



# MAKING OUR MARK

The Newsletter of Staffordshire & Shropshire Mark Master Masons



*Dear Brethren,*

I am sure we are all missing our Mark Masonry, and whilst no dates have yet been given for the relaxing of restrictions, there are some hopeful signs, notably the reduction in the number of cases mainly because of lockdown, and the tremendous efforts of so many people to achieve the substantial vaccination programme. We can only hope it is not too long before we can see a way through to resuming our normal activities.

Whilst it may appear too early, it is my firm view that we should start planning for the reopening of our Lodges and commencement of business, hopefully from September. Please don't think I wish us to do anything which we are not all comfortable with and which is not safe, but our first meeting of each Lodge should be a celebration of our 'return' with an attractive agenda, possibly even including an advancement. Careful managing of the agenda will be required – but it should be possible. It is certainly not too early to be establishing contact with those candidates we had prior to the first lockdown and planning their advancement.

I also announced at the last meeting of Joseph Whittall Lodge that I am proposing to reappoint all the active Provincial Officers who wish to continue for a further year, in recognition of the fact that they have not been able to perform their duties during the last year. Promotions will continue to be made as usual.

The other thing I have been encouraging, is for Lodges to hold Virtual Business meetings on the day they would usually have met. Some Lodges have done this and thereby got a lot of business out of the way, as well as keeping in touch with members. The Provincial Secretary stands willing to help any Lodge which wishes to do this.

Can I also thank all our Brother Almoners for their work in keeping in touch with brethren in distress. There are funds to help any brother and their family as well as a special fund to help out paying a Lodge subscription. Do make use of these funds, and there may be extra calls on them as Government support to those in difficulty gradually reduces.

Let us hope it will not be too long before we can hold that great reunion meeting in our Lodges, and virtual meetings can become reality in a safe and happy environment as in times past.

Best wishes to you all. Stay safe and well.

*Mike Heenan*

Provincial Grand Master

**STOP  
PRESS**



## **GRAND LODGE REDUCE FEES FOR 2020 / 2021**

In a much-welcomed move, Grand Lodge announced on Thursday 11th February that as part of package of measures to help brethren manage the financial impacts of the pandemic and beyond, Grand Lodge fees for the financial year 2020/2021 will be reduced by £10.00 per member.

### **The full package includes:**

- Annual dues payable on 1st September for the financial year 2020/2021 will be reduced by £10.00 per member.
- Annual Dues for Installed masters Lodges, where a reduced rate already applies, will be reduced by £5.00 per member;
- The 50% reduction on the standard rate of registration for a Brother on his admission (agreed last year) will be extended to cover the 2021/2022 Masonic year;
- The 50% reduction in the fee payable for a joining brother (agreed last July) will also be extended to cover the 2021/2022 Masonic year.

**These changes will come into effect on  
1st September 2021.**

Guidance to Lodges suggesting how the surplus generated by these reductions might be used to help those in greatest need will be issued later.

The cost to Grand Lodge of these changes is in excess of £1million.

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update



Since March of last year both Grand Lodge and the Provincial Office have issued a lot of guidance about how to manage the administration of Lodges during Covid-19. That guidance has changed – sometimes at short notice – as the situation has ebbed and flowed.

This update contains some explanation and guidance relating to the latest situation.

## Local Suspension of face-to-face meetings

Any prospect of face-to-face meetings of Masonic Lodges in England, Wales and Scotland is still some way off. However, because the conditions relating to each area of the UK differ, and as the exit strategy is likely to vary depending on location, it is impractical to issue a General Suspension of Masonic Activity in the same way as happened in March 2020.

There is no requirement to issue a Summons for any meetings scheduled to take place during this latest suspension. Simply attach a copy of the PGM's letter suspending face to face meetings in the Minute Book

## Scope of what can be achieved at a Virtual Business Meeting (VBM)

Grand Lodge and the PGM are keen to encourage VBMs on, or within 14 days either side of, their scheduled regular meetings. The guidance for holding a VBM is well established, and welcomed by those Units that have so far held such meetings.

In addition to the items of business already included in the "Paper of Business Template - Unit Virtual Business Meeting - UPDATED - 08.09.20" available to Lodge Secretaries in the Documents section of Keystone Online, Lodges may wish to think about other items of interest to provide a purpose for the meetings.

These may include:

- Lectures/Discussions on items of Masonic interest.
- Lodge of Instruction/Rehearsal of the Ceremony. It is permissible to hold a Lodge of Instruction via video conference so long as no signs or tokens are given or demonstrated, and words left blank in the published ritual are not spoken.
- Inviting the PrGDC and his team to give coaching on ceremonial matters.

Brethren who are not members of the Order may be invited to attend if the item of interest does not reveal any part of the ceremony, ritual or secrets. However, they should not be admitted to the call until the business part of the meeting has been declared closed by the Presiding Officer.

Proclamations / Installations **must not** be performed at a VBM.

## Continuation of Master in Chair and Proclamation thereof

It is **NOT** permissible to Proclaim a Master / Commander for a consecutive year in Office at a VBM. The election may take place, but the Proclamation must wait until a face-to-face meeting can be held, even if this will be the same meeting at which his successor is elected.

A Dispensation for a third consecutive year is only required

- **If** a physical (face-to-face) meeting was held at which the Master / Commander was Proclaimed for his second consecutive year:
- **And**, and the Lodge is now able to issue a Summons to hold a physical (face-to-face) meeting to Proclaim him for a third consecutive year.

The period of a Mastership is calculated from one physical (face-to-face) Installation / Proclamation Ceremony to the next, which now may well be more than 12 calendar months.

## Resumption of Lodge Meetings

It is thought likely that as and when the current restrictions are lifted by the government, we are likely to go back to a tier system. That being the case, the PGM will notify Lodges (via the Provincial Grand Secretary) when he intends to cancel local suspensions. No meetings must be held until that clearance is received.

## *The Mark Benevolent Fund Annual Review* **2020**



The MBF Annual Review provides a summary of the activities of the MBF in 2020. This is the first time this information has been produced in a single document.

Even in a year not without its challenges the generosity and continued hard work of Mark Brethren shines through.

You can read the full review by clicking [Here](#)



# Re-launch of the Mark Benevolent Fund Stewardship Scheme

The Trustees of the MBF are keen to restore awareness of the Festival Stewardship Scheme. Over the last ten years there has been a significant decline in the number of individuals choosing to qualify as a Festival Steward. This is thought to be because attention has been focused on the sale of Festival lapel badges.

As part of the re-launch of the scheme they have agreed a comprehensive package of benefits associated with this important status.

The new style Festival Stewardship is aimed principally, (but not exclusively), at members of each host Festival Province. In return for a qualifying donation of £100, each Steward will be entitled to:

- A distinctive Stewards' breast jewel (shown opposite), year bar and pocket jewel holder.
- Inclusion of their name in the Festival Stewards' Roll of Honour in the Festival booklet – this was discontinued some time ago and will now be re-instated.
- And for individuals making their first donation under the scheme, qualification as a Life Governor of the Mark Benevolent Fund – the first step on the ladder of honorifics.


Monies raised from the take-up of Festival Stewardships will be included in each respective Festival total together with income from the sale of lapel badges purchased in bulk from the Mark Benevolent Fund.

Next year's host Province, Surrey, has agreed to be the first to market the new Festival Stewardship which will be formally launched at their Provincial AGM in March.

The Board of Trustees very much hope that those Provinces hosting a Festival in the future will support this new scheme and promote the importance of becoming a Festival Steward. Other Provinces can, of course, still play their part by raising funds through the sale of lapel badges in the usual way.

*(Ed. The next Festival for our Province will not be until 2040, or thereabouts!)*

## A Sad Duty



It is our very sad duty to report that W Bro Philip Noel Niblock, PrGChaplain, passed to the Grand Lodge Above on Sunday, 8th February.

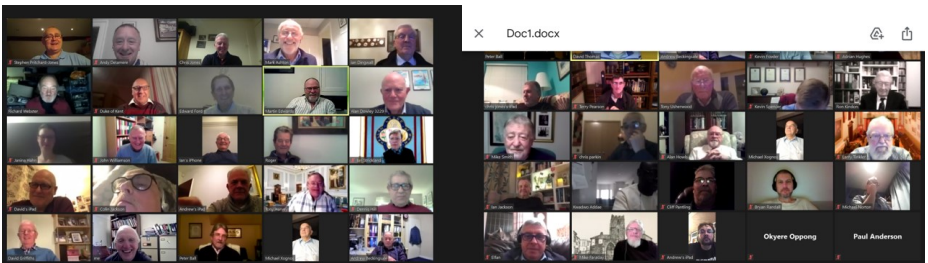
Phil was very well known to many in this Province and farther afield and was a great servant to Freemasonry. He battled serious illness, bravely borne for the past few years. W Bro Niblock, or just plain "Phil" as he was known to many, served the Province with great distinction; first as Dep PrGChaplain from 2009 until 2018, and then as PrGChaplain until his death. He will be long remembered for his genial good nature – always willing to help and support both brethren and Lodges alike no matter how short the notice, his wealth of stories drawn from a wide experience of life, his oratory and best of all, a wonderful singing voice.

Phil was advanced into Mark Masonry in April 2000 at Wrekin Lodge, and elevated into RAM in October 2003 in Wrekin Lodge of RAM. Over the years he was an active member of KT, OSM, RCC, and SC.

In the Craft he was initiated in March 1998 at Corbet Lodge in North Wales. He steadily rose through the ranks of Provincial Office holding various active and past ranks – including PrGChaplain (Shropshire) from 2017 to 2019, and from May 2018 as PPrJGW (Staffordshire) and October 2020 as PPrGSwdB (N.Wales). He was PrGScN in the Royal Arch.

A man of many parts; during his working life Phil was variously a soldier, an economist, an accountant, a tax consultant and latterly a Minister in the Unitarian Church. He was Mayor of Tywyn in 1996/97. A keen mountaineer he climbed Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa, many peaks in the Andes and all of the major challenges in the UK.

W.Bro Niblock (b December 1946, d February 2021)...a worthy Mason he; he lived respected and died regretted.



Like many Mark lodges during this pandemic Round Table and Rotary Lodge, No. 1630 was not able to meet "in person" for the November meeting. The Lodge was in the unusual position that none of its previous meetings had been cancelled, and ironically, had held their March meeting the day before the Order was suspended and held its Installation meeting on September 1st under the then rule of 30.

After hearing that the infamous, newly appointed *Mike Baker Memorial Lecturer* VWBro Tony Harvey was performing regular Zoom lectures, the senior members of the lodge decided to ask if Tony was available for a talk at our lodge. As they say nothing ventured, nothing gained; so, we contacted Tony and after a slight date amendment a talk was arranged with the 2012 Prestonian Lecturer.

As we have a number of candidates in the pipeline we wanted a lecture that was suitable for both existing members and candidates. The chosen lecture was "The Historic links between the Craft, Mark and the Royal Arch", and a small working party was set up to organise the event and make it available to all lodge members, as well as members of the Province and brethren World Wide.

Tony Harvey is a coach, speaker and consultant specialising in leadership, change and organisational development and has managed his own practice for the last twenty-five years. In 2015, he conceived and proposed to UGLE the idea of the Members Pathway which is a toolkit for Lodges to attract, introduce and retain new members which we have all heard of.

Tony is a lifelong Scout and was initiated into Pioneer Lodge No. 9065, the Scout Lodge for Derbyshire, in 1991. He is a Grand Officer in the Craft, Royal Arch and Mark and in two other Orders.

The lecture is in two parts. In the first part, he disentangles the frequently misunderstood history of the Orders and their degrees and goes on to suggest they all developed as part of one system and that, despite their current fragmentation into different sovereign bodies, are all necessary for a better understanding of the Craft.

A great evening was had by everyone who attended especially the Questions and Answers. Tony has raised over £10,000 from his lectures and at our meeting the proceeds were given to the Masonic Charitable Foundation and earmarked for the Staffordshire Festival in 2024. The Lodge would like to thank all those that worked hard to organise this event and to the nearly 50 participants from around the world including a couple of lady freemasons.

There is a part 2 to this lecture and we hope to hold the second part in 2021. If you would like to see part 1 or any other talk, please visit Tony's YouTube site at

[W Bro. Tony Harvey - YouTube](#)

