

A LIBRARY AND MUSEUM OF FREEMASONRY INFORMATION SHEET

MASONIC CHARITY JEWELS

One of the three principles on which Freemasonry is founded is Relief (Charity in modern terms). The principle of relief was reflected in the establishment of a Committee of Charity by the premier Grand Lodge in 1727, ten years after its own foundation. The Committee considered petitions from members for assistance for themselves and their dependants and made monetary grants. A similar system was established by the Antients Grand Lodge when it was formed in the 1750s which was managed through a Steward's Lodge. In 1814 the grant making elements of the Committee of Charity and the Steward's Lodge merged to form a Fund of Benevolence, managed in due course by a Board of Benevolence. In 1980 the Grand Charity took over the responsibilities of the Board of Benevolence. Part of its funding continues to come from the charitable element of a member's annual dues.

The Royal Masonic Institution for Girls (RMIG) was the name adopted in 1868 by the charity that ran a school for the daughters of "deceased and distressed Freemasons" originally founded by the Chevalier Ruspini in 1788. The school has operated on various sites and is currently at Rickmansworth. **The Royal Masonic Institution for Boys (RMIB)**, a name adopted in 1832, started in 1798 to provide education for boys. The last boys' school site closed in 1977. In 1986 the **RMIG** and the **RMIB** were merged to form the **Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys (RMTGB)** which was given the overall aim of relieving poverty and advancing education of children of all ages.

The Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution (RMBI) was formed from the Masonic Benevolent Annuity Fund for Men (founded in 1842) and the Female Annuity Fund (founded in 1849). In 1850, it opened the "Asylum for Worthy, Aged and Decayed Freemasons" in Croydon. Although it no longer runs the original home in Croydon, the RMBI now administers sheltered accommodation around the country.

The **Masonic Samaritan Fund (MSF)** was formed in 1990 to support Freemasons and their dependants who have an identified medical need and are unable to afford their own private care.

See the separate Information Sheet on **The Royal Masonic Hospital and its Jewels**.

It became common in the 1700s for charities to raise money at events such as music festivals or dinners which provided donors with entertainment and linked social activities with charitable aims. The Girls' School was the first Masonic charity to do this beginning in 1789 when it was decided to hold a church service and dinner to celebrate the school's first anniversary. Collections were taken both at the church service and the dinner and opened up a source of funding other than donations by individual lodges or members. Until the middle of the 1800s "Festivals" were fairly informal: members (and non Masonic donors including wives) gave a minimum donation for which they would be called "Stewards" of the Festival. But as funding requirements grew, the system became more formalised. Provincial Grand Masters would agree to chair a particular Festival and members in that province would focus

their charitable efforts on it for a number of years usually culminating in a Festival Dinner when the total amount raised was announced.

Any member who donated money to a Festival received a “Steward’s Jewel”. Originally these were rosettes, made with fabric and bullion tassels, but eventually a medal-like form was adopted as shown below. The ribbon of this jewel also settled into one of three colours, crimson for the RMBI, light blue for the RMIB and white for the RMIG. Every year the jewel was different, often incorporating the coat of arms of that year’s patron of the festival or the emblem of the Province that organised it. A mason was permitted to wear the jewel for a year, although in some years the presence of a Royal Patron made the jewel a permanent addition. Although the majority of the jewels were identical, the members of the committee that organised the festival would often have jewels with a bar that indicated their office, whilst the President of the festival might be awarded a more elaborate jewel.



Examples of Steward’s jewels for the various masonic charities, reading left to right-
Top row-An early 1870 RMIB rosette, 1953 RMBI, 1972 RMIB, 1983 RMIG
Bottom row- 1992 Grand Charity, 2012 RMTGB, 2014 Masonic Samaritan Fund

In addition to the steward's jewels there is also the Grand Lodge Charity Jewel (sometimes called the Sussex Jewel). Inaugurated in 1830 this was awarded to masons who became stewards of more than one of the charities (at first just the Girls and the Boys, then the Benevolent Institution as well). The central device, struck as a circular medal, is of Charity nursing a girl in the uniform of the Royal Masonic School for Girls and a boy holding a book, under a triangle containing the eye of the Great Architect, underneath the image is the Latin date for 1830. The reverse of the jewel bears the inscription "Honourable Testimonial of Masonic Charity and Benevolence instituted by H:R:H: Aug Fred: Duke of Sussex M:W: Grand Master".



Front and back of a Grand Lodge Charity Jewel on a ribbon flanking a Grand Lodge Charity Jewel on a collar, both showing bars for successive festival attendances.

The ribbon of the jewel reflects which charities the wearer supported, two of crimson, light blue or white, or all three together. The later adoption of various levels of giving to the charities allowing the donor to be a Steward, Vice President, Vice Patron or Patron led to a bewildering array of jewels with ribbons, with rosettes, on plain collars or on fully embroidered collars in silver, gold or colour. The Patrons' jewel had a crown or coronet added at the top which reflected the rank of the Grand Master at the time of issue (Heir Apparent, Royal Duke, Duke or Earl). There are over a hundred different variations of the jewel in existence. Additionally, once the jewel was awarded, a bar was worn on the ribbon of the collar for every additional year that the wearer qualified for a steward's jewel, coloured according to the charity.

A certificate was issued by each of the three charities which would allow a mason who had been a steward of any two to apply for the Grand Lodge Charity Jewel. Although a mason could not be a steward for the RMIB and RMIG after they were merged, there is an indication that in the period after 1986 that the secretaries to the charities continued to issue certificates entitling members to the jewel and it continued

to be issued from time to time while stocks remained in existence. The conditions for issue and a description of the Grand Lodge Charity Jewel remain in the Book of Constitutions for UGLE to the present day and it can still be worn by those entitled.

Aside from the central charities, the various Masonic Provinces also run their own charity events, with festivals and steward's jewels in a similar pattern. Seen here are a number of examples from (left to right) Buckinghamshire, West and East Lancashire.



Examples of Provincial Charity Steward's Jewels

Masonic degrees other than Craft Freemasonry have benevolent funds from which they give support both to members and to some non-Masonic causes. One of the largest is the Mark Benevolent Fund, set up by the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons in 1868, which is also funded by a festival system with steward's badges as well as by legacies and donations.



Three examples of Mark Benevolent Fund Charity Steward's Badges

For further information see-

The Festivals 1900 -1985, Stewards Jewels of the Royal Masonic Institution for Boys
by D. J. Heathcote

The Festivals 1900 -1985, Stewards Jewels of the Royal Masonic Institution for Girls
by D. J. Heathcote

Jewels and Medals of British Freemasonry by Trevor Harris

AQC- Transactions of Quator Coronati Lodge No. 2079, Volume 108, p162-174, 'And
the Greatest of These is Charity', Prestonian Lecture for 1993 by John Hamill

Polished Cornerstones- A History of the Royal Masonic School for Girls 1799-2009
by Lorna Cowburn

© The Library and Museum of Freemasonry (Registered Charity No 1058497) 2011

www.freemasonry.london.museum

May 2011

