



THE GRAND LODGE OF MARK MASTER MASONS

of England and Wales and its Districts and Lodges Overseas

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General Guidance for meeting during Covid-19 restrictions

The following guidelines have been put together to assist members of all the Orders administered from Mark Masons' Hall to return to meeting when they feel it is safe to do so, working in peace and harmony while observing Government requirements. Ultimately, this should lead us all to be able to enjoy our Freemasonry once again during this "new normal".

Compliance with all relevant Government requirements is essential, and any deliberate disregard of such requirements should be regarded as activity which may bring Freemasonry into disrepute.

Guidelines specific to each Masonic Centre must also be followed and if they render any part of the following ceremonial guidance impracticable please follow the Centre's guidance and seek ceremonial advice from your Province or District.

For the purposes of these guidelines it is assumed that the Masonic Centre where the meeting is to take place will already have a robust cleaning schedule and Covid-19 working policy in place which will advise on general use of the facilities and movement around the building.

There is considerable scope for local variation in the management of a meeting, but the following points are strongly recommended and should be capable of being easily integrated into most workings.

At all times the dignity of the ceremonial and the reputation of the Order must be the primary consideration. Local settings may require a common-sense approach to the problem.

- Social Distancing should always be adhered to. If taking photographs, it is essential that they show people at least **two metres** apart so as not to attract unwanted negative attention if they appear on Social Media.
- In England, the maximum number of attendees is limited to 30 by law and must be observed. All seats in the Temple are to be appropriately spaced out and kept to one row deep where possible.
- It would be advisable not to use air-conditioning but open windows to allow a natural breeze.

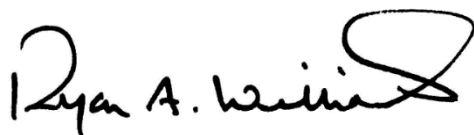
- The precise location of Officers will have to be dictated by the size and shape of the room. All must maintain the required social distance, including the I.P.M. and the Chaplain (who may therefore have to move to the south of their normal positions). The setting up/taking down of the Temple and equipment should be undertaken by as few members of the Unit as possible, ensuring that they wear disposable gloves, and all equipment is sanitised with wipes when laying out and storing away. (During the meeting, previous advice stating that face masks may be worn when attending masonic meetings, but surgical gloves should not, still stand. In those Orders where fabric or leather gloves form part of the regalia, these may be worn.)
- No Officers' robes or clerical garments/collars/sashes/collarettes are to be worn as these are often shared between Lodges and there would be difficulty in sanitising the material without marking it. Where such regalia is usually worn by Officers, these may be placed/hung near to the Officer's Chair if practicable. All Members are still expected to wear their own personal regalia.
- As a general principle, only one person should handle any individual item of regalia or furniture during a meeting. The exception to this is likely to be at Installation meetings where gavels or similar are left on a pedestal at the change of Officer. In such cases, where possible, sanitising equipment can be left on the pedestal for the new incumbent to clean the item.
- The V.S.L. should be opened at the appropriate page prior to the beginning of the meeting and any candles should be lit.
- Where Tracing Boards are used, they should be set up in the 'on view' position to reduce contact with items of furniture.
- All Books of Constitutions/By-Laws/Ritual Books and other reading materials to be handed to Candidates/joining members/newly Installed Masters or equivalent should be placed in sealed envelopes, ideally at least three-days in advance of the meeting to reduce the risk of transfer of contamination.
- The Candidate should be encouraged to bring his own V.S.L. upon which to seal his obligation which may be placed on a cushion and presented to him at the appropriate time.
- The Candidate should be invited to place his regalia on a conveniently situated cushion before the ceremony and will be asked to dress himself in his regalia at the appropriate time.
- Sanitizing liquids and cloths to be made available. A bottle of hand sanitiser may be placed on the Secretary's table and Brethren may be invited to make use of it any time they feel necessary, moving as discretely as possible if the ceremony is underway.
- Prompting and sharing of ritual books should be avoided. Please learn your ritual and be prepared when you arrive for your meeting.
- There should be no procession in or out of the Temple.
- There is to be no singing.
- There is to be no kneeling for prayers/obligations to avoid handling of kneeling stools.

- It is advisable that ceremonies are restricted to one Candidate.
- Minutes/Accounts etc for signing may be confirmed/adopted during the meeting and signed at a convenient time afterwards.
- Alms collections may be omitted from meetings, but members may be encouraged to make electronic Alms payments.
- Ballots can take place in two ways:
 - If using a ballot box, it needs to be placed on a table, preferably in a clear corner of the Temple to maintain the integrity of the ballot, with the ballot balls, having been sanitised, alongside. Those wishing to cast their vote may approach the table, maintaining a suitable distance, pick up the ballot ball and place it in the box.
 - Alternatively, instructions may be given on the Summons that ballots will be by show of hands unless anyone notifies the Secretary (or equivalent) of their objection to this process being adopted prior to the meeting.
- For the appointment and investiture of Officers, appointees may either make their way to a suitable distance in front of the presiding Officer and give a court bow, or stand but remain in their place and give a court bow, whichever they feel more comfortable with.

I do hope you will find these general guidance notes helpful, noting that certain restrictions apply in the Red Cross of Constantine and Allied Masonic Degrees for the time being.

This guidance is designed to assist the resumption of masonic meetings in a safe environment and with the minimum alterations to the ritual necessary to preserve the dignity of the ceremonial.

With fraternal regards and best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan A. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

R.W.Bro. Ryan A Williams, P.G.J.W.
Grand Secretary