

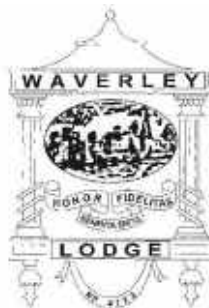


# RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

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THE FUTURE OF  
UNITED GRAND LODGE OF ENGLAND  
FREEMASONRY  
BEYOND OUR THIRD CENTURY

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## THE FUTURE OF UNITED GRAND LODGE OF ENGLAND FREEMASONRY BEYOND OUR THIRD CENTURY

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*Brethren, this Essay reflects only the author's personal thoughts and opinions, and not those of any body, Masonic or otherwise. It is offered with humility and great appreciation of those excellent aspects of the Craft worthy of preservation for future generations, as the UGLE in 2017 celebrates the completion of the third century since its founding.*

As familiar statistics attest, our Brotherhood has been declining in numbers, while our average age is increasing in a way that concerns us with respect to the future of the Craft as we know it.

There is no flawless argument for an ever larger membership, and great numbers do not make for better Masonry – but those of us who love Freemasonry, and value the principles and tenets taught therein, wish to see it preserved for the benefit of future generations. There are also many non-Masons who would immediately gain from membership. Freemasonry enriches society at large, and we have an obligation to bring the moral and social benefits to as many as may qualify. Finally, the larger our institution, the more our enhanced financial resources empower us to act charitably.

In my Essay I will attempt to portray some of the many elements that could contribute to a promising numerical future for Freemasonry without altering that which is already excellent therein. For each individual member or candidate the relative personal value of any of these elements or combination of elements will be different.

For simplicity, and to facilitate clarity in this Essay format, I will group them under the following general headings: Recruitment and Retention.

### RECRUITMENT

By fundamental design, the ceremonies of Freemasonry entail the recruitment of new Candidates for Initiation. In fact, without these 'rough ashlar' to work with, I propose that no ordinary Craft Lodge could be a very happy one for long. It is to the Candidate's benefit as much as for the progression of existing Lodge Members that the ceremonies and ritual, at once confusing and beautiful, are performed.

Yet how can we attract the necessary number of high quality, qualified individuals with the essential level of sustained commitment and realistic expectations that enable them to grow to be contented senior Masons and make their own contribution to the Craft?

### SECRECY HINDERING RECRUITMENT

People ordinarily fear what they cannot completely see and therefore do not understand. Although human curiosity as a trait leads us to some extent to be intrigued and therefore to explore and research into that which is somewhat hidden, people are just as likely to fill the paucity of accurate knowledge with malformed ideas of a negative nature.

In fact this lack of consistent public clarity about the nature of our Order and its great social and educational contributions gives ample opportunity to the creative imaginations of theorists to fill the void with outrageous fictions of conspiracies and nonsense. Almost all of these wild

speculations, when publicized, are detrimental to recruitment as they stir a latent dark wariness easily exploited by religious or secular leaders anxious to propound, even without accuracy or veracity. It's believed that popular novels and exposés featuring Masonic lore are frequently read by Masons keen for additional insight into our own secrets and mysteries!

By the very nature of our 'cautiously veiled activities' we more likely to hinder our recruitment than increase it. This is especially true when potential new Candidates are influenced by ill-informed detractors, and I therefore support the stance taken by Grand Lodge in recent years to in some measure make known, by making available, more *authentic* information about Freemasonry. But have we gone far enough? I suggest we have not.

#### MARKETING FREEMASONRY AS 'A SHINING BEACON'

I envision Freemasonry *actively* engaging in promoting its rightful outward appearance as a 'shining beacon' of stability and brotherhood in a society of sometimes ambiguous morality. Not in competition with religious or other moral orders, but in addition to them, and across them. I venture that we should be far *more* visible, but predominantly as a smiling face to the world of good men and their connections.

When compared with the ephemeral nature of other relationships, including work and friendships in the post-industrial computer age of the coming fourth century of the UGLE, Freemasonry genuinely offers an opportunity to forge and develop very long term associations worthy of investment and nurturing. We need to cultivate and articulate this value consistently and loudly to non-Masons. I suggest that this will have three different positive effects, the first two of which could lead to increased applications for membership, namely:

1. Greater interest from prospective Candidates looking for exactly what we offer, and
2. Greater support for Candidate interest and participation from families, employers and connections, who more clearly see the benefits of Freemasonry, and the lack of detriment to themselves

Another positive effect could be that we may benefit from an enhanced likelihood of retention of Members, since even more Candidates will have joined for valid and appropriate reasons.

To succeed, this whole approach will require a marketing effort, and an investment in clarifying the messages and communicating them dependably. I think Grand Lodge should appoint a Grand Communications Officer or Official Spokesperson to guide and oversee these labours.

#### A CHALLENGE BECOMES A LURE

Alongside our general self-promotion or marketing, we could also benefit recruitment by drawing more attention to the progressive nature of Freemasonry. It is not usually obvious to potential Candidates for Initiation that there is much to do inside Freemasonry that challenges the intellectual and organisational abilities of the individual and group. There are many men who like to be 'put to the test.' This enables them to achieve measurable growth recognition, and an enhanced sense of contribution and value. They do not wish to merely become a member, but look to earn the right to lead or direct.

These are target Candidates in my opinion. Each Lodge needs a new Master every two years at least; and each Province regularly renews its Provincial Executive. Let's ensure we recruit tomorrow's best leaders by communicating the potential opportunities and challenges available to members of the Craft before they even join.

There are other Masonic challenges worth publicising outside the Order, in addition to straightforward advancement within the Craft. Two of these are: Intellectual and Charitable.

### *Intellectual Challenges*

Clever minds love an intellectual challenge. Freemasonry's intellectual challenge goes far beyond the rote memorisation of the excellent rituals and ceremonies so familiar to us. There are almost endless historical and archaeological investigation opportunities for the curious. Around the globe and across time there are stories, links, and mysteries to be uncovered. You need not be a Freemason to pursue this line of research, but membership certainly aids in understanding the context and accurately recognising the facts. We should fund, research, and publish much more of our own material through a Masonic Press or on the Internet in conjunction with the Museum at Great Queen Street. This will draw new Members who wish to join and tackle such intellectual trials.

### *Charity as a Challenge*

Charity is always a challenge, whether raising funds, managing large sums for the long-term or disbursing them to maximise the value and positive impact. Masonic charity, while universally admired, needs ever more creative and resourceful assistance. We need to make a loud and consistent call to non-Masons, especially those who would be qualified to join, that both announces Masonic charitable giving and invites application for membership in the same document. This sustained message could excite interest amongst men inclined to tackle the issues surrounding charity to the benefit of all.

These are a few ideas for recruiting more Masons, and specifically the type of wonderful Masons who go on to be *ornaments* to our Society. Finally we need to remember that when recruiting people who like challenges, they often measure their success by external recognition of achievement. I advocate a new program (in the following chapter on Retention) which I call the 'Exemplars' that I believe may assist us greatly in acknowledgment and motivation in this respect.

## RETENTION

Let's explore some of the reasons for Masons becoming inactive or leaving the Order. Ill health or other infirmity I will not examine here. From amongst a large list of other well known reasons I will address:

- Lodge Politics
- Family or Work Pressures
- Fun
- Membership Benefits
- Education
- Pace
- Recognition

### *Social Make-up of the Lodge*

One aspect that is never completely clear to a Candidate for Initiation is the social make-up of the Lodge to which he is directing his application. He may have a friend or relation in that Lodge, but has no first-hand way of knowing that the particular combination of ages, backgrounds, and attitudes will be sympathetic with his own. He is committing to join, and regularly attend, a sub-group to which he may not ultimately feel he properly belongs. Over time he can reach out to the wider Masonic community, but his own Lodge may continue to feel less than compatible for him. I have seen Brethren drift away in this manner, feeling somewhat 'left out' or 'different.' I am calling this feeling 'alienation' for the purposes of this essay.

The way to reduce this is to make the social atmosphere of Lodge more transparent to the Candidate before Initiation (for example during the Interview process), and then to have the Lodge Mentor bring the new-made Brother into the social fold. Few Lodges seem to do either of these steps very effectively and guidelines from Grand or Provincial Lodges on *how* to do this, if executed properly by the Lodge, could help retain Members.

### *Work Pressures*

Almost all 'younger' Masons will be in employment for much of their formative Masonic years. In contemporary society Masons and Candidates to Masonry do not necessarily live near their work, and their Lodge could easily be at a distance from their usual place of employment. Current work hours are also longer and more variable than in the past. Travel away from the usual place of work is an increasing demand in many jobs.

As we currently tyle most of the Lodge meetings in the late afternoon of a workday, a typical Mason will almost certainly have to take a work absence to participate. The distance from work to Lodge exacerbates the issue by extending the hours of work missed in order to accommodate travel time to the Lodge. In my own Lodge there has nearly never been a meeting over the past eight years where every working Brother is able to be present, because of these pressures. Even if they could arrive in time just to attend the festive board, they may be embarrassed to arrive for this only, if they have already missed the meeting or ceremony – especially if holding an office in the Lodge. When this kind of absence occurs often enough for any one individual younger Mason, we quickly hear the 'tut-tut' of the older Masons, further pressuring the unfortunate who now finds his commitment questioned.

### *Family Pressures*

Assuming the early support of the Mason's partner, there is still a challenge to younger Masons who have family responsibilities. Since it is now more common than ever for both partners to be working, a Mason is likely to have to balance the modern requirement to share responsibilities for younger children and home duties. The hours required to practice ritual at home and in the Lodge of Instruction can create friction and

The Craft being only one Masonic Order, family pressures only increase when a Mason joins Chapter, Mark or possibly other Masonic Orders, or visits other Lodges. All these other Masonic involvements are wonderful for retention but demanding from a time-commitment perspective.

Absence from the evening family life for study, attendance at Lodge of Instruction or the Festive Board can cause friction at home or a possible criticism of the Mason as selfish by the Partner.

Taken together this forms a problem for almost every Mason from time to time.

Addressing both Work and Family Pressures as one, I suggest that there are three significant ways to manage these pressures:

1. To start Lodge meetings later, and
2. To share the ritual work.
3. Engage the Mason's family

### **Lodge meetings**

An efficient meeting including a ceremony can be beautifully performed in less time than now taken by the majority of Lodges, which could permit the meeting to start later without extending the Festive Board too late. Simple steps like sending the previous meetings minutes out with the Summons instead of reading them aloud reduce the time taken for administration. A later start would ease the pressure to leave work as early, and reduce the potential 'detriment to self and connections.' Meeting attendance could rise and satisfaction increase.

### **Shared Ritual Work**

By dropping the expectation that an Officer always needs to perform the complete portion of the ceremony ascribed to his office at every ceremony, we would lessen the burden of rote memorisation which in turn will ease the stress and impact on work and family by happily sharing the ritual among more Members as required. I understand that some Lodges already accept this; so I am only recommending it to those that don't yet do so. I have watched many Masons decline to advance to the next Office because they cannot afford the time to perfect the ritual work expected of them due to the pressures I have described above. As they fall behind they can start a slide towards non-participation that can lead to a retention issue. I feel it is much better to be supportive and accommodate these Brothers as best we can.

### **Engaging the Family**

There seems to be a paucity of organised family-oriented activities in many Lodges or Provinces. Perhaps this is somewhat due to the aging of UGLE membership. Perhaps this stems from a feeling that it is superfluous to embrace the Mason's whole family, unless it is in their time of need, when we are excellent at giving assistance. There is, however, an inclination for a Lodge to work to make a Mason's Partner or Widow welcome. I believe we should extend this out more, to Father and Child activities, or whole family events. Again a central resource of good ideas or opportunities could be shared among the Lodges. But this aspect won't change until the tolerance of some older Members improves for having young children around at a Lodge social event.

### *Lodge Politics*

Another potential contributor to alienation can be the internal politics of the Lodge to which a Brother belongs. I mean the informal internal social and power structures, and their impact on advancement, preferment, seating, inclusion or division. This power is usually under the control of the more senior Lodge Members, who have earned the right, they often believe, to make decisions and proposals for the best interest of the Lodge without always truly consulting the full Lodge, or considering the impact on newer Members. This way the Lodge unfortunately becomes run for the few, by the few, and this will almost always exclude and disaffect some others.

The only suggestions I can make are that every Brother be sensitive to the needs of all Members, wherever possible, and for the Lodge Mentor to actively guide his Lodge's young Brethren through to the heart of the Lodge. Once properly included, these newer Masons will be less inclined to leave.

### *Membership Benefits*

Most organizations seek out and negotiate discounts, deals and benefits for their members. While the real benefits of Freemasonry will always be of the social and moral kind, we have an obligation to use the size of our membership to get the best for Masons and their families.

Some of these benefits can have a dual purpose. For example, a business desiring the custom of as many Masons as possible could offer a discount to every Mason and a contribution to the Masonic Charities for each transaction. We could raise money for charity at the same time as benefiting ourselves *and* the interested supplier.

A specific example would be a discretely marked Masonic Credit Card, which could be 'fee free' 'low interest' and still donate 0.5% to 1.0% of all purchase transactions to the Masonic Charities. With just a reasonable percentage of Masons using the card, the annual sum raised for charity would be very substantial!

Even those benefits which help the Mason only would be welcome. There could be store discounts, financial products, travel discounts through a chain of hotels or car rental, etc. The few advertisers offering special terms in their ads in MQ Magazine are a minor start in this direction.

A whole package of benefits is possible and should be centrally negotiated, and annually reviewed. I am even willing to undertake to assist with this personally as I believe the benefit to all parties; especially my fellow Masons could be so substantial.

### *Education*

There has been a directive to every Mason to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge since the earliest years of the Society. Yet even today it is not clear enough to the average Mason where to turn for information of a high quality and interest. We have many libraries of books and I am aware that an effort has been made to catalogue them recently. There is non-Masonic research into Masonic history and articles in some high quality Provincial and Grand publications. Lectures, some of them excellent, are available to Lodges if the Master or Secretary knows where to look and who to contact.

There are Lodges whose main focus is expansion of the credible body of Masonic knowledge. Why not extend the work of all these people and their efforts by creating a 'College of Freemasonry,' on the internet, that collects and disseminates quality information to the Brethren from a central source? Even some Lectures could be recorded and shared. Researchers or authors could be encouraged and published there. Opinions and best practise can be shared. Copies of all the authorised Masonic publication can be available in one central place.

It is an important factor in retention for the Mason to understand his place in Freemasonry, and Freemasonry's place in society. He may also wish to know more about any one of a thousand aspects of Masonic interest – and right now has no easy way to gratify that interest. Let's make strides to do better with this in the spirit of the new openness of recent years by creating a forum for the sharing of Masonic knowledge.

### *Pace and Recognition*


While we all agree might agree the need for a reasonable investment from a new Brother before advancement, for many the current opportunities for 'moving up' are too limited and too slow. Perhaps this is just a function of the size of Freemasonry today, but I am more inclined to believe that it is just that Freemasonry has not kept up with the accelerating pace of change in the non-Masonic world. In an age when instant gratification for food, entertainment, knowledge and pleasure is being satisfied on many other levels, the pace at which we can recognize the best contributions and permit advancement appears by comparison to be at best sluggish. The mere fact that we set expectations of a seven or eight year wait after a Mason has been through the Chair before Provincial Honours states that years are more important than excellence. But how to fairly address this issue?

I propose one way is to establish a new form of recognition which I have called 'Exemplars.' An Exemplar would be an outstanding Freemason contributor in any important measure and at any point in the Mason's career. The Exemplar would be decorated with a special Jewel to identify the reason for their excellence. They would become visible examples (Exemplar is taken from the word example) to others striving to potential excellence in the same aspects for which the Exemplars have been designated. There could be Exemplars in ritual, communications, fund raising, or any specific office of the Lodge or aspect of Freemasonry. This program would help retention by both recognizing and proclaiming the superlative without waiting for years to pass, and by guiding the rest to emulate those that have been acknowledged as worthy of the same.

## SUMMARY

There are many issues to consider as we approach our next century. Both recruitment and retention is core to the very success and future of Freemasonry. I have here addressed a few related issues and proposed ways I believe we can succeed in addressing them, at least in part.

I challenge you to contribute by lending your support to any of them, or by proposing your own ideas. But either way, let's keep the discussion going, because by reflecting on the future we have the best chance of being prepared for it – for the benefit of all.



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