

Freemasonry

Simple answers to difficult questions



Manchester
Masons

www.manchestermasons.com

Manchester Hall, 36 Bridge Street, Manchester. M3 3BT.

Contents

Welcome to Freemasonry	Page 1
Self-improvement	Page 2
Where did it all start?	Page 3
What is Freemasonry?	Page 4
What is a lodge?	Page 7
What do Freemasons do?	Page 9
The benefits of membership	Page 10
Qualifications for membership	Page 11
Freemasons and Charity	Page 12
Women and Freemasonry	Page 14
Rituals and ceremonies	Page 16
How much is Freemasonry?	Page 17
The University Scheme.	Page 19
Masonic dress code	Page 21
Membership FAQs	Page 23
Joining Freemasonry	Page 26

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Copyright 2018 Manchester Masons, all rights reserved.



Welcome To Freemasonry

Freemasonry is something we take great pride in. The friendships we garner and the relationships we establish; the good we do in the community; the tolerance we foster, and, most importantly, the qualities of life and actions we promote to our members.

Despite the intrigue that sometimes surrounds Freemasonry there is no reason we can't talk publicly about what we do, why we do it, and how our organisation is founded on the principles and virtues of a civilised society. It's time for us to shout out about Freemasonry.

We want to talk one-on-one and have a conversation, to explain in plain English the beauty of Freemasonry, the values it promotes, how our families are involved in everything we do, and the qualities it espouses in making good men better men.

The whole point of this booklet is to assist us, as Freemasons, communicate openly and freely with the public. We want to share the many fine aspects of our organisation and while yes, there are small portions of our ceremonies that are not disclosed until a candidate is made a Freemason, there is a lot of information that both can and should be shared.



While any Freemason might use subtly different terminology, or highlight different aspects of the organisation, there are certain aspects that all Freemasons should rightly take pride in, and here we hope to explain some of them.

This isn't meant to be an exhaustive document, it's more about giving general information for anyone who has an interest in Freemasonry. That might be a young man interested in what goes on within a lodge, or a woman interested in the wider aspects of the organisation, charitable works, or perhaps who had a relation in the Freemasons.

As Freemasons, no matter what the subject, we should be able to speak honestly and plainly about that which we are so proud.

Self-improvement

There is an old adage in Freemasonry, that we take good men and make them better, which is a philosophy at the heart of Freemasonry.

A Freemason will be asked to look towards self-improvement and be helped and assisted by other members.



Where Did It All Start?

Freemasonry is a very old organisation; so old, in fact, the precise origins are unknown. The earliest written evidence we have of our diverse and complex organisation stems from England in the 14th century.

The United Grand Lodge of England was formed by four lodges in London in 1717 and Grand Lodges were formed in Scotland and Ireland over the following years, subsequently spreading across the globe following the growth of the British Empire.

Despite the uncertainty of the earliest timings, it is accepted that the origins go back to the 'lodges' associated with the building of castles and cathedrals during the medieval period.

The rise of Freemasonry in the general population in the following centuries is largely attributed to changes in society during the renaissance and time of the enlightenment, as well as the growth of secularism, the scientific age, and the recognition of the rights of the individual.



What Is Freemasonry?

There's no short or quick answer to this question, because there are so many facets to Freemasonry, each with equal importance. These include ideas of fellowship and a philosophy of life, personal development, and benevolence.

That said, there are some who have been able to capture some of the essence of Freemasonry and put it into words:

“Freemasonry is a brotherhood of good men meeting and working in harmony, teaching strong moral and ethical values in personal, family and community behaviour, and a code of caring for others.”

Or, as Brother Mozart succinctly stated:

“Those who are working for the enlightenment and well-being of their neighbours - striving for the triumph of good.”

There is one expression often used to describe Freemasonry in the never-ending endeavour to encapsulate its complexity. It's little more than a sound-bite, but powerful nonetheless:

“Freemasonry takes good men and makes them better men”.



Freemasonry is based on the principles of tolerance, care, kindness, honesty, and trust. The organisation may have been founded over 300 years ago, but these values are as important and relevant to the world today as they ever were.

The principle aim of Freemasonry is the promotion of universal and lasting happiness for all people.

Contrary to popular belief, Freemasonry is not a secret society - its workings and finances are a matter of public record. There are simply some that members promise not to reveal although they are feely available in the public domain.

The Freemasons also have a registered charity, called the Masonic Charitable Foundation. It does significant charitable work in the community, but charity is only one part of Freemasonry's teachings.

Freemasonry is not a benefit society, however the deep caring principle within Freemasonry is applied to its members in addition to the wider community.



Freemasonry is not a religion and it is not a sect. Men of any faith are welcome to join, however to promote and maintain harmony amongst all members Freemasonry does not permit the discussion of religion or politics.

Freemasonry is not a networking organisation. Using lodge membership to promote your own or others' businesses, or professional or personal interests, is prohibited.



What Is A Lodge?

A lodge is a group of Freemasons drawn together most often by location or interest, numbering between 20 and 40 members. Meetings are usually held monthly in a building dedicated for the purpose. The Master holds the most senior position in the lodge, and he is supported by a group of Officers in the running of the lodge and conducting the ceremonies.

What Happens In A Lodge?

Much like any other organised club, meetings have a formal structure conducting the similar administrative business. Uniquely, however, the major part of most masonic meetings focusses on the initiation and progression of members. This is performed in a series of ceremonies all new members undertake to achieve full membership and become Master Masons. These ceremonies are the means of teaching the history and the principles of Freemasonry.

Other matters at meetings include the charitable and social activities of the lodge, and dining at the social board.



“

To enlarge the sphere of social happiness is worthy of the benevolent design of a Masonic institution; and it is most fervently to be wished, that the conduct of every member of the fraternity, as well as those publications, that discover the principles which actuate them, may tend to convince mankind that the grand object of Masonry is to promote the happiness of the human race.

GEORGE WASHINGTON

Lodge buildings are easily identifiable within their communities, but why do some look so uninviting and ‘closed’?

Many of the buildings were built decades ago, when Freemasons were encouraged to maintain stricter privacy surrounding the rituals and ceremonies than they are now.

The Freemasons Hall in Manchester was opened in 1929 and has always been an impressive example of architecture within the city.

There is no prescribed architectural style for Masonic building design; they vary from classic stonework to the modern design of glass and steel of today.

Can the public visit a Lodge room?

Yes! Bear in mind, however, that the buildings are private property primarily used by Freemasons for meetings. That said, some lodges will make parts of their premises available to community groups for activities such as health & fitness, dance lessons, and arts and crafts. Occasionally a lodge may hold meetings in their lodge rooms for those interested in joining Freemasonry.



What Do Freemasons Do?

The first Masonic commitment of a Freemason is to meet once a month at his lodge, during the Masonic season. In Manchester the Masonic season runs from September to May.

If he has ambitions of becoming the Master of the lodge, he must first become an officer of the lodge, and in turn for that he must become practiced in its ceremonies and customs.

This requires attendance and participation in the more frequent 'instruction' meetings.

Visits to other lodges are also commonplace - an activity in which lodges universally engage to build and widen fraternal associations and friendships. Members will usually accompany the lodge Master on such visits, but they may also make visits independently.

Lodges have an active social life both inside and outside the lodge in which wives, partners and families are also regularly involved.

Charitable activities may include both financial assistance and hands-on involvement.



The Benefits Of Membership

Fellowship: Freemasonry encourages a strong bond between members and fosters life-long friendships. You will enjoy mixing and working with men of high integrity and strong principle.

Benevolence: Care is an essential element of Freemasonry and that extends from your Brothers inside the lodge to others outside in the wider community as a whole. All Freemasons promise to be aware of the needs of those around them.

Life Balance: In the constant, switched-on hubbub of 21st Century life, Freemasonry is seen by many as an oasis where calm and order can prevail. It provides a unique and refreshing space where you can find diversion and relaxation.

Family: Most lodges offer social programmes providing opportunities for wives and families to widen their social engagement, make new friends, and meet other families with a common interest.



Qualifications For Membership

The Freemasons will consider any man of good character. There are very few limitations, but some important exceptions.

The minimum age at which you can join is 21, unless you are the son of a member in which case you may join at 18. There is no upper age limit.

Men of all faiths are accepted, and all candidates must be able to declare a belief in a Supreme Being.

You must be an upright, law-abiding citizen, and able to afford the fees without detriment to your family or livelihood.

You must have no serious criminal record and the support of your partner.

Most lodges will ask prospective members for character references.



Freemasons & Charity

Helping those in need is a fundamental cornerstone of Freemasonry and encouraged in every member. Freemasons have been involved in charitable activities since Masonic lodges were first established. It is a major motivation for many to join the organisation.

The Freemasons Charity activity also provides support for lodges and Masonic areas, such as East Lancashire, throughout the country, allowing them to pursue their own projects of giving and aiding individuals in need. Community causes are chosen locally and vary widely with examples in eluding health care, education, children's groups, senior citizens, and many more.

Where does the money for charity come from?

The Freemasons do not ask the public for funding. Most Masonic funds come from internal resources, through members' voluntary and accumulated donations over many years, with the total value of Freemasons' giving running to millions of pounds annually.

Another short epithet to describe the Freemasons Charity is simply 'a tradition of caring'.



A Freemason will only ever be asked to give what he can afford, without detriment to his family.

Why is charity so important to us?

Fundamentally, helping others is part of our philosophy and liberal viewpoint. It shows that Freemasons value people and their rights, have a tradition of caring and trust, tolerate diversity, and encourage learning and advancement.



“

The Society or Fraternity of Freemasons is more in the nature of a system of Philosophy or of moral and social virtues taught by symbols, allegories, and lectures based upon fundamental truths, the observance of which tends to promote stability of character, conservatism, morality and good citizenship.

H.W. COIL

Women & Freemasonry

Since its inception centuries ago, Freemasonry has always been a fraternal organisation. Despite the way society has changed over the years, the organisation has chosen to remain as such to preserve some of those ancient traditions.

Lodges take particular care when accepting new members to ensure wives and partners understand the nature, age, traditional essence and meaning of Freemasonry. A Freemason's wife or partner can support the membership by participating in the wider aspects of the lodge, through friendships with other families, by engaging with the charities, and through the active social life of the lodge as a whole.

Freemasonry teaches that a member's Masonic duties come only after his commitments first to his family and then to his work.

Wives, partners, and families are always welcomed by Freemasonry.



Can women become Freemasons?

The Order of Women Freemasons is the largest Masonic organisation for Women in the country and works on the lines of male Freemasonry. In 1999, the United Grand Lodge of England issued a statement, recognising the regularity and sincerity of the order.

There is an international Masonic-styled organisation for women called The Order of the Eastern Star. It was started by a Freemason in the United States.

Freemasonry cares for Lodge widows

All lodges take care of the widows of members as part of their charitable duties. Firstly, to ensure they're properly provided for, and secondly to keep in touch through social activities and seasonal entertainment.

The Freemasons charity provides further assistance to lodges for the care of their widows.



Rituals & Ceremonies

What are the ceremonies and rituals about?

The main ceremonies, and the rituals contained within them, are the three Degrees of Freemasonry. It is these stages of membership that a candidate must pass through on their journey to becoming a Master Mason. The ceremonies take the form of dramatically portrayed, symbolic stories in which the candidate learns about Freemasonry and the principles it upholds.

These steps or stages, known as Degrees, represents the three stages in a man's life - starting in ignorance and then moving to knowledge, progressing then from knowledge to wisdom. These Degrees are known as 'Entered Apprentice', 'Fellowcraft', and 'Master Mason'.

What happens during initiation?

Initiation is the first membership ceremony. It lasts for around an hour and explains Freemasonry while creating a sense of bonding and brotherhood. Only Freemasons may attend this ceremony. Family members and friends who are Freemasons can attend to support the new Freemason.



How Much Is Freemasonry?

Do you have to be wealthy to join?

No. Many wealthy men are Freemasons, but apart from the modest membership fees previously mentioned, wealth is not a consideration in Freemasonry and most certainly not a factor in qualifying for membership.

How do Freemasons have so much money?

It's true that Freemasonry gives millions of pounds to charitable causes each year. The majority of these funds is income earned from investments made up from the donations and bequests of members.

The administration and operation of The United Grand Lodge of England and all lodges is predominantly funded from members' subscriptions.



Does a Freemason have to leave money or a proportion of their estate to the organisation?

Absolutely not. there is no pressure or even expectation that members bequest money or property to Freemasonry. It's not uncommon for this to happen, but that is entirely the member's personal decision.



The University Scheme

Universities have had an association with Freemasonry for hundreds of years. In 2005 the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) launched a scheme to help forge links between well placed, enthusiastic lodges and the many students and other young people who are seeking to become involved in Freemasonry but who may not know where to begin.

In Manchester we have the Old Mancunians Lodge which seeks undergraduates, postgraduates and even lecturers as recruits mainly from Manchester University, MMU and Salford University. The lodge also takes graduates from all over the country and abroad who may have come to live and work in the Manchester area.



A new, open attitude

Up until quite recently, as Freemasons we have been quite reticent when it comes to talking about our organisation and work. Today we are taking a more open attitude, and we encourage all Freemasons to talk about their membership, what they do, what Freemasonry means to them, and about their charity.

This booklet is intended to be an example of that.

To non-masonic readers, please, feel free to ask any Freemason for more information...

Where do we meet?

As Manchester Masons, we all meet at the Freemasons Hall, which is now called Manchester Hall. The address is Manchester Hall, Bridge Street, Manchester, M3 3BT.



“

As we continue to improve ourselves in Masonry, we are indeed improving life. We know from history that without ideals to guide us, the garden of a man's life will not grow into a place of beauty.

STANLEY F. MAXWELL

Masonic Dress

Aprons, gloves, and collars

At lodge meetings it is customary for Masons to wear their regalia, signifying their Masonic rank.

The basic dress for all Freemasons is an apron and gloves, symbolic of the stonemasons of old, over a dark lounge suit.

As members advance up through the hierarchy of Freemasonry, the regalia becomes more decorative - collars, cuffs, medals ('jewels' in Masonic terms) and colour.

Formal dress is part of past tradition and style. Most lodges today see a business suit as suitable, however some retain the more formal practice of dinner suit. Ultimately it is a decision for each lodge.

It is usual for officers of the United Grand Lodge of England, on formal ceremonial occasions, to wear 'tails'.

Freemasonry has a proud heritage and sense of tradition. Most men own a business suit and dress in such a manner at lodge meetings out of respect for the institution, its principles, and its traditions.



There are of course business and social events, however, where more casual wear is more appropriate.

Is regalia supplied?

Up until a Freemason reaches the Third Degree, regalia is supplied by the lodge.

Collars and other regalia for lodge officers is also supplied by the lodge.



“

Courage is the first of human qualities, because it is the quality which guarantees all the others.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

All that is essential for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.

EDMUND BURKE

Membership FAQs

What is ‘proper solicitation’?

The rules concerning solicitation of membership to Freemasonry are often misunderstood.

Providing it is clear that a man is evidently suitable, with the qualities required to join, then it is permitted to enquire if he is interested, to answer his questions, and to provide further information.

It is improper to apply any pressure or coercion. The candidate must be allowed to decide for himself.

Is Freemasonry open to all men?

One of the greatest things about Freemasonry is that ALL men - regardless of their race, religion, financial or social status - can come together as equals and share a common bond of friendship and mutual respect.

Is there a trial period before joining?

No, however a ‘full membership’ is not attained for a period until all the ceremonies of membership have been completed. This period is around six months, but sometimes more.



Why do men join Freemasonry?

There are many reasons to join Freemasonry, but the most common are:

- To share the company and fellowship of like-minded men.
- To fulfil a desire to further develop their life interests.
- To actively expand their involvement in community assistance.
- To widen both their own and their family's connections in their communities.
- Because of family or friends' current historical connections with Freemasonry.
- To enjoy the social opportunities.

Of course, it is a combination of these reasons that men are drawn to the organisation.

Is the organisation dying out?

No, UGLE recently celebrated its 300-year anniversary, however, membership has been in a slow decline. It is widely accepted that many membership organisations are in a similar state, reflecting the increasing pace of society and the growing commitments on personal time.



There have been small adjustments, but Freemasonry today continues in very much the same way it always has done, and it is anticipated that membership will begin to grow again.

This is because we believe that, once explained, Freemasonry has genuine appeal to all men - men who admire its traditional values, its fellowship, its benevolent qualities, and its ceremonial spectacle.

How is Freemasonry different from service organisations?

While charitable service and caring about others is a cornerstone of Freemasonry, there are other equally important parts not found in other service organisations. Men become Freemasons to develop as individuals and meet other like-minded people. They join to enjoy its tradition, the rituals, regalia, the ceremony and the sociable nature of the organisation.



Joining Freemasonry

To dispel another myth, it is not true that an interested person must wait to be asked to join Freemasonry.

He may enquire, from any Freemason he may know, what steps are necessary to become a member or alternatively fill in the “contact us” form on the Manchester Masons website and we’ll be in touch.



Manchester
Masons

www.manchestermasons.com

Manchester Hall, 36 Bridge Street, Manchester. M3 3BT.

