

BERKSHIRE MASONIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE



THE OFFICE AND ROLE
OF
THE DIRECTOR OF CEREMONIES
AND
PRECEPTOR

THE DUTIES OF THE DC AT THE
FESTIVE BOARD

THE DUTIES OF THE DC AT THE FESTIVE BOARD

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses some of the main duties of the Director of Ceremonies at the Festive Board. The coverage is not intended to be comprehensive, because so much of the form at the Festive Board is dictated by Lodge custom rather than by strict rules. No one would wish to compromise such freedom of action, and therefore the following paper is intended to provide a framework which should be of particular value to the new or aspiring DC, while still providing some useful material to the more experienced DC. While some of what is said will be 'second nature' to some of you, it may be new to others, so please be patient if you think you have heard it all before. I should also stress that this paper does not attempt to 'lay down the law', nor is it claimed that any practice mentioned or suggested is 'right' and others 'wrong'.

From the very earliest times, the Festive Board has been a key part of Masonic meetings. The origins for this may lie with the operative masons from whom today's speculative Masonry is probably descended. The operative mason's working day lasted from dawn to dusk and included meal breaks. These breaks for refreshment were much appreciated, especially the one at the end of the day when the masons could relax together. Hence we find in early speculative masonry a continuing emphasis on the balance between work and refreshment. Those of you who have witnessed a demonstration of an early Masonic ritual here at Sindlesham will remember that the Brethren seemed to be for ever going from refreshment to work and back again because in the 18th century it was quite common for the Brethren, gathered round the Lodge-table, to indulge in drinking and smoking during the working of the Lodge. Today the proceedings are more structured and the Festive Board remains a very important part of our meetings.

In this paper the following topics will be covered:-

- * Some general points on conduct
- * Preparatory duties before dinner, such as seating and arranging speakers
- * Duties at the Festive Board, such as toasts, taking wine and speeches
- * The Installation Festive Board
- * The entertainment of Ladies and other non-Masonic guests

SOME GENERAL POINTS ON CONDUCT

The Festive Board, like the Lodge meeting itself, requires discipline and structure if it is to be successful. While Brethren are more relaxed at the Festive Board, it must be remembered that the general principles of behaviour in a Lodge remain in place, even though the Lodge has been called from labour to refreshment. As always, it is the DC who has principal charge of discipline, so he should see that acceptable standards are maintained at the Festive Board. The Festive Board should always be conducted by the DC. In some Lodges this function is carried out by the IPM and it is suggested that this practice should be changed, not only because it is the DC who has principal charge of procedure, but also because the IPM changes from year to year and the maintenance of standards becomes more difficult. IPMs can be of very different calibre from year to year, and are generally not readily attuned to the skills required to function as a DC. Further, at the Installation meeting the IPM will already have conducted a long ceremony. Festive Boards are usually relaxed and happy affairs, so the

DC's duties in this respect are unlikely to be onerous. Hopefully, the following points will serve as useful reminders to some of the more important matters of conduct.

When the DC asks the Brethren to take their places at table, usually done following a brief period of refreshment in the bar, ensure that the Brethren respond without undue delay. When the WM is received at the start of the Festive Board, discourage the Brethren from the 'slow handclap' as he is escorted to his chair. An enthusiastic welcome is far more appropriate. The DC announces the WM - "Please receive your Worshipful Master, (accompanying the R.W. PGM, Deputy PGM, Assistant PGM etc. if appropriate). The Candidate should not form part of the procession. Advise the WM previously that as soon as he arrives at his place to gavel.

Only the Worshipful Master handles his gavel - it is his symbol of office. The Senior Warden and Junior Warden must be alert to the gavel and respond accordingly. At the Festive Board the same Masonic disciplines apply as in Lodge. Hence the Brethren must cease conversation abruptly when the WM gavels and it is the DC's duty to ensure this happens. If any Brother ignores the gavel, a gentle reminder from the DC at the first sign of indiscipline will ensure that further breaches of this courtesy are avoided. The best way of achieving this is not to humble the offending Brother by reminding him aloud to respect the gavel, but to give him that 'corrective' look which should ensure proper attention in future. Only if this fails should you walk round to him at the next convenient opportunity and have a quiet word with him.

Masonic fire should be given after all Masonic toasts, including The Queen and the Craft", unless the room is not tyled. The fire is best led by the DC (or visiting DC on nights of Installation). Alternatively, the Brother proposing the toast can lead the fire. The recommended wording from the Province is "Good fire Brethren: point left right, point left right etc." This avoids any debate as to whether "taking the time from me" or "taking your time with me is correct", but Grand Lodge rules in favour of the former, in case you are interested! Cross-firing, which used to be widely practised, is strongly discouraged by Grand Lodge and must not be permitted. On Masonic fire, the PGM has expressed his concern and displeasure at the speed with which this is sometimes given in our Province. The DC, and ultimately the WM, should ensure that this is not accelerated to the extent that senior Brethren would have difficulty in matching it or which, in terms of simple decorum, is perhaps distasteful or disrespectful. Fire should be given with measure, poise and decorum. Let me demonstrate.

Try to discourage Brethren from walking around during dinner and try to ensure that the stewards go about their business in a quiet and unobtrusive manner. If the Stewards are new to their office, make sure they have been properly briefed as to their individual duties. Nor should the DC walk about during the Festive Board. The DC's function is to move between his seat and that of the Master only. He will have already discussed procedures and all that should be required is a prompt by a nod of the head in the direction of a proposer if other than the WM, and to the Tyler and Organist as appropriate. It is not acceptable to wander around the Lodge touching members on the shoulder and enquiring if they are enjoying the meal and so forth. That is not the task of the DC.

The DC should ensure that nothing occurs which may detract from the enjoyment of the occasion, such as risque stories, distasteful comments or unmasonic behaviour. And finally, the DC should try to ensure that the Festive Board is conducted efficiently and with a degree of momentum which will enable the Brethren to return home at a reasonable hour.

The Festive Board is there to be enjoyed and the occasion will be best remembered if it

combines the right balance of formality and informality. Each Lodge should prize its freedom to conduct its affairs in its own tradition, so the rules on general conduct will be developed by each Lodge individually to suit the general ambience it wants to foster. It is incumbent upon the DC to ensure that established standards and procedures are adhered to.

PREPARATORY DUTIES BEFORE THE FESTIVE BOARD

Before the meeting, the DC, in conjunction with the whoever is responsible for the seating plan if there is one, should see that suitable seating arrangements have been made for the principal guests. Grand Officers are usually seated to the right of the WM in order of seniority, or to the right of the Initiate if there is one. Holders of Provincial, District and London Grand Rank can also be seated on the right. To the WM's left should be seated the IPM, the Chaplain, the Treasurer, the Secretary, the DC and the Past Masters of the Lodge. These Brethren can sit among the Brethren if such is the Lodge custom, as of course can some of the aforementioned visitors if their host so wishes.

It is important that the DC ensures that all visitors are properly looked after, especially on Installation evenings. The DC should see that each visitor has someone specifically identified to see to his needs. In most cases this will be the host. In other cases it should be a Brother who has been assigned this responsibility before the evening's proceedings start. Visitors warm to such attention.

The DC should take responsibility for ensuring that those proposing toasts, as well as those responding, have been given as much warning as possible. It is best if such detail is settled at least a week before the meeting.

Prior to Festive Board, the DC and WM should agree the list of 'wine takings'. Also before the Festive Board, the DC should meet with the catering staff supervisor to advise him that there will be taking wine between courses, to agree when tables can be cleared and to agree when the room will be tyled for the speeches.

DUTIES AT THE FESTIVE BOARD

(a) TAKING WINE

The DC is responsible for the procedure for taking wine. He requests the WM to gavel, after which the 'wine taking' is announced by the DC, or by the visiting DC when the Lodge is subject to an official visit - a subject I shall touch on later.

Unless the taking of wine by the WM is kept to a minimum, it tends to limit conversation, which is an important part of the Festive Board and can become irritating. Unnecessary 'wine takings' and toasts should also be avoided in order to ensure that the proceedings finish promptly to allow the Brethren to return home at a reasonable time. A good general rule is to avoid "all the Brethren" taking wine with anyone who is subsequently to be the subject of a separate toast, for example the Initiate or the visitors. But an exception to this rule is to be made if a member of the "Chain Gang" is present, when wine should be taken with such an individual although he will be the subject of a subsequent toast.

Taking wine is best done between courses in one contiguous session and in such a way as to cause minimum inconvenience to the catering staff. In general do not interfere with the

normal serving of food. Keep your eyes on the catering staff at all times, to fit in with their schedule. It is better to have no wine taking than cold food!

The Province encourages the following list for taking wine by the Worshipful Master:-

- (a) With the PGM or his Representative, Deputy PGM, or with the Assistant PGMs. This will usually only done at Installation meetings.
- (b) With his Wardens.
- (c) With the Grand Officers.
- (d) With the Initiate (if appropriate, and by the WM alone).
- (e) With all the Brethren.

If the Lodge is a young one, the WM may also take wine with the Founders and with the Consecrating Officers should any be present, and with other exceptional attendees.

But do limit the number of 'wine takings' on any one evening to five if possible. At the very most allow eight, broken into two contiguous sessions of four.

(b) TOASTS

The custom of toasts at our Festive Boards is so old as to have become a social landmark of Freemasonry and, as such, the accepted forms should not be tampered with to any serious extent. There is an official Toast List which should be adhered to and the DC should ensure that the WM has a copy. It is the duty of the DC to announce the toast about to be proposed after the WM has been asked to gavel.

Toasts cannot start until Grace has been said at the end of the meal. If the National Anthem is to be sung at the Festive Board, this should precede any toast. No Masonic toasts should be proposed until the dining room has been cleared of catering staff and tyled by the Tyler. However, in order to keep the proceedings moving along, it is permissible to propose toasts up to, but not including, that to the R.W.Provincial Grand Master without the dining room being tyled. In such situations, Masonic Fire must be omitted. Preferably all toasts should be fired, but if the toast to "The Queen and the Craft" is not fired (except in the circumstances mentioned above), nor should any other toast be fired and it is then not necessary for the dining room to be tyled at all.

The WM will usually propose at least the toast to "The Queen and the Craft" and to "The M.W. Grand Master". Other toasts may be delegated according to Lodge custom, but if this is to be done, the Brother proposing the toast must be given adequate warning, as should the Brother who is to reply. The responder should also be asked to keep his reply short and to avoid unsuitable humour. Only one response should be given to the toast to the visitors.

The toast to "Absent Brethren", like any other, should not be given before Grace has been said, and should not precede the toast to "The Queen and the Craft" or to that of "The M.W.

Grand Master. Traditionally it is given as near to nine o'clock as possible and should be followed by Masonic fire. However, it is permissible to drink to "Absent Brethren" before Grace, in which case Masonic fire should not be given. If the toast is given at, say, 9:15, it is incorrect to say "somewhere around the world the hands are on the Square" in spite of the fact that such a remark is often heard. Time zones move by the hour, so everywhere in the world it will be a quarter past the hour and the hands will not be "on the Square".

The following toast list is suggested:-

1. The Queen and the Craft.
2. The M.W. Grand Master.
3. The M.W. Pro Grand Master, The R.W. Deputy Grand Master, The R.W. Assistant Grand Master and the rest of the Grand Officers, Present and Past.
4. The Provincial Grand Master.
5. The Deputy PGM, the Assistant PGMs, and the rest of the Provincial and District Grand Officers, Present and Past of this or any other Province or District and holders of London Grand Rank.
6. The Worshipful Master.
7. The Initiate (if any).
8. The Visiting Brethren.
9. The Tyler's Toast.

If time is short, it is perfectly acceptable to replace the toasts between that to the Queen and the Craft and that to the WM with a toast to "The Rulers in the Craft, supreme and subordinate". Such a toast may be given by the Junior Warden.

Other toasts, for example to the Founders of the Lodge, may be included in the list given above according to Lodge custom. Honorifics, decorations, etc. should be omitted when toasts are given. Smoking is now legally prohibited within the confines of any Masonic building.

The toast to the WM is normally given by the IPM, but need not necessarily be so. The toast to the Initiate need not be by his proposer. Indeed, if the proposer is a 'young' Mason, it is often better given by an experienced PM who can speak briefly yet authoritatively about Freemasonry. The Tyler's Toast is announced by two single knocks only.

It is not a bad idea to practice some of the 'standard' toasts, such as that by the Junior Warden to the Province, in the Lodge or Class of Instruction. This will build confidence and ensure that the toast is given correctly, a point upon which the next speaker will elaborate.

The Tyler is responsible for ensuring that the dining room is cleared of catering staff when the WM wishes to start the toasts and to see that the room remains tyled until the toasts have finished or until the WM decides to interrupt the toasts so that, for example, coffee can be served or the tables cleared. Under the instructions of the DC, the Tyler should liaise with the catering staff to ensure that they know when not to enter the dining room.

If there is a raffle, the drawing of the raffle prize is best left late in the proceedings, perhaps immediately before the toast to the visitors or the Tyler's Toast.

Finally, the DC should try to avoid the use of 'tired' or overworked phrases such as "the next toast is in the capable hands of Brother V. Brother X may not demonstrate such capability and this only causes embarrassment.

(c) SPEECHES

The DC should make sure that Brethren making a speech in response to a toast are briefed as to what is expected of them, both in terms of content and length. No more than three or four minutes is a good guideline for the length of a speech. Speech-making does not come naturally to a lot of people and it is best in these circumstances if the speech is kept simple,

short and consistent with the occasion. Those who do have an aptitude for after dinner speaking tend to get called on rather too often, with the result that their contribution can be less well appreciated than it should be. To avoid this, spread the task around as much as possible. If the above guidelines are adhered to, even the newest Mason can play his part.

Speeches should start with a brief, formal preamble. The Provincial Executive in Berkshire has suggested we use the following preamble: "Worshipful Master, Brother Wardens and Brethren all".

On occasions when the Lodge receives an official visit from the PGM (or his representative), the Deputy PGM or an Assistant PGM, the words "Provincial Grand Master, Representative of the Provincial Grand Master, Deputy Provincial Grand Master or Assistant Provincial Grand Master (as appropriate) should be added immediately after "Worshipful Master". In such cases, a reply should be called for by the Brother proposing the toast. Where a representative of the PGM is present, he will reply as an officer of Provincial Grand Lodge.

THE INSTALLATION FESTIVE BOARD

This topic will be covered in some depth in the following paper on the Installation meeting, so for completeness only some key points are mentioned here.

The Festive Board following the Installation of the new WM is a very special occasion for the Lodge. In the Province of Berkshire it is customary for the Lodge to receive an official visit on Installation nights and special arrangements apply to the Festive Board.

For example, it is strongly recommended that the Lodge DC asks the visiting DC to take charge of the Festive Board in accordance with the following request which was issued by the Provincial Grand Master in 1982: I would like our Lodges to give every consideration to asking the Provincial GDC (or his Deputy) to take charge of the Festive Board until the completion of the Toast to the PGM or Deputy PGM, Assistant PGMs, Provincial and District Grand Officers etc. or until such time as we retire from the table (as the case may be)".

Having said that, the overall success of the evening is the Lodge DC's responsibility. He should ensure that the official visitors are properly welcomed and attended to during their visit. It is particularly important that the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies or the Deputy Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies is fully briefed on the arrangements for the Festive Board well before dinner commences. If the visiting DC is to introduce the 'wine takings' and the toasts, make sure that the list of 'wine takings' has been discussed with him and that he knows the names of the proposer and responder of the toasts to be made. But as I said at the start, you will hear more on this topic in the next paper.

THE ENTERTAINMENT OF LADIES AND NON-MASONIC GUESTS

It is increasingly common for Lodges to entertain wives and other non-Masonic guests to dinner. It is worth reminding you that the Board of General Purposes of Grand Lodge does not wish to discourage this practice, but hopes it will remain the exception rather than the rule, and will be confined to perhaps a single meeting in each year.

The DC should be aware that if non-Masons are present, the health of certain individuals in their Masonic capacity may be drunk. The number of such toasts should be kept to a

minimum so that non-Masons are not overwhelmed or confused. It should rarely be necessary for the list to be longer than "The Queen and the Craft", "The M.W. Grand Master", "The Provincial Grand Master", "The Worshipful Master" and "The Guests".

Masonic fire and the Tyler's toast should not be given on such occasions, particularly as the latter might be seen to be divisive by its exclusion of non-Masons from its scope. Nor should references to matters of Masonic ritual be included in any of the speeches.

Many Lodges have benefited from inviting Ladies and non-Masonic guests to one of their Festive Boards after a meeting, and if this is not currently a practice in your Lodge, it is worth considering. But beware, opposition to such an initiative can be extremely strong, and must be considered very carefully.

SUMMARY

The Director of Ceremonies plays a key role at the Festive Board. His duties start before the Festive Board commences and continue to its conclusion. On his efforts will depend the success of the evening.

The Festive Board is an ancient part of Masonic proceedings. It should balance formality and informality so that a pleasant and relaxed evening is enjoyed by all. Observing the simple guidelines given in the talk should ensure that the Festive Board runs smoothly and efficiently. It must always be borne in mind that Brethren should be returned to their families as early as possible. If wine takings and speeches are kept brief and to the minimum required to do justice to the occasion, this objective will be met without detracting in any way from the enjoyment of the evening. On Installation night, when the Lodge will be honoured with an official visit from the Provincial Executive, special attention must be paid to accommodating the official party and to ensuring that they have every opportunity to meet the Brethren and feel 'at home' in the Lodge.

For the aspiring or new DC there is much to learn on matters of procedure concerning the Festive Board. For the experienced DC, the procedure is fairly straightforward. A proper discharge of the duties concerning the Festive Board will not only ensure that a memorable evening is enjoyed by all, but also that the DC will derive much personal satisfaction from the contribution he has made.

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