



Internet Lodge 9659
United Grand Lodge of England
Province of East Lancashire
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Short Papers Competition 2009

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Title

How Welcome is 'Welcome'?

Observations from 'a bairn'....or one relatively new to the Craft.

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Visiting Lodges both within and out-with one's own Province is a critical part of Freemasonry. Since ritual was once passed on only orally, it is inevitable that differences will occur from one Lodge to another, even within the same Province, and it is these differences, sometimes subtle, sometimes less so, that make visiting such a joy and so valuable to a brother, especially a new one.

One of the claims we make, as brethren, is that we welcome all others into our Lodge and this is especially important for visitors. The tradition of standing up at the end of an evening and delivering fraternal greetings from one's Mother Lodge to the Lodge being visited, is also part of this ritual. This short speech tends to be in three parts; *thanks for the warm welcome, congratulations on your degree work, and fraternal greetings.*

What struck me recently was how often this is said by rote, regardless of the quality of the degree work or warmth of the greeting! Have we then become too complacent, do we just accept things without a degree of criticality?

Where this is really crucial is in the attitude when turning up at a strange Lodge. Are we really the welcoming band of brethren we purport to be? In many cases the answer is sadly 'no'.

I like to visit, and for various reasons often end up, without others from my mother Lodge so cannot stay within a 'friendship clique'. I can turn up at a strange Lodge, and although I am greeted with hand-shakes it often stops there.... I can end up standing, alone in a strange room, no idea where to dress, and no-one to talk to.

Once again, after the business is over, and the brethren repair to the bar, what happens? Again the lone visitor is often leftalone. This is not how it should be! The RWM and/or his wardens have to my mind, a duty of care, to welcome visitors and introduce them to others. Luckily I am older, thick-skinned and confident enough to join in with strangers, but what of younger, less-confident brethren? In these days of falling membership and concerns over recruitment we should be looking at being as attractive as we can; at making our Lodges as welcoming as we claim them to be. That does not mean staying in our own cliques or comfort zones but making an effort to include new friends and brethren – the visitors.

So brethren, ask yourself some hard questions..... what of your own Lodge? How do you treat visitors, especially the solo ones? Do you or one of the office bearers look after them? If not, maybe you should..... It could only be good for your Lodge's reputation, the visitors themselves, and the Craft

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