



SPECIAL  
SUPPLEMENT

# Insight

Your window into Hampshire  
& Isle of Wight Freemasonry

## Special Supplement

Featuring an interview with  
the Provincial Grand Master,  
RW Bro Mike Wilks

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# MYTHS AND LEGENDS?

As an editor involved in publishing, I continually discover all sorts of interesting things during the course of my work; I was excited to be invited to meet one of the more senior ranking Freemasons and learn more about that 'secret' society whose ceremonies and activities seem to be written in folklore. So, when I met with the **Provincial Grand Master**, not only did I not know what to expect; I had no idea that Freemasons could be so open, so refreshingly normal and so benevolent toward everyone, and not just their Lodge members!

**M**ike Wilks is a husband, father and grandfather and is head of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Province, and leads, supports and inspires over 10,000 'brother' Freemasons. "There is, of course, a serious side to Freemasonry when in the Lodge Room; but it is also great fun," Mike explained while sitting in the Fareham Lodge Room surrounded by the symbolic artefacts. "It is a heavy responsibility but I get enormous support from the brethren.

"Freemasonry is a fraternal organisation which exists to improve moral standards, individual character and self-confidence – and a by-product of that is, we are by nature a charitable organisation. Yes, we do help other masons and their families but we are a benevolent group of individuals within the community where we live and work."

The question of course had to be asked about it being a 'secret society'; but as we were in the Lodge Room surrounded by the, so-called, secret paraphernalia that question was almost redundant. "The secrecy badge we seem to be labelled with comes from the time of the Second World War, when Hitler declared war on organisations and sections of society that could represent a threat to his ambitions of world domination and in fact up to 200,000 Freemasons died in the holocaust as a result. Because of this, Freemasons adopted a secrecy about the organisation and its membership for their own safety.

## 200,000 Freemasons died in the holocaust as a result

"As for the secret handshake and the rolled up trouser leg that seem to get the media in such a twist, well yes, they do happen but they are historic and have a reason for being, as do all the icons that represent parts of what we do. When in the Lodge Room, and only in the Lodge Room, we give initiates the secret of the handshake, this is all the part of a drama, very much like a play, that unfolds during our ceremonies

and together, become the journey through which members attain their personal improvement. However, it is a serious matter if we discover members of the fraternity using things like the handshake away from the surroundings of our ceremonies; it's just not done."

There is some confusion about the origins of Freemasonry and its associations with stonemasonry. There is an opinion that Freemasonry descends directly from the organisation of operative stone masons. However, a more generally accepted view is that the organisation was formed by right thinking members of society who were concerned about the great political, religious and social turmoil and intolerance in the early 1600s that resulted in the English Civil War.

Mike went on to explain that in the medieval times, stone masons needed a way of introduction and indicating their level of experience at a time when there was no written indenture for apprentices and in the formation of the Freemasons, many of these methods of identification together with the symbolism based upon the tools have been adopted.

"There are three degrees for a Freemason; he comes through the door blindfolded and is initiated into the organisation and becomes an Entered Apprentice; then comes the Fellow Craft degree, and finally to become a Master Mason. This is achieved through ritual drama which is about equality, integrity and morality. The rolled trouser leg that non-masons seem to find so funny is simply the initiate taking his vow kneeling on bared knee."

All Freemasons have a few things in common, they must believe in a Supreme Being, not necessarily Christian, but their own God whether they are Jewish, Muslim or Christian, and be of high moral fibre.

"I joined in 1975," continued Mike. "And we all play our part, it is a drama to be played out and over time that becomes a way of life for Freemasons, everyone has been through exactly the same rituals. Is the ritual an obstacle for new members? No, as we are not





just any organisation and the ritual is loved by our members; especially the youngsters, and we can initiate men from the age of 21, although as a Provincial Grand Master I do have a special dispensation to allow entry as young as 18 as we do have some University Scheme Lodges. The young men love the formality and tradition upstairs here in the Lodge Room as much as they do downstairs in the bar and dining room.

"It may be an all-male organisation but there again I have never been invited to join the WI and in any event there is a separate organisation of Lady Freemasons; my wife of 44 years is fully supportive because of what we do, and she is rightly proud of all the good that we achieve as a benevolent organisation, as are my children and now my grandchildren.

"I am in a fortunate position to do what I do, we do not just hand cheques out as a charitable organisation, but we also get involved. I hope we reach out into the community and the more I have become involved in the Lodges the more determined I am to see our membership increase and that can only be good for any community when men of good moral standing come together to improve their lives and the lives of those around them."

## **“Are we just an ancient fellowship?”**

"Again this is a myth as we are very much of a modern age as we, like any modern organisation, use social media to further our good causes and contact with the community. In fact I believe we are more relevant now than ever before as people now crave structure in their lives and have a need for moral leadership, but we do this with a sort of osmosis rather than by preaching."

"We are multicultural, free in religious beliefs and the fact is that we do make the men that join our Lodges better people for having joined. It does not matter who you are or what your background, when you become a Freemason you do become a better person and gain in self-confidence. We are far from being a big secret and our doors are open to anyone who wishes to come and find out more about us; we are totally open in everything we do, but we choose not to divulge the mode of recognition (or handshake) because that is part of the play - historically a Stonemason would only use the mode of recognition to prove his level of competence in his Craft.

It necessarily follows that the mode of recognition is only used within the confines of our Lodge Room and everything we have is symbolic and has meaning in what we do; such as the aprons we wear, the stonemason used to wear a white leather apron to carry out his craft, we now wear that apron and just add adornments as we go through the ranks within our organisation, no secret meaning; just a part of our history and our ceremony.

"We make good men better, no matter who they are; when joining a Lodge it is about self-improvement and over the years you do grow in confidence so no man should be afraid to knock on our doors and ask to join. We are not a big secret and are open for any man of good moral standing to join us."

With 270,000 Freemasons in the UK and some six million worldwide it was easy to see it would be tough to keep anything secret for long, so if you are interested in joining a Freemason's Lodge just walk up and ask what it is all about, you will be surprised how open and welcoming they are.

Dave Hill, Editor of Solent Life was talking to Mike Wilks

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@MichaelWilks2 - follow the Provincial Grand Master on Twitter

## WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?

**Freemasonry is a society of men concerned with moral and spiritual values.**

Its members are taught its principles (moral lessons and self-knowledge) by a series of ritual dramas – a progression of allegorical two-part plays which are learnt by heart and performed within each Lodge – which follow ancient forms, and use stonemasons' customs and tools as allegorical guides.

**Freemasonry instils in its members a moral and ethical approach to life: its values are based on integrity, kindness, honesty and fairness.**

Members are urged to regard the interests of the family as paramount but, importantly, Freemasonry also teaches concern for people, care for the less fortunate and help for those in need.

**Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest and largest non-religious, non-political, fraternal and charitable organisations.**

It teaches self-knowledge through participation in a progression of ceremonies. Members are expected to be of high moral standing and are encouraged to speak openly about Freemasonry.

**If you are interested in becoming a Freemason?  
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