

A MUSEUM OF FREEMASONRY INFORMATION SHEET

FREEMASONRY, FAMILY AND LOCAL HISTORY



The Museum is the repository for the archives of the United Grand Lodge of England, the governing body of English freemasonry, Supreme Grand Chapter of England, the governing body for Royal Arch freemasonry, their predecessor bodies, for the archives of buildings and sites associated with the Grand Lodge, charitable bodies associated with Freemasonry, individual Freemasons and many lodges and chapters that have closed.

The United Grand Lodge archives cover England and Wales and certain overseas areas which are now or were previously part of the Commonwealth. There are separate Grand Lodges for Scotland, Ireland, and individual European countries. In the USA there are separate Grand Lodges for each state. The Museum can advise of contact details for other countries. More information about freemasonry generally is available on the United Grand Lodge of England's website (www.ugle.org.uk) and on the Royal Arch degree on the website for the Supreme Grand Chapter of England on <http://www.grandchapter.org.uk/>

Online Resources

The Museum catalogue is available online via the website at www.freemasonry.london.museum. Archive material is being added continually. It is always worth checking to see if there is a reference on the catalogue to the person you are looking for among our library, museum and archive collections. If you know the name of the lodge or chapter an individual joined then you can search the online catalogue to see if we have a lodge or chapter history. The content of such histories varies but may include a list of members, details of significant meetings and, occasionally, photographs.

A number of research resources are available and include:

- Lane's List of lodges which shows all lodges established by the United Grand Lodge of England and its predecessor bodies up to 1910 (in the process of being bought up to date)
- A list of erased lodges and details of where their records are held (from 1895 to 2010)
- Masonic Periodicals Online which provides access to digitised, searchable copies of a number of masonic periodicals published from 1790 to 1900.

Some individual lodges have published historic material on the internet which should be accessible by usual search engines.

Using the Library at the Museum

Admission to the Library at the Museum is free. Its resources are available for reference and research. It is located on the first floor of Freemasons' Hall and there are lifts available which are suitable for most wheelchairs. A number of power sockets for laptop computers are available. A staffed photocopying service and photographic service is provided. Details of current charges for these services can be provided on request. Users are required to complete a Reader Registration Form (available on the Library page of the website) and to provide photographic identification when they first use library or archive resources. Staff are always pleased to help visitors with enquiries and can advise how to use and access library and archive resources but cannot undertake extensive research on individual enquiries.

It is advisable to contact the Library at the Museum before planning your research visit as some resources are held off site.

Information on individual freemasons

Information about individual members is based on Annual Returns which are compiled by individual lodges and sent to Grand Lodge. The earliest such Returns date from about 1768 although lists of members at dates up to the late 1730s are recorded in the minutes of Grand Lodge meetings and reproduced in *Quatuor Coronatorum Antigrapha* Vol X (available in the Library). Annual Returns were used to create membership registers arranged by lodge number. There is no complete alphabetical index of individual members. Membership Registers cannot be made available to individuals to conduct their own searches due to the conservation needs of the records, although Membership Registers from 1768 to 1921 are available on Ancestry.co.uk and can be accessed in the Library at the Museum. Typical information recorded includes age, address, occupation and date of joining the lodge. The records do not contain personal details such as date of birth, marriage, family, changes of address, etc. It is possible to view Annual Returns which are more than 70 years old. Pre 1900 returns sometimes include letters and other information which may augment details about individual members.

Returns of members made by lodges to the local Clerk of the Peace under the Unlawful Societies Act from 1799 to 1967 may be available in Quarter Sessions records at local record offices. Contact the Library at the Museum for details.

For general guidance we recommend *My Ancestor was a Freemason* by Pat Lewis, (Society of Genealogists, ISBN 1859514057).

As membership information is organised by lodge, identifying a lodge name or number from any surviving documents, objects or photographs can significantly increase the success of any search.

Search service

Requests for family history and genealogical information are available by application to the Museum. A search fee is payable for this service which is not refundable in the event of a negative result. The fee is £31 per name (£16.50 per name for members of the United Grand Lodge of England). Please provide as much information as possible regarding name, dates of birth and death and possible addresses. Details are also available on the Family History page of the Museum website where you can pay by credit card. Some details of girls or boys who received assistance from the Royal Masonic Institution for Girls or the Royal Institution for Boys can also be provided on the same basis.

Information on lodges and chapters and for local history

If you know the name of the lodge/chapter then you can search the online catalogue to see if we have a lodge or chapter history. The Museum also holds a file for each lodge/chapter which is accessible to visitors on request. A lodge/chapter file may include summonses to meetings and correspondence.

Other archive material which may be consulted (Museum staff can advise):

- Petitions to form new lodges (or chapters)
- Letter books (copies of letters sent by Grand Lodge administration)
- Minute books or proceedings of meetings of the Grand Lodge itself
- Correspondence arranged by province or district

For much of the 19th and early 20th centuries there were dedicated Masonic magazines which often contain details of lodge meetings, photographs of individuals, biographical information and obituaries. These are not indexed comprehensively but if you know key dates such as death or Masonic promotion then it can be worth looking at the periodicals (available in the Museum) around that date for further information. A number of these covering the period 1790 to 1900 have been also been digitised and are available online via www.masonicperiodicals.org.

Lodges and chapters hold their own records. Requests for possible further information in those records can be forwarded via the Museum who will advise on whether such an approach is likely to be worthwhile. Where records for some lodges and chapters that have closed are available, their records are listed on the catalogue and can be accessed in the Museum. A small retrieval fee is payable as this material is stored off site. A list of lodge and chapter records deposited with local record offices is also available on request.

Photographs

There is no complete record of photographs or images of individual members. If an image is available for an individual there may be an entry on the Museum catalogue (cataloguing is ongoing). Any photograph you hold of an individual or group of individuals in regalia may help the Museum identify the person/people concerned. Providing a copy with any search request may also help identify membership of other Masonic or fraternal orders (whose ceremonial costume is often similar to that of freemasons) for which contact details can be provided. For information about non-Masonic fraternal orders we recommend *Discovering Friendly and Fraternal Societies: their Badges and Regalia* by Victoria Solt Dennis (Shire Publications, ISBN 0747806284).

Costume (regalia), medals (jewels) and certificates

Where artefacts and documents relating to specific members are available there will be an entry on the Museum catalogue. Such items which have survived in your family can also help identify the person concerned if details can be provided to the Museum at the time of your enquiry.

Sources of information elsewhere

Sometimes wills, gravestones or local newspaper reports indicate that an individual was a freemason. Some records for lodges and chapters and other Masonic organisations may be deposited with local record offices and it is worth checking their catalogues and also the National Register of Archives and Access to Archives (both available via The National Archives website on <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>). Papers relating to the Masonic membership of individuals or included in the archives of other organisations may also be found via the Archives Hub search engine (<http://archiveshub.ac.uk/>).

