



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

Just Visiting



'Visiting'

The Visitor stands to reply to his Toast. We all sit back, at ease, ready to smile at the usual pleasantries. Before too many words have passed he will have praised our Lodge for the warmth of our welcome, he will have congratulated us on the excellence of our ceremony and, dutifully, he will ask to be invited again. The familiarity with these words though should never disguise their truth. Visiting – to see old friends, to make new ones, to admire a ceremony, to learn from it – is the essence of the wider companionship encouraged by the First Degree and, it would be no exaggeration to say, is the life blood of Speculative Freemasonry. The Order and all its members would be the poorer without it.

The practice of visiting has a long and noble tradition. While today it is fun, in years gone by it was duty. The 1583 Old Charges state that *'every [operative] Mason shall receive and cherish every stranger when they come to their country and set them to work... he shall set him a fortnight to work and give him his pay. If he has not got any stones to prepare he shall refresh him with money to go to the next Lodge...'*

The 1723 Constitutions go further: *'...to cultivate a good understanding amongst Freemasons, some members out of every Lodge shall be deputed to visit other Lodges as often as shall be thought convenient...'*

By 1778 the Minutes of the Lodge of Emulation No. 21 recorded that a strong Team of visitors (from the Tuscan Lodge) were received including Master, Wardens and Officers. Six weeks later Emulation returned the compliment and so 'exchange visits' between lodges and Provinces have their first recorded origins.

In the C19 such visits were a basic requirement of *all* lodge members. By 1919 the Book of Constitutions in Rule 149 had eased the requirement to only the Master and his Wardens - and limited their travelling to neighbouring centres rather than to *all* the Lodges within the Province.

The Worshipful Master

Today what is often forgotten is that during his year the Worshipful Master is also the Lodge Ambassador or Representative to the other lodges within the Province. This begs some very important questions. How many Lodges should a Master attempt to visit in his year and what if any is their order of importance?

As ever in Freemasonry the basic rule applies. While the PrGM encourages every Worshipful Master to visit as many Lodges as possible during his year, you are not expected to adopt a pattern of visiting if it is any way detrimental to your personal, family or business interests. Only if and when you are free to visit should you attempt to do so. There is a clear distinction between retired Members who may be free during the day to travel and men still in business who are not. Expectations differ too when the Master is resident in Wiltshire and travels far from another county.

There are 44 Lodges within Wiltshire each holding around six to eight meetings a year so you have, say, some 300 meetings to choose from in this Province alone without ever crossing its borders. The Provincial Year Book contains a list of every Lodge meeting, every date and every location. In addition Lodge Installation meetings are featured in the calendar on the front page of the Provincial Website. Each Lodge Secretary receives timely Agendas from most nearby Lodges, if you are interested in visiting any Lodge simply ask him to send you copies.

While a recent Master of our Lodge managed to visit some 38 lodges during his year this was exceptional. Your own personal circumstances will obviously and always determine what is practicable for you. For most Masters without business commitments, enjoying retirement and not wishing to consult a divorce lawyer, I might suggest – if pressed - that 20 or so visits may be a reasonable target – say one visit per week during the Masonic winter months.

Should you choose to visit an Installation meeting or a 'Working meeting' or a mix of the two? While a mix is possibly ideal, if forced to choose then I would recommend attending the Installation Meetings. There are several reasons. You will have a frequent opportunity of seeing the Provincial Team at work – and you may well be in it one

day! If another Lodge member has Provincial Office you can possibly share the travelling together. It can also provide an opportunity at the bar to get to know the Provincial 'team' better and of course they can enjoy your company too.

Possibly the strongest argument though concerns 'the Club'. Most Masters in their year try to attend as many Installations as possible. You therefore get to know the other Masters well and by your year's end know them very well indeed. Friendships spring up and for the rest of your Masonic career you can exchange private visits with each other's 'Lodge working meetings'. In a few years time you will hopefully all be promoted or appointed together and these bonds of friendship grow even stronger.

The where and when will obviously depend on your working hours and/or home location. Remember that a journey from, say, Salisbury to almost any Lodge across the Plain with a walk from the car park can take from 40 minutes (Ludgershall) to an hour and a quarter (Malmesbury or Swindon on a bad day). To arrive there with time to spare you will need to leave home, all 'booted and spurred' about 4-4.30. Do you have this sort of time to spare? If not then just visit the local Lodges instead. There are plenty to choose from.

There are also a few 'yes - buts' that should perhaps be mentioned. Don't underestimate the cost. Adding together the meal, alms, raffles, wine, 'hospitality drinks' let alone travelling expenses you will be budgeting for £30 or so a visit. It may surprise you to know that many Masters in my own day as a Master took out a ten year endowment policy when first appointed as Steward to provide spending money during their year as Master, separate from the family budget.

There is one other implication which all wardens should consider. Given the commitment of time to their own Lodge and possibly 'other related degrees', the evenings spent visiting will further erode time (and mental energy) for a Master to learn his words for 'the next ritual'. If you intend to play an active role as the Lodge Ambassador during your year then it seems to make very good sense to learn the Master's role as soundly as possible during your fallow years as Warden. For most of us it is much easier to brush up a ritual once mastered rather than trying to learn it from scratch while under the harsh cosh of time.

An earlier article on visiting was closed as follows: *'The benefits of visiting are legion. But whether or not you are proposing to visit as a 'reigning master' or as a private member please remember the two golden rules – first check with the appropriate Lodge secretary that it is convenient and, secondly, always send a note of thanks to the Lodge secretary (or your private host) afterwards. A letter to the Lodge is normally preferable - but to a private host a phone call or email often 'will do nicely, sir!'* This advice, I suggest, still remains sound.

Finally, let me offer a word on the subject of visiting Freemasons' Hall in London. Our friends who use Taylor's Ritual can be heard exhorting the newly appointed Wardens of the Lodge *'...it is also your duty as well as your privilege to attend the Quarterly Communications of Grand Lodge that this Lodge may be properly represented'*. Whilst it may appear a long journey, it is a most worthwhile one and will allow you time to marvel at the building which is the headquarters of our Fraternity.

So, enjoy your visiting, fly the flag – but keep it all within limits.