



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE
OF HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT

Coronavirus Bulletin 10

24 July 2020

Dear Bro Secretary,

I trust you are well. This bulletin contains a number of important points regarding the resumption of masonic activities. I would be grateful if you will study them carefully and advise your members of any items appropriate to them:

1. A Message from the Deputy Provincial Grand Master in Charge

Dear Brethren,

I hope you and your families are keeping well in the continuing challenge we are working through.

I am indebted to the Provincial Cabinet, Executive Officers, Area teams and Visiting Officers for their hard work in keeping you informed and answering your questions as we prepare ourselves for a gradual and careful return to Masonry. My special thanks go to the Provincial Grand Superintendent of Works, the Area Superintendents of Works and the Trustees/Management Committees of all our Masonic Centres. Their workload is incredible as they undertake the guidance, legal, safety and cleaning aspects of the reopening of our Centres. It is pleasing to read that we have a number of our Centres ready to receive members again. However, no Centre should feel under undue pressure to return until they feel it is safe to do so. This of course, applies to all Brethren. Your safety and wellbeing are the most important issues.

I am also pleased to hear of the Lodges who have decided to initiate those candidates that have been waiting for some time. We have approximately 135 candidates across the Province, who have completed their applications forms, pending Initiation. The adapted ceremonies do present some challenges and different thinking but I know a number of lodges who want to try it. Again it is a local decision, taking into account the feelings of the proposed candidate and his supporters.

Your Provincial Cabinet met last week to discuss a range of issues both current and future and our Provincial Secretary refers to those issues and decisions made later in this Bulletin.

I was pleased to attend the Royal Arch Provincial Executive this week at the invitation of the Grand Superintendent and discuss again current issues that are relevant to the Craft and Chapter. I have also been invited to join the Mark Provincial Executive Virtual Meeting next week to do likewise. My thanks to Alan Berman and George Deacon respectively – we are all working together for the interest of all Brethren and Companions.

In an earlier letter to you all I spoke of the importance of keeping in contact. I know our Almoners continue to lead this effort, but, again I ask us all to take the time to call and speak to the Brother who perhaps, does not attend a virtual meeting and ensure he and his family are not forgotten.

Brethren, we take small and cautious steps forward together and I look forward to being able to meet again properly in the fullness of time.

My very best wishes

Jon

2. Provincial Office Opening

The Provincial Office will be fully staffed Monday to Friday from 3rd August. However, visitors will only be received by prior appointment.

3. Masonic Centre Re-opening and Meeting Safely

It is clearly important that everything is in place to ensure the safety of brethren before masonic meetings re-commence. To this end the Province recommends that the following three levels of action are satisfied before the Lodge meets:

1. The Provincial Grand Superintendent of Works and his team have been working tirelessly with Centre Management Teams to develop Risk Assessments and Method Statements (i.e. guidance and instructions for attendance) based on attached documents. It is ultimately the Centre Management's responsibility to declare the Centre Covid-safe and to present the Lodge Secretary with this documentation on request. The Lodge must then make its own assessment and decide if the measures are considered adequate before proceeding with Lodge meetings.
2. Certain issues may be considered specific to the Lodge and outside the control of the Centre. It is therefore essential that each Lodge develops and publishes additional guidance notes for its members to cover these points. This may include the sanitisation of Lodge equipment, the control of member numbers attending and their behaviour before, during and after the meeting and the conducting of LOIs and GPC meetings etc.
3. Brethren should be reminded via a statement on the Lodge summons and by an announcement before the meeting, that they have a responsibility to observe social distancing, to regularly use personal hand sanitiser and to wear face masks if they consider it necessary.

It is recommended that gloves should not be worn as they may interfere with the use of hand sanitiser. Interestingly, many lodges in the country did not resume the wearing of gloves after the Second World War, so there is no requirement and no national uniformity.

4. Festive Boards

I refer you to the recent directive from Grand Lodge that Festive Boards are not currently permitted after Lodge Meetings. The current Government guidelines (at 6th July) state: *'Indoor gatherings should only be occurring in groups of up to 2 households (including support bubbles) while outdoor gatherings should only be occurring in groups of up to 2 households (or support bubbles), or a group of at most 6 people from any number of households. It is against the law to gather in groups of more than 30 people in private homes (including gardens and other outdoor spaces).'* It is therefore considered that Festive Boards are contrary to these guidelines and to ignore this directive may bring Freemasonry into disrepute.

5. Entry in the Lodge Minutes after re-opening

Grand Lodge has requested that the following statement is placed in the Lodge minutes of the first meeting after the suspension:

"As a result of the suspension, owing to the Coronavirus pandemic, by The MW the Grand Master of all meetings from 17 March 2020 to 17 July 2020, the Lodge was unable to meet."

6. Provincial AGM

It is a requirement of the Provincial By-laws that a meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge is held annually. In order to conduct essential business such as the election of the Provincial Grand Treasurer and approval of Provincial Accounts etc., a 'business' meeting with a short agenda will be held at Botley Masonic Centre in late September and will be restricted to a maximum of 30 attendees. A small number of places

will be open to those Master Masons wishing to attend and these will be selected by ballot. Further details will follow in due course.

7. Official Visits and Active Officers 2021

In order to take pressure off Lodges and Centres, it is the intention not to have any Official Visits during the forthcoming masonic season. As a consequence, Active Provincial Officers will remain in Office and complete two years in the role. This decision will be regularly reviewed in line with future Government guidelines.

8. Installation of the WM

For those Lodges whose date of **election** of WM and Treasurer occurred within the suspension period, these elections should now take place at the first regular meeting post suspension.

If the WM is elected to continue in Office for a further year, he may be 'Proclaimed' immediately after being elected (i.e. on the same evening). He may then proceed to invest his Officers.

If a **new** WM is to be elected, this should occur on what would have been the date of Installation and the Installation then takes place at the following regular meeting - within 5 weeks of the election (Rule 106 BoC refers - an emergency meeting may be necessary to achieve this).

9. Abandoning Meetings

Please note that in line with Rule 137 BoC there is no provision to cancel a Lodge meeting. In the current circumstances, meetings can only be abandoned for one of the following reasons:

- i. **The Lodge is unable to reach a quorum** (i.e. 5 members excluding the Tyler and Candidate, one of which must be a Past Master). It is recommended that the Lodge Secretary keeps a record of apologies to enable him to determine if and when this point has been reached.

If, after the summons has been issued, it becomes clear to the Secretary that the number of apologies is such that a quorum will be unattainable, there will clearly be no point in the few remaining Brethren making unnecessary journeys. All members should therefore be advised of the position and at the point at which the Lodge is due to be opened (but not earlier) it may be presumed that the meeting has been abandoned. However, the Secretary must not merely assume that the members of the Lodge do not wish to meet.

- ii. **The Masonic Centre is closed.** In this case, efforts should be made to find an alternative venue and to hold the meeting by Dispensation (within 28 days of the regular meeting date). Consideration should be given to alternative Centres however, as they may be inundated with similar requests and unable to accommodate your lodge without undue pressure.

If the Lodge Warrant is inaccessible as a result of your usual Centre being closed, the Lodge must apply for a Warrant of Confirmation (via the Provincial Secretary) and receive a letter of authority from Grand Lodge for permission to meet.

In order for the Provincial Office to fully monitor the ongoing situation, it is important that a summons is issued for every scheduled Lodge meeting and a copy emailed to the Provincial Office at least 14 days before the meeting (please note the extended timescale from the current 10 days).

Fraternal Regards
Frank Milner
Provincial Grand Secretary