

An address to non Masons – perhaps at a White Table meeting

What is Freemasonry and what do I see as I look around the Lodge room?

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Ladies and gentlemen.

Winston Churchill, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Mozart, Voltaire, Pandit Nehru, Buzz Aldrin, Sir Arther Conan Doyle, Edward 7th, Nat Lofthouse, George 6th, Alexander Fleming, Henry Ford, Rudyard Kipling and Prince Michael Duke of Kent.

What do they all have in common? Yes, they all belong or have belonged to probably the oldest and most widespread Fraternal Organisation in the world - Freemasonry!

Indeed, Freemasonry, which is spread over the 4 corners of the globe, has thousands upon thousands of men ranged under its banner, many of high rank and opulence - Monarchs, Kings and Presidents - all of whom, upon entering the Order, stand side by side as equals with the vast majority of Freemasons - the ordinary and working men who join. All are considered Free and Accepted Masons, all equal and indeed equally special men, such as your hosts in this room and all who join Masonic assemblies throughout the world and partake in our ritual.

Despite this, it is without doubt that the organisation of Freemasonry remains a poorly understood in the public arena. It has continually perplexed outsiders with its mystery and ritual ceremonies. Most non Masons have only a rudimentary knowledge of Masonry, based upon hearsay and confused or misleading statements, writings and films. Indeed for lengthy periods of time Freemasonry did nothing to dispel the words, allegations or misconceptions of its critics, a factor which only served to increase speculation. More recently this matter has been addressed by both Grand Lodge and individual Lodges such as ourselves, in a programme of openness and consideration for the public at large.

However if you speak to a non Mason who inquires of the Fraternity, any Mason will find minds full of unanswered questions:

- Isn't it a secret society?
- Is it a Religion or a political factor?
- Are Animals involved? (!)
- What are the objectives?
- Why are you a Mason?

and many many more diverse, interesting but relevant queries.

So Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope in this brief time to dispel some of those concerns, give you a basic explanation of our purpose and aims, along with describing to you some of what you can see and to tell you openly the biggest and best kept secret in Freemasonry within every Lodge!!

Now that, I am sure has got you thinking, so here we go!

Freemasonry is a society of men concerned with Moral and Spiritual values. Its members are taught its precepts via a series of ritual dramas, known as degrees. These follow some of the ancient forms and usages of Stonemasons, using their customs and tools as symbolical and allegorical guides.

The fundamental ritual degrees consist of a drama surrounding the building of King Solomon's Temple and the fate of its Master Architect. Using this allegory, moral lessons are taught and, since the story concerns the building of a temple and its structure, these rituals are replete with the tools and clothing of Masons – such as the square, level and the plumb rule, the Masons maul or mallet, the chisel, the apron and so on. All have a place within the ritual signifying and symbolising a relationship to Moral and Spiritual values and personal development within the Craft.

Some Masonic terminology has, over the years, found its way into general life and some phrases, such as "on the level" and "undergoing the third degree," have become non Masonic clichés!

It is a prerequisite that every Freemason, before his acceptance and entry to the Order, must assert and confirm his belief in a Supreme Being.

(Move to WM pedestal)

How a man worships or understands this Supreme Being is his private affair. Masonry is not a religion and as it does not impose or in any way interfere with the way you worship. It stands firmly for the freedom of Religions. For example the Volume of the Sacred Law is here represented by the Holy Bible. Where other faiths and religions are involved, different and appropriate volumes will or may replace the Holy Bible. In some Lodges, for instance in India, it is customary to place upon the Master's pedestal the Holy Books of all the faiths its members subscribe to.

But please be very clear, Freemasonry is not a religion nor a substitute for religion nor does it offer any pathway to salvation, save the guidance within its precepts towards a moral life and its reminder to men and Masons of the duty they owe to their respective God, fellow Man and society in general.

Because of the tendency for religion and politics to regularly drive men apart and create divisions, these topics, be they current or historic, are never discussed in Lodge Rooms or Masonic assemblies, thus preserving order and concourse within the diverse membership of our Society.

Whilst Freemasonry expects a Mason to be active and to support his Lodge and Freemasonry as a whole, it also makes it explicitly clear to him that a Mason should never put his duties within Freemasonry ahead of his duties to his family, his God, his country and the respective Laws within the same or indeed any Country which might afford him protection or relief.

It tries fervently to induct good men over the age of 21 into Freemasonry, by reminding them regularly of the above and the values of its 3 main tenets - Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

Brotherly Love implies tolerance and respect for the opinions of others and behaviour with kindness, understanding and respect for all our fellow creatures and environment.

By Relief or Charity, Freemasons mean relief to the community and mankind from their sufferings.

Truth is a value that all Freemasons strive for, by requiring and setting high standards and aiming to achieve them within their own lives we feel able to approach all or at least most of life and its matters with common sense, reality, honesty, dignity and resolve.

Charity is the central part of Freemasonry. When a Candidate is initiated into the Lodge he is reminded of the duty he is expected to fulfil to those who need his help, the practice of Charity, caring for his own and the popular world at large, both by affordable charitable donation and voluntary efforts or works coupled with Charitable thought and word. All such activity is absolutely voluntary and indeed I shall now reveal to you the biggest and effectively the only real secret in Freemasonry which is a Members charitable giving.

Whilst every part of our ceremony can become known to a brother, no Brother other than the appointed Charity Steward has knowledge of what another member gives to Charity. Thus we correctly preserve the private affairs, the circumstances of our members and dignity of the whole format of Masonic Charity.

Masonic Charity is extended from all Lodges via direct donations to Masonic organisations to care for sick, elderly, orphans and to educate Masons and their dependants via the Grand Charity, The Royal Masonic Samaritan Fund, The Masonic Schools for Girls and Boys and many non Masonic recipients.

To name just a few Non Masonic recipients, of which there are very many, we may list the Royal College of Surgeons, the RNLI, Hospices, Hospitals, Click Sargeant Cancer Care for Children, along with aid donations very swiftly organised for disaster funds worldwide.

The sums are considerable and we are especially proud that without asking for donations from outside our fraternity, in the UK we are the second largest giver to Charity, second only to the National Lottery which with some 30

million people buying tickets has a far wider contributing base of than the 300,000 or so Freemasons in England and Wales.

To give you some idea, from 1981 up to 2009 some £47 million pounds has been distributed to NON Masonic bodies. If you would like additional Charity information, I feel sure that the Charity Steward of the Lodge will be pleased to assist you after this meeting and during our dining period.

The use by a Freemason of his membership to promote his or others businesses, any professional or personal interest or shield dishonourable or unlawful conduct, is entirely contrary to a Freemasons duty and his principle oath as a member of the Fraternity.

Allegations are often levelled on Masonry that it is a "Secret Society". Let me clarify this important matter. It is NOT as Secret Society, but it is a society with some secrets and private matters as with many organisations in life, society and business.

Our few matters of restricted knowledge and open access are concerned with traditional modes of recognition via word, grip or token and signs. These words tokens or grips and signs are only conferred upon candidates and members as they advance through the respective degrees, thus internally protecting and separating the same to preserve our order and protect our meetings from those wishing to incorrectly gain admission. For instance should a person who is not known seek admission, then he can be tested accordingly and, if giving the correct responses, will be welcomed - or alternatively denied admission if unable to give the correct recognitions.

Our ritual or the dramas which are played out by the members and respective officers are, and I am sure all Masons will agree, quite demanding - in many cases containing ancient prose or less often used English words. The ritual comprises individual sections from single word responses to large singularly delivered works of up to 20 minutes or more in length. These are meant to be learnt from the ritual books and by rehearsal (what we call our Lodge of Instruction) and delivered from memory in our regular meetings which can last from around 2 – 3 hours according to the work engaged.

I hold here an example of a ritual book and from a flick through I am sure you can discern the extent of learning and attention required to execute the same. There are many different ritual manuals. The ritual of this Lodge is called Others are Emulation, Bristol, West End & Carvers to name but a few. All are based upon and relating to the ritual dramas I have mentioned but having individual differences of wording and officer attention within the ceremony.

Hence you will also see that whilst governed in England and Wales by one Grand Lodge we can be very diverse in our physical rituals and working, but we are fully uniform in our duties as men and Masons.

These books and indeed many works relating to Freemasonry can be found in Libraries, upon the internet, in bookshops etc and have been so available and accessible to non Masons for many years along with access to our Temples or Lodge room, Museum and archives. Hardly, a Secret Society.

I mentioned The United Grand Lodge of England, that being the governing body of Freemasonry and existing in this Freemasons Hall, the building in which are sited the Grand Temple, capable of seating around 1700 people and 23 other temples of varying size, along with the Museum, the administration and offices, shop, archives and other meeting areas.

This is the 3rd Masonic building existing on this site since 1775, the current building being constructed between 1927 and 1933 in the art deco style as a memorial to the Freemasons who died on active service in WW1. It was originally named the Masonic Peace Memorial, but its name was changed to Freemasons Hall upon the outbreak of WWII in 1939. Outside the domain of government or royal buildings, it is one of the very few which remain in its almost original constructed order and in the same use. It is a high ranking L listed building and you may also have seen it when used for television and filming for such broadcasts as *Spooks*, *Poirot*, the 2009 film of *Sherlock Holmes*, and earlier programmes such as the *Professionals* and even the *Hitchikers Guide to the Galaxy!*

As I said, Freemasonry is spread worldwide and each country participating in Freemasonry (virtually all) have their own and sometimes numerous governing Grand Lodges. (Many are state orientated for example in America.) However, only those who conform to the directives of UGLE are recognised and there are many pretenders to Freemasonry. France for example has three Grand Lodges of which only one is recognised.

So that is a very brief description of the basis of and for Freemasonry and I will now likewise briefly explain what you can see in this Temple:

All Lodge Rooms are set out facing East to West, even if just symbolically, as it is widely accepted that learning and education arose from the East and gradually spread to the West. Hence the WM is always seated in the East to employ and instruct the Brethren in Freemasonry.

The temple or Lodge Room where we enact our rituals and business of the Lodge is, as you will observe, full of specific furniture and ornaments. Every object has a ritual and or symbolic significance and at some part of that ritual is fully described and explained. Very basically and with time in mind I draw your attention to the following.

Upon entry to the temple we walk upon the Black and White or Mosaic pavement of the lodge. This is meant to remind and represent with your every step of the light and dark, joys and sorrows of our passage through life.

Most prominent then are the three pedestals at which are seated the WM, representing King Solomon, the Senior Warden, representing Hiram King of Tyre and the Junior Warden, representing Hiram Abif, the Architect of the Kings Temple.

Upon the Masters pedestal are the three great though emblematical lights in Freemasonry, the VSL to govern our faith, Sq to regulate our lives and actions and C to keep us in bounds and harmony with all mankind particularly our brethren in Freemasonry,

Adjacent to the pedestals are candlesticks in the form of three of the great architectural orders: Ionic, by the Master denoting Wisdom; Doric by the SW denoting strength; and Corinthian denoting Beauty by the JW. These support and represent the three lesser lights in freemasonry: the Sun to rule the day, the Moon to govern the night and the Master to rule and instruct his Lodge in Freemasonry.

At the Master's place are also located the working tools of an operative mason, each explained in their physical and emblematical context with the respective progress through the degrees.

On the remaining pedestals are the rough and perfect ashlar, indicating that Masonry is a progressive science. These objects symbolically point out the progress from rough - as drawn from the quarry - advancing later to smooth and prepared, fit for the inclusion in the intended structure emblematically referring to the progress of the members thought the ritual and the various offices in their endeavour to attain the Masters Chair.

At the JW pedestal are also positioned what we call the Tracing Boards, three in number, each separately illustrating the three degrees and being the subject of fairly lengthy and explicit explanation pieces.

Progress to the Masters Chair through the various floor offices can take between 8 –12 years but is not compulsory. The appointment as Master of the Lodge is the highest honour any lodge is able to confer on any member, who then retains the Mastership and its special duties and responsibilities for one year, or until a successor is duly appointed and installed in his stead. Like many attainments and goals in life, that year then passes all too quickly and he then becomes a Past Master of the Lodge.

You will be aware of many different aprons, and attached badges, collars and attached jewels, breast jewels, wands, boards etc. I will now briefly explain them in order up to the Master and beyond.

Brethren, Please stand briefly whilst I explain your position or office.

Some offices are directly involved in our ritual, while others form what could be described as the "civil Service" in the Lodge, dealing with the administration, general management both in and out of the Lodge.

The EA, the new initiate starting upon his Masonic career wears a plain white apron as an emblem of innocence. In like manner all the Brethren wear white gloves.

The FC wearing the same apron but adorned with two rosettes to mark the progress he has made in the science.

The MM wearing the same but now with the colour of the blue arch of heaven added denoting his position and rank and able to be present at all Lodge ritual excepting the Installation of the Master which is restricted to the Master elect and all past masters

All the following officers wear a collar and appended jewel denoting their Rank and office as appropriate.

The Tyler, outside the Room, armed with a drawn sword symbolically guarding approach and entry, preparing candidates and announcing latecomers or special visitors.

Stewards, the assistants to the officers within the temple and the waiters to attend to the brethren and their guests at the festive board.

Inner Guard, the admitter and quizzer of masons on request for entry to the lodge.

Asst Sec, as suggests to work with the Secretary both in and out of the lodge.

Organist to provide appropriate and accompanying music which greatly enhances our meetings.

ADC invested with a wand to distinguish his authority and charged with assisting the DC particularly during the Installation of a new Master and hence normally a Past Master himself.

JD equipped likewise with a wand to distinguish his authority in conducting new candidates during the ritual and to assist the SD when required and to convey all messages of the WM from the SW to the JW

SD similarly equipped and charged with conducting advancing candidates in the ritual, assisting the JD when required and bearing all messages and commands of the WM to the SW

Charity Steward, a very important office managing and administering Lodge charity and advising the brethren on all Lodge, and Provincial, District or GL charity matters

Almoner, ensuring contact and care for our sick or elderly brethren and their family.

DC, again usually a PM, he is the manager of the lodge when in progress and at the festive board and will be well skilled in the ritual and procedures, ensuring all are aware of their duties, that the temple is correctly prepared and dealing with entering visitors and dignitaries along with any crisis or unusual occurrence within the Lodge.

Secretary, normally a PM and the administrative heart of the Lodge whose work is far from contained within the actual meeting. It is a very responsible and demanding office.

Treasurer, often from an accounting background and responsible for the collection of dues, dining fees etc, the payment of all bills and invoices, preparation, presentation to the brethren and submission of the various accounts. Strangely many Treasurers often holiday in Barbados! I jest of course as all accounts are separately audited and all cheque payments require the signature of at least one other authorised member.

Chaplain, the spiritual representative within the Lodge, delivering Masonic prayer at our meetings.

JW, the first sitting down job in the advancement to the Masters chair and the ostensible steward dealing with all admission to the Lodge.

SW, almost there, the final office approach the Master chair and in charge of closing the Lodge at the Masters command.

The WM, the pinnacle of Freemasonry in all private Lodges, commanding and ruling the Lodge, delivering and managing the ritual and ceremonies including the installation of his successor. The apron now has T bars rather than rosettes.

IPM seated to the left of the WM and prepared to assist the WM when required. He wears the collar of an IPM engraved to commemorate his service, also a past masters breast jewel likewise engraved

I mentioned earlier Metropolitan, District and Provincial Grand Lodges, in which post the Master's chair, Brethren may be honoured by their respective Metropolitan, District and Provincial Grand Lodges for continued service to Freemasonry. These Brethren wear the distinguishing dark blue and may go on from there to be additionally honoured in receiving Grand Rank from the UGLE and then wear the dark blue and gold with designs upon both apron and collars.

As you have seen all the collars are appended by a jewel denoting the rank or office held. Other breast jewels denote progress through other Masonic orders, special awards and participation within the charities.

Thus Ladies and gentlemen you can see that every Member and our Masonic guests have a part to play and join in our ceremonies, and we sincerely hope that long may it continue.

At the start of this talk, I mentioned that Masonry was spread over the 4 corners of the world, was also known as Masonry Universal and included many well known figures. I also have shown you the working tools we use in our ceremonies.

When Buzz Aldrin stepped onto the Moon in July 1969, he and the other Astronauts had been allowed to take and leave on the surface some personal momentos of their visit. Buzz Aldrin is reputed to have left a miniature set of Masonic tools. Truly Masonry Universal.

Ladies & Gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention and hope you may have found this talk interesting, informative and take away with you a more enlightened concept of Freemasonry; and, on behalf of our WM, the officers and brethren of the Lodge No. and their Masonic guests, we wish you well.