

WHAT IS FREEMASONRY

Introduction

Freemasonry is the oldest and largest world wide fraternity dedicated to the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of a Supreme Being. Although of a religious nature, Freemasonry is not a religion. It urges its members, however, to be faithful and devoted to their own religious beliefs. In fact religion and politics are expressly excluded from our meetings to ensure harmony is preserved.

The exact origin of Freemasonry is unclear however many of our symbols and ceremonies are based on the practices of the ancient stonemasons' guilds.

Our traditions can be traced directly to the associations of operative masons. They were men of outstanding character and high ideals, who built the cathedrals, abbeys, and castles of the Middle Ages.

With the decline of cathedral building in the 17th Century, many guilds of stonemasons, called "Operative" masons, started to accept into their membership those who were not members of the masons' craft and called them "Speculative" or "Accepted" masons.

It was in these groups, called lodges, comprised mainly of "Accepted" masons that Freemasonry, as we know it today, had its beginning.

In 1717, four such lodges, which had been meeting regularly in London, united to form the first Grand Lodge of England under the direction of a Grand Master. From that first Grand Lodge, Freemasonry has spread throughout the world.

And so today, the organization of Freemasonry is still based on a system of Grand Lodges, each sovereign within its own territory. There is no central authority governing all Grand Lodges. However, to be acknowledged by others, acceptable traditions, standards and practices must be maintained.

In the UK lodges are governed by a Provincial Grand Lodge and each Provincial Grand Lodge is governed by the United Grand Lodge of England, which administers Lodges of Freemasons in England and Wales and in many places overseas.

Membership

Membership is open to men of any race or religion who can have a belief in a Supreme Being and who are of good repute and are of the minimum age of twenty one years.

Freemasonry does not override the individuals duty to one's self, one's family, ones God or work but offers its members an approach to life that reinforces thoughtfulness for others, kindness in the community, honesty in business, courtesy in society and fairness in all things.

Members are urged to regard the interests of the family as paramount, but Freemasonry also teaches and practises concern for others, and to help people less fortunate than themselves.

Its ritual dramatizes a philosophy of life based on morality. It promotes self improvement. The tools of operative masons are used to symbolize and teach the basic principles of brotherly love, charity, and truth which Masons are encouraged to practice in their daily lives. Charity is a tangible way in which Masons help those whose circumstances in life fairly warrant it.

Freemasons will also enjoy the formal customs and theatrics within the lodge room which, in an appropriate context, are used to explain symbolic meaning. There is also good humour, spirit of friendship and a dinner afterwards (which is known as the Festive Board) and the potential to visit other lodges in the UK as well as abroad which all adds to the enjoyment.

The Three Great Principles

For many years Freemasons have followed three great principles, brotherly love, relief and truth:

Brotherly Love Every true Freemason will show tolerance and respect for the opinions of others and behave with kindness and understanding to his fellow creatures.

Relief Freemasons are taught to practise charity and to care - not only for their own - but also for the community as a whole, both by charitable giving and by voluntary efforts and works as individuals.

Truth Freemasons strive for truth, requiring high moral standards and aiming to achieve them in their own lives. Freemasons believe that these principles represent a way of achieving higher standards in life.

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.

Why might I become a Freemason and other stuff

Freemasonry means something different to everyone who joins. For some, it's about making new friends and acquaintances. For others, it's about being able to help deserving causes, contributions to charity and society. However, for most, it's a hobby and somewhere to meet new people from all walks of life.

A unique institution with global membership

Many are attracted by the valuable work that the movement performs in raising money for charity. A proportion of these funds are used to assist Freemasons and their dependents in times of need, but the majority goes to non-Masonic charities e.g. local, national and international. Freemasons also assist the community in more direct ways, such as carrying out voluntary work.

Others become Freemasons because of the unique camaraderie it provides. Visit a Masonic lodge anywhere in the country – or indeed, the world – and you are given a warm welcome.

What's in it for me?

Freemasons are always asked if there is preferential treatment and gain between fellow masons. Yes, there is. Freemasonry will make you rich. But isn't in £££'s,

it's in experience. It's in joining a group of likeminded, decent, principled people of the same values, who work together to help those less fortunate than ourselves, at the same time enjoying what masonry offers. In a world of mass media and mass suffering, famine and tragedy, Freemasonry provides a platform to react for fundraising when disaster strikes. Freemasons do give, but only what they can genuinely afford.

Masonic symbolism has a purpose.

But what about the infamous secret handshake and the eccentric attire? Freemasonry has been in existence for over 300 years and over time has developed a series of rituals. You may enjoy the pomp and splendour of certain parts of British life like the State Opening of Parliament. Well, Masonry has similar ceremonies that are great fun to learn and perform. They have long history and hence have some quirky rituals, (yes handshakes!!) and other symbolism that become relevant as you become involved. They no longer seem quirky after time as you learn the historical reason for the ritual.

Handshakes don't give an unfair advantage.

The handshakes are signs used within Masonic ceremonies which cannot be denied. But do not expect preferential treatment or some other sort of advantage from fellow Freemasons.

It's true of just about every group, society or body where men get together that mutual interests might be discussed. How many business deals are cooked up on the golf course? The difference is that, unlike the golf club, Freemasonry has a system of morality where personal benefit is frowned upon.

Why the mystery?

If Freemasonry has nothing to hide, why the mystery?

The 'mysteries' that are revealed to members as they progress are nothing more sinister than sound advice that helps them to lead a balanced life, like thinking about the welfare of others. Similarly, Masonic passwords are simply keys to the doors of the different levels within Freemasonry. Learning these principles on a step by step basis makes them easier to absorb and understand. Masonic ceremonies are like short morality plays in which members play different parts. Like any form of theatre, it demands the learning of words and the movements on stage.

So what's involved?

You don't need the acting skills of a West End star to become a Freemason.

In the convivial atmosphere of a Masonic meeting, members soon learn to relax and enjoy taking part in something rather special. It's a place where everyone can be themselves and contribute in a way that suits their personality. Many members actually find that learning and performing these rituals is a useful programme of self development especially building self confidence in speaking in front of others. For those that want to do it, Freemasonry also provides the opportunity to practise after-dinner speaking with a totally friendly audience.

How time consuming is it?

The majority of lodges in the Province of Worcestershire meet between 4 and 6 times a year. The formal part of the proceedings (the ceremonies) usually begin towards the end of the afternoon or early evening and are followed in the evening by a dinner and speeches. There are also weekly 'instruction meetings' where members learn more about the principles of Freemasonry, and how to master the rituals performed in the ceremonies.

Freemasons also gain great pleasure in visiting lodges other than their own, making new friends and seeing different traditions followed. Like any hobby you can't get anything out without putting something in and its as time consuming as you want it to be.....but we do think that sometimes our families may want to see us occasionally.

Wives and partners matter to Freemasons

In the interests of domestic harmony, people interested in becoming Freemasons are strongly recommended to bring their wife/partner into the picture at the earliest possible stage. All of the Masonic Centres in the Province of Worcestershire are happy to give guided tours. Visitors can see inside the Masonic temples where the ceremonies take place and ask loads of questions. There are also entertaining lectures, held inside a lodge or chapter rooms, for anyone interested in learning more about Freemasonry. These are usually followed by an informal dinner.

Not just for the well heeled

What about the cost? Membership subscriptions compare favourably with everyday gyms and social clubs. Freemasonry is not a rich man's hobby, but an affordable and rewarding pastime.

What else?

You have to be male, aged 21 or over, and be of good character (which means not having any criminal convictions).