

MASKS MUST BE WORN AT ALL TIMES

It was hard to believe this was a wedding.

Re-scheduled four times with numbers restricted to a maximum of 15 including bride, groom, witnesses and children and now so mired in rules of behaviour that ceremony and celebration were all but invisible.

Cars to be parked with two-metre gaps between them. All parties to stay outside the building until called in. No hugging or physical contact on arrival or departure. All those present to keep to their existing social bubbles with each individual or bubble seated as far away from the next as the room would allow. Signing the register to be done wearing gloves and using a sanitised pen. Masks must be worn at all times.

Any flouting of these rules, they said, would result in immediate cancellation of the event.

Hard to believe this really was an actual wedding.

At the appointed moment, the mother of the groom read a short piece – she tried to speak as slowly and carefully as she could so the words would be heard through the layers of material covering her mouth. As she started, she wondered if anyone there would remember that this verse was read at the funeral of Princess Diana. Would it matter if they did?

Time is too slow for those who wait

Too swift for those who fear

Too long for those who grieve

Too short for those who rejoice

She focused on one word at a time, trying to infuse each one with warmth and meaning whilst also trying to maintain a cool detachment so she would get through without giving way to tears. She almost succeeded.

Her son smiled, perhaps at the catch in her voice, looked up and caught her eye. A sudden connectedness speeding her back in time to the moment she first held him as a baby. Nearly four decades ago.

The registrar (with a hint of humour) said: *You may now kiss the bride.* The bride (with a touch of cheekiness) said: *Does that mean we can take our masks off?* The registrar (with a sigh of exasperation) said: *Yes you can.*

The mother of the groom wondered why the couple had been told to wear masks at all if they were going to be permitted to kiss? She tried to be amused rather than indignant. She failed.

The register was signed first by the groom, then by the bride and lastly by the witnesses who got flustered about where they were supposed to write, since the registrar could not get close enough to point to the correct place on the page.

The newlyweds – now returned to separated-ness behind their masks – looked a little bit dazed and a large bit ready to go. The deed was done. The dress, the photographs and the party with friends would happen at some future time. This was, after all, just a formality.

The sound of their dog barking in the car seemed to be the signal for action. With a sharp change of pace, the registrar asked them all to leave. Urging speed whilst reminding them again to adhere to the 2-metre rule.

But for those who love, time is an eternity.

If it was not quite a wedding, it was very much a marriage.