

About Freemasonry

What is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry (also known as Craft Freemasonry) is among the oldest non-religious fraternal societies in the world. It is a society of men who are concerned with moral and spiritual values. It encourages men to live better lives, to discipline themselves and to consider their relationships with others. Because it is a basic and essential requirement that every member professes and maintains a belief in a Supreme Being, it has a spiritual basis. However, it is not a religion, nor should it ever be regarded as a substitute for any form of religious faith. In fact, Freemasons are strictly forbidden to discuss matters of religion in the Masonic environment. The Bible (known by Freemasons as The Volume of the Sacred Law') is always open when Lodges meet. Obligations are sworn on, or involve the Volume of the Sacred Law or whichever holy book is held sacred by the man concerned.

Freemasons attempt to follow three great principles which represent a way of achieving higher standards in life:

Brotherly Love - Tolerance and respect for the opinions of others and kindly, understanding, behaviour towards fellow creatures.

Relief - Practicing charity, not only for other Freemasons, but also for the whole community. Freemasonry has always been concerned with the education of young people and the care of orphans, the sick and the aged, and continues this work. Large sums are regularly given to national and local charities – more of this later!

Truth - Freemasons always strive for truth, demanding high moral standards and aiming to achieve them in their own lives.

Freemasonry is a society which has private methods of recognition i.e. of proving membership. These methods may have been derived from those used by operative stonemasons in the Middle Ages to protect the secrets of their craft. They are now similarly used to preserve Freemasonry's method of teaching morality.

The meeting places of Freemasons are called Masonic Halls and some are open to the public on certain occasions. The rule book (known as the Book of Constitutions) is published on United Grand Lodge of England's Website as well as it is on sale to any member of the public in certain Book Shops. You would not expect your golf club or your church to publicise the list of its members. Likewise Freemasonry regards its list of members as a matter which rests between the individual Freemason, his lodge and Grand Lodge (q.v.). Indeed, the Data Protection Act now restricts the use of such lists for anything but internal purposes if kept, as is now often the case, on computers etc.

Freemasons are expected to be as open and frank about Freemasonry and their membership of it as their situation in life allows them to be.

Freemasons gain from Freemasonry only as much as they are prepared to put into it by way of commitment to the ideals mentioned above. Thereby they experience a friendship which can only be felt from within the organisation and a spiritual and moral uplift which is very real but is hard to explain.

What kind of men are Freemasons?

Men of all ages (i.e. 21 or above), races, colours, religions, politics or financial or social standing are qualified to become Freemasons. We have members who are part of our Royal family, professions, trades, skills, arts, sciences, businesses, manual occupations - both the employed and self-employed and sadly in these days, the unemployed.

When a person is admitted, he becomes known as a 'Brother' and remains so for the rest of his Masonic career. It is also pointed out to candidates that in Freemasonry all Brethren are 'on the level'.

Conditions for admission

There are, however, certain preconditions of membership of any Masonic lodge.

- You must believe in a Supreme Being
- You must be at least 21 years of age
- You must not engage in discussion on matters of religion or politics on Masonic occasions
- You must profess allegiance to the Sovereign of your country and all that the Sovereign represents
- You must be prepared to take an oath to preserve the private aspects of Freemasonry
- You must be willing to strictly observe the Laws, Regulations and Constitutions of Freemasonry
- You must be of good character and be prepared to uphold the Civil and Criminal Laws of any country in which you may reside, either temporarily or permanently
- You must have the full support of your partner and family

Society, family and your job

A Freemason's duty to society as a citizen must always prevail over any obligation to other Freemasons. Freemasonry will severely censure and probably expel any Freemason who attempts to shield another Freemason who has acted dishonourably or unlawfully.

Freemasonry must never be allowed to harm a man's family or other connections by taking too much of his time or his money or causing him to act in any other way against their interests.

If it is ever proved that a Freemason has gained an unfair advantage over another person because of his membership of the Order, a serious view will be taken. Members must never use any sort of Masonic certificate or evidence of membership to advertise a business or other enterprise nor use any sort of Masonic device or description on stationery etc. Freemasonry is compatible with any form of occupation whatsoever, but all Freemasons must be careful not to compromise their living and the living of their dependants.

How is Freemasonry Organised?

Lodges

Freemasons meet in Private Lodges. Each one has a unique number on the roll of the United Grand Lodge of England. Of course, there are many thousands of other lodges in almost every country of the world. A lodge can have a membership from about 20 to several hundreds.

English Private Lodges outside of London are mainly grouped into Provincial Grand Lodges. The lodge you wish to join is probably part of a Provincial Grand Lodge. Provincial Grand Lodges administer Freemasonry for the lodges in their areas and appoint the more senior and experienced Masons from the Private Lodges for this purpose as well as a small number of paid staff.

In England the Private Lodges (under their Provincial Grand Lodges) form part of the United Grand Lodge of England which is administered from its premises at Freemasons' Hall, Great Queen Street, London.

Degrees

When a man joins Freemasonry, he must take part in 3 different ritual dramas. There has to be 28 days between each of these ceremonies which are known as 'degrees'. The messages of the degrees are briefly:

First Degree - The candidate is admitted as an 'Entered Apprentice' – he learns about man's natural equality and dependence on others; his civil and moral duties.

Second Degree - The candidate becomes a 'Fellow Craft' - the effect of Nature and Science; the rewards of labour.

Third Degree - The candidate becomes a 'Master Mason' - contemplation of inevitable death; fidelity; duty to others.

Other Orders

Many Freemasons do not progress beyond these three degrees and continue to enjoy their meetings in what is generally known as 'Craft' Freemasonry for many years. However, all those who have received the third degree, are advised to join the Royal Arch Masonry. The message of the Holy Royal Arch is the awareness of man's relationship with his God. The Holy Royal Arch is operated as a separate and distinct part of Freemasonry and you will be advised where to seek further information when you have completed the Third Degree.

Many Masons do go on to join other Masonic degrees or Orders but these are not administered by the United Grand Lodge of England.

Offices and Ranks

Some time after you have completed your Third degree you may be invited, or express a desire, to take an office in the Lodge. This means you will be taking part in the dramatic representation of the moral messages mentioned above. Officer's progress through the offices, usually on a yearly basis, until the office of Master of the Lodge is attained.

You are under no obligation to undertake any of these offices but many men find it is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a Freemason and that they are helped to discover talents within a Lodge.

Progression

Once having achieved the chair of Master of the Lodge the next step is to be a Past Master. After a number of years as a Past Master may be invited to become an officer of the Provincial Grand Lodge. Eventually, those who show exceptional service and merit may be invited to become officers of United Grand Lodge. All these progressions, as well as being honours, bring with them new duties and responsibilities.

What Happens on a Lodge Evening?

One of the ceremonies, as briefly described above, takes place in the lodge room, and this may be followed by the social part of the evening, the 'after-proceedings' often historically known as the 'Festive Board'. At the festive board, members may have dinner and/or refreshments, toasts are given to the Queen and various distinguished members of the Order, there are a few short speeches and there is occasionally an item of entertainment.

Standards and Conduct

Dress

All lodge members are expected to wear dark* lounge suits, dark morning suits or dinner suits, white shirts together with the official Masonic tie, a black tie, official masonic bow tie or a black bow. Shoes and socks must be black. Jewellery must be kept to a minimum. White gloves are worn by all members. As well as for reasons of equality and uniformity the standard dress has a symbolic significance in Freemasonry. (Some specialist Lodges may wear e.g. military uniforms or 'old school' ties).

*No other form of dress is acceptable and members may not be admitted if not properly dressed.

Attendance

Before every meeting each member of the Lodge receives a 'summons' or 'circular' which requests his attendance and advises the date, time and business of the lodge. Members must attend on every occasion unless prevented by family, work, business commitments or other unforeseen circumstances.

When unable to attend it is essential that you send an apology to the lodge for your non-attendance. This can be done by contacting the Master, the Lodge Secretary or your Proposer or Secunder.

Behaviour

Although Freemasonry has serious aims and important ideals to convey, most members join to enjoy the fellowship, the conversation and simply to have fun. While members are encouraged to enjoy 'good food and good wine', excessive amount must be avoided at all times. The good behaviour of Freemasons outside of the Masonic environment is also very important if the high reputation of the Order is to be maintained.

Time Commitment

Meetings

Your obligation to attend a number of meetings per year has already been mentioned. Visiting other lodges can take more of your time.

Learning more

You will probably find that once you have joined Freemasonry you want to learn more about it. However this involves a further commitment of time which you should carefully consider.

Social activities etc.

You will be expected to play a full part in attending some of the Lodge's social activities. There is often a Ladies' Night or a Social Evening. These are good opportunities to let your lady partners or family and friends see what we are all about and meet those of other members. At these events, ladies and guests are often encouraged to tour Masonic premises, including the Lodge Room.

Finance Commitments

Financial commitments

You must be fully aware of the financial commitments that you are expected to make. It can not be stressed enough that at no time should your Masonic financial obligations be detrimental to the welfare of your family or those who depend upon you.

Lodge finances

Like any other organisation, lodges and their administrative bodies have considerable operating costs. These costs must be borne out of Initiation and Joining Fees, Annual Subscriptions etc.

All lodges pay a per capita fee for each member to Grand lodge, the Grand Charity and to Provincial Grand Lodge for the purpose of administering Freemasonry and its charitable funds. In addition your Lodge may have to pay for the costs of its occupancy of a Masonic Hall and / or lodge room.

Initial costs

When you first join Freemasonry you will be expected to pay the following fees etc. The current rates will be advised to you by your Proposer and / or Secunder or the lodge Treasurer.

1. Initiation Fee
2. First years Annual Subscription
3. Cost of a Masonic apron (for certain lodges)

Ongoing expenses

The only regular commitment in subsequent years will be your Annual Subscription which is payable in advance to the Lodge. This must be paid each and every year without fail at the proper time.

Charity

At most meetings charitable collections are taken and you will be expected to contribute within your means. There is often a raffle at the Festive Board for Charity. Members who are taxpayers are expected to make regular donations to Masonic charities by way of Gift Aid. The Lodge Charity Steward can provide details.

The charitable funds in Freemasonry are distributed first to needy and distressed Freemasons, their families and dependants and then to a large variety of non-Masonic international, national and local charities.

How to Join

How do I apply to join?

If you know people who are Freemasons then you should ask them about joining (note that despite popular belief, YOU have to take the initiative and ask to join - not the other way around). If you are not aware of knowing any Freemasons then you should contact the Provincial Office (click [Contact Us](#)) who will put you in touch with existing members who will be able to discuss things with you.

Formally you must have two members of a Lodge who are prepared to Propose and Second you as a candidate for Freemasonry. Ask them to provide a Registration Form for completion, first by you and then by each of them. The completed form (together with any other forms required by Grand Lodge) should be given to the Lodge Secretary. No fees are normally payable until such time as you are admitted to the Lodge.

What happens next?

The Lodge Secretary will scrutinise the Registration form and, if satisfactory, you will be called for interview by the Lodge Committee. If you are found worthy, every member of the Lodge will be entitled to vote in a secret ballot at a Lodge meeting as to whether you should be admitted as a member. If the ballot is satisfactory you will receive a letter from the Lodge Secretary inviting you to attend for your Initiation at a regular meeting of the Lodge.

What happens on the night I become a Freemason?

You should arrive in plenty of time, properly dressed as indicated above. You do not require your new Masonic apron at this meeting. An Officer of the Lodge will attend to you and the Treasurer will come to obtain the Initiation Fee and Annual Subscription.

You will then pass through the ceremony of Initiation under the guidance of Officers of the Lodge. Rest assured that you will not be embarrassed in any way.

No doubt you will be nervous, but try to relax as much as possible and take in as much of the ceremony as you can. Always remember that every Mason in the room has had the same experience or a similar experience and sympathises with how you feel. The Officers of the Lodge normally perform the entire ceremony from memory so it is probably true to say that they will be even more nervous than you!

After the ceremony at the Festive Board, there may be a toast to your health and future and you will be expected to give a very brief reply to this. Speaking in public is never easy but your Proposer and/or Secunder will give you help with what to say.