

Taught to be cautious online

Be canny and cautious when you receive emails

There are some very clever things going on, online at the moment.

All sorts of interesting messages are being received on people's emails, inviting them to click on a link for some great new product or service, or point of interest, or entertainment.

Sometimes, such links will introduce a catastrophic virus to your computer or tablet. Other times, it will be an invitation to some dubious service that, if it was above board, the provider would be open about, rather than being deliberately misleading and covertly coming at you through a back door. Other times, it could be an attempt to hack your contacts list.

Our advice to you is to remember that you were taught to be cautious. Unless you know the person who is sending you the message, **NEVER** click on any of the links or attachments that come through. Even when something appears to come from someone you know, but the message/link/attachment is unexpected or out of character, send a separate message to the person and ask for confirmation that it was a genuine message.

The Provincial website has all sorts of protective measures built in, to ensure that auto-bots are unable to grab the individual email addresses of the Lodge Secretaries and Chapter Scribes who are shown in the Lodge and Chapter listings section. If someone wants to send an email to a Secretary or Scribe via the Provincial website, they have to fill in a contact form, which is then forwarded to the Secretary/Scribe, automatically by the website, without disclosing the Secretary/Scribe's email address to the sender.

Sometimes, a determined individual may work their way through a selection (or theoretically all) of the Lodges and Chapters, inviting the Secretary/Scribe to engage on some business venture or similar arrangement.

Here is a typical example of such a phishing message:

Name: Cherry Black

Email: (link inserted here)

Comment: Hi there I am contacting you regarding my business proposal.

If you would be so kind to email me back at (email link inserted here) then that would be fantastic and at least I know I will be communicating with the correct person.

Many thanks

Miss Cherry Black

That particular example led to a female escort service! If anyone replied to it, the sender would have the respondent's personal email address forevermore!

The only way that we could stop such a determined marketing strategy at the website, is by completely disabling the conduit facility that allows Secretaries/Scribes to be contacted via the website; we really do not want to do that. So, the very best way to dissuade such people is not to respond in any way to their messages – if they get no return on the time and effort that they have to invest to get such messages out to Secretaries/Scribes, they will very soon turn their attention elsewhere.

One option would be to create an email address specifically for Lodge/Chapter business, so that the Secretary/Scribe's personal email address is not linked.

So, in conclusion, please be consistently cautious should you receive such a message – whether that be direct into your email inbox or via the Provincial website. If you are not absolutely sure about something **delete it without a second thought**. If it was genuine and important, the sender will get in touch a different way instead. If the incoming message is not clearly related to Masonic affairs, it should be ignored. Don't be tempted to open a link or attachment, or reply to the sender – just delete it.

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