

# A VIEW FROM THE EAST



## A Past Master's Musings on Freemasonry in South Australia and the Northern Territory



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## Preface

Originally published as a blog called “A View From The East”, this volume is a series of essays on a wide variety of Masonic governance issues both at the Lodge and at the Grand Lodge level, and their interaction. The fundamental premise is that the Landmarks of the Order are inviolate, but as society in general and technology in particular evolve, the governance of the Order must adapt in order to protect those Landmarks and also to maintain the viability of the Order.

These essays were, in general, published in no particular order, although some did refer back to previous essays or foreshadow future ones. A number, such as “Reimbursements and Honorariums” stood completely alone. Initially, my longer-term plan was to use these essays as the basis of a formulation of a radical new Strategic Plan for the Order.

The early essays are more abstract and often argued through hypothetical situations. Nonetheless, these have been informed by my own experiences in the Craft, and also through my wide experience in the governance of associations.

The Regulations of the Grand Lodge of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of S.A. and the N.T. Inc. specify that the Grand Master is elected annually. The Grand Master appoints the Grand Lodge Officers, with some minor limitations and requirements for consultation or approval. However, whilst not in conflict with the Regulations, there was a “Traditional Arrangement” that a Grand Master is elected and then twice re-elected and furthermore that he is then succeeded by his self-appointed Deputy Grand Master.

In October 2017 this Traditional Arrangement was broken by there being a contested election for Grand Master, and in fact a candidate other than the incumbent Deputy Grand Master won. This Grand Master elect was installed in April 2018, in accordance with the Regulations.

As the 2018 Grand Installation approached, there were ever increasing levels of activity within the Grand Lodge, related to the reasons for there being a contested election and the fall-out of the election result. My essays tended to become more specific reactions to those unfolding events.

I came to realize that hardly anyone cared for my radical new thoughts about Masonic governance; I doubt many even read them. I furthermore came to realize that the new regime about to be installed was even less concordant with my ideas than the outgoing one. As I have a debilitating and degenerative nerve disease, I did not have the energy to tilt at any more windmills, and so I abruptly ended my project.

I have combined the essays that were published at the time I abandoned the project into this single volume. (The original blog no longer exists.) I had ideas for many further essays, but these became seeds that never had a chance to germinate. This volume is thus just a record of the work completed at the time of abandonment of the project, and is acknowledged to be considerably incomplete.

I give to you my unfinished symphony ...

*W. Bro. Alan J. Branford      April 2020*



# #1 – A Healthy and Viable Lodge

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If I were to be admitted as a visitor to a healthy and viable Lodge, what would I expect to see?

I would see a handful of Entered Apprentices in the North-East and likewise of Fellowcrafts in the South-East. The ceremonial chairs would all be occupied by Master Masons, the Treasurer and Secretary chairs would be occupied by experienced Master Masons or Past Masters, as would the chairs of Chaplain, Lodge Care Officer, Director of Ceremonies and Organist. Of course, the Master and his predecessor would be sitting in the East, with a distinguished group of Past Masters behind them. Around the Lodge Room there would be Master Masons enough to bring the total Lodge Brethren present to, say, between thirty and forty. There would be a wide diversity of ages, presumably but not necessarily the youngest in the body of the Lodge through to the eldest in the East.

Now let us follow the journey of a man from prospective candidate through initiation, passing and raising, through Offices and ultimately to a seat in the East.

This prospective candidate may be someone known by a member and have been invited to consider joining the Lodge, or perhaps he approached Grand Lodge through their website or an information evening and been recommended to the Lodge. Irrespective of how the first contact was made, the prospective candidate would have attended some Festive Boards and possibly even a social event of the Lodge. Because of the diversity of ages in this healthy and viable Lodge, he would have felt comfortable to see brethren of his own age group. He would have engaged in discussions with some of the brethren, perhaps even informally over coffee or a meal. In such a way, he would have had the opportunity to assess whether this was the right sort of Lodge for him.

Conversely, the Lodge's Committee of Inquiry would have met with the prospective candidate, possibly on several occasions, and have eventually reached the conclusion that this was a suitable man to be recommended to the Lodge. Being a viable Lodge, there would have been no unseemly haste to sign the man up. An unviable Lodge may have been tempted to press a pen into the hand of any man who could "fog a piece of glass" as it were, and thereby risked bringing a man into the Lodge for whom this Lodge was not suitable, or worse risked initiating a man unsuitable to be made a Freemason. Also, undue pressure on a prospective candidate may well scare off someone who would otherwise have made a valuable brother in the Lodge.

Having been initiated as an Entered Apprentice, the new brother would be mentored by the more experienced brethren of the Lodge, until such time as he had such progress as to be ready to be passed to the Second Degree. It is for the Master to determine when the Entered Apprentice has made such progress, and the length of time since the brother's initiation will vary from brother to brother. Crucially, the passing ceremony should only be contemplated when the Entered Apprentice has made sufficient progress, and not because it suits the Lodge to hold a Second Degree ceremony in some particular month!

Now as a Fellowcraft, the brother continues his progress in the Craft, availing himself, if he desires, of his right to offer his sentiments and opinions on such subjects as are regularly

introduced for discussion in the Lodge. Similarly to before, when he has made such further progress as entitles him to be raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason, and only then, he is raised to the Third Degree and takes his place as a Master Mason on the floor of the Lodge.

As a Master Mason, the brother is a fully functioning member of the Lodge. He may now assist in the mentoring of Entered Apprentices, and he should be invited from time to time to deliver portions of ritual. It is important that the Lodge bears in mind that all people are blessed with their own unique talents, and so, while it is appropriate to invite the brother to deliver ritual, and even encourage him to do so, care must be taken not to hector him into doing so. Not everyone wishes to deliver ritual, and it is inappropriate to force the brother into doing so, or make him feel inadequate if he does not. It is perfectly acceptable for a brother to be content to sit in the Lodge room and develop his own character in his own way through witnessing the Masonic mysteries.

The Master Mason should not be rushed into taking Office. A healthy Lodge would allow and expect the Master Mason to grow and mature into his new status for at least a few years before encouraging him to nominate for Office. There will occasionally be exceptions, but that would depend on the unique circumstances of the brother, and not the convenience of the Lodge. An unviable Lodge may mistakenly feel the need to hector a brother into taking Office because there are no other eligible candidates. This may give rise to a situation of someone taking Office before he is ready, or taking an Office inappropriate to him, or, worse, may frighten the brother away from the Lodge. Any of these outcomes would be unfair to the brother and detrimental to the Lodge.

A healthy and viable Lodge would regularly rotate the non-ceremonial chairs. The Grand Lodge Regulations put a two-term limit on the Master for good reasons. It is tempting for a willing brother to become “rusted on” to an office such as Secretary. This may be convenient in a narrow-minded sense, but ultimately it is to the detriment of both the Lodge and to the brother. Term limits of say four years for all officer chairs, other than for the Master, because of the Grand Lodge Regulation, and perhaps the Chaplain and the Organist, because of the specialized nature of their positions, would ultimately make for a healthier Lodge.

So, is your Lodge healthy and viable?

If the answer is “no”, as it alas will be for many Lodges, then the Lodge needs to take action.

What is required is a carefully thought out strategic plan, with timelines for the success of the key objectives.

The failure to achieve the key objectives of the strategic plan, or the failure to engage in a strategic plan in the first place, will leave the Lodge struggling along in the hope of a miracle. If faced with that situation, then a stark decision must be made.

Does the Lodge seek to amalgamate with another lodge?

Does the Lodge surrender its Warrant with dignity?

Does the Lodge continue to decay to extinction or erasure?



## #2 – The Beautiful Lodge Room is Empty

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Even though I know some of the older brethren of this lodge, tonight is the first time I have visited. But, since I was recently installed as Worshipful Master of my own lodge, I thought that on this, their Installation Evening, it was timely for me to visit.

I am presented to the outgoing Master by the Director of Ceremonies, and I take a seat in the East. It is good to see such a full lodge room. I am anticipating an uplifting evening.

The ceremony proceeds in a very polished manner. I note, however, that this might well be due to the fact that the outgoing Worshipful Master is also the incoming Worshipful Master! Indeed, both the Wardens are also Worshipful Brethren, and this team of three seem to just keep rotating the senior offices. I suspect that by now they know the Installation Ceremony better than the Grand Lodge Installation Team!

I am heartened to see a Master Mason being invested as Inner Guard, but I am alarmed to see that he is the *only* officer being invested: all the other officers of the lodge are continuing on in their present office. I furtively consult the lodge's Installation pamphlet and I am further alarmed to see that the Senior Warden is also the *Acting* Lodge Care Officer and the Treasurer is the *Acting* Secretary, a convenient but here alas necessary device to circumvent Grand Lodge Regulation 40.3 that prohibits "any Brother (to) hold more than one regular office in the Lodge at one and the same time".

My earlier anticipation of an uplifting evening is starting to wane.

The Grand Lodge Installation Team has now left the Lodge Room, and at the third time of asking the Senior Warden calls up the members of the lodge in order to convey to the Worshipful Master the greetings and congratulations of his brethren.

My heart sinks as a mere handful of men stand.

Yes, the Lodge Room is impressively full: full mainly of visitors! The number of brethren in the actual lodge turns out to be embarrassingly small.

I participate only half-heartedly in the toasts at the Festive Board and munch a few luke-warm cocktail pies and pasties. I depart with a pervading sense of disappointment.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am somewhat nervous as the time for the tiling of the lodge approaches. This is the first meeting since the Installation and my investiture as Inner Guard, my first office in Freemasonry. I have been practising my ceremonial ritual all month; it is almost time to put it to the test.

The Worshipful Master, Past Masters and Officers of the lodge have all assembled in the ante-room, the Director of Ceremonies having successfully herded them into place. The Deacons are in position, and the Director of Ceremonies gives me the nod. I announce with a firm voice, "Brethren you will be upstanding to receive the Worshipful Master, Past Masters and Officers of the Lodge".

And then I realize that, apart from an ancient, wizened organist hunched over his instrument, the Lodge Room is completely empty.

\* \* \* \* \*

I reflect on my recent visit as Worshipful Master of my lodge to the Installation of another lodge. I am still somewhat stunned at the paucity of members of that lodge who were present at the Installation. Perhaps this was some strange aberration and that a number of the lodge's brethren were absent. I decide to visit that lodge again, this time for their first regular meeting since the Installation.

I observe the young Master Mason who was invested as Inner Guard. He seems nervous, and I am curious to see how well he performs. But, the Worshipful Master collars me in the ante-room and pleads for me to act as Tyler for the evening. Even though I know the Worshipful Master, asking a Visiting Master to act as Tyler is bizarre.

"There is no-one else!", he exclaims.

I ask the Worshipful Master what he would have done had I not been visiting that evening. He sheepishly confesses that he would have employed a "Virtual Tyler": he would have instructed his new Inner Guard to give his own knocks loudly, and then repeat the knocks softly and surreptitiously with his other hand, as if the knocks were being returned by a Tyler without.

What a welcome to Office in Freemasonry that would be for this new Inner Guard.

Reluctantly and bemusedly, I agree to act as their Tyler.

\* \* \* \* \*

A further eleven months pass, and out of perverse curiosity I again visit the lodge, for its next Installation.

As I take me seat in the East, I again notice that the lodge room is quite full, but I am alert this time to the fact that most of them are visitors.

I look for the young Inner Guard whom I saved from having to be Inner Guard and "Virtual Tyler" at his very first regular meeting.

I cannot see him anywhere.

\* \* \* \* \*

The above is of course a fable, a tale. However, I have experienced, on far too many occasions, all of the elements of that story. If you are honest, so have you.

During the middle of the last century, participation in Freemasonry expanded exponentially. Lodge rooms were full, and lodges spawned Lewis lodges and many more besides.

But, from about 1970, numbers started to decline ... rapidly.

However, the Grand Lodge of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory has no coherent strategy for dealing with contraction. With numbers today only a small fraction of what they were, there are simply too many lodges.

The Grand Lodge Regulations provide four pathways for a lodge to close: amalgamation with another lodge or lodges; surrender of the Warrant; extinction; erasure. Now, certainly, there have been many lodges close in the past fifty years. But, clearly, nowhere near enough lodges have closed, else we would not see so commonly the elements of the opening fable at play.

Amalgamations can work very successfully, but the process is often drawn out and fraught with tensions.

A formal Surrender of the Warrant is a dignified way of closing a lodge, and there are a number of lodges who have concluded that this course of action is the most appropriate for them.

Extinction or erasure is an ignominious way for a Lodge to close.

There is a natural and understandable tendency for loyal members of a lodge to work hard to pull their lodge back from the brink, to try to make them healthy and viable once more, to avoid the necessity to amalgamate, surrender, go extinct or be erased.

And so it is that we find that there are many Freemasons investing inordinate amounts of time and effort into trying to boost their lodge's numbers.

Were they to succeed, then these men would justly feel proud that their efforts were rewarded.

However, in the vast majority of cases, these many good men are deluding themselves: the lodge has gone beyond the tipping point and, after sapping the energy and resources of these many good Freemasons, the lodge will eventually close anyway.

In a large organization such as ours, there is an inevitable ebb and flow of numbers over the years, the decades.

The Grand Lodge of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory needs a comprehensive strategy for rationalizing the number of lodges.



### #3 – Beyond the Tipping Point

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The term “tipping point” often appears in our media these days, typically in articles related to economic matters or to climate science.

But what is a “tipping point”?

Imagine that you are in front of a free-standing wardrobe in a bedroom. Open the doors of the wardrobe and (standing, if necessary, in a manner consistent with occupational health and welfare standards, on a rickety chair) grab the top of the wardrobe and pull it slightly towards you. Now release the wardrobe. It should fall back into the position that it previously occupied. A shower of dust should be the only unpleasant result of this exercise.

Now repeat the procedure, but on this occasion pull the top of the wardrobe much further out. Again release the wardrobe. This time, the wardrobe falls forward uncontrollably and the wardrobe and you (and perhaps also the smashed remains of a rickety chair) collapse in an ugly pile on the bedroom floor.

You have pulled the wardrobe past its “*tipping point*”!

In the “system” that I have just described, the terminology is clearly apt.

Complex systems of interacting parts, such as economic markets and climate, can display analogous behaviour, and the term “tipping point” has been appropriated to describe such phenomena. Just think of the Global Financial Crisis or the predicted consequences of global warming.

These complex systems of interacting parts display an equilibrium over the time scales of relevance. Disrupt them with a small external interference, then after a bit of a wobble they return to their equilibrium and the dust dies down. But, provide a sufficiently large external perturbation to the system, and the parts of the system whirl uncontrollably into a chaotic and perhaps catastrophic response.

The system has been pushed beyond the “tipping point”.

\* \* \* \* \*

So, what’s all this got to do with Freemasonry?

A lodge may be viewed as a “complex system of interacting parts”, the parts being the individual Freemasons. Interaction need not just be considered as one on one interaction between members. In fact, more relevantly here, interaction is via what could be called the ‘mood’ of the Lodge.

*#1 – “A Healthy and Viable Lodge”*, by its very definition, is still in a state of equilibrium. The normal ebb and flow of numbers in Freemasonry will impact the lodge, but it will not push it past its tipping point.

I contended in my last post, *#2 – “The Beautiful Lodge Room is Empty”*, that “the Grand Lodge of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory

has no coherent strategy for dealing with contraction. With numbers today only a small fraction of what they were, there are simply too many lodges.”

I told a story in that last post of a hypothetical lodge. It was hypothetical in its detail, but I made the following observation. “... , I have experienced, on far too many occasions, all of the elements of that story. If you are honest, so have you.” The type of lodge that I described in that story is a lodge that has gone beyond the tipping point.

By what reasoning do I make that claim?

One obvious problem is that of appeal. There may be one or two members of the lodge younger than sixty, but in all likelihood the median age would be nearer eighty! A potential Freemason looking for a lodge is unlikely to conclude that this lodge would be a good match for him. So, attracting new candidates, or even joining members, would be nigh impossible, unless the man had some connection with an existing member of this hypothetical lodge.

Let us suppose that the lodge made a concerted drive to attract new members, say by having members convince their sons and grandsons to join the Craft in general and their lodge in particular. (It seems often to be the case that elderly Freemasons bemoaning the decline in numbers in Freemasonry have sons and grandsons whom they have never managed to attract to the Craft!)

A candidate for Freemasonry who is initiated as an Entered Apprentice should take between one to two years to be raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason. The exact time will depend in part on the mason’s aptitude and in part on the lodge’s schedule. But the mason should not be rushed through the degrees: recall that the Ritual demands that before a candidate may proceed to a higher degree he must first prove his proficiency in his present degree!

The newly raised Master Mason should spend between two to three years before even contemplating taking Office. During that time, he would grow in his understanding of the Masonic mysteries, as well as become familiar with the structure, operation and management of a lodge. He would be given the opportunity to deliver Ritual, with such opportunities structured by the Director of Ceremonies to allow the Master Mason to grow in confidence in the delivery of Ritual.

If after these few years, the Master Mason feels inclined to take Office and proceed through the Chairs (and not every Master Mason will), then he would take in turn the Offices of Inner Guard, Junior Deacon, Senior Deacon, Junior Warden and Senior Warden until finally being installed as the Worshipful Master.

The time between initiation as an Entered Apprentice and installation as the Worshipful Master is thus, except in extenuating cases, between eight and ten years!

So, let us assume that our hypothetical lodge is successful in its recruitment drive for new Freemasons in the lodge from amongst the issue of its older members. There will still be a lag of eight to ten years during which the lodge will need to survive, and of course to retain these new recruits.

One solution would be to attract a body of existing, middle-aged Freemasons to become joining members and to take Office immediately, in order that the lodge could bridge this lag time.

So, the lodge's future relies on a substantial and sustained influx of new initiates and the attraction of an accommodating group of joining members ... now!

Really?

I don't think so!

This lodge had declined beyond the tipping point.

So, I repeat my assertion that there are simply far too many lodges in this jurisdiction that have declined beyond the tipping point.

You may say, "What does it matter if such lodges continue to operate for as long as they can?" In my next post, I shall argue that, in doing so, these lodges cause real harm to Freemasonry in this jurisdiction and to many individual Freemasons.

Lodges of this kind should have the honesty to recognize that they are beyond the tipping point. They should concede this now and surrender their Warrant with dignity, dispersing their members to viable lodges in order to further strengthen these other lodges against external threats.

A lodge that is beyond the tipping point, but continues to operate, *will cause harm while it does so*, and it will eventually die out anyway ... *literally!*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Epilogue

My doctoral dissertation (*Self-Excited Random Processes* (1983), Faculty of Mathematics, University of Cambridge, England) investigated stochastic models of complex systems of interacting parts. In these systems, the interaction occurred by individual members of the system influencing global variables which then indirectly affected stochastically the behaviour of other individuals.

The focus of the dissertation was specifically on whether such systems, under certain conditions, could exhibit *paroxysmal behaviour*, the term used at that time for what is now termed as behaviour beyond a tipping point. The conclusion was that such systems could be induced into paroxysmal behaviour.

An application to the study of migration patterns was published as,

Branford, A.J. (1985), "A self-excited migration process", *Journal of Applied Probability* **22**, 58–67.





## #4 – Drowning Not Waving

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In my previous post, I argued that far too many lodges in this jurisdiction have declined #3 – “Beyond the Tipping Point”.

I further contended that it did matter if such lodges continued to operate for as long as they could, as, in doing so, these lodges cause real harm to Freemasonry in this jurisdiction and to many individual Freemasons.

I shall now put forward my argument for this contention. I shall do so by presenting a series of anecdotes, examples of actual events that I have witnessed. I shall not name individual lodges or individual Freemasons, as it is not my intention here to point an accusing finger.

I have entitled this post “Drowning, Not Waving”. It often happens that, when a man is on the point of drowning, he is in such a state of panic that he just flails about in vain. Lodges that are beyond the tipping point are apt to do the same!

Rather than point an accusing finger at any particular lodges or particular Freemasons, these anecdotes are intended to serve as cautionary tales: actions taken may be made with good intentions, but may result instead in actual harm.

\* \* \* \* \*

Around the time that I joined a particular lodge, it happened that they were conducting an Initiation. I attended the Initiation itself, but I had not been present when the candidate was formally proposed nor when the ballot was taken. Based simply on social interactions at the Festive Board afterwards, I assumed that the newly created Freemason was known to two particular younger members of the lodge, and so I furthermore assumed that they had been his proposers.

The reality turned out to be rather different.

No-one in the lodge really knew the new member. I never did work out who his proposers were nor on what basis the proposition was made. It became patently clear though that the Committee of Inquiry had not actually made adequate inquiry!

The new member had sought to join Freemasonry as he had an interest in esoteric mysteries. It seems that he had imagined that within a short time after initiation he would be practising arcane arts and ceremonies. When he discovered the reality that a long, measured journey in Freemasonry awaited him, he simply lost all interest.

The next twist in the story was that the lodge had not been cautious to ensure that he had paid his initial dues before the Initiation ceremony. Afterwards, telephone calls were not returned; letters went unanswered; registered mail failed to elicit a response.

In the end, the lodge had no option but to pay his first quarter Grand Lodge dues and his Grand Lodge Initiation Fee from their own coffers and have the member formally excluded.

The lodge, in its well-meaning alacrity to secure a new member of the Fraternity, had rushed or ignored the established precautions.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was Senior Warden in a lodge whose program was largely determined on a month-by-month basis by the Master and the Director of Ceremonies. I did not know what was planned for the next meeting. One of the Fellowcrafts was ready to be raised. So, when I was informed that we would be doing a third-degree working at the next meeting, I was not at all surprised.

But I was aghast to learn that we were to do a double-raising at the following meeting!

I did not believe that the other Fellowcraft to be raised was anywhere near ready. So, to conduct a raising for him at this point seemed unjustified, and for this to be done as a double-raising was beyond understanding.

And then the penny dropped.

The meeting after the next was the Installation. By conducting a double-raising at the next meeting, there would be two newly minted Master Masons ready to be invested into Office!

This “cunning” plan clearly ignored the wellbeing of the two young Freemasons, for the benefit of the lodge. As I first articulated in my post #1 – “A Healthy and Viable Lodge”, a Master Mason should be permitted two to three years to grow in his understanding of the Masonic mysteries, to become familiar with the structure, operation and management of a lodge and to be given the opportunity to deliver Ritual in a structured plan of learning.

None of this was to be accorded to these two young men.

Indeed, for one of the men, his raising from the second to the third degree itself was being “expedited”.

As a postscript, I note that the Freemason whom I believed to be ready to be raised seems to be progressing well in his Freemasonry, despite being rushed into Office. The other young man seems to have disappeared.

\* \* \* \* \*

At another time and in another lodge, the Installation was approaching. I was to be invested as Senior Warden. I was a little confused to be informed that no-one was to be invested as Inner Guard, but that the Office would be filled as a casual vacancy in a few months.

And then the penny dropped.

A Fellowcraft was due to be raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason in a few months. He was also about to be “casually dropped” into the vacant Office of Inner Guard!

\* \* \* \* \*

Nowadays, at Festive Boards following a Raising, I often seem to hear speeches in which the newly raised brother is encouraged, even exhorted, to swiftly take Office. An attitude that lends justification to the “cunning plans” of the last two anecdotes seems to be displacing the traditional attitude of progressive Masonic learning.

I believe this to be a travesty to be condemned!

\* \* \* \* \*

Those readers who are familiar with my own Masonic biography may be inclined at this point to call me hypocritical. When I was installed as a Worshipful Master, I was given a dispensation in respect of Regulation 40.2. Regulation 40.2 reads,

*“No Brother, without a dispensation from the Grand Master, will be eligible for election as Master unless, at the proposed time of Installation, he shall have been a Master Mason for a period of five years or longer.”*

I was installed as a Worshipful Master in an accelerated time span.

Surely this is not different in principle from the accelerated progress into Office of the young Freemasons in my two earlier anecdotes. I concede that this is a justifiable criticism.

I shall devote a later post to this part of my Masonic career.

\* \* \* \* \*

The anecdotes above are all related to unseemly haste in recruiting new members and to progressing them through their Masonic journey. This does a disservice to the young men directly, and thus indirectly to Freemasonry.

Another problem with lodges that are struggling in their membership is the tendency to “recycle” older brethren repeatedly through Offices. In some cases, a brother, for whom the time has come for him to be permitted to just sit back and enjoy his Freemasonry, again, out of a spirit of duty, allows himself to be talked into taking Office. It is out of this disrespect by lodges for their senior brethren that I have witnessed ...

- a Chaplain who was inclined to launch forth in a loud voice with a psalm or other such offering when the lodge was in the middle of something that required no such input from the Chaplain;
- an Organist who would play pieces of music at random times during the meeting, but alas rarely the right tune at the right time; and,
- a Tyler who opened the door to the lodge part way through a degree working, entered the lodge room wearing a Fellowcraft apron, despite earlier having been wearing his Past Master’s apron, and sat down!

These incidents are not funny; they are sad, and the lodges who permitted them to happen should be ashamed.

\* \* \* \* \*

The anecdotes presented in this post show the harm that is done to Freemasonry and to individual brethren when lodges that are doomed forget their principles in a desperate but futile struggle for survival.



## #5 – The Alchemy of Amalgamation

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A lodge, like any organization, should have a strategic plan and should regularly review its status against its strategic plan. Muddling along from month to month is a recipe for disaster.

In particular, a constant, critical appraisal of the lodge's situation can provide early warning of a decline in viability (#1 – "A Healthy and Viable Lodge") that, left unchecked, could lead to the lodge dropping #3 – "Beyond the Tipping Point". As previously argued (#4 – "Drowning, Not Waving"), lodges whose viability have dropped precariously low tend to cause real harm to Freemasonry in this jurisdiction and to many individual Freemasons.

If a lodge's strategic plan cannot arrest its decline in viability, then the Executive of that lodge must be prepared to admit that the lodge is no longer able to function individually, but while amalgamation is still a realistic option.

There are many reasons why amalgamation may seem unpalatable, not least of which being the natural inclination of a brother not to see his lodge lose its individuality. However, this natural disinclination to amalgamate, as well as the prospect of having to work through the possibly many administrative and negotiating processes required in order to achieve an amalgamation, should not deter the lodge: the only other options are the Surrender of the Warrant, erasure or extinction! (Grand Lodge Regulations 62.3, 62.2 and 62.1, respectively.)

\* \* \* \* \*

One common impediment to the active consideration of amalgamation is the issue of lodge finances. This impediment usually is based upon members having a flawed view of the status of the lodge's finances. "*Whose money is it, anyway?*" as it were.

Let us suppose that a lodge has forty members and \$40,000 cash reserves. There is no sense in which it can be viewed that each member has a \$1,000 share. A brother cannot leave the lodge and take "his" \$1,000 with him. He may not "sell" his place in the lodge to another Freemason for \$1,000. The lodge cannot organize a bacchanalian social event for its forty members that costs \$40,000.

When the lodge initiates a new member, that candidate stands on the floor of the lodge "poor and penniless", to quote from the Ceremony of Initiation. Does his initiation dilute the value of each existing member's "equity" in the lodge?

The resources of a lodge are the result of a history of activities that transcends the members of the lodge for the time being.

Even when comparing the lodge's financial situation with that of another lodge with which amalgamation is being considered, one should not argue, "Well, our Lodge has \$100,000 in the bank and owns the land and hall in which it meets, but they merely have \$20,000!" We are not arguing here about a "bride price" in a "marriage" contract. Perhaps the other lodge has been more active in using the money it has raised in charitable works; perhaps your lodge should be ashamed of being miserly. In respect of the property, perhaps your lodge is very old and dates from an era in which society was much less equitable in the spread of

wealth and there were extremely rich Freemasons prepared to bequeath land and building to lodges.

Just looking at the bottom line in the balance sheet is an inappropriate – indeed, unworthy – way of approaching the deliberations.

\* \* \* \* \*

The most important but most difficult part of the process will be finding another lodge which is also seeking an amalgamation and which in union with your lodge would form a strong new lodge.

This is one reason for acting early before the situation becomes desperate.

I have no magic recipe for how to find such a match.

\* \* \* \* \*

The amalgamating lodges may suggest the name of the amalgamated lodge for approval by the Grand Master and the Board (Regulation 61.2). Naming the amalgamated lodge the same as one of the two amalgamating lodges is clearly inappropriate, as this suggests a “takeover” of the latter by the former. Some form of combination of the names of the amalgamating lodges may be workable, but often simply leads to a strange and unwieldy concatenation.

I strongly urge the amalgamating lodges to determine a completely new name for the amalgamated lodge, but if possible one that reflects the histories and principles of the two lodges. A serious debate by the combined membership of the two lodges is recommended.

Regulation 61.3 permits the amalgamated lodge to have the number “of one of the amalgamating Lodges or another number approved by the Board.” Since Regulation 61.4 makes it clear that the “amalgamated Lodge shall be considered to be a new Lodge”, I argue that having a new number is the only appropriate action.

\* \* \* \* \*

The reader should observe that the drivers in this whole process are individual lodges, and not Grand Lodge. Grand Lodge cannot order specific lodges to amalgamate or to surrender their warrant. Action must come from the “grass roots”, to use an overworked metaphor.

The role of Grand Lodge is to be a facilitator.

Grand Lodge could seek to implement a process that assists a lodge that is looking to amalgamate to find a suitable partner (refer to the earlier discussion).

The Regulations of Grand Lodge should be framed to facilitate and not obfuscate the processes.

If one of both of the amalgamating lodges is incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1985 then there will be legal issues to be dealt with. Grand Lodge could assist in this process.

Country lodges whose viability is declining will require special consideration. Perhaps Grand Lodge should play a greater role in planning the future for these lodges.

But again I stress that it is the lodges themselves and their members who need to act.

\* \* \* \* \*

While amalgamation may in one sense close the door on the history of each individual lodge, nonetheless the amalgamated lodge should incorporate the key practices and symbols of each predecessor lodge.

The new lodge does not extinguish the principles of the previous lodges, but rather merges them into a new, healthy and viable lodge. One lodge, but one lodge that recognizes and celebrates its diverse “prehistory”!





## #6 – Order in the House

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It is incumbent on all Freemasons to assist the Worshipful Master in his duty to “Guard the Landmarks of the Craft ...” (Lodge Manual 20.2(d)). Many Freemasons, though, confuse guarding the Landmarks of the Craft with preserving governance and administrative structures. Governance and administrative structures are not Landmarks of the Craft! On the contrary, with Society changing around us all the time, it is the thoughtful adaptation of governance and administrative structures that will guard the Landmarks.

For this reason, periodical review and amendment of the Grand Lodge Regulations is warranted and healthy for the Craft, in our jurisdiction. I am not talking change for the sake of change; I am meaning change when it is appropriate in order to preserve our core principles and mission.

Responses along to line of, “The Regulations have stood the test of time. They were appropriate in the heyday of the 1960s and therefore should not be tampered with.” are ridiculous. This is not the 1960s. Policies and procedures that once worked do not necessarily work now. A process of regular review, and amendment where appropriate, is the only sensible way to operate.

And so I turn our attention to the review of the Grand Lodge Regulations currently being debated within the S.A. and N.T. jurisdiction.

\* \* \* \* \*

A review and revision of the Regulations is long overdue.

When I was Master of my lodge in the 2014-15 Masonic year, there were a number of elderly brethren who resigned due to ill health or incapacity and sought their clearances. Each time, I had a number of Freemasons – including some Grand Lodge Officers – urge me to have the lodge invite them to become Continuing Members instead. On each occasion I questioned the regulatory basis for this, since the only option of that nature available to the infirm brother was for them to request the lodge to nominate them for the Holding Lodge under (the old) Regulation 57.3.2. It is only now that there is proposed to be a revision of the Regulations to replace the Holding Lodge by this new status of Continuing Member, (the new) Regulation 56!

I have also observed that, for some time, there have been Grand Lodge Officers operating under titles and administering “portfolios” that didn’t exist. Again, these changes are only now coming forward as proposed revisions to the Regulations.

These are examples of processes that are arse-about!

There have been occasions when individual lodges have been roundly chastised for not following some regulation or other. So, especially when I was Master, I found it infuriating that the published Regulations could not be relied upon to correspond with reality!

There is also a touch of arrogance in this behaviour. By pre-empting the adoption of proposed regulations there is a presumption that the revisions will be adopted by the Grand Lodge membership at large. This appearance is not helpful.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am aware that some Freemasons, of a legal persuasion, have gone through the draft proposed Regulations with a fine-tooth comb. These analyses not only provide that brother's responses to the substantive proposed changes, but also serve to pick up editorial mistakes and to offer in some cases a better form of wording. These analyses, from "fresh eyes", will be extremely helpful to the working party that is charged with driving the revision to the Regulations, and the working party will be most grateful to these brethren.

I shall of course not attempt to replicate that detailed editorial analysis in this post.

The working party has identified the areas of substantive change and I shall now offer comments on some of these.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Regulations 2, 3 & 13.** I commented on these proposed changes earlier in respect of the timing of the establishment of new titles and "portfolios".

Given that all Grand Lodge Officers (except the Grand Secretary, under the new Regulation 3.6) are appointments by the Grand Master for the time being, and given that a new Grand Master may have a new vision for the operation of Grand Lodge, it may be worth consideration, on some future occasion, revisions to the Regulations to allow some of the appointments to be defined by Schedule rather than "hard-wired" in Regulation. This may enable the Grand Master for the time being to drive his agenda more efficiently. It would also remove the temptation to adopt changes "early" and thus pre-empt the necessary regulatory changes, as was remarked upon earlier.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Regulation 4.** The next post planned for this blog will be devoted to analysis and discussion of the process of "Nomination and Election of Grand Master".

\* \* \* \* \*

**Regulation 56.** I grumbled earlier that talk of "Continuing Member Status" has been around for many years. It is a move I wholeheartedly support and I am pleased that it is finally being formally proposed!

There is an important implication for lodges that will follow from the adoption of (the new) Regulation 56.

The Continuing Member will need to belong to a membership category in the lodge's By-laws. If the brother remains in his existing category, then he will be liable for the lodge's subscription fee for that category of member.

In the three lodges in which I have been involved, the only category of membership that has a zero lodge subscription fee is "Honorary Member". These lodges have (quite rightly, in my

opinion) argued that the category “Honorary Member” should be reserved for members of the lodge who have given exemplary service to the lodge and who are being rewarded by the granting of the title “Honorary Member”.

I suspect that most lodges will need to amend their By-laws as a consequence of the establishment of “Continuing Member” status by adding a new membership category, which for the sake of clarity should obviously be called “Continuing Member”.

Grand Lodge should inform lodges of this likely necessity to amend their By-laws, should (the new) Regulation 56 be approved.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Regulation 60.** My views on the amalgamation of lodges, and the fate of lodges that have declined #3 – “Beyond the Tipping Point”, have been discussed at length in earlier posts to this blog.

In the post #5 – “The Alchemy of Amalgamation” I stated, in respect of the name of the amalgamated lodges, “(s)ome form of combination of the names of the amalgamating lodges may be workable, but often simply leads to a strange and unwieldy concatenation. I strongly urge the amalgamating lodges to determine a completely new name for the amalgamated lodge, but if possible one that reflects the histories and principles of the two lodges.”

I furthermore stated “(the old) Regulation 61.3 permits the amalgamated lodge to have the number “of one of the amalgamating Lodges or another number approved by the Board.” Since (the old) Regulation 61.4 makes is clear that the “amalgamated Lodge shall be considered to be a new Lodge”, I argue that having a new number is the only appropriate action.”

I would prefer that (the new) Regulation 60 incorporate my views on the naming and the numbering of the new, amalgamated lodge.

I note that (the new) Regulation 60.4 provides for a dispensation by the Grand Master for exemption of the provision that the amalgamated lodge be considered a new lodge. I cannot see any argument in support of this. The amalgamated lodge is a new lodge in my opinion, and thus I oppose the revised version of (the new) Regulation 60.4.

(The new) Regulation 60.15 provides for a new, and in my opinion, bizarre form of lodge amalgamation. I can see no sense in it at all, and there appears to be no justification offered by the working party.

From time to time I have seen a lodge referred to in the form “Lodge A (incorporating Lodge B)”. What does this mean? I offer the following analysis.

1. There may have once been a Regulation, now deleted, that defined this concept and how it worked; this occurrence may be merely a relic of this bygone Regulation;
2. Lodge A and Lodge B may have amalgamated and may have been permitted to name the new, amalgamated lodge “Lodge A (incorporating Lodge B)”;
3. Lodge B may have surrendered their Warrant or may have been erased or may have gone extinct, but before their demise they may have “cut a deal” with Lodge A to informally use the name “Lodge A (incorporating Lodge B)” on their internal lodge communications in return for some of the residual property of Lodge B, even though

Grand Lodge would now regard Lodge A to be carrying on as before and Lodge B to no longer exist.

I can see no other possibilities. Possibilities 1 and 2 are unlikely and possibility 3 flies close to the edge!

But ... is the new Regulation 60.15 attempting to give a regulatory basis for the “Lodge A (incorporating Lodge B)” concept without explicitly saying so? To me it does seem to do this ... and I oppose it!

If Lodge B is doomed, then it should Surrender its Warrant with some sort of dignity. If Lodge A “feels sorry” for the imminent demise of Lodge B, then it can amalgamate with it. This proposed new concept is just bizarre!

\* \* \* \* \*

There are a couple of other minor bits and pieces that I would revise but which have not been identified for change in the present proposal.

I would amend Regulation 40.3 to require a Brother to have held the rank of a Master Mason for at least two years, except by dispensation of the Grand Master, before being eligible to hold Office in a Lodge. My reasons for this are set out in my earlier post to this blog, #4 – “Drowning Not Waving”.

(The old) Regulation 52.3.2, which is proposed to become (the new) Regulation 51.4.2, is the first mention that I can find in the Regulations of an “Executive Committee” of the Lodge. There are further references to such a committee later in the Regulations. But nowhere can I find a Regulation that states categorically that every Lodge shall have an Executive Committee. There is such a set of regulations, (the old) Regulations 49.7-49.9, in respect of the Lodge having a “Committee of Enquiry”.

The absence of a set of clauses analogous to (the old) Regulations 49.7-49.9 in respect of the Lodge having an “Executive Committee” seems to me to be an oversight, but one that has still not been detected and proposed for correction.

I am aware that a lodge’s By-Laws require approval, and that approval could be denied for any proposed By-Laws that do not include the provision of an Executive Committee, but let’s face it: that would be a cop out!

\* \* \* \* \*

I, like many others, keenly await the Special Communication that is to consider the proposed revised Regulations. I trust that the deliberations of the brothers present on that day will be held in the appropriate Masonic manner.

## **Epilogue**

By my count, there are six matters that I have raised in the essay above that I could have submitted to the Acting Grand Secretary for consideration by the working party, to be included in the final proposed new Regulations, or to stand as Motions to Amend the Motion of adoption of the final proposed new Regulations on the day of the Special Communication. I have not done so for two chief reasons.

Firstly, I do not have the legal expertise to offer draft forms of wording for my six points of disagreement. The cover letter from the Acting Grand Secretary to all members of Grand Lodge regarding the process seems to imply that a formal form of proposed words is required.

Secondly, the aforementioned cover letter requests the names of the proposers and seconders for amendments such as the six I have raised. As I have been in possession of the documentation only since the start of the late December / January Masonic “down time”, and as I am nowadays incapacitated due to a medical illness, I have not been in a position to canvass support for a seconder.

Nonetheless, I hope the sentiments of this blog post make their way in some manner into the debate on governance and administrative structures for our Grand Lodge.



## #7 – Uneasy Lies the Head that Wears a Crown

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To the outside, empirical observer, Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory is a form of monarchy. The king (Grand Master) has a coronation (Grand Installation) and appoints his ministers (Grand Lodge Officers); in particular, he chooses his successor, the crown prince (Deputy Grand Master). After three years he abdicates and the throne passes to the crown prince (Deputy Grand Master).

This is not an unreasonable form of governance.

The Grand Master has a three-year term, which, in the context of the administration of Freemasonry in South Australia and the Northern Territory, is a reasonable length of time to allow him to implement or at least substantially progress the objectives in his vision (Strategic Plan) for Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The Grand Master being free to appoint the Grand Lodge Officers, with some minor limitations and requirements for consultation or approval, allows him to build a team to best assist him in his role. Many systems of governance, including some forms of democracy, have similar systems. An obvious example is the United States of America, where the President appoints his Cabinet, subject to certain Congressional approvals.

The passing of the Office of Grand Master to the Deputy Grand Master after the three-year term allows for a Strategic Plan or vision to extend over several administrations. In effect, to use my regal metaphor again, a dynasty is created.

So, our putative, outside, empirical observer is satisfied, with a few issues to be clarified (discussed below), that there is a justifiable system of governance in place for Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory.

\* \* \* \* \*

What are the “few issues to be clarified (discussed below)” troubling our putative, outside, empirical observer.

There are certain contingencies that, although rare, could from time-to-time arise and for which the organization should have prepared and workable mechanisms to deal with them.

Do our Regulations have such mechanisms?

There are provisions for the death or resignation of the Grand Master (*Regulation 7.2 – Casual Vacancy*). There are even provisions for the removal of the Grand Master from Office in the event that he “goes rogue” (*Regulation 9.2 – Abuse of Power*).

So far, so good.

But there is another contingency to be concerned about, even though one would hope that it would occur only rarely. Having the Grand Master succeeded by his self-appointed Deputy Grand Master can, over several administrations, give rise to a dynasty of Grand Lodge

Officers that have a vision that is no longer shared by the “rank-and-file” Master Masons of the organization.

The likelihood of such a divergence between the “ruling elite” and the “masses” could be diminished by the Grand Lodge regularly communicating to Master Masons, not just what their decisions are, but providing informatively composed explanations for them. The addition of mechanisms for Master Masons to provide suggestions and feedback through, say, focus groups, open question-and-answer forums or on-line wikis, would further help to keep the whole system in balance.

But, even so, there may be times when there is a large support among Master Masons for an alternative Grand Master to the outgoing Grand Master’s nominated successor. Is there the provision for an election of the new Grand Master, even if it is only on extremely rare occasions that there is any more than one candidate, namely the Deputy Grand Master?

Yes, there is: *Regulation 4 – Nomination and Election of Grand Master.*

But hang on a minute!

Regulation 4 is implicitly but clearly stating that the tenure of Office for the Grand Master is one year, not three years!

Furthermore, *Regulation 7.1 – Term* places a term limit on a Grand Master of four consecutive years.

So, why is there a Grand Installation every three years?

\* \* \* \* \*

It dawns on us that, while not in conflict with the Regulations, there is a “Traditional Arrangement” that a Grand Master is elected and then twice re-elected and furthermore that he is then succeeded by his self-appointed Deputy Grand Master.

\* \* \* \* \*

What is my opinion of this situation?

I am opposed to “Traditional Arrangements”, even though they might not conflict with the Regulations, unless they are seriously debated and then enshrined in the Regulations.

To do otherwise creates an environment where, in our example, any alternative candidate being put forward for election as Grand Master creates uproar among the masses simply because a group had the temerity to go against the “Traditional Arrangement”. Imagine the wringing of hands and gnashing of teeth that would result from a candidate other than the incumbent being put forward for election as Grand Master outside of the three-year cycle!

\* \* \* \* \*

What do I think we should do?

For the reasons that I put forward earlier in this essay, I believe that a three-year term, not a one-year term, for the Grand Master is appropriate and the Regulations should state this. I



have already pointed out that there are contingency measures in place that cover the death or resignation of the Grand Master and the abuse of power by the Grand Master.

At the end of his three-year term, there should be an election for the new Grand Master. I would expect the Deputy Grand Master to be a candidate, and in most cases I would hope that the ship of state is sailing sufficiently smoothly that he is the only candidate. If however, other candidates are put forward, then this should be handled as in any functioning democracy and not regarded as a crisis for the organization.

Regarding term limits, I would amend the Regulations to restrict a Grand Master to two, consecutive, three-year terms.

In my next post, I shall discuss the process of the election of the Grand Master in the event of there being more than one candidate.

\* \* \* \* \*

With the Regulations amended to reflect the reality, there no longer is any need for an unwritten but somehow sacrosanct "Traditional Arrangement".

In the meantime, though, Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory is having, right now, to deal with the consequences of the breaking of the uncontested election aspect of the "Traditional Arrangement". In the recent election at the end of a three-year term, there was a challenging candidate, and in fact he was successful.

The "Traditional Arrangement" having now been abandoned, I am looking on keenly to August this year to see whether any other candidate nominates for election, thereby defying the three-year cycle aspect of the "Traditional Arrangement"!

Perhaps I should get a copy of the Nomination Form ... just in case!

\* \* \* \* \*

## Epilogue

How many thousand of my poorest subjects  
Are at this hour asleep! O sleep, O gentle sleep,  
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,  
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down  
And steep my senses in forgetfulness?  
Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,  
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee  
And hushed with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,  
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,  
Under the canopies of costly state,  
And lull'd with sound of sweetest melody?  
O thou dull god, why liest thou with the vile

In loathsome beds and leavest the kingly couch  
A watch-case or a common 'larum bell?  
Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
Seal up the shipboy's eyes, and rock his brains  
In cradle of the rude imperious surge  
And in the visitation of the winds,  
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,  
Curling their monstrous heads and hanging them  
With deafening clamor in the slippery clouds  
That with the hurly death itself awakes?  
Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose  
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude,  
And, in the calmest and most stillest night,  
With all appliances and means to boot,  
Deny it to a king? Then, happy low, lie down.  
**Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.**

William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part 2, Act III, Scene 1*

## #8 – Let Us Choose Wisely

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Taken at face value, the Regulations governing the term of the Grand Master and the timing of the election of his successor are absurd.

The Grand Master is elected in October, but must wait until the following April to be installed. Six months into his one-year term, there is an election for his successor. For the second half of his term of office, there will be the Grand Master *and* a Grand Master Elect.

In many systems of governance, during a changeover period, the incumbent administration governs in “caretaker mode”. Are the Grand Master and his Grand Lodge Officers expected to be in “caretaker mode” from October to April?

Even if there is no “caretaker period” expected, the incumbent Grand Master will nonetheless still have a Grand Master Elect lurking in the shadows for one-half of his term of office.

This situation is manifestly absurd.

\* \* \* \* \*

But, as observed in the previous post, #7 – “Uneasy Lies the Head that Wears a Crown”, there is a “Traditional Arrangement” that a Grand Master is elected and then twice re-elected and furthermore that he is then succeeded by his self-appointed Deputy Grand Master.

This convention is not in conflict with the Regulations, and furthermore avoids the paralysis that could occur were other possible scenarios to play out, ... provided everyone “plays the game” and that no-one rocks the “Ionic Column”, as it were.

The following points were argued in the previous post.

1. A three-year term, not a one-year term, for the Grand Master is appropriate and the Regulations should state this.
2. The Grand Master being free to appoint the Grand Lodge Officers, with some minor limitations and requirements for consultation or approval, is appropriate and so the current Regulations need no amendment in this respect.
3. It is to be expected that the Deputy Grand Master would be a candidate in the election for the new Grand Master at the end of the three-year term. In most cases, he would be the only candidate, but there being other candidates as well should not be regarded as a crisis but rather just a normal part of a democratic form of governance.

In this present post, I shall discuss the process of the election of the Grand Master, as promised in the previous post.

\* \* \* \* \*

Under the “Traditional Arrangement”, it was as much as anything an administrative convenience to hold the formal election for Grand Master at the October Communication: there was only ever going to be one candidate.

But with the breaking of the “Traditional Arrangement” last year by having a contested election, several deficiencies in this process became apparent.

Firstly, a member (that is, any Master Mason) could only vote if he was present at the October Communication. This clearly disenfranchised regional, rural and Territorian voters, as well as voters who were infirm or incapacitated. Quite rightly, an emergency, special Communication was held to change the voting method to a postal vote.

Due to the haste with which this change of voting method was introduced, there were inevitably a number of administrative problems. By and large, these have now been identified and steps are being taken to see them rectified for future votes. Thus there is nothing to gain by labouring those issues here.

But now, with a postal method of voting, there is no necessity at all to tie the election to the October Communication. The election could now be held much nearer to the April Communication at which the new Grand Master is to be installed. This would avoid the six-month period in which the incumbent Grand Master had a shadow Grand Master Elect, which, if the latter were not the incumbent Deputy Grand Master, could lead to embarrassment or worse.

The closing date for postal votes could be, say, the end of February, with the formal announcement by the Returning Officer of the Grand Master Elect on the 1<sup>st</sup> March. The gap between election and installation would now only be just over a month. Even the President Elect of the United States of America is only announced in November with a January inauguration, leaving a gap of only a little more than the one proposed above for the Grand Master changeover. Is Freemasonry S.A. & N.T. that much more byzantine than the executive branch of the United States of America?

\* \* \* \* \*

Consideration needs to be given to the method of election used in the event that there are more than two candidates for Grand Master, as occurred in the most recent election.

There are really only two tenable options, “first-past-the-post” and “single, transferable vote”.

In the “first-past-the-post” method, each voter nominates which of the candidates that he would like to be the Grand Master. Each candidate has his votes tallied and the candidate with the most votes is elected.

The “single, transferable vote” method, also sometimes called “preferential voting”, is the method used, for example, in the election of Members of the Australian Commonwealth’s House of Representatives.

In the case of two candidates, these two methods are of course identical.

When there are three or more candidates, the methods are different and may, but not necessarily, produce a different result.

It is important to understand that there is no right or wrong in respect of these two methods, they are simply *philosophically different*.

The "first-past-the-post" method selects the **most liked candidate**.

The "single, transferable vote" method selects the **least disliked candidate**.

The most liked candidate and the least disliked candidate may be the same person, but may not be.

The present Regulations use the "first-past-the-post" method and so the most liked candidate is selected. Personally, I prefer the "single, transferable vote" method; that is, I would select the least disliked candidate. I believe that this produces the more harmonious outcome, but it is just a personal preference.

*I reiterate that neither method is right nor wrong, they are just philosophically different.*

Some members have stated the view that the "single, transferable vote" method makes vote tampering or outcome fixing more possible. That is simply not true. The likelihood that such malpractices can occur has nothing to do with the voting method. Rather, what matters is the integrity of the administrative systems put in place to conduct the election, whichever system of recording of votes is being used.

The extension of the "single, transferable vote" method to situations where the electorate is voting for more than one vacancy, such as occurs, for example, in the method of election of the senators representing South Australia in the Australian Commonwealth's Senate, is a method that is subject to just criticism. In the 2013 Commonwealth Parliamentary Election, there were some surprising outcomes in the election of senators. There was talk of a "broker" who made a consortium of so-called micro-parties, and even created a few of his own, and advised them on how to strategically manage their party's preferred distribution of preferences. What this so-called "preference whisperer" was doing was exploiting the fact that there was a voting option available to the electors which encouraged lazy voters, typically ones who had an affinity to a special interest group, to simply follow that micro-party's preferred distribution of preferences without scrutiny. This "preference whispering" was quite legal, and significantly increased the chances that a micro-party would secure a senator, although it could not tell in advance which one. Lazy voters still abound, but the voting option that permitted this exploitation of them has since been removed. But all of this is irrelevant to the election of the Grand Master: only one Grand Master is being elected and so any notions of "preference whisperers" manipulating outcomes is completely spurious.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Regulation change that brought in postal voting for the Grand Master included a new Regulation 4.1:

*"4.1 Nominations for the office of Grand Master must be in writing on the prescribed form signed by seven members of Grand Lodge and by the nominee signifying his consent to the nomination together with a statement containing a maximum of 150 words setting out the nominee's rank, name and number of his Lodge or Lodges, profession or occupation (if retired, his former profession or occupation), age and his Masonic experience (Candidate Profile)."*

The specifications for the Candidate Profile are too prescriptive, and also do not permit the candidate to adequately express his vision for Freemasonry in the jurisdiction.

Given that every Master Mason is to be posted balloting material and the Candidate Profiles, there is an obvious administrative reason for limiting the extent of the Candidate Profile. But why not simply state that the statement be a single A4-page, pdf document.

If a candidate fills the document to its physical margins in text in 8-point font, then more fool them as no-one will read it. Conversely, if a candidate just says, "I'm Alan Branford. Vote for me" and nothing else, then it will similarly be rightly ignored by the voters.

The information prescribed by the regulation is obvious to include, and a candidate who does not do so will be judged by the voters accordingly. But there may be candidates who have experience other than Masonic experience that may set them in good stead to be Grand Master. Why should they not be permitted to include that?

And surely a good Candidate Statement would include some indication of the candidate's vision for Freemasonry in the jurisdiction?

Just leave the composition of the Candidate Statement to the judgement of the candidate and the assessment of the Candidate Statements by the voters to the intelligence of the voters!

\* \* \* \* \*

Thinking more laterally, why not, in addition to the hard copy Candidate Statements posted to each voter, encourage each candidate to compose one or more pdf documents going into detail about their vision for Freemasonry in the jurisdiction? The Grand Lodge website should have a non-public area into which Master Masons of this jurisdiction could login. Then just upload these documents for the interested voter to peruse.

Regulation 5.9, which is currently being proposed to be shifted to go under Regulation 2, stipulates:

*"5.9 No Brother shall solicit support for a candidate for an Office in Grand Lodge either personally or by letter or circular."*

This regulation is appropriate, since campaigning at lodge meetings, flyers festooning festive boards, and so on, would be quite inappropriate and undignified.

By having material relevant to the election published on the website allows the interested member to seek it out readily.

In the fullness of time, the Grand Lodge may wish to consider having discussion boards on the website for the interchange of ideas, opinions, etc. Again, this would be a facility to be used by those who wish to use it, and ignored by those who don't.

Clearly, the details of the provision of information as I have just suggested, its implementation, its moderation (presumably by the Returning Officer), and so on will need to be crafted over time.

\* \* \* \* \*

In summary, let us as a Grand Lodge embrace the idea of the informed election of our Grand Master every three years in a manner and with a dignity befitting Freemasons.





## #9 – In the Bicycle Lane of the Information Superhighway

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The Internet is now many decades old. However, with the advent of the World Wide Web in 1991 and the first widespread availability of email around the same time, the Internet has now become ubiquitous in modern society.

Advances in computer technology leading to today's smartphones mean that the "person in the street" can communicate with other people and can share information in a variety of forms through a myriad of portable devices and applications.

If someone has heard of Freemasonry and wants to know more how it operates in South Australia and the Northern Territory, the chances are that they will search the World Wide Web using a web search engine and they will quickly find our website <https://www.santfreemasons.org.au/>.

For a member of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory (AFAM (SA&NT)), Grand Lodge should provide on-line facilities for the member to access a variety of services and information.

Any organization that hopes to survive and thrive needs to embrace these modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and to adopt a coherent and appropriate presence on the Internet.

The current state of the Internet presence of AFAM (SA&NT) could be likened to being in the bicycle lane of the information superhighway. Upgrading our ICT to professional standards should be a priority area of investment of resources.

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My professional society is of comparable size, turnover and complexity as AFAM (SA&NT), so the ideas I am about to suggest, taken from the on-line facilities offered by my professional society, are not unreasonable for AFAM (SA&NT) to aspire to.

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Now, we cannot achieve these ICT facilities by calling upon a few of our more computer savvy brethren (or their teenage children) to knock something up on a wet afternoon. Let's get real.

AFAM (SA&NT) would first need to establish a Working Party, not necessarily comprised entirely of computer nerds, to steer the project. (Having some members of the working party being computer illiterate can be an advantage: they can ask the "emperor's new clothes" type of questions to keep the working party properly grounded.)

The working party would first need to research professional information and communications technology (ICT) / software engineering companies and to engage the services of one such company. The working party, with the involvement of our case consultants from the ICT company, would need to thoroughly consult the membership of AFAM (SA&NT) in order to

properly scope the project, both from the point of view of its creation and from the point of view of its ongoing maintenance.

I am not pretending myself to be at all experienced, let alone expert, in processes of this kind. This post is merely intended to throw up ideas and possibilities.

But AFAM (SA&NT) must be aware that the project will be intensive both in man-hours and in cost. We are talking here of a major, but essential, project.

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So, from the user's point of view, what should we expect from our Grand Lodge's ICT facility?

The home page of the website should of course be warm and welcoming to the general public. The working party will have determined what types of information would be appropriate, such as "What is Freemasonry?", "The History of Freemasonry", "The History of Freemasonry in South Australia and the Northern Territory", and so on. The professional consultants would have advised on how to structure the layout of the website, the links, etc.

I shall not dwell further on this aspect – I'm sure that you get the idea. The details are the domain of the working party and the consultants.

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The home page would have a clear link to "Members Login", or the like. A member of AFAM (SA&NT) would click on that link and be asked for his credentials in the usual manner of such login processes.

He should then be able to see what information about him is being stored on the Grand Lodge database. There will be the obvious things like full name, date of birth, residential address, ...

Certain fields like primary email address should be editable by the user: if the user's email address has changed, he should be able to update that information onto the database there and then, without the need to involve Grand Lodge staff.

Other fields might require the member to interact with Grand Lodge in the event of an error being discovered. For example, if the member notices that his date of birth has been incorrectly recorded, then he would be expected to provide evidence of the correct date. Likewise for Masonic information such as the date and lodge of initiation, etc.

The user's record would also show, in a clear layout, the lodges to which he has belonged, the dates he joined, the dates he left, the Offices he held in which year, etc. Also, any periods of time in which the member intermitted and was unattached to AFAM (SA&NT) would be recorded. (For various reasons, some Freemasons from time to time have periods of intermission from Freemasonry.)

There is a clear advantage in all this information being stored in a central, well-designed relational database. I have witnessed a few occasions in which a Freemason has become eligible for the award of a Fifty-Year Jewel, but the Freemason's Lodge has not applied to Grand Lodge for the award of the jewel. Given that the Freemason concerned may be only a

Joining Member of his current lodge, and may have had periods of intermittency of membership in the past, how can the current lodge be expected to know that the Fifty-Year Jewel is due for award!!? With a system such as I have described above, the AFAM (SA&NT) database will automatically flag the impending award of the jewel and notify the Secretary of the member's current primary lodge.

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My professional society shows me a history of my membership invoices and when my next subscription is due. I am automatically notified when this due date is approaching, and I can make payment on-line using a credit card. I am then able to download a Tax Invoice for taxation purposes.

My professional society, analogous to the structure of Freemasonry in this jurisdiction, has a component of subscription that is payable to the central body, and a component payable to the branch; branches charge different amounts as the branch component and even have multiple membership categories with different associated fees. The system can handle all these "complexities" with no drama.

At agreed intervals, say quarterly, the central agency (Grand Lodge) remits to the branches (the lodges) the amounts due to them from monies received. Systematic handling of overdue subscriptions, exclusion alerts, etc can all be incorporated into the design.

I realize that this approach to collecting subscriptions is the reverse of what we currently do in AFAM (SA&NT). My professional society used to collect subscriptions at the branch level too and then remit capitation fees to the central body; it was our experience that the "reverse" model outlined above works considerably better.

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How often have you sat in a lodge room while the Secretary mumbles his way through the correspondence? "Grand Lodge Circular No. blah blah blah..." Little of the information sinks in, even if you managed to hear it and understand it in the first place.

How much better would it be if Grand Lodge Circulars and any other documents for all members were just uploaded to a repository on the website and the member sent an email notification of what documents had just been uploaded? It is then up to the member to go and download the document if they wish to know more.

Lodge Secretaries could do likewise with correspondence received by the Lodge itself from other parties. If the correspondence reached the Lodge Secretary by email, then it is now a simple process to convert the document to a pdf document ready for upload. For a good, old-fashioned paper letter – well scanners cost a bugger all these days; just buy your secretary one. For the occasional stuff that's not readily uploadable, let the secretary just write and upload a note describing what it is and informing the interested member to contact him at the next Lodge meeting. Of course, these documents would be made visible only to members of the lodge concerned.

The reading out of Correspondence at the Lodge meeting would be all but eliminated. This would save time in the meeting. Also, it would allow the members to have read and thought

about the correspondence in advance of the meeting, so that “Business Arising from the Correspondence” would be a much more informed and useful exercise.

Similar patterns may apply to the circulation of documents within a lodge or within a lodge Executive Committee.

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It seems that the *Yearbook* was going out as I was coming into Freemasonry; I have never seen one.

Apart from the “other septs”, which appears by other comments to be a separate issue, what did the *Yearbook* contain that the website’s “Lodge Finder” does not?

Typically, lodges have different times, or even different dates, for their Installation meetings. These alternative times seem not to be in the website’s “Lodge Finder”. Did the *Yearbook* include these details? (By the way, why does the website’s “Lodge Finder” not include them?)

Some lodges have occasional “special nights”, e.g. the January meeting is held on the fourth Tuesday instead of the usual third Tuesday and meets at Freemasons Hall instead of the usual Tusmore Masonic Centre. These “special nights” seem not to be in the website’s “Lodge Finder”. Did the *Yearbook* include these details? (Again, why does the website’s “Lodge Finder” not include them?)

Presumably, the Lodge Secretary details were only valid from the date of publication of the *Yearbook* until the lodge’s Installation, unless the Secretary were re-elected. The website’s “Lodge Finder” should be able to update this information.

Let us suppose that I wanted to know which lodges meet on a first Tuesday. No problems – we can do that now. I might find out that Lodge A meets on a first Tuesday at a certain location and at a certain time. That’s great! Suits me – I think I’ll go. But, I seem often to hear of lodges making last minute changes to start times (e.g. a busy night, so let’s start at 7 p.m. instead of 7.30 p.m.) and the like. The *Yearbook* cannot inform the reader of these, but the website’s “Lodge Finder” should be able to update this information.

These are things we could, but do not do, at the moment, with the website’s “Lodge Finder”.

There have been many examples of visitors turning up for Lodge A’s meeting at the right time and place only to find that there was an unforeseen amendment for that month and the visitor is all alone in the rain. If the system is designed and implemented properly, the provision of these last-minute alerts would become second-nature to the Secretary – and of considerable use to the poor visitor!

I cannot grasp what the advantage of the *Yearbook* is over the website’s “Lodge Finder”, except a preference for hard copy over electronic copy, but I can see a lot of disadvantages. Younger Freemasons (i.e. our future) typically have smartphones in their pockets; they would be unlikely to be able to find a hard copy *Yearbook* in their bedroom.

Freemasonry must move forward not backward. Convince me that the *Yearbook* over the website’s “Lodge Finder” is forward and not backward.

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I was a visitor the other week and chatted in the ante-room to another visitor, Brother A.B. I wonder what lodge he is in? I forgot to ask him. I wish I could get his telephone number or an email address, as I'd like to pass on some information to him. The website should be able to allow me to search on keywords such as a name: and – bingo – I discover Brother A.B. belongs to Lodge X, and there is his telephone number. I call him to pass on my information, and while I'm at it I'll ask if he'll be going to his lodge's next meeting.

Of course, we would all be able to detail which bits of our personal information are accessible to others in this way. Perhaps, due to Brother A.B.'s privacy settings, I cannot see what lodge he is in and I am only given an email address. That's fine. I'll email him the information I had and ask him about which Lodge he's in.

Of course, Brother A.B. might choose to make none of his information searchable in this way. That's his business. I may be left with no information about Brother A.B. Oh well! Maybe we'll bump into each other again some time.

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Lodge Secretaries and Treasurers have special requirements for interacting with Grand Lodge in respect of submissions and returns. These can all be built into the system in a user-friendly way.

It will be an important aspect of the design of the overall system that Lodge Secretaries are notified by email when a member of his lodge amends any part of his personal information, such as his primary email address. This will alert the Secretary to download a "fresh" copy of the information pertaining the brethren of his lodge.

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I can hear already the scratching noise of quill on writing paper as some members of AFAM (SA&NT) write letters of protest that they do not have a computer, or don't know how to use one or that foreign spies would be able to access our records. (As for the foreign spies, given that state our records system is in at the moment, perhaps they could help us access our records.)

I argue that any Freemason under the age of fifty would, with very few exceptions, already routinely carry in their pocket a smartphone capable of utilizing all of the services I have suggested above. Indeed, they would be wondering why they cannot do so yet. These Freemasons quite probably also have a desktop personal computer at home or a laptop personal computer or a tablet device or all of the above.

There are many older Freemasons who have at least a personal computer of some sort with internet access which they are already using for services such as web access and email – and really what is being proposed above is not really any more than that from the user's perspective.

Local public libraries now provide basic internet access and assistance in its use, and basic information technology skills courses for seniors abound.

There may be a few individuals, such as those already infirm and computer illiterate, who may need to be specially catered for. There will always be such cases. There is, though, perhaps a touch of irony in the fact that even personal computers can now have software to read aloud the contents of the screen, including documents, for the vision impaired. For these Freemasons with a disability, the use of ICT will be liberating, not limiting!

There was a time when no lodge secretaries had even a telephone – the telephone hadn't been invented then! Can you imagine now the irritation that people would feel if a lodge secretary did not have even a telephone connection, let alone an answering machine or – heavens preserve us – an internet connectivity?

When I was growing up, there were many households that did not have a telephone connection. Now, we would regard that situation as rather odd. I recall with perverse amusement an elderly Past Master, who had railed against the use of this new-fangled email for sending out lodge summonses, getting very irate that another Past Master of the Lodge did not even have a telephone. In order to contact him, you either had to write a letter or visit his house on the off-chance he was home!

As for internet connectivity, there are regional, rural and remote areas where this is still a problem. It is a problem, though, that the National Broadband Network (NBN) is supposed to solve. Do not complain to Grand Lodge that your internet connectivity is poor, complain to the NBN Co. and insist on the matter being resolved.

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The advantages of exploiting the boundless possibilities of the strategic use of ICT to assist Freemasonry in South Australia and the Northern Territory to grow and prosper are far too great to allow the reluctance of a few to become involved to stop its introduction.

Standing still is not an option: we shall just get left behind.

## #10 – The Times They Are A-Changin’

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In general, people are apt to confuse cultural baggage with core principles.

Whatever the setting, we tend to think of how things were when we were young, keen and active as the way things should always be.

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Consider the matter of dress code as an example.

In the 1950s, if a man was invited to an evening function and the dress code was stated as “formal”, then he would wear a black tail coat with matching trousers, white shirt, white waistcoat and white bowtie.

A decade or two later, a dress code of “formal” would be interpreted to mean a dinner suit: a black, full coat with matching trousers (with satin stripes down the sides), white shirt and black bowtie.

Moving forward again, what previously would have been called a “lounge suit” indicating that it was a more casual form of dress, is now called a “business suit”. A dark business suit, white or lightly coloured shirt and sober long tie would now constitute “formal” dress in most (younger) men’s minds.

When I was a university academic prior to my retirement, if I wore a sports coat / blazer with a business shirt and trousers (but no tie), then I often had students query why I was wearing “formal” dress that day!

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Quite naturally, in the Lodge Room, we should expect a Freemason to be dressed formally. The wearing of formal dress represents a respect and reverence for the institution of Masonry, and the solemnity with which the brother was regarding the ceremony.

But which version of “formal”?

I contend that the prevailing view, in the SA and NT society at the time, of what constitutes “formal” dress should prevail.

Thus, I would argue that the dress code in Lodge Rooms, and in Grand Lodge, should be:

**a dark business suit, white or lightly coloured shirt and sober long tie.**

Many of our lodges have already adopted this code and have created a Lodge tie to be worn with the suit.

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Due to various sociological factors over recent decades, the age profile in Freemasonry has become very distorted: it is highly skewed towards older Freemasons. Many lodges are dominated by men for whom the dinner suit or even the tail coat are what was considered

formal when they were younger. These men are often recycled through the senior offices of the lodge while younger Freemasons work their way up the ranks. This phenomenon creates a prejudice that preserves the dinner suit as the most common dress standard in our lodges.

I argue that many of my contemporaries have never owned a dinner suit – and I am nigh on sixty years old!

Imagine, then, if you will, a man any age under sixty years old visiting a lodge at their festive board only to encounter a preponderance of old men dressed in dinner suits! Added to that scene would be the thought of having to purchase a dinner suit in order to join the Craft. Freemasonry SA & NT is not really doing itself any favours in the recruitment of men below retirement age by stubbornly holding on to these outmoded types of formal dress.

The dress code of the Lodge Room is a fashion, not a core principle of Freemasonry. How many of the brethren who formed the first Grand Lodge in England in 1717 do you think were wearing a black tail coat with matching trousers, white shirt, white waistcoat and white bowtie?

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Another anachronism still pervasive in our lodges is the concept of a Ladies Night.

The fact that Australia has recently enacted marriage equality legislation that among other matters permits men to marry men is merely a coincidence insofar as my raising of this topic of Ladies Nights is concerned.

The wives of many younger brethren would react in two rather different ways, each just as disparaging of the concept of Ladies Night.

Firstly, many wives would shriek with laughter at the absurd anachronism in the organization their husbands had joined. They may well nonetheless happily attend the function with their husbands, but their opinion of Freemasonry would have been diminished in a way that ridicules the Craft.

Secondly, many wives would be of a sufficiently independent view of the role of women in society in general, that they would find the idea offensive. The notion that we would “treat the little woman to a night out” or “thank the ladies for making the suppers that we menfolk bring along to the festive board” they would find galling. Wives in this category may well refuse to accompany their husbands to the event, and this in turn may result in neither attending.

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Returning to the issue of unions other than that of a Freemason with “his lady”, for many years there have been openly homosexual members of Freemasonry who have brought their male partners with them to Masonic social functions. This well precedes the recent marriage equality legislation.

In my own case, my partner has frequently accompanied me to such events, including past Grand Installation Balls. He keeps threatening that one day he will attend the Ladies’ Breakfast function that is typically part of the Grand Installation celebrations!



Personally, though, I find the announcement of an event as a “Ladies” Night instead of a “Partners” night as offensive, and I am inclined not to attend.

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Although a little tangential to the main focus of this essay, let us consider a little further the matter of homosexuality and Freemasonry. Can a homosexual man be a Freemason?

Freemasonry requires a belief in a “Supreme Being”, but it does not require you to elaborate on how you conceive of this. If homosexuality can co-exist with your concept of “god”, then at least in that respect, there is no conflict between being homosexual and being a Freemason.

Some (socially conservative) Freemasons may argue that there is also a requirement that “fit and proper persons to be made Freemasons” must be of “strict morals”. (I am quoting here the Masonic Ritual.) They would argue that homosexuality is inconsistent with being of strict morals.

There is really no absolute when it comes to this type of argument. Up until the late 1960s, a Freemason who became divorced from his wife would be expected to leave Freemasonry.

Can you imagine what would happen were Freemasonry SA & NT to expel every Freemason who was separated or divorced from his (first) wife or who lived in a de facto relationship with someone to whom he was not married!!? How many Freemasons would we have left?

It is clear from recent Australian social history that homosexuality per se, and the corresponding partnerships, are considered socially acceptable by the vast majority of the population. I would argue, therefore, that Freemasonry SA & NT should not regard homosexuality as inconsistent with being of strict morals.

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The last anachronism that I would like to discuss in this essay is the matter of the resignation of a Freemason and his drawing of a Clearance.

Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory (AFAM (SA&NT)), like many societies, has a concept that a member remains a member until he resigns, is excluded or is expelled.

The notion of expulsion concerns matters of internal discipline and is not part of what is at issue here.

I wish to concentrate on resignation and exclusion.

Resignation requires the departing member to conduct an explicit act, usually the writing of a letter of resignation to the Secretary.

If the member is of good financial standing, then he is issued with a Certificate of Clearance.

If the member is not of good financial standing, then that debt could in principle be recovered through legal means, but in reality means that the debt stands and the member cannot be considered for rejoining at a later date until he has paid the moneys outstanding. In

organizations with multiple branches, such as AFAM (SA&NT) having multiple constituent lodges, this same impediment to consideration for joining another branch applies.

On the other hand, a member may fall into debt. We permit the member a period of grace (in AFAM (SA&NT) it is one or two years depending on the lodge) during which he may make good on the debt. If he is still in debt after the period of grace, then he is excluded from membership. The debt owed at the time of exclusion remains, just as with a member who resigns while not of good financial standing.

I have witnessed many secretaries and executive committees being driven to distraction by the implementation of this system, especially when there are members who play a game of only paying what is absolutely minimum to keep them ahead of exclusion.

A further problem for lodges is that, while someone is a member, the lodge is obliged to pay a capitation fee to the Grand Lodge. If that member subsequently reneges on his debt, then the lodge bears that often quite substantial loss.

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Consider, instead, what happens, say, with a magazine subscription. If I take out a one-year magazine subscription, then as the renewal date draws near I will receive a renewal notice. If I take that up, then all well and good. If I do not, then I will typically be bombarded by ever more hysterical warnings of my imminent loss of the magazine subscription. If, by the due date, I have not renewed, then I typically will receive a few more issues with accompanying reminders of the little matter of payment. But, after these few "grace" issues, if I still have failed to renew, then I simply cease to be a subscriber to the magazine.

I argue that many younger folk view membership of societies in exactly the same way as subscribing to a magazine: if one wishes to resign, then one simply walks away and one lets the current subscription lapse.

I recall a case in a lodge on whose executive committee I was a member. A young member of the lodge had graduated from university and had taken a job interstate. He had the "magazine subscription" view of how his lodge membership worked, and so he simply left for interstate. For the next two years, the lodge had regarded him as still being a member and had duly paid capitation fees to the Grand Lodge, until finally the matter of his formal exclusion came up at the executive committee. Someone was charged with making direct, personal contact with the prodigal member and ask him for the debt of in excess of \$400, being his subscription to the lodge while he was living interstate! The response received was obvious.

I argued then, and I continue to argue, that such situations are ludicrous. An elderly Past Master on the executive committee argued vehemently that the process was contained in the lodge by-laws, a copy of which the young member had been presented with at his Initiation. If he had not read the by-laws, then that was his problem. I immediately took out a copy of the by-laws and found within minutes something of the order of five obligations of the executive committee specified in the by-laws that had not been enacted for years. In fact, the by-laws specified that the lodge meet on a Friday at Freemasons Hall, and yet for years the lodge had actually met on a Tuesday at a suburban Masonic centre!

Hypocrisy gone mad!

Many years ago, I became the Secretary of my professional body. This organization had a subscription philosophy of the same type as AFAM (SA&NT). I quickly became weighed down by endeavouring to implement this system. So, I bullied the society, largely by threatening to resign, into adopting the “magazine subscription” model. Members received due notification of the renewal amount and date, with a few reminders for good measure. A three-month period of grace was allowed. This was carefully timed so that the recalcitrant was not yet counted for capitation to the federal body. If renewal had not been received by the end of this grace period, then the member was informed that they were no longer a member, and that was that!

Many committee members predicted dire consequences for the membership numbers. Not so. I played hardball and won. The only members we lost were those who would have ultimately been excluded anyway, and the Branch avoided the onerous capitation fees for these phantom members.

I wish to make it clear at this point that I am not referring to individual special cases of members under financial duress, and any special arrangements that are made to provide them with brotherly love and relief.

I urge AFAM (SA&NT) and its constituent lodges to abandon the traditional but cumbersome system in favour of the “pay up or you’re out” model. It will save lodge secretaries a lot of grief and lodges a lot of undeserved capitation fees. I am of the firm belief that it will hardly affect membership numbers at all!

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I reiterate that we must distinguish the core principles of Freemasonry, the Ancient Landmarks, from the way we happen to operate within our society for the time being. For the latter, let us concentrate on what is efficient and adds value to the view of Freemasonry by the society we seek to serve.

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## **Epilogue**

*“The Times They Are A-Changin’”, by Bob Dylan*

*Come gather 'round people  
Wherever you roam  
And admit that the waters  
Around you have grown  
And accept it that soon  
You'll be drenched to the bone  
If your time to you  
Is worth savin'  
Then you better start swimmin'  
Or you'll sink like a stone  
For the times they are a-changin'*

*Come writers and critics  
Who prophesize with your pen  
And keep your eyes wide  
The chance won't come again  
And don't speak too soon  
For the wheel's still in spin  
And there's no tellin' who  
That it's namin'  
For the loser now  
Will be later to win  
For the times they are a-changin'*

*Come senators, congressmen  
Please heed the call  
Don't stand in the doorway  
Don't block up the hall  
For he that gets hurt  
Will be he who has stalled  
There's a battle outside  
And it is ragin'  
It'll soon shake your windows  
And rattle your walls  
For the times they are a-changin'*

*Come mothers and fathers  
Throughout the land  
And don't criticize  
What you can't understand  
Your sons and your daughters  
Are beyond your command  
Your old road is  
Rapidly agin'  
Please get out of the new one  
If you can't lend your hand  
For the times they are a-changin'*

*The line it is drawn  
The curse it is cast  
The slow one now  
Will later be fast  
As the present now  
Will later be past  
The order is  
Rapidly fadin'  
And the first one now  
Will later be last  
For the times they are a-changin'*

## #11 – The Burden of Office

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To be successful any lodge needs a competent and cohesive team of Officers. The qualifications for and the roles of the Officers of a lodge are the topics of this post.

The Lodge Manual in fact covers in some detail most of this; the problem seems to be that very few brethren, even the Master, have actually read that manual!

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But, first, I wish to take to task the Regulations themselves in their definition of the Officers of a lodge.

*40.1. The regular officers of a Lodge consist of the Master and his two Wardens, a Treasurer, a Secretary, two Deacons, an Inner Guard, and a Tyler. The Master may also appoint, or the Lodge may elect, as the By-laws specify, a Chaplain (who is a minister of religion), a Director of Ceremonies, a Lodge Care Officer, an Organist, and Stewards.*

The Master and his two Wardens, the Treasurer, the Secretary, two Deacons, the Inner Guard, and the Tyler are the “regular” officers.

What about the second group of officers listed, the “irregular” officers?

The wording of the second sentence (“*may*” instead of “*must*”) seems to suggest that the Chaplain, the Director of Ceremonies, the Lodge Care Officer, the Organist, and Stewards are all optional officers! It seems to permit the Master or the Lodge to dispense with these positions unless the By-laws force the Lodge to have them!

Is that what is really meant? I doubt it! But, otherwise, why not just say something like “*The other officers consist of ...*”?

(As for the question of appointment versus election, Regulation 42 has that covered:

### *42. REGULATIONS RELATING TO OFFICERS*

#### *Treasurer and Tyler*

*42.1. The Treasurer and Tyler of a Lodge will be elected officers, and the Tyler may also be removed at any time by a majority of the Brethren present at a regular meeting.*

#### *Other Officers*

*42.2. A Lodge may determine by its By-laws whether the Wardens and other officers are elected, or appointed by the Master.*

So, the strange wording of the second sentence of Regulation 40.1 cannot be concerned about that issue.)

Regulation 40.1 is strangely worded, indeed!

The only other mention of “regular officers” in the Regulations comes in Regulation 40.3:

*40.3. No Brother below the rank of a Master Mason may hold any regular office in a Lodge, nor may any Brother hold more than one regular office in the Lodge at one and the same time.*

By omission, this would suggest that an Entered Apprentice could be the Chaplain, a Fellowcraft could be the Director of Ceremonies. The Treasurer could also be the Lodge Care Officer and the Organist all at the same time.

Maybe this is what is truly meant. It just all seems odd to me.

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And why must the **Chaplain** be a minister of religion?

According to the Lodge Manual, the “Chaplain is responsible for offering up prayers and invocations.” There are passages of Judaeo-Christian Scripture that he is required to read. He also presents a newly raised Master Mason with his Volume of the Sacred Law, and gives a Blessing at the Festive Board.

If there is no minister of religion in the lodge able to take on the Office of Chaplain, then any brother may be appointed to act as Chaplain and perform the exact same duties. Why, then, require the substantive Office to be filled by a minister of religion?

I also note, in passing, that the Chaplain (or the brother acting as Chaplain) is uniquely permitted to read the ritual that he is to deliver, all other Officers being expected to recite their ritual from memory!

Some lodges take it upon themselves to expand the duties of the Chaplain to include being a spiritual mentor to a brother in the Lodge, if requested. This seems all a bit pointless if, say, a Muslim Imam is the Chaplain in a lodge with an otherwise Jewish membership.

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To take the matter of qualifications for Office to their logical extensions, then why not the following?

Should we not require the **Lodge Care Officer** to have qualifications in social work?

If the **Tyler** is “armed with a drawn sword, to keep off all cowans and intruders”, then do we not have to arrange for him to be properly licensed as a security officer?

These two are of course flippant remarks, but nonetheless I argue that they serve to further illustrate the redundancy in the requirement that the Chaplain be a minister of religion.

And while I am on the subject of the Lodge Care Officer, the Regulations define the title of the Office to be “**Lodge** Care Officer” (my emphasis), and yet there are many references to the “Care Officer”. This is just sloppy.

\* \* \* \* \*

There are other Offices of the Lodge for which particular expertise **is** required.

Why is the **Treasurer** not required to have qualifications in the field of book-keeping? Most brethren would be quite unable to properly manage the affairs of the Treasurer, would not have a clue what accrual accounting is and would be completely unable to draw up proper financial statements.

While on the subject of matters financial, the **Auditors** would need to be similarly skilled.

The **Secretary** would need to be knowledgeable in matters regarding meeting organization such as agenda setting, minute taking and so on. These are not trivial matters. I have cringed to see at times minutes of a meeting with statements such as “Brother Smith then stood up and said ‘I second that motion’”. Minutes are not a verbatim transcript of the minutiae of everything that happened at the meeting!

It would behove the **Master** to be competent in the skills required of both the Treasurer and the Secretary, so that he may work with them effectively in the proper management of the lodge, and also so that he may be properly equipped to run meetings of the lodge and meetings of the Executive Committee.

The qualifications mentioned in this group of officers could potentially be acquired by a novice were training provided, say by Grand Lodge.

\* \* \* \* \*

The **Organist** it is presumed actually knows how to play the organ! I suppose this qualification for office is sufficiently self-evident that it need not be stated. Although, as lodges find it more difficult to find qualified organists, more and more lodges will be forced to turn to pre-recorded lodge music and the “Organist” will become the operator of the associated audio-equipment.

\* \* \* \* \*

What is the role of the **Director of Ceremonies**? The clue is in the name!

On rehearsal evenings and meeting evenings, the abilities of the Director of Ceremonies are crucial to the smooth operation of the lodge. Having earlier arranged for appropriate brethren to be the occasional ritualists, he scrutinizes the running of the ritual ceremony at the rehearsal and oversees the running of the meeting itself.

His cool-headedness and knowledge of correct practices is vital in the event of something going awry at the meeting.

In many ways, the Director of Ceremonies is the Sergeant-Major to the Worshipful Master as Commanding Officer.

However, in many lodges, the Director of Ceremonies runs the lodge, or tries to run the lodge, or thinks he should run the lodge. Despite what some Directors of Ceremonies think, he does not arrange the slate of candidates for the next year’s officers, he does not determine when brethren are ready for passing or raising and he does not determine the program of meetings.

The Master and his Wardens rule the lodge, with the advice and assistance of the Executive Committee. The administrative running of the lodge is determined by the Master, the Treasurer and the Secretary.

When a Director of Ceremonies complains that he “is not being kept in the loop”, it usually means that he is not being allowed to exercise those functions that I listed above that he might think that he should have, but that are not in fact within his remit.

Although it is usually prudent to have an Installed Master (previously termed a Past Master) as the Director of Ceremonies, the Regulations do not require this to be the case. The Grand Lodge’s suggested template for the By-laws of a lodge do not make this a requirement either.

There may be (exceptional) cases in which there is elected/appointed as the Director of Ceremonies of a lodge a Brother who is well versed in the rituals and procedures, and of a nature capable of mustering the troops.

I am wondering, though, whether the drafters of the Regulations and the suggested template for the By-laws of a lodge may have implicitly assumed that the Director of Ceremonies was required to be an Installed Master despite not actually stipulating it. In the suggested template for the By-laws of a lodge, the Executive Committee includes even the Deacons, but not the Director of Ceremonies, unless the latter “sneaks” in since all Installed Masters are on the Executive Committee.

But, to return to the main issue of this section, what is the role of the Director of Ceremonies? Well ... maybe ... to direct the ceremonies?

\* \* \* \* \*

So, what is the most important “take-home message” from this essay?

Do not just mention the existence of a Lodge Manual when a new candidate is initiated and wave a book at him. Rather, have the Lodge Manual much more readily accessible (say, through the members’ section of the much updated Grand Lodge website that I advocated in the post [#9 – “In the Bicycle Lane of the Information Superhighway”](#)). Encourage all brethren to read the manual, and in particular insist that Officers-elect read the sections related to their upcoming Office.

Gaining new skills for our journey through life is part of the ethos of Freemasonry – let us embrace this.



## #12 – Reimbursements and Honorariums

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Officers of a Lodge are *volunteers* in an organization. As such, it is appropriate that each Officer makes a clear distinction between reimbursements and an honorarium. Not only is this important from the point of view of accountability of the volunteer and of the organization to interested parties, but also from the point of view of good management of the organization. In the case of a Lodge, the volunteer is the Officer, the organization is the Lodge, and interested parties include not only the members of the Lodge, but also Grand Lodge, the Craft more generally, and other bodies and members of the general public to which the Lodge presents itself as a charitably orientated volunteer-run fraternity.

\* \* \* \* \*

A reimbursement applies when the Officer has incurred an expense on behalf of the Lodge, where the Lodge has previously authorized such expenditure.

A reimbursement should not be wrapped up with an honorarium in one unitemized package. Such a practice lacks transparency and accountability and also can be an impediment to forward predictions of expenditure, thus affecting the good management of the Lodge.

A straightforward example of a reimbursement would be the Festive Board Steward purchasing a carton of beer to top up the Lodge Festive Board supplies. Typically, the Festive Board Steward would pay using his own finances and then present the receipt to the Treasurer for reimbursement. The “previous authorization” by the Lodge would be of the form of setting parameters, in this example being parameters such as what products could be purchased and in what quantity. A purchase of a \$1,000 case of French champagne would not be reimbursed!

\* \* \* \* \*

Not every expenditure can be accounted for so easily. Nonetheless, it is still possible to determine a reimbursement regime by mutual agreement of the Officer and the Executive. The overriding principle is that the method must be determined fairly and reasonably, and that it be approved in open Lodge. Preferably, the determination of the method of reimbursement should be approved in advance, consistent with the principle that expenditure should have “previous authorization” by the Lodge.

Any candidate for Lodge Office would then be aware of what types of reimbursement would apply and the method of determination of the amount of reimbursement. If he were unhappy with these arrangements, then he could simply withdraw his candidature for that Office.

\* \* \* \* \*

Consider the following examples of common expenditures that require some thought for appropriate reimbursement.

The Secretary is the Officer most likely to incur a variety of types of expenditures for which he would seek reimbursement. If the Lodge still posts documents such as the Summons as hard copy mail, then the Secretary would likely have purchased envelopes, sheets of

address labels, postage stamps and the like; reimbursements for these would be as in the previous straightforward example.

The reimbursement of printing costs, though, is not as simple.

A fair and reasonably painless method of determining a reimbursement regime would be to determine the cost per print charged by a local professional printer and apply that. The Secretary would simply keep a log of the number of prints he has made and periodically present the log to the Treasurer for payment.

A less simple method would be to reimburse the Secretary for the paper and printing. The cost of paper would be handled in the usual way. As for the cost of printing, the Secretary would note the cost of the printer and of the ink/toner and use the indicative lives of each to estimate a cost per print.

Printing costs, then, form an example where the precise details can be negotiated between the Officer and the Executive, according to the principle that the method must be determined fairly and reasonably, and then approved in open Lodge.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Lodge Care Officer may use his private motor vehicle to visit members of the Lodge, such as those in hospital. How should this be reimbursed?

The use of a private motor vehicle for work-related purposes may give rise to a tax deduction. The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) each year determines an amount per kilometre that may be claimed, which in the 2015-2016 taxation year is 66 cents per kilometre for all motor vehicles.

<https://www.ato.gov.au/individuals/income-and-deductions/deductions-you-can-claim/vehicle-and-travel-expenses/car-expenses/>

The ATO states, "You don't need written evidence but you need to be able to show how you worked out your business kilometres (for example, by producing diary records of work-related trips)."

It is reasonable for the Lodge to use this method for determining reimbursements for the use of private motor vehicles for the conduct of Lodge business. The amount per kilometre used would be the most recent as determined by the ATO, so at the date of this essay that would be 66 cents per kilometre. The brother would maintain a log of the trips made, either by explicitly noting the date, purpose and start and end odometer readings, or by noting the date, purpose and start and end locations (using say Google Maps to determine the distance that would have been driven). An example of the latter would be as follows.

Date	Purpose	Origin	Destination	km
12 May 2017	Visit Bro. Smith in hospital	Brighton	Flinders Medical Centre and return	11
15 May 2017	Visit Bro. Smith's wife	Brighton	Morphett Vale and return	31
5 June 2017	Enquiry at Grand Lodge re arrangements for Bro. Smith	Brighton	Adelaide and return	33
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75</b>

The above log would be submitted to the Treasurer with a request for 75 kilometres x 66 cents per kilometre = \$49.50 reimbursement.

\* \* \* \* \*

Just as the incoming Master and Wardens would not be expected to have to provide their own gauntlets and gavels, let alone their own pedestals, neither should the incoming Organist be *expected* to have his own music books of Masonic Ritual Music, let alone his own organ. It is reasonable for a Lodge to purchase its own copies of music books of Masonic Ritual Music, and also some books of appropriate Occasional Music, and to provide them for the use of the incumbent Organist.

In many cases, the Organist will have his own copies of such music books. In this case, the Organist and the Executive would agree on a lifetime for the books, say three years, and apportion a percentage of usage of the books for Lodge purposes. Thus, from the historic cost of the books, an annual reimbursement to the Organist for the supply of his own music books could be determined.

Yet again, here is an example where the precise details can be negotiated between the Officer and the Executive, according to the principle that the method must be determined fairly and reasonably, and then approved in open Lodge.

\* \* \* \* \*

There are occasions in which an Officer may elect to pay a Lodge expense from his own finances and not claim reimbursement. This is, in effect, a donation to the Lodge's General Purposes Fund by the Officer. Such a practice is laudable, but it should be accounted for in the proper way.

The expense should be entered as such into the expenditure side of the Cash Book, and an equal entry be made into the income side of the Cash Book as a donation to the Lodge's General Purposes Fund. Whether this donation is acknowledged by name or entered as an anonymous donation is the choice of the Officer.

This practice is essential to permit forward predictions of expenditure, and is thus essential for the good management of the Lodge: this Officer's successor may not be in a position to continue to make such a donation. Unless the donation is properly accounted for, there

could be a sudden and unpredicted expense entering the recurrent items of expenditure upon the change of Officer.

\* \* \* \* \*

In respect of members of a Lodge, an honorarium should be kept distinct from the reimbursement of expenses. An honorarium is a financial reward to the member for his time and effort, above and beyond the normal call of service towards his Lodge.

This financial reward may be explicit in the form of a cash payment, or implicit in the form of a remittance of subscription. Whether explicit or implicit, it is still an honorarium with an associated financial value!

An honorarium *may* become part of the recipient's taxable income, but not necessarily. It is not the business of the Lodge to determine the member's taxation affairs. The Lodge should note, however, that calling an honorarium a different name, say "reward", has no legal effect. An honorarium is an honorarium, whatever you may choose to call it!

Any honorarium should be approved and paid in arrears so as not to be seen as an inducement or as an explicit salary for the member's time.

An honorarium should only apply to special situations, usually some type of project outside the normal operation of the Lodge.

An example of the appropriate award of an honorarium would be where the Secretary, in addition to his normal duties, undertook a substantial rewrite of the Lodge By-Laws. After the completion of that project, the Executive, with the Secretary recusing himself, could recommend to open Lodge that an honorarium be paid.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Secretary is a particular example of an Officer whose normal duties may become excessive. If this becomes the norm for the Lodge, then the Lodge may be tempted to acknowledge this by paying the Secretary an honorarium. This practice is ill-advised.

If an Officer is overly burdened by the normal duties of his Office, then it is the responsibility of the Master to appoint one or more Assistants to distribute the workload.

\* \* \* \* \*

Even after workload amelioration, certain Offices may be difficult to fill. The Offices of Secretary, Organist and Tyler often fall into this category. There is a temptation for the Lodge to offer an honorarium for a member who takes up the Office. Such inducements are dangerous!

What are we to make of the situation where a member of the Lodge is at first not prepared to nominate for an Office, but when offered a financial inducement is now willing?

There have been cases in some organizations of members occupying an Office past the expiry, say due to age, of their ability to carry out its duties, simply because they wish to receive the honorarium. This is clearly undesirable.

If the honorarium is used as a way of attracting a new member to the Lodge in order to fill an Office, by means of a financial inducement, then the line between the payment of an honorarium and the employment of a person who happens to be a Freemason is blurred. Aside from moral and ethical questions, there could also be legal implications both for the Lodge and for the Freemason it is “employing”.

\* \* \* \* \*

If we are to countenance Freemasons “for hire” to fill positions in Lodges, then where is the line to be drawn? There are pieces of the Ritual, notably the Charges and the Lectures on the Tracing Boards, that are difficult to master. Do we wish to countenance professional ritualists? *Does your Lodge have an Initiation next month? Not to worry, I know a Freemason who does an excellent delivery of the Charge and his charge (pun intended) is quite competitive.* Is this whither Freemasonry?

\* \* \* \* \*

In summary, reimbursements of financial expenses incurred by members on behalf of the Lodge, where the Lodge has previously authorized such expenditure, can and should be made. Honorariums should be used sparingly, determined and paid in arrears, as a reward for services provided on a project outside the recurrent duties of members of the Lodge.



## #13 – Keep Your Receipts

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*“Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pound ought and six, result misery.” – Charles Dickens*

\* \* \* \* \*

It might be all very tacky and terribly common to have to think about money, but sound financial management is necessary in any organization, including a lodge.

In the post [#11 – “The Burden of Office”](#), it was remarked that the Treasurer must have the basic skills of book-keeping, such matters as the banking of receipts and payments of expenditures, the maintenance of an appropriate ledger, the notion of accrual accounting, being able to draw up proper financial statements and the production of a budget for the forthcoming year.

Ideally, a service that Grand Lodge could provide to the constituent lodges would be to offer periodically a course for Treasurers-Elect, Auditors-Elect and even Masters-Elect in these skills.

\* \* \* \* \*

The By-laws of a lodge should be carefully crafted to make it clear what expenditures require the approval of the Executive Committee only and what expenditures require approval in open lodge. The relevant By-laws will usually specify expenditures by a combination of type, amount and whether the expenditure is recurrent or a one-off expenditure.

It would also be typical to establish a petty cash fund. The By-laws must make it clear who manages this (usually the Secretary) and what records are to be kept.

It is hard to keep a straight face in the lodge room when the lodge goes through the comical theatrics of moving and seconding a motion to authorize the expenditure on that evening’s festive board, when the food is already sitting in the kitchen waiting to be served; I wonder what would happen if the motion were defeated? And yet, the executive committee of the same lodge may take it upon itself to decide upon an expenditure many times that of the festive board without any referral to open lodge for approval.

I have seen an ad hoc subcommittee of an Executive Committee, given a budget of \$1,000, take it upon themselves to commit the lodge to an expenditure of \$2,000. I have also seen a Past Master spend nearly \$100 on an item for the lodge and then seek reimbursement, based purely on his own decision that this purchase would be appropriate for the lodge.

The officers of a lodge must be reminded of the By-laws governing expenditure approval, and any pre-emption of approval must be stomped on.

It is also, at this point, worth reminding the members of the Executive Committee that an ad hoc assembly of some of its members, that happens to number the quorum set for an Executive Committee meeting, does not give this ad hoc assembly any powers at all and so

certainly does not give it powers to approve expenditure! *All* members of the Executive Committee must be given due notice of a meeting of the same, and only at that meeting may business be transacted.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Executive Committee of a lodge should expect the Treasurer to draw up a budget for the ensuing year, typically in the lead-up to the setting of the next year's subscription rates.

In most lodges, an indicative budget should not be too difficult to draft.

Most income and expenditure items will be the same, year on year, and their prediction for the new year should not be difficult.

A failing of many lodges is that the non-cash assets of the Lodge have never been included in the Statement of Members' Funds. (Older brethren will be more used to calling this the Balance Sheet.) The lodge may not own real estate and not own lodge furniture, say, but it typically it will own officers' collars and jewels, perhaps its own gavels or mauls, ode books and other such items.

The lodge should have a depreciation schedule for its non-cash assets. Correspondingly, the lodge should make provision each year for eventual asset replacement. Any large expenses that the lodge routinely incurs, but only once in every several years, should also have an annual provision made.

I believe that subscriptions (and any other recurrent income) must cover recurrent expenditure. A lodge may dip into their reserves for projects like the production of a membership leaflet, but not to artificially subsidize subscriptions. It is inappropriate to use the frugality of past lodge members to fund the current members.

If, in order for recurrent income to cover recurrent expenditure, the subscription rates must be set "too high", then the expenditure is too much! Live within your means!

\* \* \* \* \*

Many lodges choose *not* to be formally incorporated under the South Australian "Associations Incorporation Act 1985".

The South Australian Government website defines unincorporated associations thus. "When a group of people agree to act together as an organisation, club or group they form an association. Unincorporated associations are simply a collection of people acting together. These are not regarded as legal entities by law."

This web page lists advantages and disadvantages of being an unincorporated association.

One of the disadvantages listed is that an unincorporated association cannot hold assets in its own name, as it has no legal identity. It must appoint individuals as trustees who own the assets but hold them for the benefit of the association. The trustees are bound by the South Australian "Trustee Act 1936".

The template for lodge By-laws recommended by the Grand Lodge has a section that requires the immovable property of the unincorporated lodge (land and/or premises) be



vested in not less than three Trustees on behalf of the lodge. It also has a section that requires the movable property of the lodge (jewels, furniture, funds, books and documents) be vested in and deemed the property of the Master and Wardens for the time being in trust for the lodge.

The template for lodge By-laws recommended by the Grand Lodge also includes clauses requiring appropriate insurance be held by the Trustees. Individual lodges can opt to take out the requisite insurance through a service offered by Grand Lodge.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lodges which choose to be formally incorporated associations under the South Australian “Associations Incorporation Act 1985” have certain obligations under the Act, but certain advantages as well.

Some incorporated associations, usually large organizations such as sporting clubs, are “prescribed associations” under the Act. These associations are subject to much more stringent regulation, and in particular prescribed associations have strict auditing requirements under the Act.

Most incorporated lodges are not “prescribed associations” under the Act.

\* \* \* \* \*

Incorporated associations that are not “prescribed associations” under the Associations Incorporation Act 1985, and unincorporated associations, are not legally required to be audited unless the Rules they have chosen to adopt require it.

However, returning specifically to lodges, Grand Lodge Regulations do require all constituent lodges to be audited.

A grave deficiency in the Grand Lodge Regulations is that there is no indication of the scope of such an audit. They must have an “audit”, but at what level of scrutiny need it be?

\* \* \* \* \*

On one occasion, I attended a festive board and sat next to two brethren unknown to me. After being seated though, I realized that they were hard at work with some documents. I observed that what they were doing was going through a set of bank statements – I presumed those of the lodge – and they were ticking off income items against receipt book duplicates and outgoing items against cheque butts. I did not dare ask, but I think that this constituted the lodge audit. Sigh.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was once asked to audit the books of a “dying” lodge. It had been determined that the lodge would hand in its Warrant, but the books had to be audited before that could take place. We were by then well into 2016, and the last Financial Statements to have been audited were the 2012-13 Financial Statements! There were thus *three* years for me to sort out – and as it happened “sort out” is a polite description!

As would be the case in most lodges, some of the lodge funds were entailed for charitable purposes and the remainder were general purposes funds. It is typical for the actual moneys to be pooled and invested in a strategic way, but of course it essential that the amounts in each category are recorded.

I discovered that the 2012-13 Financial Statements – the ones already “audited” and approved by the Lodge – only showed the aggregate of the general purposes funds and the charitable funds! Somewhere in the past, the two separate amounts were pooled in the Financial Statements, and the split into general purposes funds and charitable funds had been thereafter lost. A daunting forensic investigation of the Lodge records would have been required to establish the split, and even then the investigation may have failed if records had been lost.

Other than noting this unsatisfactory state of affairs, I proceeded with my audit with the amounts aggregated.

Perversely, in any given financial year, the surplus/deficit for the general purposes funds and the surplus/deficit for the charitable funds could be determined. The information that had been brought forward permitted this, but this was not enough information to determine the split of the aggregate funds.

I discovered income with no record of payer or purpose. In some cases the income had been by cheque, and so information could be recovered from the records kept by the bank. Also, there was expenditure with no record of payee or purpose. Some were payments by cheque, but the cheque butts were blank. Again, in these cases the information could be recovered from the records kept by the bank.

These last issues would even have been detected by the “auditors” I had encountered at the festive board doing the ticking off of the bank statement items exercise mentioned above. What they would have done about it I could not begin to guess.

I discovered receipts for festive boards that had no corresponding catering payments. The food may have been donated that evening and the festive board charges used to raise general purposes funds for the lodge. But there were no notes to explain the oddity. How far should the auditor go in trying to discover whether a caterer had not been paid?

There were meetings for which there were neither festive board receipts nor catering payments. Again, no notes to explain the anomaly. Perhaps there had been no festive board that evening, perhaps the lodge “ate out”, perhaps ... ? Again, how far should the auditor go in trying to discover the explanation?

There were some meetings for which there were no receipts for the festive boards even though there were catering payments! Fortunately, in all those cases, I was able to discover readily that the festive board was not charged for on those evenings due to them being special occasions, rather than having to track down some stewards with cash in their dinner suit jacket pockets!

\* \* \* \* \*

Should the auditors of a lodge examine the cash collection procedures used by the lodge? If a single steward collects funds and gives a handful of money to the Treasurer, what checks are there on the integrity of that procedure?

\* \* \* \* \*

In many lodges, a charge is collected by the stewards and raffle tickets are distributed. It is often not clear if the charge is for the festive board and the raffle ticket is free, or the other way around. There are some people who regard even raffles as gambling and that goes against their ethics. If the festive board is free but the charge is for the raffle ticket, then such people must be permitted a free supper!

\* \* \* \* \*

Of the financial issues discussed in this post, the one that is clearly in need of serious contemplation and action is the question of what the Regulations mean by the “audit” of a lodge’s finances. The current Regulations are unacceptably vague.

Earlier in the post, in respect of training for prospective Treasurers, I advocated a service that Grand Lodge could provide to the constituent lodges of offering periodically a course in the relevant skills.

In the light of the issues raised in the discussion of the auditing of lodges, I would go further by advocating a standing team of Grand Lodge Officers who are financial advisers to and inspectors of the constituent lodges. These officers would be charged with the inspection of the financial systems in place in each lodge, the training of the lodge Treasurer and the annual audit of the lodge finances.

Now, I can hear the screams already! This infringes on the independence of lodges, too much control by Grand Lodge, squawk, squawk, squawk, ... ! But, if a lodge wishes to have the imprimatur of being a constituent lodge of the Grand Lodge of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory, then the latter does have the right to demand the integrity of the financial arrangements of the former.



## #14 – A True and Correct Record

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If a dispute arises when playing a traditional parlour game, the players would resolve the issue by reaching for “Hoyle’s Games”. This authoritative book has even given rise to a common saying: if things are being done in a proper manner, then they are said to be done “according to Hoyle”.

Debates over appropriate wording of sentences are traditionally settled by reference to “Fowler’s Dictionary of Modern English Usage”.

But, when it comes to matters concerning meeting procedure in Australia, the gold standard is “Joske’s Law and Procedures at Meetings in Australia”. The book is described thus:

*“Covering such topics as the convocation of meetings through notice and quorum, procedures, minutes, and the effect of irregularity in proceedings, this title will inform anyone who participates in, or provides advice in connection to, meetings in Australia. The book is divided logically into three parts, each containing up-to-date legislation and recent case law: Part I discusses the common law of meetings and the standard rules of meetings procedure; ...”*

\* \* \* \* \*

Now the business part of a lodge meeting and a meeting of a lodge Executive Committee are unlikely to be so convoluted or contentious as to require frequent reference to *Joske* itself. Many organizations such as Freemasonry SA & NT will have formulated a simplified form that would cover any scenarios likely to arise. Also, in some parts, the organization may choose to explicitly vary the procedure laid down in *Joske* due to some particular circumstance of that organization.

Cue the **Lodge Manual**.

In the post #11 – “The Burden of Office”, I decried the fact that the Lodge Manual is routinely carried in the Lodge Room by the Master and waved at a newly initiated candidate, but is only ever opened, it would seem, if the manual were accidentally dropped on the floor! I encouraged all brethren to become familiar with the contents of the Lodge Manual.

For there, in **Section 7**, are specified the **Rules of Debate**.

\* \* \* \* \*

The usual business to be dealt with at a lodge meeting are the minutes of the previous meeting, correspondence and the financial report. Section 20.4 of the Lodge Manual, which is within the section concerning the duties of the Master, contains precise instructions for the Master in the handling of these items.

It should be observed that there is assumed to have been liaison between the Master, Treasurer and Secretary prior to the meeting. Furthermore, the Master will be aware either that the minutes of the previous meeting will be read aloud or that the minutes had been previously distributed to members. There is no reference at all to motions

that “the minutes be taken as read”: that idea seems to be some vestigial nonsense from an earlier age.

It should also be noted that there is no moving or seconding of any motions at all in the handling of the matters of the minutes of the previous meeting, correspondence and the financial report! Such theatre might be all rather fun, but it is totally redundant and time wasting. The Rules of Debate in Section 7 counsel the Master against motions from the Chair, but the above-mentioned processes in Section 20.4 *de facto* do allow the Master to move motions directly from the Chair.

Masters should read the Lodge Manual ... and just get on with things!

\* \* \* \* \*

There are two further issues regarding lodge meeting process that I wish to highlight.

Firstly, there is the matter of applications for Joining Membership and Affiliating Membership.

The Regulations previously demanded that the proposition be determined by ballot. I have seen many occasions, though, in which the Master has asked the meeting if it agrees to a vote, rather than a ballot, and then proceeded to a show of hands. This practice was prohibited unless by Dispensation of the Grand Master.

Recent proposals to amend the Regulations would give the Executive Committee the power to decide whether the proposal be put to a vote or a ballot.

At the time of writing, I am unsure of the status of that proposed Regulation change.

I am, though, most strongly against the proposed Regulation change. The true will of the Lodge in respect of the application for Joining Membership or Affiliating Membership can only be determined through a ballot!

\* \* \* \* \*

Secondly, there is the matter of dissent against a successful motion.

There is a departure from the normal practice in respect of what is recorded in the minutes, that I presume is inspired by the concept of Masonic harmony. Masters and Secretaries should take note that a member who has voted against a successful motion may not have his dissent recorded in the minutes, except in special circumstances.

#### 46. CONTROL OF LODGE'S PROCEEDINGS

##### *Right to Regulate Proceedings*

...

*46.2. No member is permitted to enter or request to be entered in the Minute Book of his Lodge an objection against any resolution or proceedings which may have taken place, except on the ground that the resolution or proceedings are contrary to the*

*By-laws or the customs and usages of the Craft, and that the objection is for the purpose of complaining or appealing to a higher Masonic authority.*

...

\* \* \* \* \*

At a meeting, business is transacted and decisions are made. The purpose of having minutes of the meeting is to provide an accurate record of what transpired.

But errors and omissions can occur and wording can be unclear. And so there is some process established whereby appropriate members may scrutinize the minutes and they are asked to confirm them. After that is done, an appropriate official appends his signature to the minutes to certify that the process of confirmation has been carried out.

This does not *prove* that the minutes are without error or omission. Someone may subsequently challenge the accuracy of the minutes, if necessary in a civil court. But the signed, confirmed minutes are powerful *prima facie* evidence of what did transpire. Their existence places the burden of proof squarely on the plaintiff.

In most organizations, the minutes of a regular meeting are considered at the next regular meeting.

There is a popular fallacy that only members who were present at the original meeting may take part in the debate concerning the minutes. This is a matter for the organization's rules, and in the absence of any such restriction, all members of the subsequent meeting may take part in the consideration of the minutes of the previous meeting.

Possibly after some debate which may include some amendment, the minutes would be confirmed and then signed by the Chairman of that subsequent meeting.

Extraordinary meetings would have their minutes considered in some process laid down in the organization's rules, but typically they are considered at the next regular meeting.

There can be other methods of dealing with the minutes.

An ad hoc meeting might have the minutes drawn up as part of the meeting concerned, and these then confirmed and signed at the said same meeting. More likely, the minutes would be circulated later to the members of the ad hoc meeting, with the instruction that any requests for amendments or a request for a follow-up meeting to debate the minutes need to be lodged by some specified time. If nothing is objected to by that time, the Chair of the ad hoc meeting would then declare the minutes confirmed and sign the minutes as such.

Freemasonry SA & NT places an unusually high standard on the consideration of the minutes before the minutes of a meeting can be confirmed and signed.

At the meeting that is considering the minutes, the Master first asks members who are present that evening and who were also present at the original meeting if they accept the minutes as an accurate record. Once, possibly after some debate which may include some amendment, the minutes are deemed by this group of members to be an accurate record, then the minutes are put to the entire membership present that evening for confirmation.

Thus, there is a two-step process that must be satisfied before the minutes are confirmed and may be signed by the Master. If the first step of this two-step process fails to pass the motion that the minutes are an accurate record, or if the first step succeeds but then the second step fails to pass the confirmation motion, then negotiation must be pursued until both motions succeed on some amended form of minutes. Only then may the Master sign the minutes.

As mentioned earlier, this two-step process is spelled out in Section 20.4 of the Lodge Manual, which is within the section concerning the duties of the Master.

\* \* \* \* \*

In my opinion, the conduct of the Executive Committee meetings in most lodges is woeful. There is usually no written agenda, but rather a “Well, okay boys, what are we going to chat about tonight?” verbal agenda. This is not good enough.

In one lodge, I was asked to take on a responsibility that had not previously existed in the lodge. The first thing I did was draft a duty statement for the role and submit it through the Secretary for consideration by the Executive Committee.

The Secretary had no idea what to do with this.

There was no culture in the lodge of a written agenda, and attachments to the agenda to be read by members in preparation for the meeting.

The sorts of documents that might be attached to agendas for discussion at the meeting are a strategic plan, a proposed budget, draft duty statements, draft prize rules, proposals for fund-raising events and so on.

And yet, most Executive Committees have members just turn up to the meeting cold. How can serious planning for the lodge be carried out in such an ad hoc way?

This is simply not good enough!



## #15 – A Peculiar System of Morality

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“What is Freemasonry?”

“A peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols.”

The First-Degree Catechism describes Freemasonry thus.

Our ritual provides the vast majority of the allegory and the symbolism, and is thus a fundamental part of the practice of Freemasonry.

But how seriously do we take our ritual?

\* \* \* \* \*

A core part of the Initiation Ceremony is the Obligation. Among other promises, the candidate swears “that I will always **hele**, conceal and never improperly reveal ... the Secrets ...” and also “that I will not write those Secrets, **indite**, carve, mark, engrave, or otherwise them delineate, ...”.

How often do you think that the candidate would know what the words “hele” and “indite” mean? I daresay that the Worshipful Master would struggle to define them!

Now, in any degree working, the candidate is usually overwhelmed by everything that is happening, and he would have said those words, as instructed by the Worshipful Master, and just gone with the flow. (Have you ever seen a candidate interrupt the proceedings and ask to be informed of the meaning of those words before uttering them in an obligation?)

But, after the degree working, the candidate should revisit the ritual, reflecting on its meaning, and, in particular, he should make an effort to discover the meanings of words he has not previously encountered.

There is a great opportunity for a new Entered Apprentice to review his Initiation Ceremony, if the lodge is to be opened in the Second Degree for some workings. The Entered Apprentice will be retired to the ante-room, and a Master Mason, preferably the lodge’s Education Coordinator, should retire with him for the purpose of Masonic instruction.

When I was an Education Coordinator, I developed a series of what I termed “Rough Ashlar Anteroom Seminars”, the first being “Entered Apprentice Seminar #1 – Review of the Initiation Ritual”.

\* \* \* \* \*

Let me remind you of the First Tracing Board. “In all regular, well-formed, constituted lodges, there is a point within a Circle. This Circle is bounded between North and South by two grand parallel lines, the one representing Moses, the other King Solomon. On the upper part of this Circle rests the Volume of the Sacred Law supporting Jacob’s Ladder, the top of which reaches to the Heavens; and were we as conversant with that Holy Book as those parallels were, and adherent to the doctrines therein contained, it will lead us to Him who will not deceive us ...”.

This is making it clear to all Freemasons, no matter how experienced, that they will always have yet more to learn.

The immovable Jewels, the Tracing Board and the Rough and Perfect Ashlars “lie open and immovable in the lodge for the brethren to moralize upon” – constant reflection and contemplation.

The Working Tools are explained to us so that we may seek “the moral to be derived from the contemplation of these tools ...”.

The Charge after Initiation charges you “to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge”.

In the initiation ceremony itself, the newly invested Entered Apprentice has it explained to him “the reasons for (his) preparation which, at first sight, to (his) untaught mind must have appeared somewhat strange, ...”.

As Freemasons, we are constantly being exhorted **to reflect upon the ritual, to contemplate its meaning and to make its moral significance our personal objective**.

And, of course there are not just the static symbols and the verbal allegories. Let us not forget the lessons to be drawn from the physical ritual.

For example, the penal sign in the first degree “... is an allusion to the ancient symbolic penalty of the degree, which implies that, as a man of honour, an Entered Apprentice Freemason would have submitted to having his throat cut across rather than improperly disclose the secrets entrusted to him”. It behoves the Freemason to reflect on this allusion when giving the sign. If through familiarity the penal sign degenerates into a stylish wave to the Master, the ritual loses its allusion and therefore its entire point.

If this observation is extended to the ritual generally, our ceremonies become merely the eccentric circus that our detractors often accuse us of being.

Thus, I would recommend to all brethren regular exegesis of the ritual, and attention to its correct execution, the better, as the chisel reminds us, to “cultivate our minds and render us better members of society”.

\* \* \* \* \*

But, I questioned earlier, “How seriously do we take our ritual?”.

Many brethren present pieces of ritual, and in preparation for that they commit to memory the words and the actions of the ritual. But is that all they are doing? Are they simply committing the words and the actions to memory and not taking the opportunity to once more seriously reflect on the point of the ritual?

And, in their delivery, do they convey the lessons of the ritual to the novice?

How often have you seen even a Past Master deliver a piece of ritual, with his gaze somewhat towards the ceiling, as he struggles to dredge up from his memory the next word, or words? Sometimes, he is nearly word-perfect, if by that you mean he utters the correct words in the correct order.

But, to the candidate, the timing of the delivery would bear no relation to the natural phraseology of the text. To the candidate, this would be a disjointed series of words. There would be no education being passed on to the candidate by the Past Master.

The ritual, as delivered, would be pointless.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is the duty of the Director of Ceremonies to ensure that the ritual is delivered by brethren capable of doing the job properly.

Now, the Director of Ceremonies should encourage all brethren, especially those who are junior, to take on pieces of ritual, especially ritual that is new to them. But this exercise should not be simply one of allocation.

The Director of Ceremonies should oversee the training of brethren in techniques for remembering and delivering ritual. Clear diction, correct phraseology and voice projection to all corners of the lodge room would all be part of this training.

The Director of Ceremonies would also have a responsibility to ask a brother to give a piece of ritual that was within his current level of achievement. He would not, for example, ask a newly raised Master Mason to deliver the Lecture on the Second Tracing Board in a Passing Ceremony, but he might suggest to the newly raised Master Mason that he explain the Lesser Lights in an Initiation Ceremony!

There is an apt sporting analogy that may be used. Brethren should be encouraged to “try out” for the “ritual team” with a piece of ritual appropriate for them.

But, at the end of the day, the Director of Ceremonies should only permit ritual to be delivered in the actual ceremonies by those capable of delivering it.

\* \* \* \* \*

But, what about ritual that is required to be delivered by specific officers of the lodge?

In these cases, the Director of Ceremonies needs to work with the officer, as would a coach, to ensure his technique improves.

In order to do so, the Director of Ceremonies must debrief the officer after any lodge meeting, if there were any aspects of the officer’s performance that were deficient. This requires the Director of Ceremonies himself to be fully conversant with the ritual, and to be prepared to point out errors in the work of the officer.

A particular case in point is the Junior Warden when a Fellowcraft lodge is being opened.

When the lodge is being opened in the second degree, the Junior Warden, in response to the ceremonial question, “What is the square?”, he is supposed to answer, “An implement for measuring angles of 90 degrees, which is used to try and to adjust rectangular corners of buildings ...”.

How often, though, do you hear the response, “An implement for measuring angles of 90 degrees, which is used to try and adjust rectangular corners of buildings ...”?

The verb “to try” meaning “to make an attempt” takes the infinitive of the verb for the action being attempted. Hence “... to try to adjust ...” means “... to make an attempt to adjust ...” But that is not what the words of the ritual are trying to say (pun intended)!

The verb “to try” can also mean “to measure the correctness of”, and in that meaning it takes an object, the name of the thing being judged. And that is what the ritual is saying here. “... to try rectangular corners of buildings and (if necessary) to adjust rectangular corners of buildings ...”, which by elision becomes the simpler “... to try and to adjust rectangular corners of buildings ...”

“... to try and adjust rectangular corners of buildings ...” is not even grammatically correct, let alone semantically correct!

The Director of Ceremonies should jump on this error firmly and immediately.

\* \* \* \* \*

In respect of the delivery of ritual in our ceremonies, there is the old hoary chestnut of whether the reading of ritual should be allowed.

I think that it is clearly desirable for a ritualist to recite with ease from his memory the entire text of his piece, giving appropriate emphasis and phraseology, and in a clear voice projected to the entire lodge room.

Very few of us can consistently manage this.

There will be some brethren who could give an excellent rendition of the ritual, were they permitted to refer to a conveniently placed, large-print transcript of the words. Recall television newsreaders from the days before the teleprompter technology. They had the skill to switch effortlessly between reference to their script and the television camera, all the while delivering the news report in a professional manner.

Surely this approach is to be preferred to the “word-perfect” but disconnected mumblings of bits of phrases, as described earlier in this essay?

When a brother whose abilities require the assistance of a transcript is to deliver a piece of ritual, then why not have a steward hold the transcript, turning pages if necessary, akin to the altar attendants in some types of church service?

I think this idea is at least worth some serious consideration.

Of course, having such a transcript to hand does not guarantee a well delivered piece of work. I have heard many a prepared speech read from a transcript which has been delivered in a droning monotone devoid of any emotion.

The Director of Ceremonies, as “coach of the ritual team”, will still need to put the aspiring ritualists through their paces and select those who are able to give the ritual the delivery it deserves.

\* \* \* \* \*

From time to time there may be an opportunity in the calendar of the lodge for a meeting devoted to the improvement of ritual. This exercise might be run by the Director of Ceremonies or perhaps by some suitable Grand Lodge Officer.

Another time, the lodge might invite a suitable Grand Lodge Officer to conduct as the main business of the lodge meeting a session in which portions of the ritual are not just worked, but are discussed and analyzed as an educational exercise.

As a side note here, I have often seen lodges Call Off in order to run such an item and then Call On again afterwards. I argue that this is completely inappropriate. Items such as the ones I suggested above are Masonic business and are part of the business of the lodge for that meeting.

In order that the exercise take place in a sensible fashion, it may be appropriate for the Worshipful Master to suspend temporarily the usual lodge room protocols. That is the way in which such exercises should be handled, rather than Calling Off.

\* \* \* \* \*

The motivating question behind this essay is, "How seriously do we take our ritual?".

I fear that some Freemasons see the lodge meeting as an opportunity to have a night out with the blokes, leaving the 'missus' at home with the kids.

Sure, it's great fun to dress up, with lots of bling and dangly bits, but let's remember that the Masonic regalia has a meaning, and its wearing gives a solemnity to the occasion that should fix our minds on the contemplation of the ritual.

I instinctively worry about lodges that meet only bimonthly, especially those that accompany the meeting with a boozy nosh-up rather than a simple festive board. I am not saying that such lodges in themselves are not taking their Freemasonry seriously and I am not accusing all members of such lodges of forgetting what it is all supposed to be about. But I do fear that this is an easier environment for brethren to be distracted from the contemplative side of Freemasonry that makes our fraternity distinctive from other charitable organizations.

I urge all Freemasons to reflect honestly on the balance of their motivations.

Are you a Contemplative Freemason?



## #16 – There was a Man in the Land of Uz

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Those readers who are familiar with my Masonic biography may know that, when I was installed as a Worshipful Master, I was given a dispensation in respect of Regulation 40.2. Regulation 40.2 reads,

*“No Brother, without a dispensation from the Grand Master, will be eligible for election as Master unless, at the proposed time of Installation, he shall have been a Master Mason for a period of five years or longer.”*

I was installed as a Worshipful Master in an accelerated time span.

In the post, [#6 – “Order in the House”](#), I stated that I would amend Regulation 40.3 to require a Brother to have held the rank of a Master Mason for at least two years, except by dispensation of the Grand Master, before being eligible to hold Office in a Lodge.

Given the *prima facie* hypocrisy of my own accelerated Mastership, I promised that I would devote a later post to this part of my Masonic career.

\* \* \* \* \*

I had been invested Junior Warden in October 2012 and Senior Warden in October 2013. It was therefore expected that I would be installed as Worshipful Master in October 2014.

I was duly elected by ballot, unopposed, in August 2014. The minutes of that meeting were confirmed at the following meeting.

As one of the many tasks that I was attending to as Master-Elect, I was carefully reading the Rules and the Regulations of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory Inc., a copy of which I had arranged to be procured from Grand Lodge. I had taken on this task, as I assumed that familiarity with these would be appropriate as Master of my Lodge.

I was flabbergasted when I read Regulation 40.2.

No-one had ever made any mention of a five-year qualification period. The Executive Committee comprised entirely Past Masters except for me, and that included two Past District Grand Superintendents. And yet no-one had even indicated that there was a qualification period, let alone queried whether I had met it.

I immediately raised the alarm.

\* \* \* \* \*

There are many Regulations with qualifications along the lines “except by dispensation of the Grand Master”. Having such qualifications is generally a good idea, in that when a set of regulations is devised it is nigh on impossible to predict all the possible contingencies. The usual state of affairs is dealt with by the regulation, and this qualification gives an avenue for the Grand Master to deal with any exceptional case that may arise.

Thus, the onus was on my Lodge – and so *de facto* really on me – to demonstrate that my particular Masonic experience together with experience I had gained outside Freemasonry

was sufficient to adequately equip me to be the Master of a Lodge, despite not satisfying the five-year Regulation.

It is important to observe that precedent has nothing to do with Regulations with qualifications along the lines “except by dispensation of the Grand Master”. Just because a dispensation has been granted in the past to a Freemason *in itself* has no bearing on a new case. Dispensations by their very nature deal with exceptional circumstances: the in-depth detail of each case that makes it unique.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now, I had a close association with another Lodge, and, very soon after my being Raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason, I had become a Joining Member of that other Lodge. I started to also take office in that other Lodge, and so in a very real sense my Masonic experience was indeed being accelerated.

I was in my fifties when I joined Freemasonry, and so I had already had an extensive career behind me, in my case as a university academic.

These various factors I was prepared to put together as a formal argument to the Grand Master to support the Lodge’s request for a dispensation from Regulation 40.2.

That’s not exactly how things panned out, though.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some Past Masters of my Lodge decided to make a direct, verbal approach to the Grand Master seeking the dispensation. I have never understood why they thought this a good idea. They were not at that time in possession of the arguments that would have supported the request. Why did they think a telephone call to Grand Lodge would “fix things”?

As it was, their request for a dispensation was angrily rebuffed by the Grand Master. I think that was quite an appropriate response!

\* \* \* \* \*

Given the events just described, I did not proceed any further to put together my case. The Lodge had basically blown its opportunity to seek a dispensation. The Lodge now had to find an alternative candidate to be Master for the next term.

Given the timing, the Installation was now put back to November.

I was frankly very annoyed about the disrespectful approach to the Grand Master. I think that I could have made a convincing case for a dispensation, had the request been conducted in a formal manner and had actually incorporated a supporting case.

I was also perversely amused by the realization that, had I not blown the whistle upon myself, in all likelihood I would have been installed as Master in October 2014 as planned, and no-one would have ever discovered the violation of Regulation 40.2!

\* \* \* \* \*



I was aware of another Freemason, with whom I was personally acquainted, who had been installed as Master of his lodge even though he had not met the five-year regulation. I was not aware of whether he had received a dispensation or whether his was an example of someone simply slipping through because no-one noticed.

In any case, I made no mention of this, though, since, as I argued above, precedent in itself is not an argument for a dispensation.

\* \* \* \* \*

There were, however, Past Masters in my Lodge who were not going to stop trying to wriggle a way out of their dilemma of whom to have as the next Master.

Somehow, they too discovered the case of my friend that I mentioned above, and again made representation to the Grand Master claiming that due to this precedent a dispensation for me should therefore be granted. Despite what I thought was clear logic that this was not about precedent but rather about the evaluation of exceptional circumstances, the Grand Master this time – *very begrudgingly* – did issue the dispensation.

Before the formal decision was made, the Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master did me the courtesy of personally telephoning me to appraise me of what was happening and asking whether I was happy to accept the dispensation and proceed to be installed as Master.

I should have stuck to my principles and declined the dispensation unless it was granted, ungrudgingly, based on my case for exceptional circumstances and not this flawed logic of precedent.

Hindsight, though, is a wonderful if useless thing.

I acceded to the wishes of my Lodge and accepted the dispensation.

\* \* \* \* \*

And, thus, in November 2014, one month after the event should have been held, I was installed in the Throne of King Solomon as Worshipful Master of my Lodge.

At my Installation, I noticed that the Volume of the Sacred Law in the Lodge Room had been opened to the Book of Job. My new Senior Warden had noticed this too, and in his greetings to me, on behalf of the members of the Lodge, at the Third Time of Asking he remarked on this and said that he hoped that it was not a bad omen.

\* \* \* \* \*

So, how was my experience as Worshipful Master of my Lodge?

*There was a Man in the Land of Uz ...*



## #17 – Zedekiah’s Lament

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*Freemasonry is an ancient and honourable institution that is built on the practice of every moral and social virtue. Its ancient landmarks, the system of morality that is veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols, is universal in time and space. Nonetheless, the implementation of the Craft in a particular jurisdiction should be regularly reviewed and changes as appropriate should be made to ensure that the practice of Freemasonry continues to best promote the worthy objectives of the Craft.*

It was for these reasons that I created this blog. The blog offered the observations, analyses and opinions of a Past Master of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory (AFAM (SA&NT)).

Since Freemasons, upon attaining the rank of Fellowcraft, have “earned the right to offer their sentiments and opinions on such subjects as are regularly introduced for discussion in our lodges”, to quote from the Charge upon Passing, the blog was made accessible to Fellowcrafts of AFAM (SA&NT); all posts on this blog were password-protected accordingly.

\* \* \* \* \*

In any organization, there will be different schools of thought in respect of how the organization’s affairs should be managed and the like. Such differences of opinion are usually benign; at times they may even be beneficial, as debate may give rise to an overall better outcome.

However, within AFAM (SA&NT) there has arisen a schism, and this can only be corrosive and lead to damage to the organization.

The catalyst for this schism was the sale of Masonic Homes Limited (MHL) and related matters.

A contested election in October 2017 for the position of Grand Master for the next period, unprecedented in decades, was a manifestation of this schism.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am of the personal opinion that the sale of MHL was appropriate policy and was conducted in a financially responsible manner, but that the public relations exercise was a disaster.

I have no doubt that considerable time and effort were put into the business transactions, but I believe that nowhere near enough thought or resources were put into bringing the mainstream of the brethren along with the narrative. As well as the “business team”, there should have been a “public relations team”. (If there was a “public relations team”, then clearly I believe that they failed.)

The effort that was put in to inform and involve the brethren seems to have been a rear-guard action after discontent began to spread. I am mindful of confidentiality considerations that would have applied in the lead-up to the sale of Masonic Homes Limited. However, at

the time that the sale was able to be announced to the brethren, a thoroughly planned information campaign should have been ready to be implemented simultaneously. I am not qualified in matters of public relations, but I would have had a strategy that pushed information to the brethren, rather than simply providing opportunities for concerned brethren to ask questions: proactive versus reactive.

I believe that there were four aspects of the sale of MHL and related matters that should have been anticipated to cause unease unless addressed at the outset. The four aspects to which I refer are:

1. Why the Grand Lodge of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory should divest itself of Masonic Homes Limited and repurpose the funds
2. The need for the creation of Masonic Charities Limited, separate from the existing Freemasons Foundation
3. The process of the appointment of the Directors of the new corporate entity, the issue of their fees and the need for confidentiality
4. Why the transfer of a small percentage of the proceeds to Grand Lodge was appropriate and necessary

\* \* \* \* \*

Regarding #1.

There has been considerable change in the regulative environment in which MHL operates. These changes have resulted in MHL no longer being able legally to pursue its original objectives.

I am convinced that many brothers are still unaware that, outside of the control of the Grand Lodge, MHL, originally intended as a residential aged care organization for elderly Freemasons and Masonic Widows, had now become just another corporate player in the residential aged care sector. They do not realize that it was this that led the Board of Management to the decision that running MHL was no longer an appropriate activity for the Grand Lodge, and that the considerable resources tied up in the organization would be better redirected to activities more closely aligned to the objectives of the Grand Lodge.

These brothers are still clinging to a nostalgic view of how things used to be and therefore are unconvinced of the need for change.

Surely, it has not escaped the notice of concerned brethren that SA & NT is just one of several jurisdictions likewise divesting their equivalent of MHL?

\* \* \* \* \*

Regarding #2 and #3.

I, and I would argue most brethren, would be unqualified to judge to wisdom of the financial structures put in place as a result of the divestment of MHL.

However, given that so many brethren would have been shocked at the news of the sale of MHL and bewildered as to why it was necessary, it was then easy for a storm of suspicion and conspiracy theories to be formed around the new financial structures.

Had the mainstream of the brethren been more aware and comfortable with the reasons for the divestment of MHL, then I believe that they would also have been more content with an explanation of the consequent financial structures, such as the explanation given in the Most Worshipful Grand Master's letter to the brethren (Cr. 12/17, 27 March 2017).

That letter advised the brethren that, after due consideration of advice from experts, it was determined that the funds derived from the sale of MHL should be vested in a new corporate identity, rather than using the Freemasons Foundation as a vehicle. Likewise, the determination of the Directors, the issue of their fees and the need for confidentiality.

There would no doubt still have been a core group of malcontents that was never going to buy into the narrative, but at least they would then not have been able to recruit as many followers as they appear to have done.

\* \* \* \* \*

Regarding #4.

As for the transfer of a small percentage of the proceeds to Grand Lodge for General Purposes, there are many brothers who are of the opinion that all of the proceeds should be entailed for Charitable Purposes.

The Board of Management are of the view that without a properly resourced and functioning organization underpinning Masonic Charities Limited, the Charitable Funds cannot be properly applied. I can see merit in this argument.

I can see that those who are of the opinion that all of the proceeds should be entailed for Charitable Purposes are unlikely to have been swayed by this argument. But, had it not been for the wider hysteria that seems to have taken hold, this group may have nonetheless gone along with the narrative and just been a little grumpy.

\* \* \* \* \*

There seems to me to have been a constant stream of invective, innuendo and accusation on social media ("social" media has never seemed to be such an oxymoron). It may well be that, at least in the beginning, the chatter on social media was being driven by a handful of brothers who would see a conspiracy in everything. I fear however that many, otherwise more measured brothers have been taken in by their siren song.

Policy by poorly considered and articulated posts on social media appear to have replaced reasoned and well written discussion papers. Even the United States of America now has a President who governs by tweet!

Many brethren were quite rightly aghast when an article, reporting on the controversy within the Freemasons SA & NT, appeared in the local press. That any brother would leak information of this internal matter to the public media, presumably in some mistaken belief that it would further their cause, is unforgivable!

More recently, there is a website which has appeared anonymously on the open world wide web. Not only may any cowan or intruder to Freemasonry, or any member of another Masonic jurisdiction, visit this website by simply typing its URL into a web browser, but also this site appears in web search engine results for any casual user of the internet who happens to enter search keywords that mark out this website. This is another example of at best careless and at worst deceitful disregard of our of Masonic values.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is crucial that we have a strong and united team of Grand Lodge Officers who will be willing to tackle large and controversial, but vitally important, issues. It is further crucial that we have a wider fraternity with faith in the ability and integrity of the team of Grand Lodge Officers.

If the divestment of Masonic Homes Limited leads to such a schism, then what future Grand Master will have the conviction to pursue other important issues? Such an outcome would result in stagnation at the top and inexorable decay at the base of the Craft in this jurisdiction.

\* \* \* \* \*

So, we are left with a schism between two groups.

1. Those who are prepared to tackle major issues that arise, as society changes around us, in order to protect and preserve Freemasonry's ancient landmarks
2. Those who would strive to recreate the heyday of Freemasonry in the 1960s, in a society that has moved on fifty years or more

Clearly my views, as expressed in the series of posts that make up this blog, mark me out as a member of the first group. I believe that the members of the second group are delusional, and that their efforts will lead to a further decline in the popularity and relevance of Freemasonry in South Australia and the Northern Territory.

However, on 21 April 2018, the Counter-Reformation will be installed. I can but fear for the future of the Craft.

\* \* \* \* \*

The effects of a degenerative peripheral nerve disease have now sapped too much of my energy for me to fight on.

This post has been officially published at 1800 hours Central Australian Time (UTC+0930) on Monday, 16 April 2018. Later this evening, a letter of resignation will be read in the Correspondence to be received by my Lodge at its April 2018 meeting, whereupon, according to Regulation 55.1, my resignation from that Lodge, and by implication Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory, will come into effect<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I had planned my resignation to take effect on that evening, in order that I should **not** be a member of the Grand Lodge of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australian and

**Valete!**

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Epilogue**

King Solomon cries in vain while masons sleep,  
And Hiram still is dead, while Tyre must weep.  
The enemy is in the temple now,  
And stone by stone they bring the temple down.

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the Northern Territory Inc. when the new Grand Master was installed in April 2018. As things transpired, I was convinced by a number of concerned Freemasons to remain in the Order and to continue “the good fight”. I thus rescinded my letter of resignation. However, my medical condition precluded any further active Masonic participation and the new Administration was in my opinion as bad as I had feared. I thus only continued for the 2018-19 Masonic Year. I specifically declined to be considered for any “Continuing Membership” status, as I argued in [#6 – “Order in the House”](#) that this idea had yet to be fully thought through.

*AJB – April 2020*

