

Outside
looking in

History and Tradition in Freemasonry ...



Have you ever wondered
what Freemasonry is all about?
and
Do you want to know more?

Here are some of the most frequently
asked questions - and answers!



When did Freemasonry begin?

We cannot say for sure, but the earliest recorded 'Making of a Mason' in England is that of Elias Ashmole in 1646. Organised Freemasonry began with the founding of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717.

There are two main theories of origin. The operative stonemasons who built the great cathedrals and castles had Lodges in which they discussed trade affairs. As there were no recognised qualifications or means to demonstrate that they were trained masons when they moved from site to site, they had a simple Initiation ceremony to prove the point. The other theory was that in the late 1500's and early 1600's these operative mason's Lodges began to take in non-operatives as 'gentlemen masons' and gradually these non-operatives turned the Lodges into 'free and accepted' or 'speculative' Lodges.

Of these, a group was interested in the promotion of religious and political tolerance at a time of great intolerance when matters of religion and politics were to lead to bloody civil war. In forming Freemasonry, they were trying to make better men and build a better world.

The old trade Guilds provided them with the structure of organisation such as Master, Wardens, Treasurer and Secretary and the operative's working tools gave them a wealth of symbols with which to illustrate the moral teachings of Freemasonry.

What is Freemasonry?



Freemasonry is the UK's largest secular, fraternal and charitable organisation and it is worldwide. This means that if you join a Lodge, you are entitled to visit any other recognised Lodge in the country or across the world, thus giving you an immediate circle of like-minded associates and friends. There are over 300,000 members in nearly 8,000 Lodges, and in Surrey alone, there are over 300 Lodges across the county.



Is it a secret society?

No, it is not, but Lodge meetings are private and only open to members, just like many other organisations. Masons are encouraged to talk openly about Masonry and although certain parts of a ceremony are not disclosed, there is nothing else that cannot be discussed with anyone. Many Lodge meeting places encourage community events to take place in their venues.



Who have been Masons?

The list is far too long to lay out, but many Kings – the last was George VI, Princes and Dukes – the current Grand Master is HRH The Duke of Kent, Prime Ministers and

Statesmen such as Winston Churchill and George Washington; many leaders in business, in the arts, such as Mozart, Rudyard Kipling, Peter Sellers and John Wayne, together with those in the worlds of medicine, research, education and entertainment have been and are Masons. Current Soap stars, football and rugby players, Judges and Taxi drivers - there are no class barriers in Freemasonry.

You might care to ask yourself – if these people of quality were Masons, surely it cannot be anything but good?



Is Freemasonry religious or political?

Freemasonry is not a religious organisation although there is a qualification for admission – the belief in a Supreme Being. There are all faiths and religions in Freemasonry but religion is not discussed and there is never a conflict. Contrary to some misconceptions, Roman Catholics have never been banned from becoming Freemasons and many are involved at the highest levels. Similarly, politics is never discussed at a Masonic meeting and although members are entitled to their views, the organisation will never become involved in any political matters, nor can it influence any decisions of a political nature.



Do Freemasons only look after each other?

No – Freemasonry is possibly the largest donor to charity; the first being the National Lottery. It has Masonic charities that look after Mason's wives, children's education and their elderly and infirm, but these are funded entirely by Masons and no monies come from the public for these Masonic institutions. It is possible that the Hospice movement would collapse without the help given by Masonry. Many other charities have benefited over many years from donations by Masons and their Lodges, especially in the areas of medicine, medical research and in the needs of children.

Families and Social involvement ...



Freemasonry has now become very much a family orientated organisation and although wives and female partners cannot become Freemasons in the United Grand Lodge of England, many Lodges have a very social programme of activities involving their wives and children. Should ladies wish to join Freemasonry, there is a separate Grand Lodge in England, exclusively for ladies. There are Ladies' Clubs, eg Guildford, where the qualification for membership is to be a wife or partner of a Mason and where interesting talks and social events take place. In Surrey, Freemasons are very involved with Charity, both nationally and in their local areas, but they also take part in other activities such as sporting events; fishing, golf, go-kart racing, bowls, clay shooting and an annual family weekend, whilst at the same time supporting local youth football teams and even parachuting for charity.

The Museum at Grand Lodge

The Library and Museum of Freemasonry is located in Freemasons' Hall, 60 Great Queen Street, London WC2B 5AZ.

Telephone: 020 7395 9257

Email: libmus@ugle.org.uk

www.freemasonry.london.museum

Guided tours of the building are generally available, free of charge, on Monday to Friday. Saturday tours are available, but must be pre-booked in advance. It is a fascinating and worthwhile place to visit and is open to members of the public.



Do you want to know more
or how to join a Lodge?

The Provincial Grand Lodge of Surrey

If you have not been given this leaflet by a friend or associate to whom you can go back to for more information, staff at the Provincial Office will be happy to put you in touch with a Lodge in your local area and you can have a chat with one or two of their members who will be happy to answer any of your questions.



Email: membershipenquiries@surreymason.org.uk

Website: www.surreymason.org.uk

Telephone: 020 8686 8388

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