



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT

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MASONS

MEET THE MASONS

Liz Kavanagh pays a visit to Winchester Masonic Centre

The Winchester Masonic Centre on Alresford Road forms part of The Masonic Province of Hampshire and Isle of Wight, which celebrates its 250th anniversary this year.

It's one of 47 provinces in England and Wales, with over 9,000 Freemasons in 253 lodges, and is headed by Provincial Grand Master Michael Wilks, a retired solicitor who became a Mason after being motivated by the kindness of Masons shown towards him.

"Being a Mason is about following a code of conduct and aspiring to be a better man," he says. "That's at the heart of our ceremonial traditions and also brings us together socially. While persecution, including that by the Nazis, forced masons into secrecy, we're now very open, and welcome new members from all backgrounds."

Established in the 1600s as an organisation to promote tolerance and peace for the betterment of mankind, Masons ban political and religious discussion, and instead champion moral and spiritual values.

"Newcomers work through three degrees before becoming Master Masons, and learn ceremonies which lead them to self-discovery," Mike says.

The 'funny handshake', Mike explains, is a grip of the hand originally used by stonemasons to demonstrate proficiency in craftsmanship before the days of paper certificates. The tradition has continued and is used only for ceremonial purposes.

In Winchester the main lodge room is imposing, with a large chequered carpet at its centre representing darkness and sorrow and the light and happiness of man's earthly existence. A tracing board reveals the three pillars of development required from masons in pictorial form, while rough and perfect ashlar stones symbolize learning and progress. Those attending meetings wear different aprons, indicating the stage they have reached in Freemasonry.

Ceremonies typically include initiations for new Masons and promote aspiration and morality and are followed by socialising over drinks and a meal. "Within Winchester we have 10 craft lodges, which are individual groups that meet at the centre," Mike says. "Masons also form lodges for particular interests: we have a rugby lodge, a football lodge and a lodge for motor sport enthusiasts."

"Giving to the community is a big part of our work, with hundreds of thousands of pounds raised in the province every year. Masons develop great friendships whilst improving their characters for the benefit of all."

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