

**THE PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF
WEST KENT**



**Interested in becoming a
Freemason?**

Information about Freemasonry
in general and
County Gate Lodge No.7849
in particular.



<http://www.cgl7849.org>

INTRODUCTION

Having shown an interest in becoming a Freemason, this information will assist you to understand more about our organisation. It explains what you may expect on becoming a member and what is expected from you.

WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?

Freemasonry is an ancient, charitable voluntary organisation, which teaches self knowledge and promotes a strict code of conduct and the best possible human values.

Freemasonry, has over 300,000 members within England and Wales making up nearly 8,000 Lodges plus a further 30,000 members overseas.

This makes it the largest fraternal organisation in the United Kingdom.

It is unknown precisely how long Freemasonry has been in existence. However our earliest records detail Elias Ashmole who was made a Mason in England in 1646. These ancient records show that Freemasonry has been existence for over three hundred and fifty years.

- Freemasonry is one of the oldest and largest fraternal societies in the world.
- It will provide you with a code of living in today's community, based on good moral and ethical standards.
- It is an organisation of men who try to live by the principles of integrity and goodwill which unifies them, regardless of colour, creed or worldly status.
- It is a non profit making organisation that is involved in supporting charity and service to the community.
- It will provide you with a common interest where you can meet and enjoy the company of like minded men from all walks of life.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF FREEMASONRY?

These are the principles upon which modern Freemasonry rests:

Freemasonry offers its members an approach to life, which seeks to reinforce:

- **Thoughtfulness for others**
- **Honesty in business**
- **Fairness in all things**
- **Kindness in the community**
- **Courtesy in Society**
- **Charity for the community**

We try to impress upon the minds of our members the principles of personal responsibility and morality, encouraging each member to practice in his daily life the lessons taught through the symbolic ceremonies held within the Lodge. Although these stories and symbols are from times of long ago, we relate their relevance to modern Freemasonry and describe it as a special way of life.

Freemasonry also has an important part to play in a world where the only constant is change. It sometimes appears that every known thing in today's world is changing at an ever increasing and sometimes alarming rate. With our principles, which have survived many changes for over 350 years, our organisation will provide you with a solid foundation upon which to anchor yourself and will encourage you to accept and move with these changes.

WHAT FREEMASONRY IS NOT

Since its beginning there has been much misinformation published about Freemasonry. For the benefit of every prospective candidate, it is only fair that we give information on what Freemasonry is **not** and which it has never claimed to be. The most important points are as follows:-

Freemasonry is **not a religion**, nor is it a substitute for religion, however, it does require a belief in a Supreme Being. Every member is encouraged to practice his own religion. Freemasonry is complementary to and supportive of religion, allowing all cultures and creeds to meet in harmony and understanding. It has a philosophy which we believe is acceptable to every religious institution in the world. Therefore, because there are different ideologies and thoughts in the world and to avoid disharmony, we do not allow religious discussion at our meetings.

Freemasonry is **not a benefit society**. There are no paid insurance policies to give protection against sickness, death or old age.

Freemasonry is **not for promoting social or economic advancement of its members** to the detriment of non-members.

Freemasonry is **not a secret society**, but in common with many other organisations, its meetings are private and, as might be expected, only open to members. The rules and aims of Freemasonry are readily available, as are details of every Masonic Lodge and the names of all senior members of the organisation. The locations and addresses of all Masonic centres are given in telephone directories. Many centres hold open days where the public is invited to visit and see for themselves the aims and objectives of Freemasonry. The Freemason's Hall in Great Queen Street, London, is open to the public and guided tours take place regularly.

WHAT THEN ARE THE SECRETS?

The so-called secrets of Freemasonry are the traditional ways of recognition. The signs in the past enabled a complete stranger to arrive at a building site and at once establish his status as a craftsman. Those signs were a sort of PIN and as such were closely guarded.

MASONIC PREFERENCE

Freemasons are certainly not expected to prefer fellow Masons at the expense of others. Such an action would be a fundamental abuse of membership and would be subject to Masonic discipline, possibly expulsion. A man who becomes a Mason is informed from the outset that he should expect no material gain.

Freemasonry is not connected in any way with a political body or ideals. A Freemason's political views and beliefs are his own and every Lodge will have members who support the many different and divergent political ideologies. For this reason political discussion is not allowed at Masonic assemblies.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

The **three essential qualifications** for membership to Freemasonry cover your spiritual, moral and physical aspects. The qualifications are as follows:-

The essential **spiritual qualification** is that you must believe in a Supreme Being. Membership is open to men of any race or religion who can fulfil this essential qualification and who can satisfy the other two requirements.

The **moral qualification** is that you must be of good repute, a loyal citizen and obedient to the laws of the land.

The **physical qualification** is that you are male and must be at least 21 years old, or at least 18 with dispensation of the Provincial Grand Master. This age qualification exists to ensure that you are free to formulate your opinions, and exercise your own judgement.

Wives, partners and families of members are of course, encouraged to enjoy many of the social aspects of Freemasonry, but it is only men who are eligible for membership.

New members join as Entered Apprentices, progress to Fellow Crafts and then become full Master Masons, a process which can take 8 to 18 months.

WHAT FREEMASONRY CAN OFFER

Freemasonry is a way of life where men can meet regularly in order to be active in the support of the Lodge members, their ideals and of the community at large. There is a very true and much used phrase in Freemasonry **“You will only get out of Freemasonry what you put in”**. The greater the effort you make to integrate with the other members of the Lodge, the more benefit you will gain from your membership. We are sure that you will gain far more from your membership than you expect by becoming a Freemason, and become a more useful citizen in your community.

There are no mandates associated with your membership. After becoming a full member of the Lodge, you may be content to remain as a non-active member within the Lodge and just enjoy the fraternal gatherings.

We hope however that you will decide to progress through the various positions of responsibility within the ritual to become Master of this Lodge. One of the benefits of becoming active in the ritual side of our ceremonies, which will assist you in everyday life, is that by increasing your mental capacity for memorising it will give you more self-confidence in speaking in front of your fellow men.

MASONIC CHARITIES

Charity is one of the priorities of Freemasonry and its members are encouraged to give what they can reasonably afford - but no more! Masons do not raise money from the general public, contributions are raised from the members themselves and are given for the benefit of those less fortunate, both masons and non-masons and their families. Masonic giving takes place on three levels:- most Lodges support their local charities such as Hospices etc; Provinces support larger charities in the area, while the Grand Lodge supports national charities.

There are four major Masonic charities:

I. THE GRAND CHARITY

The Grand Charity was set up to respond quickly to urgent needs such as natural disasters. It helps individuals and many charities. Recently the Grand Charity donated £2.1m to Masonic causes and £2.9m to non-Masonic causes within one year.

2. THE ROYAL MASONIC BENEVOLENT INSTITUTION (RMBI)

The RMBI maintains 17 Care Homes, which look after some 2,000 older Freemasons and their dependants. Prince George Duke of Kent Court at Chislehurst, Kent is the nearest. Some of the homes are specially equipped to care for those with mental or physical illnesses and are tailored to meet people's needs. Additionally, the Institution pays annuities to elderly Masons and widows who have fallen on hard times.

3. THE MASONIC TRUST FOR GIRLS AND BOYS

The educational needs of over 2000 children, or grandchildren of Freemasons are looked after by the Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys, and this includes grants to those continuing to higher education. Bursaries are in place at some 22 cathedral schools so that children from poorer families, Masonic and non-Masonic alike, may have the opportunity to take part in the great choral traditions of our country. There is also a scheme called 'Talent Aid' to assist especially gifted children and grandchildren of Freemasons to develop their talents in music, sport and the performing arts.

4. THE NEW SAMARITAN FUND

The New Samaritan Fund supports the needy, sick and infirm Freemasons and their families, particularly where they cannot obtain treatment from the National Health Service without undue delay or hardship.

WHAT FREEMASONRY EXPECTS OF YOU

Freemasonry is judged largely by the actions and lives of its individual members. When a man is known to be a Freemason, it is the standard by which the outside world judges our organisation. To ensure that our reputation remains impeccable we expect you to maintain the standards set out in the qualifications for membership.

Freemasonry demands and expects that every member will place the needs of his family first, his obligations to his vocation second, and after these his duties to Freemasonry.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Should you decide you wish to become a Freemason, and a member of Albert Lucking Lodge, you will be required to complete an application form, giving details about yourself, including a declaration that you are of good character etc. It is unlikely that anyone with a criminal record would be considered for membership.

On receipt of your application form you will be required to attend an interview by the Lodge committee, where you will be asked why you want to become a Freemason etc. This is also an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have. If the committee agree that you are a suitable candidate you will be recommended to the members of the Lodge, and a secret ballot held. Assuming this proves successful your application will proceed.

From the time you are balloted for within the Lodge and accepted as a future member, the Secretary of the Lodge will keep you informed regarding your application to join us, and will help you with your anticipated start in Freemasonry. You will also be invited to any social functions held by the Lodge, where you will be able to meet some of the members.

Although you will become a member of our Lodge from your first evening with us, before becoming a full member and enjoying all the rights and privileges of

full participation, you will be conducted through two further progressive separate ceremonies. This process may take a few months or more, but we expect you to attend all our meetings to enable you to enjoy your involvement within the Lodge, and to begin your introduction to understanding Freemasonry during this period.

WHAT HAPPENS ON YOUR FIRST VISIT TO THE LODGE?

You will be brought into the Lodge room and take part in a simple but solemn ceremony which has been the basis of Freemasonry for the past 300 years. During this ceremony you will hear a number of short lectures on the aims and objectives of Freemasonry and on your part you will be asked to promise to:-

- Preserve the customs of the Lodge
- Obey the civil laws of the Country
- To be kind and thoughtful to others
- Not to discuss religious or political matters within the Lodge
- Not to reveal the methods of recognition by which we identify each other in the Lodge
- Not to use Freemasonry for personal gain.

At all times you will be accompanied by one of the members, who will guide you through the ceremony, during which you will become a member of this Lodge and worldwide Freemasonry. Afterwards at the festive board, you will have the opportunity to meet many new friends.

There are certain financial responsibilities associated with your membership, just as there are costs in membership of any organisation. These however, are not too onerous.

The fees payable are set by the Lodge in its by-laws which include:-

A one off **Initiation fee of £100 plus the Grand Lodge registration fee** in force at the time, is payable prior to joining the Lodge. This covers your registration with Grand Lodge, and the provision of a certificate which will be presented to you on becoming a full member of our organisation known as a Master Mason.

An **annual fee, currently £210, pro-rated depending upon your joining date** is also payable at the time of joining the Lodge. The annual subscriptions are used to cover Grand Lodge and Provincial Grand Lodge dues and to maintain the facilities of the Centre, either to cover the rent of premises, or the maintenance of owned buildings, and for all other matters of Lodge administration.

At various times during the year you may be asked to contribute time or money to **charitable projects** being organised by the Lodge. Your contribution must at all times be determined by **what your circumstances will permit**. This is for you to determine and at no time should you place your personal financial viability at risk.

The dress code is; dark suit, white shirt, black socks, black shoes, a black or other approved Masonic tie and white gloves. The Lodge will provide you

with your apron when you become a Master Mason or you may of course prefer to use a family apron from a relative who no longer has a need for it.

MASONIC STRUCTURE

Within the international world of Freemasonry, the most important entity to you will be your Lodge. Worldwide there are Grand Lodges that govern specific geographical territories, and each individual Lodge relies on its own Grand Lodge for the setting of standards, and for recognition with other Grand Lodges. In our Lodge the controlling body is "**The United Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of England**" or more generally known as "**Grand Lodge**", with over 300,000 members working in nearly 8,000 Lodges in England and Wales. The United Grand Lodge website at www.ugle.org.uk is a source of much useful information, both for a prospective and existing member.

Grand Lodge meets every three months and has its administrative offices at Freemason's Hall, Great Queen Street, London. The Grand Master, the Duke of Kent, presides over the meetings whenever he is available. In his absence his place is taken by the Pro Grand Master, Peter Lowndes.

Masters and Past Masters of every Lodge under the English Constitution are entitled to attend and vote on matters raised.

Every Lodge in the country also comes under the jurisdiction of a Provincial or Metropolitan Grand Lodge, in our case, the **Provincial Grand Lodge of West Kent** with around 6,000 members. Every Lodge is presided over by a Master, who normally holds office for one year, who will be pleased to meet and receive you at your first Lodge meeting.

Decisions concerning financial and administrative affairs are democratically made in open Lodge by all the Lodge members present. Voting is usually by show of hands, but if the Master deems it necessary, decisions may be made by secret ballot, ensuring that at all times the will of the majority prevails. As soon as you join the Lodge you will become eligible to vote on any matters concerning the Lodge.

COUNTY GATE LODGE

The Lodge has a membership of around 34 including non-dining members.

We meet 5 times a year on the 2nd Tuesday in February and April, the third Tuesday in July, September and November. It is expected that you will make every effort to attend the Lodge at each of its meetings, to receive maximum benefit from your membership and to assist those who rely on your attendance. Regular Lodge Meeting dates are fixed and can be diarised each year well in advance.

At our Lodge meetings, ceremonies are usually conducted to bring new members into Freemasonry, or to take them to the next step towards becoming a Master Mason. The July meeting is reserved for the Installation of a new Master. On other occasions there may be a guest speaker giving a talk on a subject of Masonic interest.

Following the meetings, the members and their visitors gather in the dining room for a meal and to enjoy each other's company in a relaxed and informal environment. This is known as the Festive Board.

The best way to enhance your understanding of Freemasonry is to attend the Lodge of Instruction. This is held on Friday evenings at Dartford Masonic Centre throughout the year and is where the ceremonies are rehearsed. It is also an opportunity to meet other brethren in an informal atmosphere and integrate into the Lodge.

Visiting other Lodges, either in this Province or for that matter anywhere in the world, is always an enjoyable experience. It will give you the opportunity to increase your circle of Masonic friends, learn how other Lodges conduct ceremonies and generally to enjoy the wider Masonic life that membership brings in a less formal environment.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Lodges encourage wives and families to see themselves as part of the Masonic family, and draw that family together. Many Lodges hold a meeting each year after which families and friends are invited to join us for a meal. Ours is usually in April and it is called a "White table". In addition, many Lodges including ours, host an annual "Ladies Weekend" Dinner and Dance, and we hold social functions throughout the year including a family Sunday Lunch.

Should a member die, his widow and family are not forgotten but continue to be part of the family, and the Lodge does its best to offer support through the Almoner. Widows are invited to the Lodge's family events and are always remembered at Christmas.

CONCLUSION

Freemasonry constantly strives to receive trustworthy men into its organisation, and through its teachings will assist you to value and appreciate the friendships you will make, and improve society in general. Men like yourself, who we hope will actively participate at our meetings, will enjoy a unique comradeship and develop a confidence in communicating with others that will enable you to put our Masonic ideals to good effect.

Please remember, to want to become a Freemason must be your decision and yours alone, but like most of our members, you will most likely wish you had joined sooner!

We hope you have found this information useful. If you would like to know more about County Gate Lodge, please visit our website at www.cgl7849.org where should you wish to progress with an application to join us you can contact our Secretary who will be pleased to assist you. Alternatively, should you know someone who is already a member of our Lodge you can speak to them about membership.