

INTRODUCTION:

PRELIMINARY NOTES AND RESOURCE SUGGESTIONS

Welcome

A number of years ago, I was asked by various people (both Freemasons and non) in different parts of the world if I would be willing to write a brief course on Freemasonry. As I was about to begin to write it, following writing myself a broad outline, a situation arose where a Brother, who was going to tutor the second course undertaken by my Lodge's *Certificate of Masonic Studies*, became hospitalised, and I was asked if I would be willing to take his place for the time being. As a consequence, this very course was put off for nearly two years.

In the meantime, instead of actually *writing* this course simultaneously, I simply let it sit.

So here we are, starting the course, with my notes as they were back then with, admittedly, the wonderful additional experience of having had the privilege of tutoring the *Victorian Lodge of Research's* Certificate course.

I'll be, nonetheless, *writing* the material as we go along. As a consequence, some segments I may want to revise based in part on the feedback I receive from yourselves (though I may of course be somewhat pig-headed and decide to keep things as they are even given sensible advice to the contrary!).

Surprisingly given the requests I had received over time, only ten people are currently subscribed to this course. In many ways, this is undoubtedly a blessing in disguise: a blessing, in that it allows me to fully consider your own feedback as we go along; and, I trust, an easier acceptance from yourselves of 'draft' failings as we go along. Though self-subscriptions are now closed, if there is someone you know who would like to be included (within the next few weeks only), I'll add them to the list.

About me

Perhaps I should mention some of my own Masonic affiliations given this course offerings.

That some members of my family are and were Freemasons is, to a large extent, beside the point. I put off my application to join until the late 1980s. I have therefore been in the Craft for about 20 years. Given that the average age of Freemasons is past retirement age and more often than not joined in their 20s or early 30s, it follows that most Freemasons have been in the Craft for longer than I have.

It may even be the case that some you (as is the case for the courses run by my Lodge) have been in the Craft longer. Longer, however, does not necessarily mean that Freemasonry's historical nor, indeed, its essential characteristics have been carefully considered by most - although you may indeed have seriously reflected on the Craft, in which case your insights can only add to the overall interaction amongst us all!

I am also, as it happens, currently in the Chair of the *Victorian Lodge of Research*, 218 UGLV ('218' refers to the number on the register of the warrant given by the *United Grand Lodge of Victoria* [UGLV]). It is usually, but not universally, the case that Lodges have a 'register' number provided). This is my third time in the Chair of a Lodge, the second for 218.

I should point out that, clearly, whatever I express in this course – although deriving from various readings, open papers delivered to the Lodge, various visits to various Lodges in different parts of the world, and discussions with fellow Freemasons – reflects my understanding, and should in no way be taken to be reflecting views of the Lodge(s) of which I am a member nor the Grand Lodge with which these are affiliated. In fact, in some cases, what I present is likely at odds with the views of the current Grand Master and with (current) official pronouncements by my own Grand Lodge.

Masonic Education

Until quite recently, I would suggest that Masonic education (ie, education *about* Freemasonry) has on the whole surprisingly absent. What tended to occur (and in some places still occurs) is that the *ritual* is well memorised and the ritual workings (ie, the movements required) well rehearsed. The *when* or *why* or *what does it mean* generally taking but a poor back-drop to the *how*.

Throughout this set, therefore, what is of importance is not so much the specific variations that may occur in a Lodge, but rather reflections on Freemasonry in general, questions as to its inherent nature, and developments across time.

Course outline

You may already have surveyed the titles of the proposed sequence of the ensuing seven pdfs. These should give a brief overview as to what I intend to address in this course:

Historical Survey and Watersheds

Landmarks and Essence of Freemasonry

The Freemason, the Lodge, and Grand Lodge

The Three Fundamental Degrees

Freemasonry as Secular Impulse

Degree Structures: a three-fold form

The Future Beckons

In the *Historical Survey and Watersheds*, I wish to address, in rather broad strokes, the development of Freemasonry over the centuries. This will provide some foundation for what follows. In *Landmarks and the Essence of Freemasonry*, what can be regarded as some of the more controversial philosophical aspects are addressed. Controversial, as there has never been agreement as to what, if any, are the specific Landmarks (certainly various authors make their own claims), nor, for that matter, what are essential characteristics of Freemasonry (the two are intimately intertwined in any case).

Further discussions arising from considerations addressed in the previous two pdfs are explored in the ensuing two pdfs. In the first instance, the relationship between a *Freemason, the Lodge, and Grand Lodges* – and, for that matter, their inter-relationship; and what constitutes the *Fundamental Degrees of Freemasonry*.

By this stage, various socio-political considerations will already have been raised or implied. In the ensuing pdf, some of this will be taken up in *Freemasonry as Secular Impulse*. In case you're interested, a paper I delivered last year to the *Victorian Lodge of Research* will soon be available on its website (when I get around to putting it up, which should be by the end of April). The pdf that follows, *Degree Structures: a Threefold Form*, will look at the various orders and degrees 'within' or 'appended' to Freemasonry in general. Here is where we'll look (in overly brief ways) at the 33°, the Knights Templars, SRIA, Memphis Misraim, etc.

Finally, considering all these reflections which I trust will be supplemented by your own reading in other places and various discussions you are encouraged to have, what of the *Future of Freemasonry*? Here considerations as to what *our* generation is doing to and in Freemasonry is considered and consequences broached.

The course, as a whole, will have achieved, I hope, a foundation from which to undertake further

research both independently or formally. Also, an overview of Freemasonry in general will, hopefully, be achieved.

What will NOT be included

If you're hoping to find in the course the 'secret' words or 'handshakes' or 'signs', you'll be disappointed. These are, in any case, available in numerous online locations. This does not mean that certain words used as pass/words will not be included. They very well may, but only in the context in which they arise, and without mentioning their usage *as* pass/word.

Resources

In each pdf, I'll reference various books or articles. Pre-empting some more general questions, however, here are a couple of books I strongly urge you to obtain (whether by purchasing¹ or library borrowing). In case you also read French, the third provides an important addition.

Naudon, Paul

Secret History of Freemasonry, isbn 159477028X

Jones B. E.

Freemasons' Guide and Compendium, isbn 0245561250

Bernheim, Alain

Une certaine idée de la franc-maçonnerie, isbn 9782844545640 (in French)

There are also numerous online discussion forums. If you're already using one or another of those, by all means feel free to discuss your reflections thereon (please acknowledge this course as a source if appropriate - www.fourhares.com/freemasonry/course.html). If you'd *like* to participate in an online forum but do not know which to choose, I recommend especially:

Quarry Masonic Forum - tamrin.proboards.com

Other online resources are included within links at the Quarry Masonic Forum. Of those, I would especially recommend:

Pietre-Stones - www.freemasons-freemasonry.com

my own Resources page - www.fourhares.com/freemasonry/resources.html

FAQs

It's difficult to pre-empt 'frequently' asked questions prior to questions actually being asked... but here goes.

1) With regards to *Wikipedia*, I find much of the information on Freemasonry rather biased. Various attempts have been made to balance this a little, some of which has been successful, some not. It is still, however, a useful resource to have, and can provide the basis for further questions;

2) Apart from the *Square and Compasses*, there is no other emblem that is universally used by Freemasonry throughout the world. It should be remembered, however, that it is not only Freemasonry that uses the Square and Compasses, so seeing these does not necessarily mean Freemasonry

¹ If purchasing online, using my site gives me a few cents: astore.amazon.com/fourharescom-20?_encoding=UTF8&node=5

is implied;

3) There is no central governing body. Various *Grand Lodges* exist which have, at most, 'governance' of their own respective warranted Lodges – and 'governance' is even here too strong a term in most jurisdictions;

4) Not all Freemasons *recognise* each other as Freemasons. This is in part due to historical developments – and something we shall look at in coming pdfs;

5) Yes, donations for this course are welcome... I'll send details twice during this course: half-way and at the end. 'Donation' means just that, and remains entirely at your discretion should you be able and willing to donate.

Course engagement

As I mentioned on the enrolment page, I would like your involvement. Basically, unless I get your feedback, I remain in the dark as to how useful the way in which I have written (or rather, will write) the course remains.

On the enrolment page is written that:

Participation in each module is required before access is given to the ensuing pdf. Participation includes contributing your views to the specific points raised in each module/pdf on study.fourhares.com. Failure to do so results in being removed from the subscription list. Be aware, however, that such contribution need not be extensive: rather, a minimal amount of reflection showing that you have indeed read the material is what is looked for. Furthermore, disagreement with anything I present is of course perfectly fine!

'About you' survey: In order to ascertain the range of participants, the following questions (and only those) will be asked via a survey on Polldaddy.com. Please do not subscribe if you are unwilling to answer these honestly.

This 'pre-course introductory pdf' only *requires* (but see below for more work) that you participate in the anonymous survey. I will not, of course, be able to ascertain who has participated. Please complete the survey so that I at least have a sense for the range of participants (being only ten, it's even more important for me to see who the offering appealed to and the range of *non*-subscribers!). The questions only include:

age range

gender

Freemasonic affiliation

location

For the survey, please go to:

<http://surveys.polldaddy.com/s/BB9F91822F3AFD26/>

Contacting me and pdf links

On the first page my name is an email link (the link only works with *some* pdf readers), and most instances of blue writing are (or should be, unless I've overlooked it) links.

In case you wish to record it, my email address is

jmd@fourhares.com

With regards to study.fourhairs.com, I need to do a major software update to the site prior to your registrations thereon... more information will be forthcoming with the next pdf, due in a few weeks. I trust you enjoy this course!!!

For brief research / your own notes

meanings of

Grand Lodge:

Grand Orient:

Landmark:

Watershed:

Secular:

Degree:

Grade:

If you have never used the 'define' function within Google, I suggest you write the following (exactly as is):

define: grand lodge

For some terms, the function is extremely useful, for other terms, far less so. For example, 'define: degree' mainly returns mathematical meanings, whereas 'define: masonic degree' returns nothing (at this stage).

Your own brief notes to the above terms will make much of what follows more engaging!