

Freemasonry in Athol Masonic Buildings 60 Severn Street Birmingham B1 1QG

A Guide and Aid for New and Aspiring Members,
their Proposers and Seconders
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**UNITED GRAND LODGE
OF ENGLAND**

Preface and Acknowledgements

This booklet was written to improve the questions and information that a person interested in joining a Lodge would require. It was felt that perhaps some brethren with a little more experience could anticipate what they should be explaining to prospective candidates, so they were aware of just what Freemasonry is really all about.

Some of the more recent brethren said that although the Lodge had taken great trouble to discover their motives in wanting to join, the emphasis had been on the practical matters, i.e., could they afford the costs of fees and regalia, did they have the proper clothing and the importance of paying annual subscriptions at the proper time !

Not enough, however, was said about the ideals of Freemasonry, where it fits into society, what are the expectations of the Lodge he was about to join, what he had a right to expect from Freemasonry. These and other questions need to be addressed if we are to encourage the right calibre of men into Freemasonry and ensure that we retain them in our Lodges for the good of the craft and to the benefit of society in general.

This booklet will help not only the candidates but also their proposers or seconders who felt they needed some assistance in explaining what they were encouraging their friends to join.

There are a number of excellent publications which have gone a long way to explaining to brethren the degrees through which they have passed and encouraging membership of another avenue for Freemasons known as the Royal Arch. However, not too much appears to have been written in a practical form for those who have not yet made the decision as to whether Freemasonry is what they are looking for. I hope that this booklet will help to fill that gap. There is nothing in these pages that cannot be revealed freely to anyone outside of Freemasonry who is genuinely interested in the Craft.

I must acknowledge the various leaflets published by the Board of General Purposes of the United Grand Lodge of England in recent years, notably 'Freemasonry and Society' and "Discover Freemasonry in Warwickshire", which were of help in deciding on the content of this booklet

Useful links to freemasonry in general, the Provincial Grand Lodge of Warwickshire, the Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) and the Masonic Charitable Foundation are shown below.

<https://www.ugle.org.uk>

<https://www.warwickshirepgl.org.uk>

<https://mcf.org.uk>

INTRODUCTION TO ATHOL MASONIC BUILDINGS

We are pleased that you have expressed an interest in becoming a Freemason and, in particular a member within the many lodges in Athol Masonic Buildings which was originally founded by members of the 7th Dragoon Guards, who were stationed in Birmingham in 1811 to cope with rioting in the city at that time.

Athol Masonic Buildings in Severn Street, in the city centre of Birmingham is a Grade 2 listed building next to the new retail, restaurant, and hotel complex, "The Mailbox".

Many Freemasons Lodges meet at our historical rooms, usually from September to May whilst the buildings are open for weddings and other functions during the summer period.

After each meeting of their respective lodges, the members then dine in style in our own dining room, which freemasons call the "Festive Board".

There are various steps you must take before that can happen, but, before you finally decide, it is very important that you read this booklet carefully and that you thoroughly understand the nature of Freemasonry, what you can expect from being a Freemason and what Freemasonry has a right to expect from you.

ABOUT FREEMASONRY

What is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry is among the oldest non-religious fraternal societies in the world. It is a society of men who are concerned with moral and spiritual values.

It encourages men to live better lives, to discipline themselves and to consider their relationships with others. Because it is a basic and essential requirement that every member professes and maintains a belief in a Supreme Being, it has a spiritual element. However, it is not a religion, nor should it ever be regarded as a substitute for any form of religious faith.

In fact, Freemasons are strictly forbidden to discuss matters of religion in the Masonic environment. The Bible (known by Freemasons as The Volume of the Sacred Law) is always open when Lodges meet. Obligations are sworn on or involve the Volume of the Sacred Law or whichever holy book is held sacred by the man concerned.

Freemasons use four important guiding principles in life to help define their path through life.

Integrity.

Building good people:

Rather than working on buildings like the masons of old, today's Freemasons focus on building themselves as people of integrity and membership provides the structure to help achieve that goal.

Friendship.

Building together:

One of the oldest social organisations in the world, Freemasonry is not defined by an ideology. It is open to people of all religions and political persuasions and provides the common foundation for friendship between members, many of which will last for life.

Respect.

Building unity:

With a membership of more than 200,000 people drawn from communities across the UK, Freemasonry brings people together irrespective of their race, religion or any other perceived differences that can divide us as a society.

Charity.

Building compassion:

Kindness and charitable giving are deeply ingrained within the principles of Freemasonry. The organisation provides support structure that helps members make positive contributions to communities and worthwhile causes through fundraising events or volunteer work.

Freemasonry is not a 'Secret Society'. It is a society which has private methods of recognition i.e. of proving membership. These methods may have been derived from those used by operative stonemasons in the Middle Ages to protect the secrets of their craft. They are now similarly used to preserve Freemasonry's method of teaching morality. All Freemasons are totally free to acknowledge their membership and are encouraged to do so when asked by someone whose reasons are genuine and not merely to denigrate Freemasonry. There is no secret about its aims and principles but, like many other societies - clubs, churches, the military etc.- it regards some of its internal affairs as being of no concern to other people. The meeting places of Freemasons are not secret - indeed some are open to the public.

Freemasons gain from Freemasonry only as much as they are prepared to put into it by way of commitment to the ideals mentioned above. Thereby they experience a friendship which can only be felt from within the organisation and a spiritual and moral uplift which is very real but is hard to explain. You will however make lifelong friends throughout your membership of Freemasonry.

The first of the 'Antient Charges' from the 'Book of Constitutions', shown at the end of this booklet, states admirably what Freemasonry is meant to be.

What kind of men are Freemasons?

Men of all ages, races, colours, religions, politics or financial or social standing. We have members who are part of our Royal family, professions, trades, skills, arts, sciences, businesses, manual occupations - both the employed, self-employed, the retired, and, sadly, in these days, the unemployed.

When admitted a man becomes known as a 'Brother' and remains so for the rest of his Masonic career. It is also pointed out to candidates that in Freemasonry all Brethren are 'on the level'.

Although financial standing is not a bar to becoming a Freemason, it must be appreciated that you should be able to afford the minimum obligations of membership (see 'Finances')

Conditions for Admission

There are, however, certain preconditions of membership of any Masonic lodge.

- 1 **You must believe in a Supreme Being**
- 2 **You must be at least 18 years of age and completed full time secondary education or training. There is in existence the United Grand Lodge Universities Scheme and there are two lodges in Severn Street which are members of this scheme**
- 3 **You must not engage in discussion on matters of religion or politics on Masonic occasions**
- 4 **You must profess allegiance to the Sovereign of your country and all that the Sovereign represents**
- 5 **You must be prepared to take an oath to preserve the private aspects of Freemasonry**
- 6 **You must be willing to strictly observe the Laws, Regulations and Constitutions of Freemasonry**
- 7 **You must be of good character and be prepared to uphold the Civil and Criminal Laws of any country in which you may reside, either temporarily or permanently**
- 8 **You should have the full support of your partner, if any**

Society, Family and your Job

A Freemason's duty to society as a citizen must **always** prevail over any obligation to other Freemasons. Freemasonry will severely censure and probably expel any Freemason who attempts to shield another Freemason who has acted dishonourably or unlawfully.

Freemasonry must never be allowed to harm a man's family or other connections by taking too much of his time or his money or causing him to act in any other way against their interests.

If it is ever proved that a Freemason has gained an unfair advantage over another person because of his membership of the Order, then this is a serious matter and a view will be taken. Members must never use any sort of Masonic certificate or evidence of membership to advertise a business or other enterprise nor use any sort of Masonic device or description on stationery etc.

Freemasonry is compatible with any form of occupation whatsoever, but all Freemasons must be careful not to compromise their living and the living of their dependants.

The principles of Freemasonry should, at all times, strengthen a man in fulfilling his public and private responsibilities

WHAT HAPPENS ON A LODGE EVENING AT ATHOL MASONIC BUILDINGS

All of the masonic ceremonies take place in the lodge room or Temple, and this is always followed by the social part of the evening, the 'after-proceedings' often historically known as the '**festive board**'. This is held in the dining room at our beautiful and ancient buildings.

At the festive board members will enjoy a very convivial dinner, with wine served at the table. Dinner is run on our ancient tradition during which toasts are given to the Queen and various members of the Order. There are a few (hopefully!) short speeches. The festive board is also a lot of fun where members can enjoy the camaraderie and friendship of their colleagues and visitors alike.

The installation of the new Master of each Lodge takes place each year, and again is one of the highlights of the year.

STANDARDS AND CONDUCT

Dress

All members of the Lodge are expected to wear dark lounge suits, white shirts (or with only a subdued colour or pattern) together with the official Warwickshire tie, but some lodges prefer their own lodge tie. Shoes and socks should ideally be black. White gloves are worn by all members during the Masonic meeting but not at dinner!

As well as for reasons of equality and uniformity the standard dress has a symbolic significance in Freemasonry.

Attendance

Before every meeting each member of the Lodge receives a printed 'summons' or 'circular', distributed by email, which requests his attendance and advises the date, time and business of the lodge. Members should try and attend on every occasion unless prevented by family, work, business commitments or other unforeseen circumstances.

Behaviour

Although Freemasonry has serious aims and important ideals to convey, most members also join to enjoy the camaraderie, the conversation and simply have some fun. This too is a vitally important part of Freemasonry.

While members are encouraged to enjoy 'good food and good wine' excesses must be avoided at all times. Freemasonry is not just another dining or drinking club.

FINANCE

Financial commitments

You must be fully aware of the financial commitments you are expected to make. It cannot be stressed enough that **at no time should your Masonic financial obligations be detrimental to the welfare of yourself, your family or those who depend upon you.**

Lodge finances

Like any other organisation, lodges and their administrative bodies have operating costs. These costs must be borne out of Initiation and Joining fees as well as annual subscriptions.

All lodges pay a per capita fee for each member to Grand Lodge in London, the Grand Charity and to Provincial Grand Lodge for the purpose of administering Freemasonry and its charitable funds. In addition, the Lodge also has to pay for the costs of its occupancy of the Masonic Hall and any other such as printing etc.

The main item of income in any Lodge is the Annual Subscription from all members.

Initial costs

When you first join Freemasonry, you will be required to pay the joining fees on the night, which vary from lodge to lodge which covers the necessary dues and Annual Lodge Subscription plus a further payment of approximately £23 (dependent on the chosen menu) for the meal following the meeting.

The only regular commitment in subsequent years will be your annual subscription which varies from lodge to lodge which is payable in advance at the annual installation or by a monthly Bank Standing Order which spreads the cost over a year. This can vary between £100-200 depending upon the numbers in the lodge and how many times they meet each year.

Charity

At most meetings charitable collections are taken and you will be expected to contribute within your means.

No Freemason is ever expected to contribute any more than his circumstances in life may allow.

The charitable funds in Freemasonry are distributed to needy and distressed Freemasons, their families and Dependants and also to a large variety of non-Masonic international, national and local charities such as Air Ambulance, Cancer Research, Scouts etc.

WHAT NEXT?

How do I apply to join?

Once you have considered what Lodge membership entails and the calls on your time and finances, and you wish to proceed, then you will meet informally with the Lodge Membership Officer, perhaps also your proposer and one or two other members of the lodge. At this first informal meeting this is your opportunity to ask any questions.

After this first meeting, and you wish to continue with your application to join us, you will be provided with a **Registration Form** for completion, first by you, and then it is passed to the Lodge Membership Officer. He will then discuss your application with the Lodge Secretary and other senior members of the lodge. No fees are normally payable until such time as you are admitted to the Lodge.

What happens next?

The Lodge Membership Officer, followed by the Lodge Secretary will scrutinise the Registration form and, if satisfactory, you may be called upon by appointment, to discuss your application at another informal meeting with the Lodge Membership Officer or another senior member of the lodge and raise any queries or issues which require clarification.

Thereafter, it is sometimes normal practice that you (and your partner if you wish) will be invited to any lodge social functions so that other members of the lodge and their partners can meet you in an informal setting. Other lodges do not take this step but move forward into an informal interview in a meeting with Past Masters and perhaps other members of the lodge, and, only if you wish, and it is the protocol for the lodge, you may, if you wish, bring your partner if any, to be part of these discussions so they are fully aware of the commitments you are entering into.

If you are happy to proceed and those brethren of the lodge that have met you feel that you will fit in with the Lodge then you will be formally proposed at a meeting and every member of the Lodge will be entitled to vote in a **secret ballot** at a Lodge meeting as to whether you should be admitted as a member. If the ballot is satisfactory you will receive a letter from the Lodge Secretary inviting you to attend for your Initiation at a regular meeting of the Lodge.

What will happen at my interviews/meetings?

You should have read this information thoroughly and be prepared to answer a few basic questions about yourself, your beliefs your motives and intentions. You will also have been sent open source web links (See Page 2) to other areas of interest for aspiring freemasons.

All of the interviews will be informal, and there is absolutely no pressure upon you at any time, but the brethren must, however, be sure that you are a fit and proper person to be admitted. You will also have the opportunity to ask any question or raise any matter at any time which may be something you may not sure about.

What happens on the night I become a Freemason?

You should arrive in plenty of time, properly dressed as indicated above. You do not require your new Masonic apron at this meeting. An Officer of the Lodge will attend to you and (as you might expect!) the Treasurer will come to obtain the Initiation Fee and Annual Subscription.

You will then pass through the ceremony of Initiation under the guidance of Officers of the Lodge. Rest assured that you will not be embarrassed in any way and enjoy this unique experience. Every member of every lodge in the country, including members of the royal family will have been through the entire ceremony, as have all your colleagues of the lodge you choose, who will be there to support you.

The Officers of the Lodge normally perform the entire ceremony from memory (and are expected to make a good job of it !) so it is probably true to say that they will be even more nervous than you!

After the ceremony, at the Festive Board, there will be a toast to your health and future, and you will be expected to give a very brief reply to this. Speaking in public is never easy (as many of us will testify) but your Proposer and/or Secunder will give you help with what to say.

This is a very special night for you - one you will always want to remember, so enjoy it to the full.

Once you become a Freemason you may be invited by friends within the lodge or from other brethren visiting us, to visit their lodges which is an integral part of the camaraderie and fun of freemasonry.

A number of social functions will be organised by the lodge throughout the year where we encourage brethren to invite their family and friends. Your lodge will also have fraternal visits to other local lodges, and occasionally further afield.

LEARNING MORE

More about your application ?

If you want to know anything further please do not hesitate to ask your Proposer or Secunder, or any member of the Lodge or any Freemason of your acquaintance.

Further Masonic studies

Once you have passed through the three-degree ceremonies of Freemasonry and have become a Master Mason, you may wish to further your Masonic knowledge, such as membership of the Holy Royal Arch which is the next step in your masonic journey.

Subscribe to the UGLE magazine, Freemasonry Today. The new Solomon website from the UGLE will help you in your quest for masonic knowledge and is well worth reading.

FINALLY.

Now that you have learnt something of what Freemasonry is all about and its expectations we hope that you feel you would still like to share our fellowship. However, it is essential that you look carefully and honestly at yourself, your family, your occupation and all your circumstances in life and ask these questions:

- 1 Do I want to be part of a well-organised society that reaches across the whole world; an Order inspired with high motives assisting all its members to be better men?**
- 2 Is Freemasonry really what I'm looking for to assist in improving myself as a person, as a citizen and as a 'Brother' to other men ?**
- 3 Do I want to experience a whole new sphere in my social life and that of my family – a social life which can bring much fun, enjoyment and satisfaction.**
- 4 Can I make a commitment to the time, the finances and the principals involved without harming my family or connections?**
- 5 Do I, and my dependants, see Freemasonry as being part of our lives for the foreseeable future ?**

If you are sure you **can** answer 'YES' to all the questions, ask your Proposer and / or Secunder to progress matters for you and we look forward to seeing you in the Lodge in due time.

Remember, as a Freemason, you will never be alone, and if you are unsure about anything during your journey through Freemasonry just ask

The first of the Antient Charges from the Book of Constitutions
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The Charges of a
FREE-MASON
Etc., Etc.

1. Concerning GOD and RELIGION

A MASON is obliged, by his tenure, to obey the moral law; and if he rightly understands the art, he will never be a stupid atheist nor an irreligious libertine. He, of all men, should best understand that God seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh at the outward appearance, but God looketh to the heart.

A mason is, therefore, particularly bound never to act against the dictates of his conscience. Let a man's religion or mode of worship be what it may, he is not excluded from the order, provided he believes in the glorious architect of heaven and earth, and practise the sacred duties of morality. Masons unite with the virtuous of every persuasion in the firm and pleasing bond of fraternal love; they are taught to view the errors of mankind with compassion, and to strive, by the purity of their own conduct, to demonstrate the superior excellence of the faith they may profess. Thus, masonry is the centre of union between good men and true, and the happy means of conciliating friendship amongst those who must otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.

