

**PROVINCE OF EAST LANCASHIRE**  
Prepared by the Education and Training Committee

**FREEMASONRY.....it's no secret!**

**This leaflet does not pretend to be a complete guide to Freemasonry: rather to provide a brief insight into its history, its organisation and its principles in the hope that it will dispel many popular misconceptions.**

Freemasonry is a way of living. Its main objective is to make good men better men by teaching them thoughtfulness for others, kindness in the community, honesty in business, courtesy in society and fairness in all things.

It places great emphasis on charity – concern for people, care for the less fortunate and help for those in need.

Every Freemason knows he must not seek pecuniary benefit from his membership and that, whilst he is expected to give moral support to a brother Mason, his duty to his God, the law, his family and as a citizen must come first.

Abuse of membership can result in temporary suspension and even expulsion.

**Membership**

Contrary to popular belief, Freemasonry is not a closed organisation open only to those who are invited to join.

Membership is open to all men of good character who might have a variety of religious beliefs, so that the Jew can be in harmony with the Arab, Protestant with Roman Catholic and Hindu with Muslim.

As in many clubs, an applicant has to be formally proposed and seconded. Following a successful interview by a small committee there is next a ballot of all the members.

The candidate is then led through the three stages of being made a Mason – from Apprentice to Craftsman and on to Master Mason.

At each stage he takes an obligation (not an Oath) and, as such obligations have traditionally been taken “on bare and bended knee”, hence the popular misconception that all Masons meet with trouser leg rolled up.

**Membership under the Grand Lodge of England is restricted to men, but there are at least two other completely separate organisations governing lodges restricted to ladies.**

**Freemasons come from all walks of life and they do not have to be rich: it costs far less to be a Freemason than say a member of a Golf Club or Health and Fitness Club.**

**An annual subscription covers the cost of lodge administration. Then there is the price of the meal after each meeting. Donations to Charities are expected but should not be to the detriment of a member's other financial responsibilities.**

**At the opening and closing of each meeting the lodge Chaplain leads the brethren in prayer and, during the meeting, the Volume of the Sacred Law (in this country always the Bible) is open in front of the Master.**

**If a candidate being made a Mason is not a Christian the volume sacred to his religion is also opened and he takes his obligation on that volume.**

**The agenda for each meeting is printed and confined solely to the business of the lodge – approval of minutes and accounts, reports from various representatives and receipt of correspondence etc.**

**If the lodge has a candidate, the agenda will also include a ceremony, normally conducted by the Master. These take the form of a dramatic presentation of the moral and social behaviour expected of a Freemason.**

**At each stage of admission the candidate takes an obligation (not an oath) as to his duties. He does promise not to reveal certain secrets but these are restricted to signs and passwords he needs to prove that he is a Mason.**

**The lodge meeting over, members normally join the Master for a meal, with formal and informal toasts. The first toast is always to the Queen, accompanied by the singing of the National Anthem. Occasionally there will be after-dinner entertainment.**

**Many lodges have an extensive programme of social events, to which their Wife and families, their friends and their friends ladies are invited.**

### **No Secrets**

**Whilst every Freemason promises not to reveal certain signs and passwords, they are not secret.**

**In fact, along with the contents of all Masonic ceremonies, they have been revealed in a variety of publications available to the public and on the World Wide Web.**

**Many Masonic Halls now have open days, when the public is invited to meet local Masons and tour the lodge rooms.**

**The vast majority of Freemasons openly acknowledge their membership because they are proud of it. Others, regrettably, have reason to fear discrimination in business or employment if their membership becomes known.**

### **The Early Days**

**Scholars disagree about how Freemasonry began. There are two main theories.**

**According to one it stemmed directly from lodges formed by stonemasons who built medieval castles and cathedrals.**

**They were rightly jealous of their skills and developed secret signs and passwords to enable them to prove that they were masters of their craft – just as signs and passwords are used by Freemasons today to prevent non-members gaining admission to their private meetings.**

**The theory goes that some of these stonemasons' lodges began to suffer declining membership and invited non-craftsmen, known as gentlemen masons, to join them. Gradually, the gentlemen masons took the lodge over.**

**The other theory is that a group of men started it because they so hated the religious and political intolerance of their day that they decided to try and build a better world. They took the building of King Solomon's Temple as the basis of their ritual and used the tools of stonemasons to illustrate their moral teachings.**

**No one knows exactly when Freemasonry began.**

**The earliest written reference to an English Freemasons' Lodge comes from the diary of Elias Ashmole, who recorded that he was made a Freemason in Warrington in 1646.**

**Lodges founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century were few in numbers and were scattered all over the country. Some formed groups and called themselves grand lodges, but eventually all joined together in the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813.**

**There are two other Grand Lodges in the British Isles – Scotland and Ireland (covering both north and south).**

**Freemasonry is now world-wide with nearly 130 Grand Lodges in 60 different countries. Each is independent: there is no international Masonic Organisation.**

**Some of these Grand Lodges are not recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England because they dabble in politics and religions, topics which are banned at Meetings of English Freemasons. English Freemasons do not have any association with these unrecognised Grand Lodges.**

**World-wide membership is estimated at around five million.**

### **English Freemasonry**

**The United Grand Lodge of England administers Freemasonry in England, Wales, the Isle of Man, the Channel Isles and a number of Districts overseas.**

**England and Wales are divided into 47 Provinces, of which Cheshire is the oldest, West Lancashire the largest and East Lancashire the second largest. London has its own organisation through the Metropolitan Grand Lodge of London.**

**There are approximately 6,000 lodges in the Provinces, 1,600 lodges in London and 800 lodges abroad, giving a total membership of over 300,000 members in England and Wales and 30,000 in overseas Districts.**

**The head of English Freemasonry is called the Grand Master, an office currently held by HRH the Duke of Kent.**

### **East Lancashire**

**The Province of East Lancashire covers an area from Manchester in the south to Clitheroe in the north, and from Bolton in the west to Todmorden in the east.**

**The Provincial headquarters is at Freemasons Hall, Bridge Street, Manchester, which is also the meeting place for well over 100 lodges.**

**The head of the Province is known as the Provincial Grand Master, he has a Deputy and one Assistant for every group of forty lodges. For administrative purposes the Province is divided into seventeen districts each with a chairman, deputy chairman and secretary.**

**Six of the districts are in Manchester and the others are in Salford, Bolton, Bury, Blackburn, Rossendale, Accrington, Burnley, Oldham, Ashton, Audenshaw and Rochdale.**

**In addition to these centres there are Masonic Halls in Farnworth, Darwen, Radcliffe, Mosley, Shaw, Clayton-le-Moors, Clitheroe, Colne, Nelson, Bacup, Oswaldtwistle, Haslingden, Padiham, Rawtenstall, Todmorden and Whalley. Each is a meeting place for lodges.**

**There are more than 350 lodges in the Province with a total membership in the region of 8,500.**

### **The Lodges**

**Each lodge is private and independent, though it must comply with the general regulations of the United Grand Lodge of England.**

**Each has its own Bye-Laws and can make its own decisions on matters not covered by the general regulations.**

**It is headed by a Master, usually a different member elected each year. Once a member has served as Master he is then referred to as a Past Master.**

**Each Lodge is identified by a name and number. It can be named after a place, a well known individual or an admirable human quality such as Faith or Friendship.**

**It is given a number by Grand Lodge which indicates its comparative age.**

**Most lodges outside London meet eight or nine times a year, with a break during the summer.**

***Copies of this text can be obtained in leaflet form from the Secretary of the Provincial Education and Training Committee.  
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**OCTOBER 2003.**