

As used by St Laurence Lodge No 5511 on Saturday 16th of March, 2011

Script

In what follows, the names of the officers and speakers indicate those that we used. This, of course, can be changed. They suited our lodge's purposes at that time.

Once everyone is seated, the ADC will say:

ADC Ladies, gentlemen and Brethren. Please receive the Worshipful Master, his Wardens and their Ladies.

Everyone stands. The WM and his Wardens, with their Ladies at their side and preceded by the Deacons and the ADC, will enter the Lodge in normal procession. When everyone is in place, the ADC says:

ADC Please be seated.

He then takes his seat. The WM gavels and is answered by the Wardens.

Master Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this the St Laurence Lodge number five thousand five hundred and eleven on the register of the Grand Lodge of England. Thanks for coming today and I hope that you will enjoy our meeting this afternoon and the Festive Board which will follow.

We would like to give you an insight into what it means to be a Freemason. We would really like you to understand something of what it means to us. Some of you may think that Freemasonry is about boys running around in funny aprons and calling each other funny names – and there is some truth in that! However, if that was all it was, Freemasonry would never have lasted the 294 years that it has since the formation of the first Grand Lodge. The Brethren would long ago have lost interest.

So let me start by being serious. If you asked St Laurence Brethren what they get out of membership, they would say many different things. However, most would point to fellowship and mutual support, a feeling of doing the right things, a sense of continuity with the past and future, the satisfaction of ritual well performed, perhaps an enjoyment of the theatre aspects, a great deal of laughter, a few drinks, a good meal ... and something not easy to put into words. While many of the Brethren might be a little embarrassed to say it out loud, what we really gain is a feeling of something beyond oneself, something that lifts one onto a higher plane, that makes one want to live up to the ideals of Freemasonry.

Today, we'd like you to catch a glimpse of all this and so we will show you some of the ritual and its moral teaching. Most of what we show you will not be actual ritual but only something like it. However, we will give you two genuine extracts.

Right. In all our meetings, we go through a procedure known as opening the lodge. I will use something like it to introduce our progressive officers, those on their way to this chair. (*Gavels*) Bro. Inner Guard. (*IG steps to the edge of the pavement.*) Please tell us who you are and what you do. (*Officers speak from memory.*)

IG I guard the door on the inside and ensure that only Masons and proper candidates are allowed to enter.

Master Brother JD.

JD I guide the candidates round the Lodge during the ceremony of initiation and help the Senior Deacon at other times.

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Master Brother SD.

SD I also guide the candidates during ceremonies and help the Junior Deacon as required. Brother Rupert and I are both involved in voting and collection of alms.

Master Brother JW.

JW I sit in the South and mark the sun at midday. I am in charge when the Lodge is at refreshment so “that profit and pleasure may be the result.” I am responsible for visitors and keep order in the South.

Master Brother SW.

SW I sit in the West and mark the setting sun. I am in charge when the Lodge is at work and I close the Lodge, “having seen that every Brother has had his due.”

Master Brother IPM. The Master?

IPM The Master sits in the East to open his Lodge and “employ and instruct the Brethren in Freemasonry.”

Master So ladies and gentlemen, my name ... and I am Master for this year. A new Master is installed each year as the Brethren in the ‘progressive’ offices progress towards the chair. Now, having, so to speak, opened the Lodge, I call upon our Secretary, Brother ..., to explain the proceedings.

Secretary Ladies and gentlemen. We thought you’d like to know a bit about the ritual, a bit about the history, something about the origins of this Lodge, what it all costs, something about Masonic Charity and something about the place of women in Freemasonry. (*IG goes to the door and opens it a crack. He ensures that the Tyler is ready. Waits there to give Tyler the cue for 4 knocks.*) We have organised some short illustrated talks and of course we welcome your questions. In the pack on your seats you will find a questions page. Write out your question and give it in at the Festive Board. I now call upon our Chaplain, who will tell you a little * about our ritual.

*At * IG gives Tyler the cue and **immediately** there are **four loud** knocks on door.*

IG Steps to pavement. No salute. Bro. JW. There is a report.

JW WM. There is a report.

Master Bro. JW. Enquire who wants admission.

JW Bro. IG. See who seeks admission.

IG goes to door and is given a card. He returns to the pedestal and reads:

IG WM. W. Bro. ... Past Provincial Senior Grand Deacon in the Province of Essex and Holder of London Grand Rank is outside the door of your Lodge and *requests* admission.

Master Admit him Bro. IG.

IG goes to the door and lets VADC in. VADC steps to edge of pavement.

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VADC WM. Very Worshipful Brother ..., Past Provincial Grand Sword Bearer in the Province of Essex, Holder of London Grand Rank, Past Deputy Provincial Grand Master of the Province of Flanders in the Grande Loge Nationale Francaise, is outside the door of your Lodge and *desires* admission.

Master We will admit him with pleasure. (*Gavels*).

VADC WM. Have I your permission to form a column to welcome the Past Deputy Provincial Grand Master in to your Lodge?

Master Please do.

VADC (*Calls upon selected brethren.*) Please form up in the North West of the Lodge.

IG opens door. ADC and Chaplain form a small procession of those named. They enter the Lodge and march East to the left (as they see it) of the WM's pedestal staying in two lines. Each line faces inwards towards each other. The Deacons raise their wands to form an arch and the distinguished guest moves along the line, through the arch to shake hands with the WM. DC aids him to take his seat. VADC then says:

VADC Be seated Brethren. (*The column disperses and everyone sits, the Deacons squaring as they do so.*)

VADC takes his seat in the NE. Chaplain steps forward in the SW to the podium.

Slide 1 (*Lodge emblem*)

Chaplain Ladies and gentlemen. What just happened demonstrates a couple of things about us. One is that we do like a bit of ceremony! Another is that Freemasonry is international. Brother ... is a member of this Lodge and also of the Le Touquet Lodge in France. There are Grand Lodges more or less all over the world – from Russia to Japan and from Brazil to Bosnia.

In France, Bro. ... is a Past Deputy Provincial Grand Master – a rather important rank. When someone with such a rank visits a lodge, we receive him with a bit of ceremony such as you have just seen. This is not to give him a big head. It is just to recognise that what you get out of Freemasonry depends on what you put in.

Slide 2 (*Collar jewel*)

The rank that a Brother holds is shown partly by his apron and badge and partly by his collar and jewel. My apron is dark blue and I am a Provincial Grand Officer. My actual rank is Past Provincial Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies. Something of a mouthful, I agree! W. Bro. ..., (*He stands*) over there, is Past Provincial Grand Standard Bearer. His apron is similar but the badge on it and the jewel on his collar are different.

Over in what we call the 'Blue Corner' are kept some very special exhibits – the Grand Officers! You can recognise them by their highly decorated collars and aprons. (*Each stand in order*) W. Bro. ... is Assistant Provincial Grand Master. You can call him John. We tend to call him sir! We also have with us W. Bro. ..., Past Junior Grand Deacon (note the absence of the word 'Provincial'), W. Bro. ..., Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies and W. Bro. ..., Past Grand Standard Bearer.

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Welcome, Brethren all.

So let's get back to ritual matters. We work an age old ritual; much of it story telling, a form of teaching and learning that predates books and reminds us of the virtues we should practise. Freemasonry is a "peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols" and everything in the Lodge "serves to inculcate the principles of piety and virtue."

Slide 3 (Mosaic pavement)

For example, take the floor of the Lodge – which we refer to as the mosaic pavement. It reminds us of the uncertainty of all things. Bro. Michael:

Brother stands and reads:

As the steps of man are trod in the various and uncertain incidents of life, so are his days variegated and chequered by a strange contrariety of events. Today we may travel in prosperity; tomorrow we may totter on the uneven path of weakness, temptation, and adversity. So with this emblem before us, we are instructed to walk uprightly and with humility before God, there being no station in life on which pride can with stability be founded. While our feet tread on this mosaic work, we hope, as good men and Freemasons, to maintain harmony and to live in unity and brotherly love.

Brother sits. Chaplain continues:

Slide 4 (Working tools)

The gavel, the rule, the square, the compasses, the plumb-line, the level and the trowel are tools used by the operative stone mason. As Freemasons we do not build in stone but in virtue and so we apply these tools to morals. Bro. . . . :

Brother stands and reads:

Let every Mason knock down every evil disposition with the gavel of righteousness and measure out his actions by the rule of one day. Let him fit them to the square of prudence and equity; keep them within the bounds of the compass of moderation; adjust them by the true plumb-line of sincerity; bring them up to the just level of perfection and spread them abroad with the silent trowel of peace and charity.

Brother sits. Chaplain continues:

Our actual ritual we learn by heart.

Slide 5 (Ritual book)

If you commute by train, you may see a middle aged, or even a young man apparently talking to himself, looking up in the air and then sighing and looking down at a small book. No. This is not a new form of religion. It is a Mason trying to repeat the ritual to himself, getting stuck and having to take a peek at the book.

We rehearse the ritual at our weekly Lodge of Instruction under the strict eye of a severe headmaster known as the Preceptor. I am the Preceptor of this Lodge! I am very severe!

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I will now ask W. Bro. ... to give you, from memory, part of what we call the Charge to the Initiate. I want you to imagine that W. Bro. ... is talking to a Brother who has just been initiated. This is a genuine extract from our ritual.

Actually, let us do it properly. We will borrow one of our guests here today to stand in as the initiate. Mr ... – would you assist? (*ADC guides ... to the NE of the Lodge, facing South.*)

Brother Deacons. Please assist. (*Deacons bring their wands and squaring the Lodge, move to stand one each side of Mr*) Brother Back to you.

Slide 6 (An initiate)

.. moves to the SE, facing North.

... Having passed through the ceremony of your initiation, I congratulate you on being admitted a member of our ancient and honourable Institution. Ancient no doubt it is having subsisted from time immemorial and honourable it must be acknowledged to be as by a natural tendency it conduces to make all those so who are obedient to its precepts. Indeed no institution can boast a more solid foundation than that on which Freemasonry rests, the practice of every moral and social virtue; and to so high an eminence has its credit been advanced that in every age Monarchs

Slide 7 (Royal Freemasons)

themselves have been promoters of the art, have not thought it derogatory to their dignity to exchange the sceptre for the trowel, have participated in our mysteries and joined in our assemblies.

As a Freemason, I would first recommend to your most serious contemplation the Volume of the Sacred Law

Slide 8 (VSL)

charging you to consider it the unerring standard of truth and justice and to regulate your actions by the Divine precepts it contains.

As a citizen of the world, I enjoin you to be exemplary in the discharge of your civil duties: by never proposing or at all countenancing any act which may have a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society.

As an individual, I would further recommend the practice of every domestic as well as public virtue. Let prudence direct you, temperance chasten you, fortitude support you and justice be the guide of all your actions.

Still, as a Freemason, there are other excellencies of character to which your attention may be directed. Among the foremost of these are secrecy, fidelity and obedience.

Slide 9 Aude, vide, tace

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Secrecy consists in an inviolable adherence to the obligation you have entered upon, never improperly to disclose any of those Masonic secrets which have now been or may at any future time be entrusted to your keeping.

Your fidelity must be exemplified by a close conformity to the constitutions of the Fraternity and by refraining from recommending anyone to a participation in our secrets unless you have strong grounds to believe that he will reflect honour on our choice.

Your obedience must be proved by modest and correct demeanour in the Lodge; by abstaining from every topic of religious or political discussion and by a ready acquiescence in all votes and resolutions duly passed by a majority of the Brethren.

And as a last general recommendation, I exhort you to dedicate yourself to such pursuits as may enable you to continue respectable in life, useful to mankind and an ornament to that society of which you have this day become a member.

... nods to volunteer who is guided to return the nod by ADC. ADC and volunteer then return to their seats. ... does so as well. The Deacons square the lodge and return to their seats.

Chaplain Thankyou Brethren – and thank you Mr ...

Chaplain sits but stays ready to assist speakers.

Slide 10 (Burns)

Master Many famous men have been Freemasons – government leaders, sportsmen, comedians, military men, explorers, musicians, and poets. One of the most famous poet Freemasons was the ‘Immortal Bard’, Robert Burns. You will remember many of his poems and songs – *A red, red rose, Green grow the rashes O, The silver Tassie, Ae fond kiss* and of course the *Address to a haggis*.

W. Bro. Robert Burns was initiated into Freemasonry in 1781. He remained a committed Freemason for the rest of his tragically short life. Here is a poem he wrote about Brotherly Love, entitled *John Anderson my Jo*. As a rare treat, it will be read to you in Burns’ own tongue by our Brother ... (*who is a Scot.*)

(... stands and reads the poem from his place.)

John Anderson, my jo, John,
When we were first acquent;
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonie brow was brent;

But now your brow is beld, John,
Your locks are like the snaw;
But blessings on your frosty pow,
John Anderson, my jo.

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John Anderson, my jo, John,
We clamb the hill thegither;
And mony a cantie day, John,
We've had wi' ane anither:

Now we maun totter down, John,
And hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson, my jo.

(sits)

Master Thankyou Brother ... Ladies and gentlemen, a translation is in your packs.

Slide 11 (Kipling)

Rudyard Kipling was initiated in 1858 into a lodge in India, one supported by both British and Indian communities. Here is Kipling's most Masonic poem *The Mother Lodge*, recalling the brotherly love he experienced in India. It is read by W. Bro. ... (*... stands and reads from his place.*)

Slide 12 (the slides in this section are a quite rapid series of pictures from 19th century India.)

There was Rundle, Station Master,
An' Beazeley of the Rail,
An' 'Ackman, Commissariat,
An' Donkin' o' the Jail;

Slide 13

An' Blake, Conductor-Sargent,
Our Master twice was 'e,
With 'im that kept the Europe-shop,
Old Framjee Eduljee.

Slide 14

Brethren join in

Outside - "Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!"
Inside - "Brother", an' it doesn't do no 'arm.
We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,
An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

Slide 15

We'd Bola Nath, Accountant,
An' Saul the Aden Jew,
An' Din Mohammed, draughtsman
Of the Survey Office too;

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There was Babu Chuckerbutty,
An' Amir Singh the Sikh,
An' Castro from the fittin'-sheds,
The Roman Catholick!

Slide 17

We 'adn't good regalia,
An' our Lodge was old an' bare,
But we knew the Ancient Landmarks,
An' we kep' 'em to a hair.

Slide 18

An' lookin' on it backwards
It often strikes me thus,
There ain't such things as infidels,
Excep', per'aps, it's us.

Slide 19 (*Words of chorus with an invitation to guests to join in.*)

Outside, "Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!"
Inside, "Brother" - an' it doesn't do no 'arm.
We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,
An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

Slide 20

For monthly, after Labour,
We'd all sit down and smoke
(We dursn't give no banquits,
Lest a Brother's caste were broke),

Slide 21

An' man on man got talkin'
Religion an' the rest,
An' every man comparin'
Of the God 'e knew the best.

Slide 22

So man on man got talkin',
An' not a Brother stirred
Till mornin' waked the parrots
An' that dam' brain-fever-bird;

Slide 23

We'd say 'twas 'ighly curious,
An' we'd all ride 'ome to bed,
With Mo'ammed, God, an' Shiva

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Changin' pickets in our 'ead.

Slide 24 (*Words of chorus with an invitation to guests to join in.*)

Outside, "Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!"

Inside, "Brother" - an' it doesn't do no 'arm.

We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,

An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

Slide 25

Full oft on Guv'ment service

This rovin' foot 'ath pressed,

An' bore fraternal greetin's

To the Lodges east an' west,

Accordin' as commanded

From Kohat to Singapore,

But I wish that I might see them

In my Mother-Lodge once more!

Slide 26

I wish that I might see them,

My Brethren black an' brown,

With the trichies smellin' pleasant

An' the hog-darn passin' down;

An' the old khansamah snorin'

On the bottle-khana floor,

Like a Master in good standing

With my Mother-Lodge once more!

Slide 27 (*Words of chorus with an invitation to guests to join in.*)

Outside, "Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!"

Inside, "Brother" - an' it doesn't do no 'arm.

We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,

An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

Secretary Thankyou Brother ... (*Pause*) We started this sequence talking about famous Freemasons and we have prepared a little quiz for you.

Slide 28 (*Some famous Freemasons*)

You will find a copy in your pack – with some clues. Now, the guest who gets the most answers correct will be awarded a bottle of bubbly. I now call upon W. Bro. ... to tell us something about the history of Freemasonry.

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Chaplain stands to welcome ... who steps up to the podium. Exchanges nods with Chaplain.

Slide 29 (Picture of castle)

Historian There are several theories about the origins of Freemasonry. The difference between them turns largely on the connection, if any, between 'operative' and 'speculative' masons.

The word 'operative' describes working masons who actually work with stone. The trade of the working stone mason reached its peak with the building of the castles and great cathedrals from the 12th to the 16th century. For example, the construction of Beaumaris Castle in 1290 involved 400 masons, 2,000 labourers, 200 quarrymen and 30 smiths and carpenters together with 100 carts, 60 wagons and 30 boats.

Masons working on such buildings created 'lodges', shelters at the building site or quarry in which to talk, exchange views and no doubt complain about the Master Mason and their pay.

Slide 30 (Working masons)

In the middle ages masons went through an apprenticeship at the end of which they were considered qualified – or 'free'. The word is still met in the title 'Freeman of the City of London.' Since they worked hard to become qualified, quite understandably they did not want unqualified workers – called 'cowans' – taking their jobs. Since few people could read and write at that time, certificates were of little use and so masons used signs and passwords to prove that they were properly qualified and they kept these secret for obvious reasons.

Slide 31 (Pictures of early speculative freemasons)

At some point in time, men who were not working masons joined lodges. This seems to have happened first in Scotland and it is the beginning of what we call 'speculative' masonry. The old word 'speculative' describes someone who ponders on, or speculates about, the meaning of things. The speculative mason uses the tools and practices of masonry as symbols for moral teaching.

Now other people disagree with this 'transitional' theory. They see speculative Freemasonry as a separate creation, arising probably in the 16th century in reaction to the religious troubles of the time.

Slide 32 (English civil war)

Just think of Henry VIII, Bloody Mary, Cromwell and the later Jacobite rebellions. This may have led well-meaning men to seek ways of meeting together, irrespective of creed. The fact that from its very beginning, speculative Freemasonry has been open to men of all religions may be evidence for this. We still forbid all religious and political discussion in Lodge.

Slide 33 (Humorous picture of spy)

The secrets of Freemasonry, so this theory goes, would still have been words and signs, not to protect jobs but to protect the members from spies. The talk of the mason's trade was mainly 'cover'.

During the 17th century, we see the spread of speculative Freemasonry.

Slide 34 (James I)

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There is a view that King James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) was accepted into a Scottish Lodge in 1601. From 1620, there is evidence of part of the London Company of Masons joined by people who were not operatives. This was called the 'Acception' and is where our name comes from: 'Free and Accepted Masons.'

Slide 35 (Elias Ashmole and the museum)

In 1646, Elias Ashmole, whose name lives on in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, was made a Freemason in Warrington in Cheshire. In 1686, the writer Robert Plot and the celebrated diarist John Aubrey both describe aspects of Freemasonry.

Slide 36 (Goose and Gridiron)

In 1717, nearly 300 years ago, the modern organisation of Freemasonry begins with the premier Grand Lodge. Four existing Lodges in London got together at the Goose and Gridiron in St Paul's Churchyard 'and resolv'd to hold an annual assembly and feast.' Modern Freemasonry grew from there.

Historian exchanges nods with Chaplain and returns to his seat.

Slide 37 (This section was entirely about St Laurence Lodge)

Secretary I will ask W. Bro. ... to speak about the early days of St Laurence Lodge. ... goes to the podium.

The Founders of our Lodge were a mixed bunch. Some worked in the City, some were local tradesmen, one was Rector of St Laurence Church, one was a publican and one was a lighterman on the Thames. Whatever we are, we are equal as Brothers. External rank and fortune is not of the least importance to us.

Slide 38 (Pictures of freemasons around the world)

A Brother's colour, race or religion is not important either. Freemasonry is open to all and so is St Laurence Lodge. Freemasonry has welcomed Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Deists, Catholics and Protestants. St Laurence extends the same welcome.

The rest of this section is omitted as any lodge seeking to run a white table will use their own data.

Slide 39

Slide 40

Slide 41

Slide 42

Slide 43

Slide 44

Slide 45

Slide 46

... exchanges nods with Chaplain and returns to his seat,

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Secretary I will now ask Our Treasurer to talk about the financial side.

Treas goes to the podium and exchanges nods with Chaplain.

Slide 47

Again this section has to be relevant to the lodge running the white table. What our Treasurer said is shown here as a guide.

Len It costs about ... a year to run the Lodge. The main costs are the four lodge dinners, the Festive Boards (here in light yellow); the dues we pay to Grand Lodge (light blue); those we pay to Provincial Grand Lodge (maroon) and the rent of the temple (light green. The Lodge maintains a reserve of about ... to fund the operations of the Lodge, to cover any loss that we may make in a year - and, of course, to pay for the Treasurer's annual holiday in Monte Carlo!

Slide 48 (*Picture of caravan in the rain*)

The reserve fund also pays for repairs and purchases including the breast jewel given to the Master at the end of his year. However, since it is the custom for Past Masters to return their jewels when they are appointed to Provincial Grand Rank - the dark blue aprons - we re-cycle them.

Slide 49 (*PM jewel*)

The jewel is refurbished and the new Master's name added to a jewel already engraved with the names of his predecessors. The jewels become objects of historical interest.

W. Bro. ... (*stands*) wears one of our most famous and most valuable jewels – one which is engraved with his name as 75th Anniversary Master and also with the names of our very first Master, our 25th Master and our 50th Master. (*sits*)

Slide 50 (*Costs slide*)

The cost of running the lodge is divided among the members. There are ... members at the moment and we each pay an annual amount decided by the Treasurer in what are called 'dues. Charitable donations are a separate affair and are paid in several ways. We collect money at each lodge meeting. We call it 'alms'. We did this in the formal lodge meeting today before our guests entered. Brethren also make regular payments, often through Gift Aid which means the charity can reclaim tax, or make once off payments during the year in response to appeals.

Slide 51 (*Trowel*)

Charity is one of our major ideals and each Brother is expected to give. How much? Well as much as the Brother's situation in life may fairly warrant.

Slide 52 (*Charity logos*)

Taking the year 2010 as an example, the Lodge gave ... to the Grand Charity, ... to Little Havens Children's Hospice and ... to Leukaemia Research. We put ... into our Widows Fund and found ... to

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support the Havering Music School concert. While some of this money came from Lodge reserves and Lodge events, 72% came directly from the pockets of the Brethren.

Slide 53 (Charity logos)

We have also supported other non-Masonic causes - including the British Epilepsy Association, Macmillan Nurses, Havering Association for People with Disabilities, the British Heart Foundation and Essex Air Ambulance. I don't say this to boast. I tell you this to demonstrate how important charity is in our Masonic lives.

Slide 54 (Golf picture)

As I said, some of the charity money is raised through Lodge events. Our annual Golf Day raises about ... a year. If you'd like to play, you would be very welcome. We have about 60 entrants each year which makes ours the biggest Masonic golf day in Essex.

Slide 55 (photo from Charity Ball)

Our 2010 Charity Ball - *St Laurence goes Latin* - raised ... as well as being lots of fun. Of course, our Lodge plays its part in the charitable life of the Masonic Province of Essex. We are a Double Grand Patron of the Essex Provincial Charity Fund, a Grand Patron of the Chelmsford Cathedral Appeal. We hold the Gold Award for Essex Festival 2000 and have become a Grand Patron of Essex Festival 2011 on behalf of The Grand Charity.

Slide 56 (Charity logos)

At National level, Freemasonry is second only to the Lottery in charitable giving. The Grand Charity is the largest of the Masonic charities. It gives money to assist Masons in distress, and their widows and children but 50% of it goes to non-Masonic causes. The Grand Charity supports The Royal College of Surgeons, Mencap, Research into Ageing, Drug Abuse, Hospices and many other charities large and small. We are fortunate that through our fraternal Grand Lodges overseas, we can provide emergency aid very quickly to places in the world hit by disaster.

Treas exchanges nods with Chaplain and returns to his seat.

Slide 57 (Almoner collar jewel)

Secretary I will ask our Almoner, to talk about our support for our own people.

Almoner goes to the podium and exchanges nods with Chaplain.

My job is to be the eyes and ears of the Lodge. I seek to maintain contact with all Lodge widows, Lodge members and their dependants and to identify where help is required. Hence my collar jewel is a purse.

We maintain a small Benevolent Fund for emergencies. We also maintain an account known as the Robin Trust Fund, which exists to give our Widows a gift at Christmas. The fund commemorates Robin Gover, the son of one of our Past Masters. Robin died at the age of seven. However, if a Brother or a Lodge widow needs major help – an operation, a stair lift, or some financial support - the Lodge Almoner

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takes the matter up with one of the big Masonic Charities. Such help is usually means tested but it is always worth trying for.

Slide 58 (Masonic charities)

The main aim of the Grand Charity is to support Freemasons and their dependants who are experiencing hardship. This includes past, present and lapsed members of Lodges. It also includes widows and certain other immediate dependants of a Freemason. As a general guide, almost anyone related to a Freemason who receives additional support from the state by the way of Pension Credits or other means-tested benefits is likely to be eligible.

Grants are given towards the cost of essential daily living expenses and unexpected needs. The Grand Charity also manages a scheme offering the free loan of mobility equipment such as stair lifts, mobility scooters and wheelchairs.

The Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys aims to provide an education for the children of a Freemason as their fathers would have done, had they been able to do so. The Trust helps children who are at school, at college or university, or studying at postgraduate level.

The Masonic Samaritan Fund's aim is to provide financial assistance to those who are unable to obtain or have to wait an unacceptably long time for NHS treatment but who cannot afford private treatment.

The Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution operates residential care homes in England and Wales. Many homes are registered for both residential and nursing care and a number of them offer specialist dementia care. While charges are made for care and accommodation, unlike other such homes, once the assets of a resident fall below the critical amount, The Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution steps in and pays everything thereafter.

There are no age limits for such assistance and there is no requirement to still be active within the Craft. Indeed, we can often help even when a Freemason's membership has lapsed. Applications are welcome on behalf of the wife, partner, widow or surviving partner of a Freemason. For example, the Masonic Samaritan Fund regards anyone who is physically or financially dependent on a Freemason, or his estate, to be eligible to apply as the dependant of a Freemason. Nearly 50% of the grants made by the MSF have been in support of the wives, widows and dependants of Freemasons.

Slide 59 (Almoner collar jewel)

So Ladies, Gentlemen and Brethren, if you know of anyone who needs help do please let me know as soon as you can. At the very least speak to me and take one of my cards. You never know when help might be needed.

Almoner exchanges nods with Chaplain and returns to his seat.

Slide 60 (Amusing picture about the battle of the sexes)

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Secretary Finally, ladies and gentlemen, since there are many ladies present, I will call upon our ADC to tell you about women and Freemasonry.

ADC goes to the podium and exchanges nods with Chaplain.

Ladies and gentlemen, Freemasonry is often thought to be a men only affair but you cannot keep the ladies out. Indeed the ladies have always been involved.

There never was a guild of masons as such, but a few of the larger cities did have guild-like bodies which tended to be religious fraternities with a social side.

Slide 61 (Picture of 14th century fashion)

One such was founded in 1313 in Lincoln and it seems that brothers and sisters were admitted. There were male and female members. The London Company of Freemasons held a regular Mass and afterwards a dinner (at what we would call lunch time) to which wives were invited. The price in 1481 was 12 old pence (about 5 new pence) which would have been 3 day's wages at the time.

Slide 62 (Picture of 17th century fashion)

The sons or daughters of a liveryman could claim membership. In 1663, a Margaret Wild was a member and as late as 1713 Mary Banister, the daughter of a Barking barber, was apprenticed to a working Mason for the usual seven years.

As far as speculative Masonry goes, our Grand Lodge recognises as regular only Grand Lodges which adopt certain principles, one of which reads:

Bro. stands and reads

“That membership of the Grand Lodge and individual Lodges shall be composed exclusively of men; and that each Grand Lodge shall have no Masonic intercourse of any kind with mixed Lodges or bodies which admit women to membership.”

Bro. sits. ADC continues

If legends are to be believed, this has not stopped the initiation of women over the years. Viscount Doneraile, a resident of Cork in the early part of the eighteenth century, held what was then known as an “occasional lodge” in his own house.

Slide 63 (Honourable Elizabeth St Leger)

The story goes that one evening, his daughter, the Honourable Elizabeth St Leger, hid herself in the room adjoining which was undergoing some alterations. She is said to have removed a brick and witnessed the ceremony of initiation. She failed to elude the Tyler who barred her exit with a sword and her shrieks brought members of the lodge rushing to the spot. After a considerable discussion she was duly initiated to safeguard the secrets and, to complete the story, later became the Master of the lodge. Fairy story or not, there is a plaque to the event in the Cathedral in Cork. New evidence is now coming to light that there was a Masonic Lodge for Women way back in 1787 – here in Essex – and that there was a

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procession of lady Freemasons “dressed in white and purple” at Dartford in 1796. Indeed, it is held that the then Provincial Grand Master actively promoted female involvement in masonry.

Slide 64 (A picture of a lady Grand Master)

Something like this did happen because there is a very active order of Women Freemasons in England and elsewhere in the world. In fact there are two orders in the UK, the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons established in 1913 and the Order of Women’s Freemasonry, established in 1908. We have with us this afternoon, two Grand Officers in the Order of Women's Freemasonry [*they stand*]: Mrs ... and [*Ladies sit.*]

Slide 65 (A picture of centenary of the ladies freemasons body)

The United Grand Lodge of England has recognised since 1998 that the two English women's jurisdictions are regular in practice and has indicated that these bodies may be regarded as part of Freemasonry, when describing Freemasonry in general. The rituals of the women’s orders are identical to ours.

ADC exchanges nods with Chaplain and returns to his seat.

Slide 66 (Lodge emblem again)

Master (Gavels) Ladies, Gentlemen and Brethren. I shall now call this part of the proceedings with what we call the Long Closing; a charge to the Brethren to remember their Masonic vows when they leave the Lodge.

ADC helps Master down from the chair and stands behind him. Another Bro. takes his place in the chair. Master steps down from the pedestal and moves a few paces towards the West. He speaks from memory.

You are now about to quit this safe retreat of peace and friendship and mix again with the busy world. Amidst all its cares and employments, forget not those sacred duties which have been so frequently inculcated and so strongly recommended in this Lodge.

Be ye therefore discreet, prudent, and temperate. Remember that at this pedestal you have solemnly and voluntarily vowed to relieve and befriend with unhesitating cordiality every Brother who might need your assistance; that you have promised to remind him in the most gentle manner of his failings and to aid and vindicate his character whenever wrongfully traduced; to suggest the most candid, the most palliating and the most favourable circumstances, even when his conduct is justly liable to reprehension and blame. Thus shall the world see how dearly Freemasons love each other.

But, my Brethren, you are expected to extend these noble and generous sentiments still further. Let me impress upon your minds, and may it be instilled into your hearts, that every human creature has a just claim on your kind offices. I therefore trust that you will be good to all. More particularly do I recommend to your care the household of the faithful, that by diligence and fidelity in the duties of your respective vocations, liberal beneficence and diffusive charity, by constancy and sincerity in your friendships; a uniformly kind, just, amiable and virtuous deportment, prove to the world the happy and beneficial effects of our ancient and honourable institution.

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Let it not be said that you laboured in vain nor wasted your strength for nought; for your work is before the Lord and your recompense is with God. Finally Brethren, be of one mind, live in peace and may the God of love and mercy delight to dwell amongst you and bless you for evermore.

Master remains standing but moves to the side.

Secretary Ladies and gentlemen, Thank you for your attention.

Slide 67 - *and last slide. In our case, some brethren in dinner jackets. "There's an offer you can't refuse!"*

We would now like to offer you a drink which will be waiting for you as you leave the Lodge room. Don't forget to answer the quiz. Finally, a last bit of ceremony.

Brother in chair gavel. Music starts. Deacons move to position.

ADC Ladies and Gentlemen, please stand while the WM, accompanied by his lady (*brings her to stand beside Master*), his Wardens and their ladies, the Past Deputy Provincial Grand Master of Flanders, Grand Officers and their ladies, leave the Lodge. Forward, Brethren. (*Usual exit*)