



## PAPER

### Freemasonry – What Now? According to Fred & Charlie



**Summary:** A discussion on the future of Freemasonry.

*‘And where are we off to tonight, Fred?’ enthused Charlie as he climbed into Fred’s car.*

As his Proposer, Fred had been taking Charlie around neighbouring Lodges to let him see the many ways in which Masons enjoy their Craft. As this was a long run Charlie kept his driver supplied with the usual Masonic mixture of peppermints and idle-gossip.

*‘These are changing times, Fred. Where do you see Freemasonry going, eh?’*

Fred paused and sucked on his Polo. *‘Freemasonry must be a part of the society around it, Charlie, or it becomes irrelevant. Let me ask you, where do you see our society going, eh? We might then find out whether there will still be a role in it for Freemasonry? How does society view us today, Charlie?’*

Charlie was thoughtful. *‘Well, Fred, on the one hand some see Masonry as a companionable men’s dining club, some as a charitable donor to good causes, and, perhaps for a thoughtful few a strongly moral society once with aristocratic connections.’* He shrugged. *‘On the other hand, we are regularly portrayed by the media as a secret society, a misogynistic club for men and as a butt of TV sitcom humour, or as a dark force in local politics. You pays your money and you make your choice.’*

Fred mused. *‘Our heyday was possibly between the wars. We still kept near Victorian values of courtesy and respect for authority, and the Sunday Church Services were as deeply ingrained in us as the roast dinner after the Sermon. Early closing day enabled us to wash and brush-up, don our Masonic best, and arrive in good time for the early Lodge committee meeting. The Masonic diary was placed alongside the Royal Court Circular on the media’s centre pages.*

*That world has long gone, Charlie. Women want a career and help pay-off the mortgage. In turn men share the domestic chores. Belief in a Supreme Being, our cornerstone, is waning and a lot fewer people attend church regularly, and our busy lives exclude time for spiritual contemplation. Freemasonry’s natural pool of recruitment is getting smaller year by year.’*

*‘That’s pretty bleak stuff, Fred. Isn’t there any upside at all?’*

*'I am convinced there is, Charlie, big time. The American 'Elks' for example believe in God, have an oath, follow a ritual, promote a moral code, have now reached half a million strong, and once included Presidents Truman and Kennedy. Their secret is to get their families on board by making their meeting house a social focus. A Lodge room at night yes, but during the day a drop-in centre for shoppers, with a coffee bar, dining room, lecture hall, committee room etc. Generally, there are facilities too for nursery and toddler's groups, scouts and guides, U3A-type lecture programmes, religious house groups, private celebrations etc. It makes a natural place for everyone to come together, a village hall in all but name.*

*Although church numbers have dwindled people still believe in right and wrong, and seek a code to live by. While we are not a religion, Freemasonry can fill that vacuum by way of a very companionable social setting.'*

*'What can we do Fred? What should a Provincial Grand Master be pressing for?'*

*'Well Charlie our Provincial Grand Master and his Provincial team are already doing a lot of very good stuff; encouraging family involvement in dinners, barbecues, visits here, there and everywhere. They have worked really hard to raise our public profile in the local media, and are working just as hard to increase Masonic knowledge across the Province.*

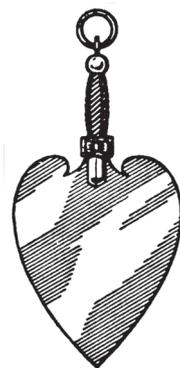
*He might re-emphasise to his Province that Freemasonry, as well as being socially relaxed, still demands a strong moral ethic. I believe we are entitled to expect the same high social standards as with other professional gatherings. At heart though, if we are to survive, Freemasonry must return to be a natural element of our national society.*

*The best Regiments prefer to run light than just make up numbers. The pressure to expand quickly can encourage Lodges to accept members who lack true commitment; sometimes visible in the gaps we see in Lodge offices. Officers can be installed far too early, and lack experience, tradition or leadership, sometimes leading to a slip in standards.*

*I would also review our fund-raising. Our first principle is Brotherly Love. Brotherly love, agape, caritas and charity all mean one and the same thing. They come from the heart. Money given for local hospital equipment is always appreciated by the public; so are donations to disadvantaged children. Charity comes from the heart Charlie, but also from the muscle. Why not form working to paint and refurbish school rooms, community buildings and the like. In short let us be where society needs us and can see us. Let us become part its fabric. Let us devote money, time and effort to some of glaring gaps in our own local community.'*

*'Powerful stuff, Fred. Do you think anyone will listen?'*

*'I do hope so. Unless we play a far more active role in our community, we may well be on the slippery slope of steadily reducing numbers and irrelevance. Freemasonry when I was initiated, and Freemasonry today are rather different animals. Let's make it great again. We can!*



## Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
  - Followed by 'any questions'
  - As a precursor to a discussion (in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself)
  - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

\*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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Fred and Charlie character drawings courtesy of Eddie Wildman.

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