



Welcome to Sandbach Freemasonry

What is Freemasonry?

Imagine, several centuries ago you worked as a stonemason. As a skilled Mason, able to build complex structures, like churches and cathedrals, you were able to travel and find work. With your colleagues and families you were lodged in a temporary structure attached to or near the main building. In this Lodge you ate, slept and received your work assignment from the master of the work.

The apprentices were trained and moral values were attached to the tools of the trade. The moral code they learned helped to maintain the reputation and stability of the little community in which they lived and worked. In those days there were many guilds – textile workers, carpenters, carvers, glassworkers etc each of whom kept close their traditionally imparted technology, the **arts** and **mysteries** of their crafts.

During the 17th Century the Guilds began to admit non-operative (speculative) masons to their ranks. This was a time when, as a membership organisation, the stonemasons were suffering due to the new fabrics being used to make buildings – bricks, wood etc.

Freemasonry's transition from a craft guild of operative, working stonemasons into a fraternity of what we call speculative or accepted (gentleman) Freemasons began during the early 17th century.

The first record of the Initiation of a non-operative on English soil, was in 1641, when Elias Ashmole was initiated into a Lodge in Warrington. The obvious response to this is that speculative Lodges must then have been in existence before this time.

Throughout the Middle Ages and thereafter until well into the eighteenth century, travel in Britain was greatly restricted and very hazardous. Although the more affluent residents could make journeys on horseback or by horse and coach, ordinary people were usually confined to travelling on foot. Robbery under arms was commonplace, so that the general population avoided travel whenever possible.

Because of their vocation, the operative masons frequently had to travel long distances in search of new work. A unique custom in the craft was that an itinerant mason, when seeking work in an operative lodge, had either to be given employment for an appropriate minimum period or to be provided with sufficient sustenance to reach the next nearest place of work. To facilitate their travel in safety, the operative masons in those days had unobtrusive distinguishing signs enabling them to seek out members of the craft at roadside hostelries.

As well as modes of recognition with which to establish their credentials with a prospective employer. Some masonic researchers hold the view that the possession of masonic credentials for safe travel was a primary objective of those who were "made" masons in the seventeenth century.

The above is one, and the most favoured, of several theories that lead to Lodges of speculative Masons forming.

In 1717, four or possibly six among the oldest Lodges assembled in London and established the first Grand Lodge, claiming jurisdiction over all lodges meeting in London and Westminster.



In 1752 the Grand Lodge of Antients was formed in protest against the apathy and neglect being displayed by the Grand Lodge of England which they dubbed “the Moderns”, as well as through dissatisfaction with the rituals being used and the ceremonials being practised.

The Antients and the Moderns finally settled their differences and their two Grand Masters signed and sealed twenty-one Articles of Union in 1813. Thus the United Grand Lodge of England was formed, initially looking after 647 Lodges. It is still in existence today when there are approaching 250,000 Masons in 46 Provinces throughout the Realm.

Freemasonry – the Myths and the Truths

In recent years Freemasonry has become far more prominent and noticeable in our local communities, on the internet and in the local press, partly as to consequence of openness and also because of the regular publicity we receive, particularly in relation to our charitable activities (which demonstrate Freemasonry in action).

Most Masonic Halls have regular open days and most members of the public either know a Freemason or have attended Masonic functions. Despite this increasing exposure and prominence there are still websites which try to convey false information about Freemasonry and people who have a poor understanding of what Freemasonry is and may have developed a negative view.