asiamah, Dep.Dist.G.M., and W.Bro. Kojo Taylor-Appiah, Dist.G.Sec., both receiving P.G.S.D.;

From Gibraltar, V.W.Bro. David Reading, P.G.J.O.;

From Hong Kong, W.Bro. Vivian Lee, P.A.G.D.C., and W.Bro. Paul Whitmore, P.G.S.D.;

From Italy, R.W.Bro. Andrea Bonechi, Dist.G.M., and W.Bro. Gabriele Belforte received P.G.J.D.;

From Nigeria, W.Bro. Laurence Sams and Kelechi Njoku;

From Netherlands, R.W.Bro. Peter Kirpensteijn, Dist.G.M., and Bro. Hendrik Exmann;

From Romania, four Brothers, and three from South & East Caribbean;

From Spain, R.W.Bro. Robert Munday, P.Dist.G.M., and four other Brethren;

From Sri Lanka, W.Bro. David Rose, P.G.J.D.;

From Unattached Lodges overseas:

W.Bro. Nebojsa Dordevic from Serbia – St Aubyn Lodge of M.M.M. No. 64;

From the Grand Lodge of Scotland

W.Bro. Robert Clark.

Let's show our appreciation to these Brethren for their attendance here today. One of the hallmarks of English Freemasonry is that we have an array of independent Masonic Orders working happily together for the benefit of Freemasonry, and I now want to introduce the Rulers of some of these Orders, and again, I am sure you will join with me in a warm welcome at the end of the list.

From the Grand Lodge of M.M.M.

Past Deputy Grand Masters, R.W.Bro. H. Keith Emmerson, and R.W.Bro. Francis Spencer

Supreme Council Ancient and Accepted Rite

R.W.Bro. David Williamson, Lieutenant Grand Commander

Order of the Red Cross of Constantine

R.W.Bro. Graham Flight, Grand Sovereign

Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters

R.W.Bro. Kessick Jones, Grand Master

Order of the Secret Monitor

R.W.Bro. Andrew Sweeney, Grand Supreme Ruler

Ancient and Masonic Order of the Scarlet Cord
R.W.Bro. Ian Currans, G.S.W., Grand Summus

Worshipful Society of Operative Freemasons
V.W.Bro. Dr Paul Mycock, 1st Grand Master Mason

Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests and Order of Holy Wisdom
V.W.Bro. Christopher Maiden, Grand High Priest

Brethren, let's show them our appreciation.

Well, Brethren, we are approaching the end of a very busy meeting which has seen over 100 Brethren promoted in Grand Rank and, delightfully, most are here in person. Brethren, you should be justly proud of your achievements which reflects the service you have given, and be ever more aware of what is expected of you in the future. The most important Brethren in our Order are those who are to be Advanced and Elevated. They are our future, and we are in control of that future in delivering the quality ceremonies I mentioned earlier. I do not expect perfection, but, if we chase perfection, hopefully we can catch excellence. Speaking of excellence, I must thank the Grand Secretary and his team, and the Grand Director of Ceremonies and his team, for producing the event we have all enjoyed today.

Before I conclude, I have one more duty to perform on behalf of the Grand Master. In 1991 the Grand Master's Order of Service to Mark Masonry Award was instituted. Since then there have only ever been five recipients, and I am pleased today to be able to invest the sixth. The following citation from the Grand Secretary will explain everything:

CITATION

The recipient today has been a Craft Freemason for 44 years, having been initiated into Freemasonry in Shadwell Clerke Lodge No. 1910 in 1981. But it was Advancement into the Mark, six years later, in 1987, in Bon Accord Lodge, Time Immemorial, that set him on a path to Masonic success. He served as Master in 1992, Provincial Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies of London in 1998, Provincial Deputy Grand Secretary 2002-2004 and Provincial Grand Secretary 2004-2007, before being made Deputy Provincial Grand Master of London Mark in 2007 - the same year he received his first Grand Rank as Past Grand Junior Overseer. In 2011, promotion beckoned again and it was then that he was appointed, obligated, invested and installed Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master for London, an office he held for eight years.

Upon retirement he then took up post for two years as Deputy President of the Mark Benevolent Fund. It's here, away from the Masonic ranks and chains, that our recipient's burning passion for the charitable works of the M.B.F. was really given a chance to shine. A self-appointed salesman in chief for the M.B.F., our recipient has travelled the length and breadth of the country, encouraging Brethren to dig deep for the Mark Benevolent Fund, marketing the honorifics, and talking up the beneficial work carried out by the fund. He's the kind of person that if you give him a job, he'll do it. But give him a job to do in the name of charity and he'll own it. On days such as today you'll find him in the vestibule here at Freemasons' Hall helping sell the charity jewels. But it's not just at high profile events like this where his efforts are visible. There's many a cold, wet evening when you can find him working one of the dining rooms at Mark Masons' Hall, running a raffle or his heads and tails game, to raise money for a chosen charitable aim. And then there's the Diamond Geezers, a dining club for those who have reached M.B.F. Diamond Honorific status; a group through which he somehow manages to raise even more money.

Somewhat typically of his nature, when the Grand Master's Keystone Fund was launched, our recipient put the full weight of his verve and enthusiasm behind the fund and quickly began taking orders for the jewels relating to that fund as well. Our recipient is a fund-raising force of nature who has been instrumental in the success of both the M.B.F. and the Grand Master's Keystone Fund through his income generating endeavours.

Brethren, without the input of this very worthy recipient, our charitable funds would be much, much poorer, and not just financially. As he proved so successfully in 2017 with the Province of London's 'Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Walk', fund raising can be fun, and over 170 Brethren answered his call to walk the eight miles to raise over £400,000 for the National Association of Blood Bikes initiative.

To have someone who can go about their business with such high spirit, enjoyment, and good nature is a gift for those who benefit from his tireless hard work. It is for these reasons Brethren, that our Grand Mater, Most Worshipful Brother His Royal Highness Prince Michael of Kent, GCVO, has been pleased to confer the Order of Service to Mark Masonry upon Right Worshipful Brother David Frederick Ashbolt.

Brethren, that really does conclude my business. I thank you all for your kind attention and I look forward to repeating the process at the Royal Ark Mariner Grand Assembly meeting in December.