

LODGES AND CHAPTERS HANDING IN THEIR WARRANTS AND CHARTERS

While it is always regrettable when a Lodge or Chapter decides to terminate its existence, it is extremely important for the members and in some circumstances those who depend on them Masonically, that the closure should be conducted in a business-like way and with appropriate Masonic decorum.

When the Lodge or Chapter feels that it is clear that a substantial majority of its members, having explored any alternatives, has reached the point where the surrendering of its Warrant or Charter is appropriate and inevitable, the following is the process which that Lodge or Chapter should follow. Two meetings are required.

- a. The Lodge or Chapter should give Notice at a regular meeting of a proposition that it should surrender its warrant or Charter and that this proposition will be considered at the next regular meeting or at an Emergency Meeting called specifically for that purpose by Dispensation. (A Dispensation is not required in the Royal Arch, but the Province should be informed.)
- b. At the second meeting the proposition is put to those members attending and is decided by a simple majority of those present and voting. (The Master or First Principal having a second or casting vote if necessary). There is no proxy voting in Freemasonry.

The closure of the Lodge or Chapter, if approved by the vote, takes effect from the moment the Lodge or Chapter has been closed in due form on that occasion, or at the end of a future meeting, if specified in the Notice of Motion.

- c. Well before the final meeting of the Lodge or Chapter clear resolutions should have been passed by the Brethren in Open Lodge or Chapter determining the destination upon closure of all the Lodge's or Chapter's assets and possessions including monies. In a few cases, such as Lodges and Chapters involved with Trusts or holding shares of various kinds, it may be necessary to seek legal or professional advice on their disposal and time should be allowed for any such matters to take their proper course as, after a Lodge or Chapter has finally closed, it has no entity and cannot continue to transact business, financial or otherwise. Nor, most emphatically, can individuals continue to do so on its behalf.
- d. The Secretary or Scribe E is required, upon closure, to render to Grand Lodge/Chapter and Provincial Grand Lodge/Chapter a closing Annual Return and Dues in settlement of the account of the Lodge or Chapter and must also give full account of any arrears due but unpaid from the membership at the point of closure. Such Brethren will have the status of 'in arrears' permanently until they clear their arrears. The Secretary or Scribe E should consult the Provincial Office well in advance of closure in order to obtain the necessary documents and to be informed of the amounts involved.

The Lodge or Chapter must make every effort to ensure the comfortable continuing welfare of any of its Masonic dependants, whether they be Brethren and Companions or ladies and widows. The Local or Regional Care Officer should be approached to give advice on these matters. For this reason, the Lodge or Chapter must also inform the Charities Office at Hope Street (0151 709 2458 Ext.1) of the intended closure and of the arrangements to be made for its dependants and in the case of monies received from any other Masonic charitable source, direct contact should be made with them to like effect.

In the case of a closing Lodge which has a Chapter sharing its name and number there is no longer any difficulty in that Chapter continuing with its existing name and number.

Care should be taken when choosing the date of closure not to disadvantage the Master or First Principal of the Lodge or Chapter if he is occupying the Chair for the first time. In order to qualify as a Past Master or Past Z he must have served in those Offices from one Installation to the next (or one election to the next in the Royal Arch). Otherwise he will never be a Past Master or Past 'Z' (until he goes through another Chair). Similarly Wardens in the Craft and Scribes, Principal Sojourners and Assistant Sojourners in the Royal Arch must have served in one of those Offices for a similar full year before they will qualify to proceed to higher office.

Similarly, care must be taken to ensure that all members of the Lodge or Chapter understand the implications upon closure of becoming an Unattached Mason or Royal Arch Mason as a result of not already being a member of another Lodge or Chapter, or if they do not intend to join another Lodge or Chapter. This has serious implications, including barring them from appointment to or promotion in Provincial Rank. Guidance on 'Unattached Masons' is available on this website.

If the closure of the Lodge leaves any Brethren standing as Fellow Crafts or Entered Apprentices then the Lodge must obtain, via the Province, interim Grand Lodge Certificates for those Brethren in order that they can proceed further in another Lodge. All members should be issued with certificates under Rule 175 stating whether or not the Brother was in good standing at the time of closure.

It is very much hoped that despite the unhappiness and formality of the closure of a Lodge or Chapter, the Lodge or Chapter will invite the Assistant Provincial Grand Master or the Assistant to the Provincial Grand Principals and/or their Group Chairman to their final meeting in order that the formality of handing the Warrant or Charter over to him may take place but also that the history and service of the Lodge or Chapter can be suitably celebrated and recognised in a proper Masonic fashion.

Immediately after the final meeting the following items must be returned to the Provincial Grand Secretary's Office:

The Hall Stone Jewel (if appropriate)	Account Books
Minute Books	Membership Books
Attendance Books	Declaration Books

These are not destroyed but are returned to the Library of the Grand Lodge for perpetual storage and to assist with Masonic history and research.

Lodges or Chapters contemplating closure should direct any other enquiries or difficulties to their Group and subsequently to the Provincial Office.