

The Toast to the visitors

WM and Brethren

Most Lodges meet only four or five times a year and most of us enjoy our Masonry too much for that to suffice. So we go visiting and what a pleasure it is!

It is always interesting to witness other Workings – Emulation, West End, Carvers and so on. If you are very lucky you may one day even get to see Bristol Working. The differences between workings can lead us to speculate and to learn. For example, Emulation Lodges say “*hail and conceal*” while we say “*hele and conceal*”. We might speculate on this difference. It turns out to be a matter of English pronunciation in the 18th century. Let me give you a clue. To be consistent, Emulation Lodges ought to say, “*Hail and consail*.” We might then be led to ask what “hele” means. I will leave you to discover that.

In some Lodges the JD changes the tracing boards. Some Lodges use both Deacons. Why? Deacons did not exist until the middle of the 18th century and tracing boards seem to have been introduced towards the end of the 18th century. What happened before – and how?

Occasionally we bring ideas back. W. Bro. Len West first witnessed the *Walking Charge* at the Albert Lucking Lodge, No 2717. A version now appears in our ritual book. The way our Deacons handle their wands seems to me to have changed since I was initiated. I do not recall, in those far off days, that Deacons ever changed the wand from right to left hand to salute. Brethren visiting other Lodges saw how much tidier it is to do this and changed our ways.

Perhaps most of all, we compare the standard of the ritual in other Lodges with our own. Sometimes the ritual is very good indeed and makes us stop and think that perhaps we had better try that little bit harder. Without anything to compare ourselves with it would be easy for standards to slip - almost unnoticed.

So there are many good reasons to visit – and every Brother should do so. Visiting is an important part of Masonry. We receive many invitations for our Lodge to be represented at other Lodge’s meetings. If possible, the WM and the Secretary will visit. However, it is more and more accepted for other Brethren to represent the Lodge and we will be asking you if you will so act on occasion.

Of course, if a Lodge invites us to its installation, we do have to send Past Masters. After all, it is bit dull for a visitor to get thrown out during the inner working but why not Master Masons on other occasions? Indeed, there is a good deal of social cachet in being a Warden and to announce that our Lodge is being represented by the WM and the Junior or Senior Warden would be rather good. I do not see why a Fellow

Craft cannot represent us if the other Lodge is doing a first or a second. So perhaps Bro. Graham would like to participate.

Let us turn to inviting visitors to our Lodge. Naturally, we invite visitors to our Lodge for many of the same reasons - to compare and contrast. It is a delight to have Bro. Kevin Hall with us today. His masonry is rather different from ours and I hope that Brethren have been able to chat with him about how things are done in the Grand Lodge of the District of Carolina.

We also like to have visitors because it shows that other Lodges want to be represented here – that they see us as a worthwhile Lodge. We are delighted to see W. Bro. Brian Dilloway and W. Bro. Peter Allan here this evening – secretaries of Lodges in the Ingrebourne family and good friends of this Lodge. We are also delighted to see W. Bro. Keith Bleasdale and W. Bro. John Stonely, Grand Officers who take an interest in us – and almost always make a useful comment or two.

However, just as importantly, visitors act as an audience; someone to show our steps to. While dress rehearsals do matter, it is the opening night which is the real thing. We need visitors to keep us sharp. It is good to see W. Bro. Michael O'Connor from the Province of East Kent with us today because it is good to have a keen new eye appraising us just as it is also good to welcome old friends who visit often – W. Bro. Clem Britton and W. Bro. Eric Stuckey.

Our visitors become our guests at the Festive Board. It is good to entertain them, to make them feel welcome, to buy them a drink and to give them a good meal and some entertainment. It is a way of cementing the bonds of Brotherhood; of creating that one Fraternity that we uniquely are. I hope their voices are in good order for the carols later.

We thank our guests for visiting us. They have got all togged up and turned out on to be with us - not just anyone but us - to be our audience. And that is another reason for visiting - because it gives our fellow Masons pleasure. They too want an audience and they too want the opportunity to entertain their guests. So an excellent reason to visit is to make other Brethren happy – not much wrong with that.

It really does matter that the Lodge has visitors and every Brother should seek to bring visitors to our meetings - and now let us drink a toast to them. We thank them for being here. We are enjoying their company and we look forward to seeing them again – in our Lodge or theirs. Brethren of St Laurence, please rise. The toast is the visitors.

I claim a response from W. Bro. Eric Stuckey of the Incorporated Society of Musicians Lodge, No 2881.