



A guide and aid for new or aspiring members, their Proposers and Seconders.

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased that you have expressed an interest in becoming a Freemason and, in particular, a member of The Dartmoor Lodge 4604. There are various steps you must take before that can happen, but, before you finally decide, it is very important that you read this pamphlet carefully and that you thoroughly understand the nature of Freemasonry, what you can expect from being a Freemason and what Freemasonry has a right to expect from you.

ABOUT FREEMASONRY

What is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry is among the oldest non-religious fraternal societies in the world. It is a society of men who are concerned with *moral and spiritual values*. It encourages men to live better lives, to discipline themselves and consider their relationship to others. Because it is a basic and essential requirement that every member profess and maintain a belief in a Supreme Being, it has a spiritual basis. However, it is not a religion, nor should it ever be regarded as a substitute for any form of religious faith. In fact, Freemasons are strictly forbidden to discuss matters of religion in the Masonic environment. The Bible (known by Freemasons as The Volume of the Sacred Law) is always open when Lodges meet. Obligations are sworn on, or involve the Volume of the Sacred Law or whichever holy book is held sacred by the man concerned.

Freemasons attempt to follow three great principles which represent a way of achieving higher standards in life:

- Brotherly love - Tolerance and respect for the opinions of others and kindly, understanding behaviour towards fellow creatures.
- Relief - Practising charity, not only for other Freemasons, but also for the whole community. Freemasonry has always been concerned with the education of young people and the care of orphans, the sick and the aged, and this work continues. Large sums are regularly given to national and local charities - more of this later!
- Truth - Freemasons always strive for the truth, demanding high moral standards and aiming to achieve them in their own lives.

Freemasonry is not a 'Secret Society'. It is a society which has private methods of recognition i.e. of proving membership. These methods may have been derived from those used by operative stonemasons in the Middle Ages to protect the secrets of their craft. They are now similarly used to preserve Freemasonry's method of teaching morality. All freemasons are totally free to acknowledge their membership and are encouraged to do so when asked by someone whose reasons are genuine and not merely to denigrate.

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Freemasonry. There is no secret about its aims and principles but, like many other societies - clubs, churches, military etc. - it regards some of its internal affairs as being of no concern to other people. The meeting places of Freemasons are not secret - indeed some are open to the public. The aims have often been published in the press and the rule book (Book of Constitutions) is available for any member of the public to see. You would not expect your golf club or your church to publicise the list of its members. Likewise Freemasonry regards its list of members as a matter which rests between the individual Freemason, his lodge and Grand Lodge (q.v.). Indeed the Data Protection Act now restricts the use of such lists for anything but internal purposes if kept, as is now often the case, on computers etc.

Freemasons are expected to be as open and frank about Freemasonry and their membership of it as their situation in life allows them to be.

Freemasons gain from Freemasonry only as much as they are prepared to put into it by way of commitment to the ideals mentioned above. Thereby they experience a friendship which can only be felt from within the organisation and a spiritual and moral uplift which is very real but is hard to explain.

What kind of men are Freemasons?

Men of all ages, races, colours, religions, politics or financial or social standing. We have members who are part of our Royal Family, professions, trades, skills, arts, sciences, businesses, manual occupations - both the employed and self-employed and, sadly, in these days, the unemployed.

When admitted a man becomes known as a 'Brother' and remains so for the rest of his Masonic career. It is also pointed out to candidates that in Freemasonry all Brethren are 'on the level'. Although financial standing is not a bar to becoming a Freemason, it must be appreciated that you should be able to afford the minimum obligations of membership (see 'Finances').

Conditions for admission

There are, however, certain preconditions of membership of any Masonic lodge, which are that you must:

- Believe in a Supreme Being
- Be at least 21 years of age
- Not engage in discussions on matters of religion or politics on Masonic occasions.
- Profess allegiance to the Sovereign of your country and all that the Sovereign represents.
- Be prepared to take an oath to preserve the private aspects of Freemasonry
- Be willing to strictly observe the Laws, Regulations and Constitutions of Freemasonry
- Be of good character and be prepared to uphold the Civil and Criminal Laws of any country in which you may reside, either temporarily or permanently.



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Society, Family and your job

A Freemason's duty to society as a citizen must **always** prevail over any obligation to other Freemasons. Freemasonry will severely censure and probably expel any Freemason who attempts to shield another Freemason who has acted dishonourably or unlawfully.

Freemasonry must never be allowed to harm a man's family or other connections by taking too much of his time or money or causing him to act in any other way against their interests.

If it is ever proved that a Freemason has gained an unfair advantage over another person because of his membership of the Order a serious view will be taken. Members must never use any sort of Masonic certificate or evidence of membership to advertise a business or other enterprise nor use any sort of Masonic device or description on stationery etc. Freemasonry is compatible with any form of occupation whatsoever, but all Freemasons must be careful not to compromise their living and the living of their dependants.

The principles of Freemasonry should, at all times, strengthen a man in fulfilling his public and private responsibilities.

FINANCE

Financial Commitments

You must be fully aware of the financial commitments you are expected to make. It cannot be stressed enough that at no time should your Masonic financial obligations be detrimental to the welfare of your family or those who depend on you.

Lodge finances

Like any other organisation, lodges and their administrative bodies have considerable operating costs. These costs must be borne out of initiation and joining fees, annual subscriptions and, occasionally social activities (though the latter should not have to be relied upon for operating a lodge).

All lodges pay a per capita fee for each member to Grand lodge, the Grand Charity and to Provincial Grand Lodge for the purpose of administering Freemasonry and its charitable funds. In addition your Lodge may have to pay for the costs of its occupancy of a Masonic hall and/or lodge room. The main item of income in any Lodge is the Annual Subscription.



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Initial costs

When you first join Freemasonry you will be expected to pay the following fees etc. The current rates will be advised to you by your Proposer and/or Seconder or the lodge Treasurer, which will include:

- Initiation Fee.
- First years Annual Subscription Fee.
- Cost of purchasing a Masonic apron.
- Ongoing expenses.

The only regular commitment in subsequent years will be your annual subscription which is payable in advance every year. **This must be paid each and every year without fail at the proper time.**

Charity

At most meetings charitable collections are taken and you will be expected to contribute within your means. There is often a raffle at the Festive Board for Charitable (or Lodge) funds.

No Freemason is ever expected to contribute any more than his circumstances in life may allow. The charitable funds in Freemasonry are distributed first to needy and distressed Freemasons, their families and dependants and then to a large variety of non-Masonic international, national and local charities.

HOW IS FREEMASONRY ORGANISED?

Lodges

Freemasons meet in **Private Lodges**. (This is what you will be joining if you become a member of Dartmoor Lodge 4604). Each one has a unique number on the roll of the United Grand Lodge of England. At the time of writing there are some 7.7 thousand lodges in England and new lodges are added each year. Of course there are many thousands of other lodges in almost every country of the world. A lodge can have a membership from about 20 to several hundreds. In England alone approximately 8000 men become Freemasons **every** year.

English Private Lodges outside of London are mainly grouped into **Provincial Grand Lodges**. The lodge you wish to join is probably part of a Provincial Grand Lodge. Provincial Grand Lodges administer Freemasonry for the lodges in their areas and appoint the more senior and experienced Masons from the Private Lodges for this purpose as well as a small number of paid staff.

In England the Private Lodges (under their Provincial Grand Lodges) form part of the **United Grand Lodge of England** which is administered from its premises at Freemason's Hall, Great Queen Street, London.

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The Degrees

When a man joins Freemasonry he takes part in 3 different ritual dramas. There has to be 28 days between each of these ceremonies which are known as 'degrees'. The messages of the degrees are briefly:

- **First Degree** - The candidate is admitted as an 'Entered Apprentice' - he learns about man's natural equality and dependence on others; his civil and moral duties.
- **Second Degree** - The candidate becomes a 'Fellow-Craft' - the effect of Nature and Science; the rewards of labour.
- **Third Degree** - The candidate becomes a 'Master Mason' - contemplation of inevitable death; fidelity; duty to others.

Offices and Ranks

Sometime after you have completed your Third Degree you may be invited, or express a desire, to take an office in the Lodge. This means you will be taking part in the dramatic representation of the moral messages mentioned above. Officers progress through the offices, usually on a yearly basis, until the office of Master of the Lodge.

After some years' experience and progressing through various 'offices' in the lodge a Master Mason can qualify to be elected as *Master of the Lodge*. This is the highest honour a lodge can bestow on one of its members and he is made aware of the duty to administer and teach.

You are under no obligation to undertake any of these offices but many men find it is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a Freemason and those they are helped to discover talents they did not know they had!

Progression

Once having achieved the chair of Master of the Lodge the next step is (logically!) to be a Past Master (which may or may not have duties attached). After some years as a Past Master a brother may be invited to become an officer of the Provincial Grand Lodge. Eventually, those who show exceptional service and merit may be invited to become officers of United Grand Lodge. All these progressions, as well as being honours, bring with them new duties and responsibilities.

What happens next?

The Lodge Secretary will scrutinise the Registration form and, if satisfactory, you will be called for interview by the Lodge Committee. If you are found worthy, every member of the Lodge will be entitled to vote in a secret ballot at a lodge meeting as to whether you should be admitted as a member. If the ballot is satisfactory you will receive a letter from the Lodge Secretary inviting you to attend for your Initiation at a regular meeting of the Lodge.

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What will happen at my interview?

You should have read this pamphlet very thoroughly and be prepared to answer a few basic questions about yourself, your beliefs, your motives and intentions. The interview will be friendly and as informal as possible. The Committee must, however, be sure that, to ensure the integrity and reputation of Lodge and Freemasonry in general, you are a fit and proper person to be admitted. You will also have the opportunity to ask any question or raise any matter which is puzzling you at this stage.

What happens the night I become a Freemason?

You should arrive in plenty of time, properly dressed as indicated above. You do not require your new Masonic apron at this meeting. An officer of the Lodge will attend to you and (as you might expect!) the Treasurer will come to obtain the Initiation Fee and Annual Subscription.

You will then pass through the ceremony of Initiation under the guidance of Officers of the Lodge. Rest assured that you will not be embarrassed in any way.

No doubt you will be nervous, but try to relax as much as possible and take in as much of the ceremony as you can. Always remember that every Mason in the room has had the same experience or a similar experience and sympathises with how you feel. The Officers of the Lodge normally perform the entire ceremony from memory (and are expected to make a good job of it!) so it is probably true to say that they will be even more nervous than you!

After the ceremony, at the Festive Board, there may be a toast to your health and future and you will be expected to give a very brief reply to this. Speaking in public is never easy (as many of us will testify) but your Proposer and/or Secunder will give you help with what to say.

This is a very special night for you - one that you will always want to remember, so enjoy it to the full.

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FINALLY

Now that you have learnt something of what Freemasonry is all about and its expectations we hope that you feel you would like to share our fellowship. However, it is essential that you look carefully and honestly at yourself, your family, your occupation and all your circumstances in life and ask these questions:

- Do I want to be part of a well-organised society that reaches across the whole world; an Order inspired with high motives assisting all its members to be better men, assisting each other, upholding their character and providing them with friends and raising them when they are low and distressed?
- Is Freemasonry really what I'm looking for to assist in improving myself as a person, as a citizen and as a 'Brother' to other men?
- Do I want to experience a whole new sphere in my social life and that of my dependants - a social life that can bring much fun, enjoyment and satisfaction.
- Can I make *UNQUALIFIED* commitment to the time, the finances and the principles involved without harming my family or connections?
- Do I, and my dependants, see Freemasonry as being part of our lives for the foreseeable future?