

Thames Valley Allied Masonic Degrees



Gridiron Gossip *Summer Edition August 2025*



*F*rom my vantage point in the 'bothy' the sun continues to turn out each day, although I note the colour of the trees are beginning to look autumnal and a few are shedding their leaves. Nevertheless, the summer days had us hugging the air con and fans (plus several cold beers) for several weeks longer than had been the case over the past few years.

The district annual meeting will soon be upon us, and the Executive committee has met to plan the day. Each of your summonses shows the date of the meeting, as does the district website, but just as another reminder, the meeting will be held on Saturday **18 October**, at the Bletchley Masonic Centre. Although I chair the meeting, it is your meeting where you can celebrate with members of your own

Council who are receiving District appointments or promotions. It also allows me to deliver the 'end-of-term' report on behalf of the district, whilst welcoming our newest members into the Order, and to celebrate with those who have received a first appointment or promotion to Grand Rank and are to be invested by the Grand Master at Grand Council on Tuesday **21 October**. This year, we have been privileged to receive four Grand Rank appointments, to be bestowed on W Bro Dr Silverio Ostrowski – Bocardo Council No 84 (first appointment to Acting Grand Steward), W Bro Alastair Mason – Chiltern Hundreds Council No 142 and Walpole Council No 181 (promotion to Past Grand Registrar), W Bro Simon Gillas – Veran Council No 18 (promotion to Past Grand Senior Deacon), W Bro Keith Bristow – Middlesex Council No 108 (promotion to Past Grand Junior Deacon), W Bro Phillip Purves – Veran Council No 18 and Bocardo Council No 84 (a Grand Council appointment, promoted to Past Grand Registrar). In addition, there are two re-appointments of RW Bro Jonathan Roberts – Middlesex Council No 108 (President Executive Council), VW Bro James Hilditch – Rollright Council No 127 (Grand Treasurer). To all receiving Grand honours, we offer our warmest and heartiest congratulations.

The past nine months have been productive in many ways and none more so than the district has Admitted ten new members into the Order, whilst several brethren have completed all 5 degrees and who are now looking forward to progressing through the offices in their respective Councils. As ever, the degrees of the Red Cross of Babylon and Grand High Priest remain the two degrees that are the last to be conferred; reasons for which we are aware. The delay in receiving these degrees is now impacting on some Councils who have insufficient members qualified to progress to Warden and are either having to re-appoint those who are qualified, or appointing brethren to higher office who have not followed the normal route of progression through the offices. It is feasible now for a brother to have been in the Order for less than 3 years who could end up as the



WM, having been fast-tracked to one of the Warden offices! Where many would rise to the challenge, there are those who might feel daunted by this and who might not have the confidence to meet the challenge. Whereas I was intending to hold another 'mass' Red Cross of Babylon ceremony in July next year, there is now backlog of members waiting to have this degree bestowed. I have, therefore, agreed to bring the event forward to Wednesday 15 October, at the Richard Mordant Council meeting, Aylesbury. In January, the Degree of Grand High Priest will be undertaken to ensure the majority of new members will have completed all five degrees to become qualified to take office beyond that of Warden.

I now spot Mrs C beckoning me, which tells me it's time to put on my other apron and start operating the oven! Enjoy the remainder of this wonderful summer and I look forward to being in your company in the very near future. Why not attend the luncheon on Sunday 14 September at the Bell Hotel – it will save you from having to put on the oven pinny!

RW Bro Robert W Chevin – District Grand Prefect

Around the District

Veran Council No 18

At the July meeting, it was decided that the By-Laws be amended to revert from being a Past Master's Council to that of a regular Council, and to admit candidates into the Order. Since Covid, the admission of Past Masters as joining members has been limited in the extreme. During, and following the pandemic years, Worshipful Masters of their respective Councils remained in-situ for two years, and in some cases, for three years. Following this period, there seemed little appetite from among those qualified, to join the Past Master's Council, whilst at the same time, the Council was experiencing a surge of deaths and resignations of its members reducing the overall membership to that of just managing to remain quorate at each meeting.

Given the ancestry of the Council, and the fact that it remains the only Council we have meeting in Berkshire, it has been necessary to agree a plan of action towards recovery. A clinical analogy at this time is that the "patient is in Intensive Care and heavily sedated, with a poor prognosis". Recovery, by increasing the membership is essential, and proposals are underway to recruit among Berkshire Chapters and Mark Lodges, but there is also a need for members of the district, who are Berkshire masons, to assist in our endeavours.

One simple and speedy resolution would be to ask brethren if they would become a joining member of the Council, maybe for a period of three years, whilst the efforts of increasing the membership are undertaken with the admission of new members.

Middlesex Council No 108

In his role as the Provincial Grand Master for the Mark Province of Berkshire the WM, W Bro Graham Seeman, had encouraged his deputy, W Bro James Payen, to join the Allied Degrees, and following a successful ballot, was immediately Admitted into the Middlesex Council by his Mark boss!

Bro James, including Bro Gil Singleton, received the degree of Grand High Priest with W Bro John Stribling undertaking the role of GHP. This was well performed by all who played their respective parts well, with the DistGDC being coerced into acting as the Master of Ceremonies. On receiving this

degree, Bro Gill had now completed his five degrees and was presented with a breast jewel by the DGP, who was doubly delighted to perform this, having been responsible for bringing Bro Gill into the Middlesex Council.



Rollright Council No 127

At the meeting of Rollright Council, on Tuesday 20 May, six candidates received the degree of the Red Cross of Babylon in a ceremony that was exceptionally performed by members of the Council and the Acting District Officers. The occasion was particularly enhanced with the presence of the Deputy Grand Master, RW Bro Ian Bailey. VW Bro James Hilditch welcomed all present, including the DGP, and opened a Lodge of St LM, which was swiftly adjourned, and a Royal Arch Council opened for the first part of the ceremony to admit six candidates. VW Bro Hilditch heading the RA Council, the DGP acting as the Director of Ceremonies and RW Bro Ron Bridger, heading the Persian Court, the candidates could not fail to have been impressed by a 'high power' performance. Following the banquet, midway through the ceremony, the overall performance by all who played their part was of the highest standard with each of the candidates expressing their delight at receiving the degree.

On completing this degree, three of the brethren had now completed each of their five degrees permitting them to wear the breast jewel, which was duly presented by the District Grand Prefect, who gave a particular welcome to each on their achievements to date, stating that the expectations in their progress were now raised.



Chiltern Hundreds Council No 142

On Wednesday 7th May, Bro Keith Hawes was installed as the Worshipful Master of the Chilterns Hundreds Council 142. The ceremony was conducted by W Bro David Tremaine, in fine style that was enjoyed by all the brethren. In attendance was the Deputy District Grand Prefect, W Bro Simon Gillas, who welcomed the WM on behalf of the DGP, enjoining him to enjoy his year in office advising him that time will rapidly pass by and he will soon be handing on the gavel.

The WM appointed and invested his Officers of the year after which, all retired for an excellent festive board.



Walpole Council No 181

Walpole Council No 181 received the DGP, DepDGP, and the DistGSD and were welcomed by the WM, W Bro Paul Rush. Having declined the WM's gavel, the WM presented the DGP with a cheque for £240 as a donation from the members of the Council, towards the GMKF Award. This was well received by a most delighted (and surprised) DGP on behalf of the District who thanked the members for their very considerate and kind donation.

Following an exchange of the occupants of the Chair, W Bro Alastair Mason proceeded to Admit 4 candidates into the Degree of St LM in a most excellent and sincere manner. This was concluded by the most precise delivery of the lecture by W Bro Andrew Stephens that was well received by all present, particularly the candidates.

With the WM returning to the Chair, he proceeded to install W Bro Terwyn Williams as WM for the ensuing year. Again, the ceremony was well delivered and sincere and with the newly installed WM now in charge, having invested his Officers, completing the remainder of the agenda, it was a beeline dash to the bar, and the festive board.

Cowper & Newton Council No 266

At the meeting of Cowper & Newton Council on Wednesday 11 June, the Council was honoured with an official visit of the District Grand Prefect and a delegation of District Officers. This was a special event for Bro Tim Long who was installed as the Worshipful Master for the ensuing year.



The ceremony was well performed by W Bro Mike Jolley who installed Tim in his customary and inimitable style to the delight of all those present. On his being proclaimed, Worshipful Brother Tim set about investing his Officers for the year, following which, the brethren then advanced on the bar and dining room to complete the evening's event.



District Visiting

One of the pleasures of the role of DGP is the opportunity of accepting invitations to attend District meetings within England and Wales. These are spread across the east and west of the country from Northumberland on the east coast and the fells of Cumbria on the west coast. To the hallowed counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire, dropping down to east and west Midlands, the serenity of the Chilterns, following the rail line to London, and down to the southern counties of England that takes in Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, eventually reaching the District of Devon and Cornwall, the inhabitants who continue to debate over what to place on a scone first, the jam or the cream! Finally, there is the delight of visiting the principality of Wales.

The DGP, DepDGP and District Officers attended the meetings of nine Districts since October, including a visit to St Helier for the investiture of the new District Grand Inspector of the Channel Islands. Visiting other Districts is an open invitation to any member of the district and everyone is personally addressed and publicly welcomed by the DGP of the District visited. Everyone is encouraged to attend and all that is required is for you to inform the secretary, W Bro Peter Rawlinson. However, the festive board is not a freebie, and you will be required to pay, usually in the region of £30-£35.



Herts & Beds



Kent



Southern Counties



East Midlands





Channel Islands



Essex



Sussex

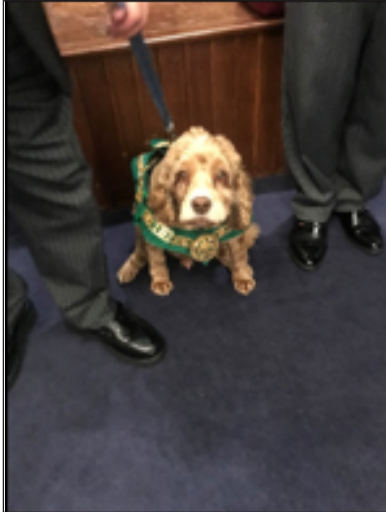


Devon & Cornwall

Devon & Cornwall Meeting

The annual visit to the Devon & Cornwall District meeting was another memorable weekend away. Thames Valley was, again, well represented with the Deputy DGP, DistGSW, and DistGDC accompanying the DGP. The events for the weekend began, as ever, with a meeting at a local hostelry, appropriately named 'The Gypsy Moth' at which the local brew underwent some serious testing! On this occasion, we were joined by members of another District – East Anglia. Along with their DGP, Geoff Keer, they had gone 'on tramp' and arrived at the same venue – no need for any Allied recognition on this occasion, we know 'common people' when we see them! Being the last to leave the bar seemed to be the target – and it was a bull's eye!





The following day there was the opportunity to address any hangovers with bacon butties and coffee and try to recall who paid the bar bill the night before! The DistGSW seemed to be demonstrating the draft plan used for the design of the 'two pillars at that porchway or entrance' - that on the left was a local vintage, exemplified by that on the right! Once again, we had the pleasure to encounter Rufus, the 'Grand Keeper of the Kennels', a medical detection dog, who holds Grand Rank in most of the Orders governed by Mark Masons Hall. The delight of the festive board was matched by that of the meeting and our hosts, having ensured we returned home with pleasant memories of the occasion, we bid a fond farewell to the 'common people' of East Anglia, with a promise to resume our labours at their meeting in October.



SECRETARY'S MUSINGS

August, a time for a slowdown in Masonic activity, well no, not for a District Grand Secretary. A time for ramping up and getting everything ready for the Annual Meeting of the District on Saturday 18th October at Bletchley. (I am sure you all have it in your diary already.) Paper, printer ink and labels to be ordered and time to dust off the mail merge skills as invitations to the District Meeting will be sent out soon, please watch out for them in your in-boxes.

In addition, at the beginning of the month, the letters of offer of District Grand Ranks have been sent out and acceptances are coming in thick and fast. Congratulations to all those who have received preferment.

The District will be cooperating with individual Councils to help work the larger Degrees over the next few months and will hold the Red Cross of Babylon at Richard Mordant Council on 15th October and Grand High Priest, again at Richard Mordant Council on 14th January 2026

It's also a time to remind Council Secretaries to get their Keystone records up to date, especially ensuring that members who have left who have been Honorary members have the information added to their record. If they are still showing as active members when the Mark Masons Hall invoices are raised at the beginning of September, the Council will be liable for their dues next year as well. I am on hand to help with any problems, should it be needed.

Please may I remind all Council Secretaries that they should be sending copies of their Summons to our web-master VW Bro Brian Roake, brian.roake@btopenworld.com, for publication (remember to redact the personal information on the copy you send – names of candidate only will suffice.)

The Grand Master's Keystone Fund for a District collarette is still open for donations and payments can be made direct to the District's account – details:

**Thames Valley AMD, Sort Code 30-98-97, Account No. 32944763,
quoting GMK with your surname as a reference.**

Individual Councils may also apply for a collarette on payment of £25 per subscribing member, perhaps your Council would wish to put their alms collection, or raffle takings, towards this? Details on the MMH web site

The District Grand Prefect's Lunch still has a few spaces left – please use the booking form -

<https://forms.office.com/e/xDI6rJ5fJS> to book in, or contact me at the email address below.

W. Bro. Peter Rawlinson P.A.G.D.C.

District Grand Secretary

peter@derbyhouse-brackley.co.uk

and finally.....

We extend our congratulations to Bros Paul Harrison and Silverio Ostrowski, both of whom received Mark Grand Rank at the Grand Mark meeting in June. Paul was appointed to Acting G.St.B. and Silverio promoted to P.A.G.D.C. - well deserved.

