

WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?

Freemasonry means different things to each of those who join. For some, it's about making new friends and acquaintances. For others it's about being able to help deserving causes – making a contribution to family and society. But for most, it is an enjoyable hobby.

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest and largest non-religious, non-political, fraternal and charitable organisations. It teaches self-knowledge through participation in a progression of ceremonies. Members are expected to be of high moral standing and are encouraged to speak openly about Freemasonry. The following information is intended to explain Freemasonry as it is practised under the United Grand Lodge of England, which administers Lodges of Freemasons in England and Wales and in many places overseas.

Freemasonry is a society of men concerned with moral and spiritual values. Its members are taught its principles (moral lessons and self-knowledge) by a series of ritual dramas – a progression of allegorical two-part plays which are learnt by heart and performed within each Lodge – which follow ancient forms, and use stonemasons' customs and tools as allegorical guides.

Freemasonry instils in its members a moral and ethical approach to life: its values are based on integrity, kindness, honesty and fairness. Members are urged to regard the interests of the family as paramount but, importantly, Freemasonry also teaches concern for people, care for the less fortunate and help for those in need.

Becoming a freemason

CHARITY

From its earliest days, Freemasonry has been concerned with the care of orphans, the sick and the aged. This work continues today.

In addition, large sums are given to national and local charities.

THE HISTORY OF FREEMASONRY

MIDDLE AGES

The questions of when, how, why and where Freemasonry originated are still the subject of intense speculation. The general consensus amongst Masonic scholars is that it descends directly or indirectly from the organisation of **operative** stone masons who built the great cathedrals and castles of the middle ages.

1646

Elias Ashmole recorded his initiation with these words:

'October 16, 4.30pm - I was made a freemason at Warrington in Lancashire with Colonel Henry Mainwaring [a Roundhead parliamentarian friend related to his father-in-law] of Karinham in Cheshire. The names of those

that were then at the Lodge, Mr Richard Penket Worden, Mr James Collier, Mr Richard Sankey, Henry Littler, John Ellam, Richard Ellam and Hugh Brewer.'

This is the first evidence of the initiation of an English speculative mason - notwithstanding the fact that those present and listed would have certainly been initiated at an earlier date.

1660

From the 1660s more evidence exists of gentlemen being made Masons in **non-operative Lodges**.

1717

On 24 June 1717 four London Lodges, which had existed for some time, came together at the **Goose and Gridiron Tavern** in St Paul's Churchyard, declared themselves a Grand Lodge and elected Anthony Sayer as their Grand Master. This was the first Grand Lodge in the world.

1723

By this time the new Grand Lodge had published its first rule book - **The Book of Constitutions of Masonry** - and was meeting quarterly and recording its meetings. It had extended its authority outside London.

1725

The Grand Lodge of Ireland was established.

1736

The Grand Lodge of Scotland was established. The three Home Grand Lodges began to take Freemasonry overseas and the development of Freemasonry abroad mirrors the 18th and 19th century development of the British Empire.

1751

A rival Grand Lodge appeared in London. Its original members were Irish Masons who claimed that the original Grand Lodge had made innovations. They dubbed the first Grand Lodge the **Moderns** and called themselves the **Antients**. The two existed side by side - both at home and abroad - for nearly 63 years, neither recognising each other as regular.

1813

After four years of negotiation, the two Grand Lodges in England united on 27 December 1813 to form the **United Grand Lodge of England**. This union led to a great deal of standardisation of ritual, procedures and regalia.

1814

Some 647 Lodges were in existence. The 19th century saw a great expansion of Freemasonry - both at home and abroad.

1900

2,800 Lodges had been established despite losses when independent Grand Lodges were formed in Canada and Australia in the later part of the century.

WORLD WARS

The two World Wars both had a great effect on English Freemasonry. In the three years after the First World War over 350 new Lodges were set up, and in the three years after the Second World War nearly 600 new Lodges came into being. In many cases the founders were servicemen who wanted to continue the

camaraderie they had built up during their war service, and were looking for a calm centre in a greatly changed and changing world.

1967

On 14 June 1967 the 250th anniversary of Grand Lodge was celebrated at the Royal Albert Hall. Centrepiece of the celebrations was the installation as Grand Master of HRH The Duke of Kent, who still holds that office today.

1992

On 10 June 1992 over 12,500 Freemasons and guests gathered at Earls Court in West London to celebrate the 275th anniversary of Grand Lodge. For the first time press and television were present at a meeting of Grand Lodge and the event featured on television newscasts around the world.

2017

Preparations are now beginning to celebrate the tercentenary of Grand Lodge in June 2017.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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• **WHAT HAPPENS AT A LODGE MEETING?**

The meeting, which like those of other groups, are open only to members, is normally in two parts. First, there are normal administrative procedures such as:

- Minutes of the previous meeting
- Proposing and balloting for new members
- Discussing and voting on the annual accounts
- Masonic news and correspondence
- News about charitable work

Second, there are the ceremonies for:

- Admitting new members
 - The annual installation of the Master of the Lodge and his officers
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• **WHY DO FREEMASONS TAKE OATHS?**

New members make solemn promises concerning their behaviour both in the Lodge and in society. Members also promise to keep confidential the way they recognise each other when visiting another Lodge. Freemasons also promise to support others in time of need but only so far as it does not conflict with their family and public obligations.

• **ARE FREEMASONS EXPECTED TO GIVE PREFERENCE TO FELLOW MEMBERS?**

Certainly not. This would be unacceptable and may lead to action being taken against those involved. On joining, each new member states that he expects no material gain from membership.

- **WHO DO THE MASONIC CHARITIES DONATE TO?**

Whilst there are Masonic charities that cater specifically, but not exclusively, for Masons or their dependants, others make significant grants to non-Masonic organisations.

- **WHAT IS FREEMASONRY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH RELIGION?**

All Freemasons are expected to have a religious belief, but Freemasonry does not seek to replace a Mason's religion or provide a substitute for it. It deals in a man's relationship with his fellow man not in a man's relationship with his God.

- **WHY DO SOME CHURCHES NOT LIKE FREEMASONRY?**

There are elements within churches who misunderstand Freemasonry and its objectives. They confuse secular rituals with religious liturgy. There are many Masons in churches where their leaders have been openly critical of the organisation. Masonry has always actively encouraged its members to be active in their own religion.

- **DOES FREEMASONRY ACCEPT ROMAN CATHOLICS?**

Yes. Four Grand Masters of English Freemasonry have been Roman Catholics. Today there are many Roman Catholic Freemasons.

- **WHAT IS FREEMASONRY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH POLITICS?**

Freemasonry, as a body, will never express a view on politics or state policy. The discussion of politics at Masonic meetings has always been prohibited.

- **IS FREEMASONRY AN INTERNATIONAL ORDER?**

Freemasonry exists throughout the world. However, each Grand Lodge is sovereign and independent. There is no international governing body for Freemasonry.

- **ARE THERE WOMEN FREEMASONS?**

Yes. Whilst UGLE, following the example of medieval stonemasons, is, and has always been, restricted to men, women Freemasons have two separate Grand Lodges, which are restricted to women.

• **WHY DO YOU WEAR REGALIA?**

Wearing regalia is historic and symbolic. Like a uniform, the regalia indicates the rank of the wearer in the organisation.

• **HOW MANY FREEMASONS ARE THERE?**

Under the United Grand Lodge of England, there are over a quarter of a million Freemasons.

There are Grand Lodges in Ireland, which covers both Northern Ireland and Eire, and Scotland which have a combined total of approximately 150,000 members.

Worldwide, there are approximately six million Freemasons.

• **HOW MANY DEGREES ARE THERE IN FREEMASONRY?**

Basic Freemasonry consists of three degrees:

- Entered Apprentice
 - Fellow Craft
 - Master Mason
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. VISITING FREEMASONS' HALL

- When the Grand Temple is not in use there are up to five tours per day, Monday to Friday (inclusive). Tours commence at 11am, 12noon, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm, and the starting point for all tours is in the Library and Museum of Freemasonry.
- Please be aware that visitors may be required to show photographic ID before the tour commences.
- Pre-booking is required for all group tours, and for any tours on Saturdays. Further information is available on the Library and Museum website
- **PLEASE NOTE:**
- **Freemasons' Hall is not open on Sundays, public holidays, the Saturday preceding a Monday public holiday, or over the Christmas / New Year period.**

It is not possible to hold tours when there are major events happening, some of which are arranged at short notice. If you are making a special trip to visit Freemasons' Hall then please contact the Library & Museum who will be able to confirm that tours are running on the day of your visit.

- Freemasons' Hall is located at 60 Great Queen Street, London WC2B 5AZ.
- Our contact telephone number is [+44 \(0\) 20 7831 9811](tel:+442078319811)
- Below is a map of our location. For directions to Freemasons' Hall, simply enter your address including your postcode. A detailed list of driving directions will then be displayed below the map.
- The closest tube stations are Holborn, Covent Garden and Leicester Square.