

# Who are the... FREEMASONS?



by Artur Nistra

**That's not a surprising question. Even though Freemasons are members of the largest and oldest fraternity in the world, many people aren't quite certain just who Masons are or what Freemasonry is about.**



**T**he answer is simple. Freemasons are members of a fraternity known as Freemasonry or Masonry. A fraternity is a group of men (just as a sorority is a group of women) who join together because:

- There are things they want to do in the world.
- There are things they want to do “inside their own minds.”
- They enjoy being together with men they like and respect.

## **FREEMASONRY EXPLAINED - WHAT IS IT?**

No one knows just how old Freemasonry is because the actual origins have been lost in time. Probably, it arose from the guilds of stone masons who built the castles and cathedrals of the middle ages. Possibly, they were influenced by the knights templar, a group of Christian warrior monks formed in 1118 to help protect pilgrims making trips to the holy land.

In 1717, Freemasonry members created a formal organization in England when the first Grand Lodge was formed. A Grand Lodge is the administrative body in charge of Freemasonry in some geographical area. In the United States, there is a Grand Lodge of Freemasonry in each state and the district of Columbia. In Canada, there is a Grand Lodge of Freemasonry in each province. Local organizations of Freemason are called Lodges. There are Freemasonry Lodges in most towns, and large cities usually have several. There are about 13,200 Lodges in the United States.

## **THE ANCIENT STONE MASON PERSPECTIVE**

Freemasonry draws much imagery from the history and construction of King Solomon Temple (945 BC) by masons from the Phoenician city of Tyre, it seems fanciful to claim direct Stone-Mason links from that era. Nevertheless, skills in the manipulation of stone had been well established by then and had been handed down through the ages and through the hands of many peoples including craftsmen from the Greek, Byzantine and Roman Eras.

Certain present day Masonic words and meanings seem rooted from the time of the early Egyptians of this era: The virtues of truth and justice were said by them to be “on the square”. Confucius in 500 B.C. referred to the squareness of actions; even Aristotle in 350 BC associates square actions with honest dealings. The square and its symbolism is very old and has maintained a remarkable consistency of meaning over the centuries. However, it does not necessarily follow that Freemasonry began in those eras any more than trying to assert that Euclid was a Freemason because his 47th Proposition (as shown on the WMs jewel) has relevance in modern Freemasonry!

Legend next informs us that Athelstan, having subjugated most of the minor kingdoms of England, gathered together many skilled masons and established York Rite Masonry in 926 A.D. by granting them a Royal Charter. The charter enabled the stonemasons to meet in general assembly once a year and seems to have been a catalyst for a host of construction projects including numerous abbeys, castles and fortresses. Athelstan's importance to Stonemasons is mentioned in both the Regius and Cooke Manuscripts.

# THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

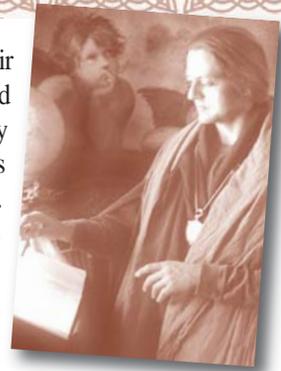
Masonic legend and some tradition is borrowed from the fanciful stories of the Knights Templar, an enigmatic and powerful military Order of fighting monks set up by Hugues de Payens in 1118. Their illustrious history has been the subject of numerous fascinating books and their effect upon the course of world history, religion and commerce is much greater than generally recognized. They were also responsible for the erection of many churches (eg Middle Temple on the Embankment in London shown on the left) and the assembly of numerous large estates and would themselves have employed a great many stone masons.

**“As every man progresses in life by education, so every Freemason is taught how he can be a better Man”**

The Knights Templars ostensible purpose was the protection of pilgrims on their journey from the coastal port of Jaffra to Jerusalem. Initially however, there were too few of them to be an effective escort. In any event, for the first nine years of their existence, they were far too busy purposefully digging under the ruins of King Solomons Temple to be offering any support to Pilgrims. It seems clear that during their excavations they discovered something of immense spiritual or material value for they swiftly became very rich and powerful and enjoyed this position for nearly two hundred years until the fall of the Holy Lands. The Knights Templars were effectively extinguished on Friday 13th October 1307 by King Phillip of France who, broke at the time, stole their lands and possessions (a fate he inflicted upon French Jews two years earlier) and with collusion from the Pope, instructed the Inquisition to torture any Templars he managed to round up to gain evidence to legitimise his grand theft. Many of the fit and able Knights (and their entourage) and most of their wealth managed to escape. It is from their exodus from France and other parts of Europe that much of Masonic folklore stems.

Given a background of organized secrecy, could it have been possible that Stonemasons guilds became convenient, if not unwitting, conduits of social refuge through the ages? Templars, who required

a degree of privacy from State or Church in their thoughts, discussions or travel arrangements would have found stonemasons guilds attractive. History however, contains virtually no written references linking KT and Freemasonry until the 18th C. Most serious historians believe that a link with the Knights Templars only came about through marketing skills displayed by Ramsay in his Oration in 1737 when he attributed (in error) the origins of Freemasonry to Crusaders and the Knights of St John. Ramsey, a talented self-publicist, would have known that such a pedigree was bound to impress the French audience whom he was addressing. Robert Brydon, in his book *The Masons and the Rosy Cross*, informs us that Alexander Duechar confused the issue still further by his attempts to revive Scottish Templarism and integrating it within the ambit of Freemasonry.



## PRINCIPLES

**BROTHERLY LOVE** is the concern which each Freemason has for his Brother, which is readily shown by tolerance and respect for the beliefs, opinions and practices of his fellows and his willingness to care for his Brother and that Brother's dependants.

**RELIEF** The Freemason is by nature a charitable man. He will cheerfully and kindly assist those less fortunate (whether Freemasons or not!). He will care for and support his community - local, national and international.

**TRUTH** The Freemason believes in Truth in all things in honesty and integrity in his personal, business and public life, in fair dealings and in firm standards of decency and morality.

**EDUCATION** As every man progresses in Life by education so every Freemason is taught how he can be a better Man. For a Mason this is done by a series of degrees - each degree educates him and answers some questions but leaves a door beyond. When the candidate has grasped the teaching of one degree, that door is opened by his progress to the next degree. Freemasonry is believed to have begun its evolution 500 or more years ago among the bands of working, skilled builders known as "Masons".

**FREEMASONRY & RELIGION** Freemasonry is an ancient and honorable Society. Its principles are just steady standards of life and conduct in a changing world. The practice by the Freemason of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth and the other principles of the Craft will go a long way to making a good man better.

## A WAY OF LIFE

There are about 4 million Freemasons under more than 100 "regular" Grand Lodges worldwide. Membership of the Craft is open to every respectable man who believes in his personal Supreme Being - usually known in Masonic terms as the Great Architect of the Universe, Grand Geometrician of the Universe or Most High. These descriptive names show the importance the Freemason places on his Supreme Being in the order of things in Life.

Based on the rich historic facts and the promise of real friendship based on solid moral conducts, the author of this humble article joined the fraternity on April of 2007 and since then I had have learn valuable lessons, that will guide me thru life. ■

