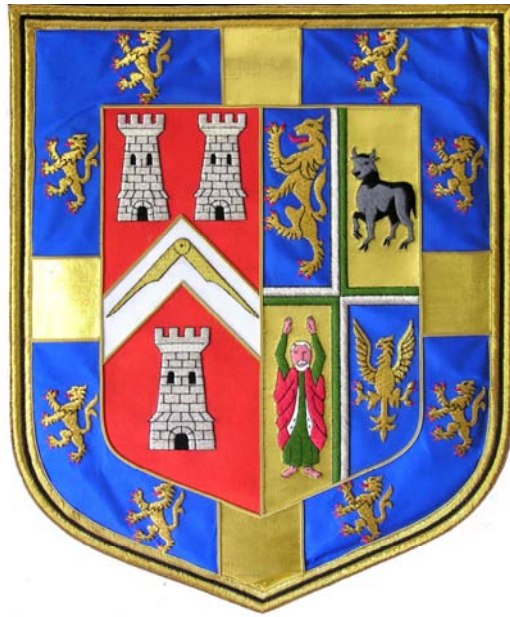


Provincial Grand Lodge of Durham



Guidance for Prospective Members

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T F R Coulson 19/01/2007
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INTRODUCTION

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.

From the time you are balloted for within a Lodge and accepted as a future member, your proposer and 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.

Although you will become a member of the 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 simple ceremonies. This process may take a few months or more, but we expect you to attend all meetings to enable you to enjoy your involvement within the Lodge and to begin your introduction to understanding Freemasonry during this period.

WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?

- 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?

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

300 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.

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 usually at least 21 years old. This age qualification exists to ensure that you are free to formulate your opinions, and exercise your own judgement. Special dispensation can be given for younger men, usually at least 18 years of age, to join and applications from these are welcome.

Grand Lodge membership fees for under 25 years old are reduced by 50% to reflect the financial situation of students and when commencing a career.

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.

WHAT FREEMASONRY CAN OFFER

Freemasonry is a way of life where men can meet regularly in order to be active in the support of its own members, their ideals and of the community at large. What you will get out of membership of Freemasonry will be reflected by the effort you make to integrate with the other members of the Lodge. **We are sure that you will gain far more from your membership than you expect, by becoming a Freemason and 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 your 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.

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.

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:-

- An **initiation fee** 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** payable to the Lodge. The Lodge uses this to maintain the facilities of the Lodge, either to cover the rent of premises, or the maintenance of owned buildings, social occasions 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 purchase of a Masonic apron may be required when you become a Master Mason. You may of course prefer to use a family apron from a relative who no longer has a need for it but in any event your proposer will discuss and arrange this with you.

THE LODGE 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 Lodges the controlling body is the **United Grand Lodge of England** with over 300,000 members working in nearly 8,000 lodges in England and Wales.

Every individual Lodge in the country also comes under the jurisdiction of a Provincial Grand Lodge, in our case, the **Provincial Grand Lodge of Durham**. Each Lodge is presided over by a Master, who normally holds office for a year, who will be pleased to meet and receive you at your first Lodge meeting.

We are obliged by Grand Lodge rules, to ensure all Candidates for joining Freemasonry are elected by ballot of the Lodge members.

Other 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 ballot, ensuring that at all times the will of the majority prevails. Soon as you join the Lodge you will become eligible to vote on any matters concerning the Lodge.

Your proposer will explain to you on which night the Lodge meets and in which months of the year. 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.

At your Lodge meetings, usually ceremonies are conducted to bring new members into Freemasonry or to take them to the next step towards becoming a Master Mason. On other occasions there may be a guest speaker giving a talk on a subject of Masonic interest or there may simply be a discussion among the Lodge members.

Following the meetings, the members and their visitors usually gather in the dining room for a meal and to enjoy each other's company in a relaxed and informal environment.

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.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

A ballot will be held at a meeting of the Lodge, where all Master Masons present will vote on your admission. If the ballot is successful, the Secretary will contact you and advise you of the date at which your admission can be fitted into the Lodge programme of meetings.

During this time, a member of the Lodge, usually your proposer or the secretary will maintain contact with you and invite you to any open meetings or social functions held by the Lodge, where you will be able to meet some of the members.

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 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 during the meal or festive board as it is popularly called, you will then have the opportunity to meet many new friends and most probably renew friendships with other men you have met outside of Freemasonry.

CONCLUSION

Freemasonry constantly strives to receive trustworthy men into its organisation and through its teachings will assist you to appreciate the friendships 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 wish you had joined sooner!