

D R A F TVISITORS TO LODGES.

I have been requested by the Board of General Purposes to draw attention to the need for adequate examination of visitors to Lodge meetings: Rules 125, 127, and to a lesser degree 126, of the Book of Constitutions are all relevant, and every Master will remember the Charge he has promised to enforce.

1. The first paragraph of Rule 125 makes it clear that if some Brother present is able personally to vouch for a visitor of the English Constitution he may be admitted: from this it may be inferred that if they have sat together in a Lodge when it was open in the relevant degree, it is unnecessary for him to be proved in the ritual sense.

In the case of a visitor from another Grand Lodge, it is particularly important to ensure that the terms of the second paragraph of Rule 125 also are being complied with. To facilitate this a list of all Grand Lodges recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England is published annually in the Masonic Year Book and is thus available for reference: a would-be visitor claiming to belong to a Lodge under a Grand Lodge which does not feature in this list should in no circumstances be admitted until enquiries have been made to the Grand Secretary's Office and a satisfactory answer has been obtained.

2. Where no one is able to vouch for a visitor he should traditionally be examined by the Junior Warden. In practice, however, it is rarely convenient for the Junior Warden to abandon his duties in the Lodge, and where a ritual examination is required it is generally preferable for an experienced Past Master to be asked to carry it out.

3. Such examination does not, however, relieve the Lodge of its responsibility for ascertaining whether the visitor is qualified under the terms of Rule 127. This Rule lays down that a Brother who has ceased to be a member of all his Lodges without having been excluded from the last of them is entitled to visit any one Lodge once (i.e. he may not visit the same Lodge more than once): he must put 'unattached' after his name when signing the attendance book and must state the name and number of the Lodge of which he was last a subscribing member. If, however, he was excluded from his only Lodge or from the last of a series of Lodges of which he was at some time a member, he is not permitted to visit any Lodge at all.

While it is recognised that it is not always easy to ascertain such facts from a would-be visitor, the duty will no doubt become less difficult if members of Lodges are made aware of the requirements of the Rule and are asked to make themselves personally responsible for ascertaining whether any visitor whom they invite is still qualified. A would-be visitor who is not thus vouched for by a member should be admitted only after demonstrating his Masonic rank and giving convincing proof that he has not lost his qualification to visit: such proof may be found in a Lodge summons or recent list of members showing his name, or an up-to-date clearance certificate or receipt for subscriptions, in addition to a Grand Lodge Certificate. With regard to visitors from Grand Lodges recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England, it is highly probable that they will carry "dues cards" showing them to have paid their Lodge subscriptions for the current year, but it is less likely that members of our own Constitution will carry with them any such easily recognisable evidence of good-standing in their respective Lodges.

4. The Board considers that if a would-be visitor can produce no adequate documentary proof of good-standing, and no satisfactory reason is given for non-production, the Lodge has a clear duty to decline to accept him as a visitor. It is felt that in the present age of swift communication with almost every part of the Masonic world, no Brother need be prevented for a long time from visiting for lack of evidence of good-standing, particularly if this is brought home to him by admission being refused, and that no Brother who has learned the lesson of Masonic caution from the first degree can reasonably take offence at caution being practised by others.

5. At the same time it will be to the general good if it is impressed upon members generally that when visiting Lodges, particularly where they are not known personally, they should carry with them their Grand Lodge Certificate as a means of identification and either a clearance certificate or a receipt for their current year's subscription, and that without these they likewise may well find themselves refused admission.

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