



PROVINCE OF WEST LANCASHIRE

REVISED GUIDANCE FOR LODGES CONTEMPLATING AMALGAMATION

NOVEMBER 2004

Since the issuing of the first revised guidance on the process of amalgamation in July 2002, experience of quite a number of actual amalgamations has led to the following further revised guidance, which reflects what we have learned of this process since its inception. While no less rigorous, it does reflect a more relaxed and less bureaucratic approach.

A. Preliminary

By whatever appropriate organic processes, Lodges identify potential partners. Groups can assist and suggest but the liaison between Lodges must be such that they make their own voluntary way towards amalgamation, with a view to the process being as natural as possible. 'Strategic' amalgamations, suggested from outside, are likely to be unsuccessful unless they strike a particular and special chord with the Lodges concerned. In a serious sense, amalgamations seem to originate from within and can defy outside pressure.

Tripartite (or greater) amalgamations are coming to be seen as more promising than just two Lodges joining.

Some Lodges can be considered too weak to amalgamate unless with other much stronger Lodges.

B. Nomenclature

1. The 'prevailing' Lodge is the Lodge continuing after amalgamation is complete, which may have a new name but will retain its previous number.
2. The 'subsumed' Lodges are those returning their Warrants for cancellation but then retrieving them for permanent display at future meetings of the prevailing Lodge.

C. Formalising

Once the process is sufficiently advanced to be considered a serious idea, the Lodges should meet with an outside agent in order to have the opportunity to describe their plans and to some extent have them tested. This agent should be a Group Officer and/or the Assistant Provincial Grand Master. He/they should discuss the plans with the Lodges dispassionately and point out any aspects of union which he/they feel the Lodges may not have taken into consideration. There are potentially numerous such aspects.

The purpose of the intervention of the Group at this point is not to delay the process (amalgamation can be achieved surprisingly quickly, and many amalgamating Lodges want to get on with it) but to start to test the intended structure with a view to arriving, if it is ready to happen, at a 'settled will' to proceed.

D. 'A Settled Will'

This test phrase is deliberately employed as it is not difficult to tell when this stage has been reached. Similarly, it is very easy to tell when it has not been reached.

The 'settled will' can be discerned in an absence of any further doubt between the parties involved. They will give the clear impression that they know what they are doing and why. They will also, usually, start to give an impression that they are anxious to proceed. When intending Lodges have reached a 'settled will', it should, quite simply, be obvious to the observer that they are ready to go ahead.

Important areas of planning where they should have no remaining doubts include:-

1. Finance.

Treasurers are very important in amalgamations and they should be able to confirm that they will have the cash necessary either:-

- a) In the case of a subsumed Lodge to settle their final accounts for Dues to Grand Lodge, the Province and their Masonic Hall or
- b) In the case of the prevailing Lodge the appropriate cash-flow in order to settle their next Dues in respect of what may be a much larger membership following amalgamation.

In the planning of their amalgamation timetable the Treasurers should think strategically in arriving at dates of closure and dates of joining which are the least burdensome to the cash-flow of their Lodges, bearing in mind the dates on which the Dues to their various regular debtors will fall. Their Dues to Grand Lodge are payable according to their subscription year and to Provincial Grand Lodge on 1st January of a new year. Dues to Masonic Halls may be otherwise arranged on a seasonal basis.

In the prevailing Lodge, appropriate dates and amounts for the taking of a subscription (if required) from the Joining Members therefore need to be considered and Lodges must note that it is not permitted to charge a Joining Fee for members joining at an amalgamation.

It is a condition of amalgamation that no man in good standing can be refused joining membership of the prevailing Lodge. Conversely men who are not in good standing cannot amalgamate and run the risk of becoming indebted 'Unattached Masons'.

2. Lodges must realise that seniority in an amalgamated Lodge for the Past Masters **of** any of the amalgamating Lodges is established in a single order according to the date of their Installation into the Chair of whichever of the amalgamating Lodges. Past Masters **in** the Lodge are arranged in seniority in a similar way and Master Masons are arranged in a single list of seniority according to the date of their Initiation, whichever of the amalgamating Lodges they originate from.

(Past Masters should be assured, however, that for the purposes of Provincial Honours a separate record is maintained at Province in respect of each of the amalgamating Lodges in

order that no member of a subsumed Lodge is forgotten at the time appropriate for his consideration for Provincial Rank.)

3. Lodges should have made clear and agreeable arrangements for the succession of Master and the filling of other Offices in such a way that all the participating Lodges are satisfied of the fairness of the arrangements.
4. Arrangements for the passing over of assets and/or the disposal of them must be complete *before* a Lodge closes as a result of the amalgamation procedure. A Lodge has no legal entity after it has closed, which can give rise to very complicated situations if disposal of assets has not been completed.

E. Outline Timetable

Once a Petition for Amalgamation has been signed by the Masters and Wardens of the amalgamating Lodges (together with a request, if required, for a change in the name of the prevailing Lodge), and subsequently by the Provincial Grand Master, the process next requires two meetings of High Masonic Authority to take place in London.

Firstly, the Petition for Amalgamation is considered by the Advisors to the Grand Master.

If approved it will be sent to the very next meeting of Grand Lodge, and on that day the amalgamation is complete and the subsumed Lodge(s) cease to exist independently.

Those who understand the meeting patterns of the two bodies concerned will realise that depending on the time of year, the period of time taken for the formal completion of amalgamation can vary considerably.

The Province looks forward to celebrating their union with the members of the amalgamating Lodge at the impressive Ceremony of Amalgamation, held at a later, convenient date, usually a regular meeting. But the amalgamation itself happens at the meeting of Grand Lodge mentioned above.

F. Starting the Clock

Only at the point of reaching a 'settled will' do the Lodges start to consider a time schedule for amalgamation, which they do once the Assistant Provincial Grand Master has assured himself of the rightness of the amalgamation and the likelihood of its success and has recommended the same to the Provincial Grand Master via the Provincial Grand Secretary.

If the Provincial Grand Master concurs with the view of the Assistant Provincial Grand Master, the Provincial Grand Secretary will be instructed to convene a meeting of the interested parties at which he will discuss the formal and procedural requirements of the amalgamation process and outline the possible timescales for its accomplishment (which can be surprisingly quick, depending on circumstances). However, the Lodges may and must proceed at the pace they wish. There is no external imperative with regard to speed. Indeed, there are certain Masonic situations which may influence planning and timing (such as the Worshipful Master of a subsumed Lodge being in the Chair for the first time and who therefore must be allowed to complete a full year in order to qualify as a Past Master).

At this point Lodges have to agree on a schedule which will lead to the closure of the subsumed Lodges and the timing of their joining of the prevailing Lodge (bearing in mind all the implications, including financial, which are discussed above). Furthermore the timetable should seek to avoid any period in which a Brother is perforce 'unattached' between the closure of his Lodge and the date of joining of the prevailing Lodge. The process within the Lodges involves giving Notice of Motion at one regular meeting of the intention to amalgamate and voting on that motion at a second meeting. The motions themselves are set out in the appendices to this guidance. However, the passing of these motions does not in itself bind the Lodge immediately to a particular timescale. The formal process of amalgamation is triggered by the submission to London by the Provincial Grand Secretary of the signed petition for amalgamation.

The Advisors to the Grand Master will also wish to know the voting numbers in each Lodge for the motions concerned and the date on which the ballot for joining membership in the prevailing Lodge will take place.

G. Warning

A member of a subsumed Lodge who chooses not to join the amalgamated Lodge, and who is not a subscribing member of any other Lodge must be helped to understand that if he does not join another Lodge he will become 'unattached' by default when his Lodge is closed, and his Masonic activities will be all but at a standstill. (As an Unattached Mason he may visit any English Lodge but, in each case, once only **ever**).

An Honorary Member of a subsumed Lodge will also become unattached, if not a subscribing member of another Lodge, unless he is regularly elected an Honorary Member of the prevailing Lodge. Similarly, "Country" Members cannot be transferred from a subsumed Lodge and would need to be elected to that status in the prevailing Lodge.

H. Advice

Lodges contemplating amalgamation can be assured of an abundance of assistance from the Province and their Group while they are considering the matter and are encouraged to seek it.