

## Spread all over its surface

There are 194 countries in the world and, according to the *Grand Lodge Handbook*, 194 regular grand lodges; so a perfect match between countries and grand lodges. Masonry spread all over the surface of the globe? Not exactly. The spread is rather lumpy, like my late mother's custard.

In some countries, there is no freemasonry at all: none in Arab countries, except Lebanon and Morocco, none in Myanmar or China. (The Grand Lodge of China is in Taiwan.) There has been none in Pakistan since 1972.

While there are places without freemasonry, there are places where it comes in big lumps. Several countries organise their masonry by state or province, so that Colombia, with coasts on the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, has six grand lodges; Brazil also. Australia has five, Canada ten, and the USA has mostly two for each of its 50 states, including Prince Hall Grand Lodges.

The famous educationist and abolitionist, Prince Hall, is known as the founder of black freemasonry in America, where segregation was sadly widespread and even legal until Earl Warren's landmark Supreme Court decision in 1954. Many lodges refused black candidates, but in 1775 Prince Hall with 14 friends were initiated in an Irish constitution lodge, attached to British forces stationed in Boston during the American Revolution. In 1784 Prince Hall obtained a warrant from the Premier Grand Lodge in England and formed the African Lodge No. 459. In 1808, one year after his death, the African Grand Lodge was formed, later re-named the Prince Hall Grand Lodge. There are now around 50 Prince Hall Grand Lodges in the USA, Canada, the Bahamas and Liberia, although African-Americans can join any lodge today.

To make it even lumpier, there are a number of irregular, unrecognised grand lodges around the world. I have counted 88. At the front of your copy of the *Book of Constitutions* you will find the *Basic Principles for Grand Lodge Recognition*. Only those grand lodges that sign up to these eight 'laws' are deemed regular by the United Grand Lodge of England — although no one knows what the eighth means. It is about the landmarks but there is no agreement on what these are.

You will have noticed that our summons says:

*Brethren contemplating visiting lodges overseas should first ensure there is regular Freemasonry in the country concerned.*

Visiting a lodge owing obedience to an irregular grand lodge is a big no-no. The main reasons for irregularity come down to three:

### (1) Women.

There are lodges for women only and lodges for men and women together, in what is called co-masonry. Headquartered in Paris, *Le Droit Humain* (the human right) is

perhaps the most universal of mixed masonic orders. It claims 16 lodges in the UK. Not only does *Le Droit Humain* admit women, it does not demand a religious belief, the next reason for irregularity.

**(2) Belief in a supreme being.**

Formed in 1773, the Grand Orient is the largest masonic body in France. In 1877, it decided to admit brethren with no religious belief and ceased to use the VSL. It holds that the state has a duty to help the poor, protect the environment, and guarantee food, shelter and care for all. Thus it also encourages the third reason for irregularity:

**(3) Political discussion.**

English masonry is conservative. It avoids involvement in social issues; gives to charity but supports the *status quo*. By contrast, the Grand Orient seeks social change. This is increasingly true of other grand lodges, even some regular ones. Spain is an example.

Thus there is masonry in about 150 of the 194 countries in the world with perhaps 280 grand lodges. Freemasonry is spread all over the world but with humps, bumps and hollows — and I do miss my Mum's custard. I liked the skin too.