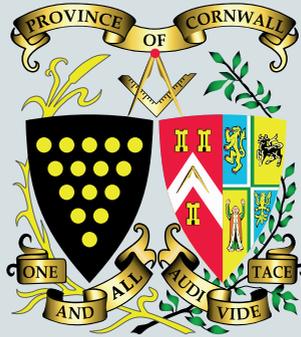


PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF CORNWALL



The questions
you've always wanted
to ask about

FREEMASONRY
NOW ANSWERED



Section 1: History, heritage, principles and structure

Q1. What is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest and largest non-religious, non-political, fraternal and charitable organisations, whose values are the principles of kindness, honesty, fairness, tolerance and integrity. For many its biggest draw is the fact that members come from all walks of life and meet as equals, whatever their race, religion or socio-economic position.

It has over 200,000 members under the auspices of the United Grand Lodge of England, who meet in more than 7,000 Lodges across England, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands - and membership is strong especially among young people. Worldwide, the figure grows to around six million Freemasons.

Any man over the age of 21 can apply to become a Freemason (or the age of 18 in the case of University Lodges), although those aged between 18 and 21 may be initiated by special dispensation from the relevant Provincial Grand Master. There are two equivalent independent Grand Lodges that are exclusively for women.

Today Freemasonry is one of the largest charitable givers in the UK, through its Masonic Charitable Foundation, as well as to non-Masonic charities and disaster funds; the organisation has donated to every major disaster since 1982, predominantly through the Red Cross.

Freemasonry encourages its members to take a moral and ethical approach to life. Its principles are more important and relevant in today's society than ever before, as we enter a time of unprecedented austerity. Family and community are also both central to Freemasonry; members are encouraged to see the interests of the family as paramount and to become involved in their communities, for example through voluntary work.

Q2. Are there specific principles upon which Freemasonry is based?

Yes, Freemasons follow five principles, as they have done for many years. These encompass and embrace the fundamental principles of good citizenship in all walks of life:

- **Kindness:** Freemasons have always been deeply involved in charity and make a major contribution to society through their own charities, as well as through donations to UK charities and worldwide disaster funds, with members playing an active role in their communities.
- **Honesty:** Freemasonry prides itself on its transparency. Not only are Freemasons completely free to acknowledge their membership, they are encouraged to do so.
- **Fairness:** Freemasons treat all as equal. For many, the organisation's biggest draw is the fact that members come from all walks of life and meet as equals whatever their race, religion or socio-economic position.
- **Tolerance:** Freemasons are expected to show respect for the opinions of others and behave with understanding towards other people.
- **Integrity:** Freemasons are asked to be the best people they can be. Integrity comes hand in hand with following the above principles of kindness, honesty, fairness, and tolerance.

From its earliest days, Freemasonry has been concerned with the care of vulnerable people in society including the sick and the elderly. This concern continues unabated today and Freemasonry is now one of the largest charitable givers in the UK.

Q3. What is the history of Freemasonry – where did it all begin?

The first major milestone of Freemasonry occurred on 24 June 1717 when four London Lodges came together at the Goose and Gridiron Tavern in St Paul's Churchyard and declared themselves the world's first Grand Lodge.

By 1723 the new Grand Lodge published its first rule book, The Constitutions of the Freemasons, and was recording its quarterly meetings. There is evidence to suggest that by this time its mandate had spread outside of London. By 1736 the Grand Lodges of Scotland and Ireland were also established and the three Home Grand Lodges set about taking Freemasonry overseas. A rival Grand Lodge appeared in London in 1751 - the two existed side by side until they merged in 1813 to form the United Grand Lodge of England. Much of the standardisation of ritual, procedures and regalia dates back to this integral unison.

The 19th and 20th Centuries saw a huge expansion of Freemasonry both at home and abroad. After the two World Wars, Freemasonry provided the perfect platform for ex-servicemen to continue the camaraderie that had grown during their time at war; it was a calm centre in a world full of change.

In 1967 the 250th anniversary of the United Grand Lodge was celebrated in style at the Royal Albert Hall. During the event, HRH The Duke of Kent became Grand Master – a position he still holds to this day. 25 years later, the world's press and television attended a meeting of the United Grand Lodge for the first time, to join them in celebrating its 275th anniversary at Earl's Court in June 1992. Today, plans are well underway for the United Grand Lodge's celebration of its Tercentenary in June 2017.

The United Grand Lodge of England is the Mother Lodge of the world from where the English constitution is run. There are currently over 200,000 Freemasons in England and Wales and in 34 districts around the world.

Q4. How is the organisation structured?

The United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) is the governing body of Freemasonry in England, Wales and the Channel Islands. Its headquarters is at Freemasons' Hall, 60 Great Queen Street, London, WC2B 5AZ.

UGLE is the mother Lodge of the world from where the English constitution is run. It currently has over 200,000 members meeting in over 7,000 Lodges, which are grouped as follows:

- Lodges meeting in London (an area generally within a 10-mile radius of Freemasons' Hall) are administered by, the Metropolitan Grand Lodge of London.
- Lodges meeting outside London, and within England, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, are grouped into 47 Provinces, whose boundaries roughly correspond to those of the old Counties, with each headed by a Provincial Grand Master.
- Lodges that meet outside England, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are grouped into 34 Districts with each headed by a District Grand Master, five Groups (currently too small to make up a District), each of which is headed by a Grand Inspector; and 12 Lodges abroad which are directly administered by Freemasons' Hall.

There are separate Grand Lodges of Ireland and Scotland, which have a combined total of approximately 150,000 members. Worldwide, there are approximately six million Freemasons. There are also two independent Grand Lodges in the UK that are exclusively for women members.

Q5. How many members do UGLE have?

UGLE currently has over 200,000 members meeting in over 7,000 Lodges. In addition, there are separate Grand Lodges for Ireland and Scotland that have a combined total of approximately 150,000 members. Worldwide, there are approximately six million Freemasons. There are also two Grand Lodges exclusively for women (The Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons and The Order of Women Freemasons).

Membership of Freemasonry is strong, particularly among young people who can now join 55 University Lodges across the UK.

Q6. Where is the headquarters of Freemasons?

UGLE, the governing body of Freemasonry in England, Wales and the Channel Islands, has had its headquarters at Freemasons' Hall, 60 Great Queen Street, London, WC2B 5AZ, for more than two hundred years.

Freemasons' Hall is one of the finest Art Deco buildings in England, and it's highly likely that you will recognise it, as it's one of the top 10 filming locations in London, popular with TV and movie production companies alike. The Hall has featured in a number of Hollywood blockbusters. It will also be familiar to many BBC1 viewers as it acts as headquarters to the fictional team from Spooks. Freemasons' Hall can also be hired for events and hosts London Fashion Week.

Q7. What is a Lodge?

Every member that joins Freemasonry does so through a Lodge. There is a Lodge to suit everyone in terms of location and interests, and members are able to join more than one Lodge if they would like to. Groups of Lodges are organised on a regional basis into Provinces and the Metropolitan area (covering London). There are more than 7,000 Lodges in England and Wales.

Lodges meet on average between five and six times a year and in a variety of locations from Masonic buildings to village halls. Meetings usually last no more than an hour and a half and are followed by a dinner, which provides an opportunity for members to relax and enjoy the company of others.

Every Lodge follows the same structure. It is this structure that many Masons cite as one of the things they enjoy most about Freemasonry. There are three levels of Freemasonry through which members progress, which are linked to the organisation's symbolic origins in stonemasonry. A Mason starts as an Entered Apprentice, progresses to a Fellow Craft and finally becomes a Master Mason.

The progression to Master Mason takes on average two years but is dependent upon the size of the Lodge. The progression through these levels can be seen in much the same way as a person progressing through their career in other organisations, at each promotion there is a greater understanding and more involvement. Once a Master Mason, a member may progress to one of the senior roles in their Lodge, the highest being Master of the Lodge. The Lodge also has permanent positions such as Secretary and Treasurer.

Q8. What happens at Lodge meetings exactly?

Meetings are run in a similar way to those of other membership organisations, covering orders of business, the induction of new members and any new appointments. They are open to members and guests from other Lodges. Charitable funds are also raised at meetings through out of pocket donations, which are given to causes chosen by the individual Lodge.

Q9. Is it possible to go along to a Lodge meeting as a non-Mason?

No. Lodge meetings are for members only and invited guests from other Lodges, similar to the meetings of most other membership-based organisations or even the board meetings of companies. Apart from this Freemasonry operates in an extremely open and transparent manner. For example, members follow a set of rules as set out in the Book of Constitutions that was first published in 1723 and is available for public viewing or purchase.

Visitors are welcome to visit Freemasons' Hall in London, there is a wealth of information available on the UGLE website at www.ugle.org.uk and the organisation welcomes enquiries about Freemasonry and its aims and objectives.

Section 2: Membership

Q10. Who can join Freemasonry?

Any man over the age of 21 (or 18 in the case of University Lodges) can apply to join Freemasonry, regardless of race, colour, religion, political views or social or economic standing. In some cases, those aged under 21 and 18 respectively may be initiated by special dispensation from the relevant Provincial Grand Master.

All potential Freemasons must believe in a Supreme Being, although Freemasonry does not seek to replace an individual's religion or provide a substitute for it. Freemasonry itself is a non-religious and non-political organisation, and discussion of politics and religion are not allowed.

Today there are over 200,000 Freemasons in England and Wales, a further 150,000 in Ireland and Scotland, and around six million worldwide. Members are of all ages and from all walks of life, and membership is strong, demonstrating the relevance of Freemasonry to people in the 21st Century.

Q11. Who cannot join Freemasonry?

Freemasons do not discriminate on grounds of race, colour, religion, political views, or social or economic standing. Any man over the age of 21 (18 in the case of University Lodges) can apply to join Freemasons, while woman can apply to join one of two equivalent Grand Lodges in the UK – the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons (HFAF) and The Order of Women Freemasons (OWF) - which are independent of UGLE.

Q12. Is Freemasonry open only to men?

Lodges under UGLE are restricted to men. However, there are two separate Grand Lodges, which are exclusively for women (HFAF and OWF). This is the way that both the men and women's Lodges like it to be just like other single-sex organisations such as the Women's Institute (WI).

Q13. Does Freemasonry accept Roman Catholics and people with different religious beliefs?

Yes, absolutely, people from all faiths have always been welcomed. In fact, this is a cornerstone of Freemasonry, which is a non-religious and non-political organisation and does not discriminate on the grounds of race, colour, religion, political views or social or economic standing.

Q14. Why do people join Freemasonry?

Like any membership organisation, there are many different, and personal, motivations for becoming a Freemason. One of the key reasons cited is camaraderie; Freemasonry provides a unique environment for people from all backgrounds to make lasting friendships, learn skills achieve their potential and, above all, have fun. What is more, the organisation provides a valuable forum for discussion between members in an open environment, helping to build trust.

Freemasonry also provides a valuable framework around which members can make a positive contribution to society and can also provide structure to people's lives, helping them to be the best they possibly can.

Q15. How much does it cost to be a Freemason?

It varies from Lodge to Lodge. Members pay annual dues to UGLE and a further sum to the individual Lodge, which is set by the Lodge itself. Freemasonry is not expensive when compared to other social activities.

In addition, members are invited to give to charity but this should always be within their means and it is entirely up to the individual how much they wish to contribute.

Q16. How do Freemasons recruit new members?

Freemasons do not actively advertise for new members. They are always seeking men of integrity to join and candidates can also approach the organisation or an individual member. All applications for membership are considered.

Q17. What is the application process – how long does it take and what's involved?

Suitable potential candidates are usually first seen by a Lodge Committee. It is important that each individual from the outset understands the principles of Freemasonry and the importance of communicating these to both family and friends.

Q18. Is it possible to leave Freemasonry once you've become a member?

Yes, of course! Like any other membership-based organisation, people only remain a member for as long as they wish to participate. People don't tend to leave very often since the vast majority of members appreciate the personal and wider value that Freemasonry offers. It should also be noted that membership is growing, especially among young people.

Q19. Why is Freemasonry a men-only society? Isn't this out-of-step with equality in today's society?

UGLE is restricted to men. However, there are two separate Grand Lodges, which are exclusively for women (The Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons and The Order of Women Freemasons). Historically this has always been the case and it's the way that members today still prefer the organisation to be organised. It's worth noting that it's not so unusual, as there are many thriving single-sex organisations – the Women's Institute, for example, is run for the benefit of its female members.

Q20. Isn't Freemasonry going to 'die out' as younger people look for more straightforward, less elaborate organisations?

On the contrary, Freemasonry has around 200,000 members in England and Wales, 150,000 in Scotland and Ireland and around six million worldwide. Membership is strong, particularly among younger people who often join University Lodges.

In fact, Freemasonry is arguably more popular – and relevant – today than it has ever been. It does not discriminate on grounds of race, colour, religion, political views or social or economic standing, and encourages its members to take a moral and ethical approach to life, helping them to be the best they can. It is based on the principles of kindness, honesty, fairness, tolerance and integrity, all of which are perhaps more important in today's society than ever before.

Q21. Is Freemasonry relevant today?

Yes, absolutely. Membership in the England & Wales currently stands at over 200,000 and is strong, especially among young people, who can join one of the many University Lodges.

In many ways, Freemasonry is more relevant today than it ever has been, particularly with regard to its community involvement and contribution to good causes – both Masonic and non-Masonic – in the current age of austerity and reduced state involvement in many areas of life.

Q22. Is it true that many influential and powerful people were – and still are – Freemasons?

Freemasons are mostly ordinary people doing ordinary jobs. There have also been many famous Freemasons through the ages in many different fields including kings (e.g. George VI, Edward VII and Edward VIII), Prime Ministers and Presidents (e.g. Winston Churchill and George Washington), historical figures (the Duke of Wellington and Henri Dunant, founder of the Red Cross), sportsmen (Clive Lloyd and Arnold Palmer) and actors/entertainers (John Wayne, Clark Gable and Peter Sellers).

However, it's worth noting that business networking is not allowed at Masonic meetings, nor is using Freemasonry in any way for personal financial gain.

Section 3: Relationship with religion and politics

Q23. Do you need to be religious to join the Freemasons?

Members must believe in a Supreme Being, although Freemasonry does not seek to replace an individual's religion or provide a substitute for it – instead it focuses on an individual's relationship with his peers.

Q24. Why does the Church/other organised religions not like Freemasonry?

Broadly speaking, this is not believed to be the case, though there are elements within churches that choose to misunderstand Freemasonry and its objectives. Freemasonry has always encouraged its members to be active in their own religion and does not make any attempt to replace it. Freemasonry is a non-religious and non-political organisation, which encourages its members to become the best they can be. In fact, Freemasonry is entirely complimentary to the best aspects of all religions.

Q25. What is Freemasonry's relationship with politics?

Freemasonry is a non-political organisation and as a body will never express a view on politics or state policy. In fact, the discussion of politics (and religion) at Masonic meetings is not allowed. They believe this is the best way to ensure that everyone gets along well, since politics is a subject that often gets emotions running high!

Q26. But aren't religion and politics two of the main topics of conversation?

Freemasonry is a non-religious and non-political society and believes that separating these topics from Lodge meetings is the best way to ensure that Freemasonry is able to focus on its core principles and beliefs – such as helping other people and contributing to the wider community. We also think this is the best way to ensure that everybody gets along together as both religion and politics are subjects that often get emotions running high!

Section 4: Charitable role

Q27. Is Freemasonry a force for good?

Yes, absolutely. Freemasonry is one of the biggest contributors to UK charities (both Masonic and non-Masonic) and other good causes (such as disaster relief funds – it has contributed to every major disaster fund since 1982). It is also worth noting that Freemasonry encourages its members to take a moral and ethical approach to life, helping them become the best that they can be. It seeks to reinforce the principles of kindness, honesty, fairness, tolerance and integrity.

Q28. How is the money donated to charity raised?

The members themselves raise all the money donated to charity. For example, they are invited to give to charity at Lodge meetings, though this should always be within their means; it is entirely up to the individual how much they wish to contribute. Occasionally money is raised from such events as Ladies' Nights and barbeques where wives and partners meet socially.

Part of the enjoyment of being a Freemason is that numerous events are arranged to specifically raise money for local and national charities. It never ceases to amaze just how inventive Freemasons are in their fundraising activity, it seems that the joy of giving springs from the act of enjoyment, it's all part of that unique feeling of being a Freemason.

Q29. Do they raise any money through campaigns such as door-to-door or street collections?

No. Almost all of the money raised is by members themselves, from their own income. Occasionally money is raised from such events as Ladies' Nights and barbeques where wives and partners meet socially.

All Freemasons are encouraged to give to charity – though this should always be within their means and it is entirely up to the individual how much they wish to contribute. In addition to an annual subscription fee, money is raised at regular Lodge collections, for example.

Q30. Surely Freemasons could contribute even more to good causes if they reached out to members of the public – through street collections for example?

Freemasons have always raised money almost exclusively via their members – and occasionally through wives and partners of members at social events - and this is the way they want it to remain, especially since there are many other good causes, which raise funds through proactive campaigns such as street collections. Freemasons are already one of the largest charitable givers in the UK. Members will continue to raise funds for good causes (both Masonic and non- Masonic), as well as contributing to society and individual communities more widely.

Q31. Is Freemasonry a registered charity?

No, Freemasonry is not a charity, but it operates its own charity the Masonic Charitable Foundation. Previous to 2015, this was four separate charities, the Grand Charity, The Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys, the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution and the Masonic Samaritan Fund. It also contributes to many other non-Masonic charities and funds, such as disaster relief.

Q32. Who receives the money that Freemasons raise?

Local Lodges and groups of Lodges raise money for various good causes, often smaller, local charities. They also give money to the Masonic Charitable Foundation, which prior to 2015 comprised four separate Masonic charities, based in London:

- The Freemasons Grand Charity
- The Masonic Samaritan Fund
- The Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution
- The Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys

A decision was taken in 2015 to bring these four charities under the umbrella of a single entity and the Masonic Charitable Foundation was formed.

The Masonic Charitable Foundation continues to offer the same comprehensive support to Freemasons and their family members as previously and continues to fund the work of many non-Masonic charities helping the wider community.

Section 5: Myths & misunderstandings

Q33. Is Freemasonry a secret society?

No quite the contrary. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that Freemasonry does not fit the definition of a ‘secret society’. There are no closed doors in Freemasonry. Freemasons operate in a very open and transparent way. For example, copies of its aims, constitutions and rules are freely available and have been since 1723. The UGLE website at www.ugle.org.uk contains a wealth of information on everything from the historical foundations of the society to the layout of a typical Lodge room.

Q34. Will Freemasonry change in the future to become more open and transparent?

Freemasonry is already a very open and transparent organisation. For example, copies of its aims, constitutions and rules are freely available and have been since 1723. Anyone can visit the UGLE headquarters, Freemasons’ Hall, for a guided tour any day of the week (except Sundays and public holidays). It is one of the finest art deco buildings in London, which many people will recognise, as it is a sought-after location for TV and movie companies. Individuals are completely free to acknowledge their membership and are actively encouraged to do so. To read the organisation’s straight talking guide to Freemasonry visit:

<http://freemasonrytoday.com/whats-it-all-about>

Q35. But Lodge meetings are private aren’t they?

Yes, Lodge meetings are for members only, similar to the meetings of most membership-based organisations or even the board meetings of companies. However, Freemasons operate in an extremely open and transparent manner. For example, members follow a set of rules as set out in the Book of Constitutions that was first published in 1723 and is available for public viewing and purchase. Visitors are welcome to visit the UGLE head-quarters, Freemasons Hall, there is a wealth of information available on the UGLE website at www.ugle.org.uk and the organisation welcomes enquiries about Freemasonry and its aims and objectives.

Q36. Freemasons take oaths don’t they? What’s that all about?

New members make solemn promises concerning their behaviour both in the Lodge and in society. Freemasons also promise to support others in time of need but only so far as it does not conflict with their family and public obligations. Effectively, such promises govern the way members conduct themselves – similar to the rules and terms of membership of any membership-based organisation – whether it’s a tennis club or organisations such as Rotary or the Women’s Institute.

Q37. There are some rituals involved in Freemasonry aren't there?

There are ceremonies symbolically based on the initiation of apprentice stonemasons in the Middle Ages, and which have become parts of Lodge meetings. For example, new members are introduced to the values of Freemasonry, through ritual dramas, which are learnt off by heart and stonemasons' customs and tools are used in these. In addition, historic regalia is worn and this shows a member's role within the organisation. Any group with a history dating back several centuries will have built up a particular way of doing things, including ceremonies that may appear strange to non-members. For example, the ceremony and rituals surrounding the state opening – and operation – of Parliament are likely to appear strange to those not familiar with its history and heritage. The meetings, of other well-known organisations such as Rotary and Scouting, for example, follow set patterns, and many involve uniforms, badges or chains of office, so there are a number of parallels.

Q38. Why do members wear regalia at Lodge meetings?

Wearing regalia is historic and symbolic. Like a uniform, the regalia is first an equaliser although it also indicates the role and seniority of the wearer. In this, Freemasonry is really no different to any other uniformed organisation – from the police to the Scouts.

Q39. Why are there so many myths and rumours surrounding the Freemasons?

The most likely answer to this is the long history and heritage of Freemasonry, which dates back over a number of centuries, and the ongoing debate as to its precise origins. Additionally, in World War II, after being persecuted by the Nazis along with other groups and fearing that there would be a German invasion of England, Freemasons made a point of keeping their membership private – this inward-looking stance has taken a long time to shake off, causing myths surrounding Freemasonry to be perpetuated. In fact, Freemasonry is a very open and transparent organisation. For example, members follow a set of rules contained within the Book of Constitutions that was published in 1723 and is available for public viewing. In addition, visitors are welcome to visit the Freemasons' Hall, there is a wealth of information available on the UGLE website at www.ugle.org.uk and the organisation welcomes enquiries about Freemasonry and its aims and objectives. To read the organisation's straight talking guide to Freemasonry visit:

<http://freemasonrytoday.com/whats-it-all-about>

Q40. Is it true that there are secret Freemason messages built into some of the major buildings in cities around the world?

No. This is a rumour likely to have derived from the fact that Freemasonry's symbolic heritage dates back to the stonemasons who were responsible for building many historic buildings – such as churches and cathedrals – which still stand today. They may well have included some of their symbols in the architecture, almost like signatures to illustrate their involvement.

However, they are no more than that.

Q41. Is Freemasonry a cult?

No. Freemasonry is a non-political, non-religious membership based organisation open to people regardless of race, colour, religion, political views or social or economic standing.

Freemasonry encourages its members to take a moral and ethical approach to life and to become the best that they can be. Freemasonry is run in an extremely open and transparent way and is one of the largest charitable givers in the UK.

Q42. Has being a Freemason helped influential people reach such levels of success in their careers?

No, absolutely not. In fact, business networking is not allowed in Freemasonry. Clearly, many highly successful people have been Freemasons, but most are ordinary people.

Q43. Is Freemasonry effectively a networking opportunity for members to help further their careers?

No, absolutely not. In fact, networking is not permitted in Freemasonry and using membership for business advancement is strictly not allowed. Freemasonry is a non-religious, non-political organisation. From its earliest days it has been concerned with the care of vulnerable people in society including the sick and the elderly. This work continues unabated today and Freemasons have become one of the largest givers to good causes.

Q44. Do you have to be a Freemason to be successful?

No, of course not! There have been many high profile Freemasons, but there are also many other members who are ordinary, hard-working people from all walks of life who join Freemasonry for the camaraderie, to become the best that they can be and to get involved in charitable and community work.

Q45. Is the Prime Minister a Freemason?

That's a question that you should put to the Prime Minister of the day. Like any responsible organisation, we are bound by the Data Protection Act and would not divulge the names of individual members without their express permission.

Q46. Do you think it would appeal more to the next generation of Freemasons if you were to lose some of the mysterious terminology and practices?

No. Membership of Freemasonry in England & Wales is strong, currently standing at over 200,000. The long history and heritage of the organisation are an integral part of the Freemasons and will continue to be so in the future.

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