



# In touch > On line

The newsletter for Wiltshire Freemasons

Freemasons support Trafalgar Day



October 2020

Happy have we met, sorry may we part, and happy meet again....

Wiltshire Freemasonry



To some it may seem that the thought of meeting under the so called 'rule of six' is simply not worth the time and effort; indeed I have had some Brethren ask me "What is the point?" While others have questioned the logic of travelling to a centre only to be in a meeting for 30 minutes. I understand the sentiment and would say to anyone who feels that way that they must follow their own inclination and register an apology for their absence secure in the knowledge that no one will judge them for the decision they make. For here as they say is the rub. During the Covid-19 pandemic under guidelines issued by Grand Lodge and supported by Provincial Grand Lodge no Brother is compelled to attend a Lodge meeting should they feel indisposed to do so.

However, to paraphrase the recent words of the Grand Secretary when asked why UGLE had not simply issued a second suspension of Lodge meetings, he suggested there is a considerable cohort of Freemasons who wish to meet, and while it is safe for them to do so, every reasonable action should be taken to accommodate their desire to gather to work and to instruct and improve themselves in the mysteries of the antient science.

I have been incredibly impressed by the number of Wiltshire Lodges which have met under the 'rule of six'. Some have just undertaken the most basic business of the Lodge, while others have conducted ceremonies including an Installation of a new Master. I am particularly pleased to have been told that a number of Second Degree ceremonies have been held, and that the Brother being Passed to the degree of a Fellow Craft was delighted to have been a part of the history of the Lodge. I look forward to reading and hearing of many more ceremonies including an Initiation being conducted over the next few months.

One ceremony in which I do have an involvement is the annual meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge, which as you will recall 'always' takes place on the first Thursday in October - sadly Covid-19 made sure that didn't happen this year. But I am pleased to tell you that the annual meeting (under the rule of six) will be taking place at Cricklade. I will be joined by David Davies, and Simon Leighfield together with the Provincial Grand Secretary and the Senior and Junior Provincial Grand Wardens for what will be a very unique meeting. During the course of the meeting I will 'call off' Provincial Grand Lodge and welcome via Zoom the active officers for the new Masonic year. I know the Provincial Communication Team has tested the system and everything is in place for a successful meeting.

An event which will resonate with many of our Brethren, particularly those with an association with the Royal Navy is Trafalgar Day on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> October. I am pleased to recognise this important date in the calendar of our nation's history and honour the memory of Vice Admiral Lord Nelson with his image at the top of the page. I am sorry that the traditional Trafalgar Day dinners will not be held this year, but would ask all Brethren to join in the toast "The Immortal Memory of Lord Nelson and those who fell with him".

Finally, I would once again extend to you all my thanks for the incredible stoicism you have displayed during the past nine months. I am persuaded that our Wiltshire Masonic family will emerge from these quite strange circumstances with renewed vigour and and a fresh appreciation for the joys of fraternal association so eloquently expressed in the words which preface this message.



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Standards must not slip.... (A message from John Smith - Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies)



It is good to see the efforts being made by Lodges to meet under the very difficult 'Rule Of Six' conditions, and I have been heartened to see pictures of many meetings in the Province. Wearing a face mask is not at all comfortable but they are a necessity to provide an element of protection and to assist in prevent the transmission of Covid-19, as such must always be worn when Brethren meet together in a Masonic Hall. Having looked at some of the photographs of meetings I am sure that under the masks there have been some smiling faces, I feel sure that despite the understandable apprehension, there would also have been a feeling of having 'left refreshment to return to Masonic duty.'

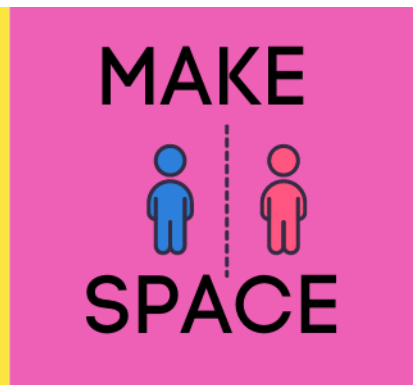
A number of Lodges have met only to conduct a business agenda but also to perform a ceremony. As you are aware the only ceremony not permitted is that of Raising (the Third Degree) and while that may prove unpopular to the Fellow Craft who has patiently waited in eager anticipation of taking his Third, I am sure everyone will appreciate the logic which prohibits that ceremony being performed.

I am pleased that my own Lodge, Gooch Lodge No.1295 has already conducted a Passing and this month will undertake another. I agree with the PrGM who on page 1 refers to the Brother being Passed to the degree of a Fellow Craft was delighted to have been a part of the history of the Lodge.

Just as it is important that we attend meetings, so to it is important that we bear in mind the requirement to observe the best traditions of Freemasonry, of which one is how we present ourselves at Masonic meetings, a subject covered by a decision of the Board of General Purposes dating back to 1950 and which has been confirmed on a number of occasions. In brief it is expected that *"dark suits, black shoes and ties, and white collars will be the general wear with Masonic clothing."* Of course there has been an update to this decision of 1950, and that is the wearing of the Craft or Provincial tie is acceptable in a Lodge.

The observance of this decision is a matter of courtesy and I know that Brethren would not wish to be anything other than courteous in their behaviour.

I have been made aware that some Lodges are having difficulty getting their head around the issue of the number of officers required to conduct a ceremony, and how best to cover what at first sight appears to be a problem of not having enough men available to do the job. Let me assure you that it is no problem whatsoever to Initiate, or Pass a Brother with five officers in the Lodge Room. If any Lodge Director of Ceremonies has a problem and wishes to contact me for further information, please feel free to do so, I am always available to advise on matters of Lodge ceremonial workings.





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## Another pandemic - this time in 1968

A few of our older Brethren will have been born in the years following the eventual end of the 1918 Spanish flu, of which I wrote in the early October edition of **In touch > On line**. However, I doubt they will have even childhood memories of that pandemic which killed somewhere over 260,000 in the United Kingdom. I suspect that this lack of memory is one of the reasons why it has been remarkably hard to get some people to take seriously the warnings about 'physical distancing' for example.

Did you know that fifty years after the first recorded incidences of the notorious Spanish Flu the UK experienced an epidemic of influenza which was given the name Hong Kong flu and which hit the UK in two waves in 1969 and 1970. Despite the flu being highly contagious, it had a relatively low mortality rate, and figures suggest that between 60,000 and 80,000 people died of Hong Kong flu

The effects of this international pandemic were sufficiently bad that, for a shortish period, normal life changed for the population. There was no email in those days, and the post (delivered by the Royal Mail) was delivered late or not at all. Milk, almost all of it delivered to the door in glass bottles (can you remember Co-op milk tokens?) just stopped arriving. Trains and buses ran to significantly reduced timetables: more often than not due to the fact drivers had contracted the flu. Doctors, and nurses also caught the flu, and for short time the fledgling NHS was overwhelmed. Thankfully the NHS coped extremely well and the crisis for the hospitals was for a relatively short time, only a small number of weeks and not many months.



Covid-19 is, of course, something entirely different. On the evidence so far it is far more potent in transmission than influenza, and particularly dangerous for older people and those with pre-existing ill health conditions. It also has very severe respiratory symptoms in a significant proportion of cases, and at a higher rate than flu, and as we enter what we refer to as the winter months, November through February the fear is that seasonal winter flu combined with a second phase of Covid-19 may overwhelm the NHS and place too much demand on our hospitals, although some experts suggest this need not be the case at all as winter pressures on the NHS have always existed, accident and emergency departments have constantly been stretched to near breaking point, and it is claimed we have never ever had enough doctors, nurses, and other clinical support staff, and yet somehow as a nation we have managed and the NHS remains 'free at the point of delivery, treatment is still provided on the basis of clinical need and not the ability to pay.' Whether it meets the third core principle that it 'meet the needs of everyone.' Is a matter for discussion on another occasion.

Epidemiologists, scientists, and clinicians are tracking what is happening within the UK. The science is way ahead of where it was in 2009 with swine flu, let alone in 1968. For over six months the NHS has been making preparation for a second wave of Covid-19 and ramping up its plans to cope with Covid-19 cases; this planning convinces me that the NHS will be so much better equipped to tackle these issues than they were in the past.

For Freemasons, not being able to meet is completely anathema to who and what we are; but we know that this hiatus will not be forever and we take comfort in some familiar words "Happy have we met, happy have we been, and happy may we meet again" To which we all say "same".

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## The rule of six works....

And here is the proof, with images from six of the meetings held recently. Well done to every Lodge that has been able to meet during the Covid-19 crisis. It's not been easy, and it's certainly required some clever thinking as meetings have had to be conducted under the rule of six, and be carried out in accordance with UGLE guidelines.

Masonic Hall committees have excelled themselves in preparing venues and making them Covid-19 secure. Individual members have prepared risk assessments, built safety features, and supervised specialist works, all for the safety and well being of the Brethren attending meetings.





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## Wiltshire Regalia open for business....

After 16 years of trading as Warminster Masonic Regalia, Chris and Debbie Robbins have decided to retire and spend their time doing other activities. Over the years they have supplied a great deal of regalia including Lodge Banners which are on display throughout England. The business was more a cottage industry/serious hobby and it needed new ideas and more technology including a web site and an online presence. It's clear that Twitter and Facebook are here to stay!

Chris and Debbie were pleased to find a keen Freemason in Paul Sharp to take over the business and continue to provide Masonic regalia to Brethren in Wiltshire and the surrounding Provinces. From his premises in Cricklade (just north of Swindon) where there is free car parking, a coffee shop and a great product range, Wiltshire Regalia is able to supply a comprehensive range of Masonic items at competitive prices via their online service with next day delivery.\*

You can contact Wiltshire Regalia by email at: [orders@wiltsregalia.co.uk](mailto:orders@wiltsregalia.co.uk) or phone 01793 840073

Wiltshire Freemasonry

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