

# PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE MARK MASTER MASONS OF SOMERSET



W. Bro. Ian G. P. Strickland PGJD RAMGR  
Provincial Grand Secretary

21<sup>st</sup> July 2020

Dear Sir and Brother,

You will be well aware of the expiration of the General Suspension of Masonic Activity on 17<sup>th</sup> July and the advice of several Degrees within the Province as to how an exit strategy should be implemented. You will now have received the further guidance issued by Mark Grand Lodge on the 17<sup>th</sup> July, explaining their position and the framework within which individual Lodges can best decide their own course of action for the remainder of 2020.

I am now writing to explain the policy that the Mark Province of Somerset will be adopting for the rest of 2020, subject to any further changes to Government and/or Grand Lodge advice.

Whilst the Province cannot dictate to individual Lodges what course of action they should take, it is hoped that the advice offered herewith will provide clear guidance as to best practice to be followed.

- a) There will be no Annual Provincial Meeting of the Mark or Royal Ark Mariner Degrees at the Webbington in September. This has now been abandoned and, in its place, a **Provincial Virtual Business Meeting (VBM) will be held on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> September at 10.00am**. Recipients of Mark Provincial Honours in May already hold their new rank, and recipients of Provincial Royal Ark Mariner Grand Rank in September will assume that rank on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2020. The Provincial VBM will provide an opportunity for the Provincial Grand Master to congratulate them and formally recognise their promotion, as well as clearing outstanding Provincial business and addressing the brethren of the Province. Details regarding accessing this meeting will be forthcoming for all brethren.
- b) All Active Provincial Officers will be offered re-appointment in May 2021. There will be no fee of honour for this.
- c) This will delay receipt of Provincial Office for new Past Masters by 12 months. The Province therefore recommends that all Lodge Offices are 'rolled over' for another year and existing Masters & Commanders serve another year in office where possible and are proclaimed as such at Installation Meetings.
- d) There will be no Provincial representation at any Lodge for any ceremony (including Installations) or Provincial Team Visits for the foreseeable future and the current Installation/Team/PGM Visits diary should be ignored. As the situation regarding the Covid 19 pandemic evolves, a new Provincial Diary for 2021/22 will be drafted and Lodge Secretaries/Scribes will of course be kept informed of this.
- e) **Where Masonic Halls/Meeting Places are closed**, Lodge Meetings should preferably be "abandoned" as per Grand Lodge instructions. A summons must nevertheless be prepared and the correct entry made in the Lodge minute book. As per rule 123 Constitutions and Regulations, meetings cannot just be cancelled.

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- f) Virtual Business meetings are recommended for dealing with administrative matters where possible. No ritual can take place and only administrative items are to be included.
- g) In the case of abandoned meetings not entailing Lodge business, a virtual social gathering of members is quite acceptable. There would be no Summons or Minutes required for the online invitation as this is not a Lodge Meeting. Nevertheless a Summons and an appropriate entry in the Minute Book regarding abandonment are still required as per note (e) above.
- h) The Province hosts a Zoom Account with access for 100 guests which is available for any Lodge to use if so required. (There is no restriction on numbers of guests for Provincial Zoom events).
- i) **Where Masonic Halls/Meeting Places are open**, the Province suggests small quorate meetings are held with minimum members attending (please remember that current guidance prohibits dining after Meetings). If insufficient members can or wish to attend to make the meeting viable it should be abandoned (and the guidance at Note (e) above followed).
- j) Although guidance will be forthcoming from Grand Lodge over “socially distanced” ceremonies, brethren must put safety first and give serious consideration as to whether the health of those attending and their families could be compromised by carrying out any ritual.
- k) The Province intends to hold monthly Zoom meetings with Secretaries and Scribes to discuss the ongoing situation and offer further advice as circumstances change. Further details will be forthcoming.

It must be stressed once again that the Province cannot dictate to Lodges what course of action they should take in the months ahead, provided of course that they comply with Grand Lodge instructions. However, there is no doubt that we all wish the safest exit from the ongoing pandemic. Let us not forget that our Freemasonry must always be enjoyed “*without detriment to ourselves or connections*”. The concern of the Province is, and always will be, the health of its members and their families.

With fraternal regards and best wishes,

*Ian Strickland*