

This two-part essay provides a critique of the 'populist policy' guiding Freemasonry in Queensland and suggests rather that the esoteric nature of Freemasonry should be its guide into the future.

# Inverting the Paradigm

An Alternative Direction  
for Queensland  
Freemasonry.

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## Preamble

*I write as a relative newcomer to the Queensland Constitution and as a very recent Immediate Past Master. I came from an interstate constitution where I was awarded the Grand Master's Order for services to Freemasonry.*

*Until recently I accepted, reluctantly, that Freemasonry had to make some concession to the times. Consequent to recent experience however, my views have undergone a radical shift. I freely accept that my following comments will be viewed as being retrogressive and elitist by many quarters of Freemasonry.*

*Moreover, I acknowledge that my perceptions of the United Grand Lodge of Queensland have been shaped by my experience of Freemasonry in north Queensland.*

*I also hasten to add that my observations and comment are very much my own; they are offered completely independently of my Lodge, of which I am very fond, and are offered in good faith and on behalf of those Freemasons who might share my concerns as to the direction of the Craft.*



# PART ONE



## Introduction

On Saturday morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 2011, I received a survey telephone call as part of the United Grand Lodge of Queensland's (UGLQ) survey of Craft members. I was delighted to participate as it gave me an infrequent opportunity to 'get a few things off my chest'. Coincidentally the following night, ABC TV Compass aired a programme entitled *Whatever Happened to... the Freemasons?*

The foregoing set in train this essay, being the distillation of several years of concern at the direction of the Craft. Since embarking on this essay I received my November copy of *The Qld Freemason* which appositely contains a Report from the Membership and Marketing Committee<sup>1</sup>. I will offer comment on this report below.

The very title of Geraldine Doogue's Compass story provides an obvious signpost towards the serious and various crises of confidence confronting Freemasonry. These crises include *inter alia* declining membership, future direction, conflicts over property and argument over ritual. This essay however focuses upon membership and Masonic culture. It will contend that, in an endeavour to address these questions, the UGLQ is clutching at straws and that by doing so it is only compounding the problem.

A readily accepted assumption within Freemasonry was amply expounded on the Compass programme by Victorian Mason, Ian Goddard: "Freemasonry, if it is going to survive, it's got to be more public."<sup>2</sup> Giving weight to this assumption, Masons have in recent years been adjured by the UGLQ and other constitutions to become family friendly; to become open; to be seen in public as often as possible; to wear shirts and caps emblazoned with anything Masonic; to become active and be seen to be active, in community fund-raising and to man sausage stands and candy floss stalls at country fair grounds. Indeed, extending upon the Compass programme, if we choose to join Masonic motorcycle clubs, masonic caravan clubs and every other 'normal' manifestation of social recreation, so much the better.

Moreover, not only are Freemasons encouraged to become more open, we are expected to become more inclusive as far as our wives are concerned. Long gone are the nights when father went out to Lodge and returned late at night. Gone are the dark secrets contained in that much maligned black bag and gone are the annual Freemasons Dinners for their wives. The contemporary Freemason is purportedly a sober, clean living family man whose idea of a rip-roaring time is a Masonic outing with the wives, happily raising money for charity.

The culture of Freemasonry has changed to the extent that it has become natural for many of today's Masonic wives to go out on Lodge evenings and socialize together whilst the men are at Lodge. This is in fact the case in my Lodge, being in the country where the spirit of family and neighborliness is strong. In itself, for those wives that wish to attend, this is no bad thing. It must be said however that our Lodge still holds its traditional South [festive board] after the meeting.

Some Lodge's however have dispensed with the South altogether, preferring to meet at a restaurant or somesuch with the ladies. One order with which I am associated, meets in the ante-room immediately after the meeting to hurriedly drink the obligatory toasts with soft-drink before rushing off to meet the ladies at a restaurant. I might add that I haven't yet been to one of their restaurant dinners.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Qld Freemason*. November 2011. Pp14-15.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Goddard: *Whatever Happened to... the Freemasons?* Compass. ABCTV. 14 August 2011. Transcript. Website.

This depth of cultural change within Freemasonry was amply illustrated by the Compass programme. One of the ladies interviewed extolled the ‘inclusive’ nature of Freemasonry, using the pronoun ‘we’ on occasion to describe her masonic experience:

“The good thing about Freemasonry is it's not just about charity. It's about morals and ethics and the way we stand as a person within our community. So I think it develops you in that side of things as well as the charity and the social side. So I don't think that we would have achieved the same thing if we had joined a social club.”<sup>3</sup>

Aside from the obvious that the good lady has completely missed the point about Freemasonry, one has to raise the next obvious question as to when did Freemasons admit women? Expanding upon this question, I put a further question, the more open we get, how long will it be before we are compelled into accepting women? Another Masonic wife argued pungently:

“If Freemasonry offers so many wonderful things, so many wonderful ways of enriching one's personality and educating a person down the right path, why don't they offer it to both male and female? Why should we exclude half of society?”<sup>4</sup>

Moving on from the obvious riposte that if that particular lady is genuinely interested in the ideals of the Craft she has the option of joining that most worthy Order of the Eastern Star, I seriously ask, are we creating a rod for our own backs?

Freemasonry traditionally denies it is a service organization. In the past its charitable endeavours have been renowned for their unostentatious and oblique nature. This was in keeping with Masonic culture. The idea of publicly trumpeting its own virtues was unheard of and wearing anything else in public other than a Masonic tie was frowned upon.

We are however being told today to get into the market place and mix it with the big boys. Get out, put your cap on, be seen and flog a few more sausages. Sounds like Lions - bingo!

I describe this contemporary Masonic as ‘populist policy’. In pursuit of such policy, I contend that we are distilling our Order to the status of yet another service club. And worse, we are competing in a shrinking market for those willing to join such? Just how far we can change the public face of our Craft to satisfy public perceptions about us remains a moot question?



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<sup>3</sup> Kerrie Goddard: Compass. 14 August 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Noha Sayed. Compass. 14 August 2011.

## A Critique of Populist Policy

I am struck by the lack of intellectual rigour about the direction of Freemasonry and the blithe assumption that Freemasonry needs ‘modernising’. Moreover, I am saddened at the widespread acceptance of the principle that any modernisation is better than none.

Comments such as those of Masonic writer, Peter Lazar, made on the programme: “providing we can bring it into the 21st century and maintain *some* [emphasis added] of those great morals and values which we espouse I think it has a future for men in Australia[.]” are distinctly unhelpful. An inherently negative comment, Lazar assumes Freemasonry is rooted somewhere else and needs to be redrafted for the times and, implicit in this assumption, is that during the redrafting process it will necessarily lose at least *some* of its “great morals and values”.<sup>5</sup>

The great moral truths, ethical precepts and life’s lessons of Freemasonry are surely transcendent? They do not belong to any ‘period’ in time but rather help us become better men in coping with the changing times and, most importantly, provide moral direction in new territory. The Landmarks of our Order, an oft expressed and much misunderstood phrase, should serve to guide our way.

As I see it, populist policy is policy on the run born of desperation consequent to declining membership. This declining membership can be attributed largely to an aging membership base; insufficient candidates entering the Craft to counter this natural decline; poor public perception of the Craft; a changing social dynamic and an extended period of weak intellectual leadership within the Craft.

Furthermore, populist policy rests on a questionable premise, namely, that Freemasonry is in ‘decline’. I say questionable in that this premise is only correct if it is judged against the immediate past. It seems to have quite escaped attention that perhaps membership numbers of the immediate past were artificially inflated by the social dynamic that was post-war Australia. The Compass programme asserted that Masonic membership in Australia peaked at 330,000 after World War Two. Indeed, the programme asserted that in 1955 one in 16 Australian men was a Freemason.<sup>6</sup>

Lazar suggests that:

When the men came back from the war and they had their experiences in war and in lodge when in camp or in prison camp, they wanted to relive some of that with their mates after they came home. So I think it was an opportunity for ex-servicemen to get back together again, and to reminisce about their war time experiences and how it was.

It should be firmly pointed out that post-war Australia was a completely different place than the Australia of today. In that social dynamic most people were ‘joiners’ of social, sporting and service organisations in a manner that they are not today. Freemasonry is not the only organisation suffering from lack of members because of the changed social dynamic. Moreover, if the Compass figures are correct, sustaining a one in 16 membership across the male population of Australia indefinitely would be a hard ask.

From that high point, ‘decline’ may be seen as natural and inevitable. Paradoxically, it may even be desirable. But more of that later.

Returning however to the notion of populist policy, I suggest that this manifests itself in four clearly identifiable aspects: being a family friendly organisation; being seen as more

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<sup>5</sup> ABC 1. Compass. *Whatever Happened to... the Freemasons?* Transcript. Website.

<sup>6</sup> *loc.cit.*

open to the public; actively encouraging membership and being aggressively involved in charity. I shall address these individually.

### ***Family Friendly***

In the context of a changing social dynamic, Masonic leaders adduce that the secretive and gender exclusive nature of the Craft is no longer acceptable to the contemporary family.

Populist policy centres on the notion of a 'family friendly' organisation, promoting the involvement of wives and partners in Lodge activities as much as possible. Indeed, Grand Lodge information booklets for intending candidates are excellently produced and most informative, everything the happy couple needs to cosy up to before the fire and read before he joins and she inquisits on his return.

Freemasonry was a fraternal organisation. At this point in time it still remains, perhaps only just, a fraternal organisation. To this end, the obvious must be strongly pointed out, namely, that because a man chooses to become a Freemason and is fortunate to have his wife's support in his endeavours, it does not follow that his wife necessarily wants to become involved in the social affairs of the Lodge. Indeed, it is far from axiomatic that she is going to have anything in common with other masonic wives. Moreover, any social pressure applied by other wives can readily disavow her of the Craft. To cite an unfortunate personal experience, although strongly supportive of my commitment to Freemasonry, my wife was seriously disavowed of participating in Masonic social activities by the unpleasantness and politics of the ladies in another Lodge of which I was a member.

### ***Open Freemasonry***

Part of Freemasonry's very essence, and dare I suggest, its appeal, is its enigmatic nature. The very act of now trying to 'be more open' is to some extent an admission that this quality is now unsound. If Freemasonry is to become more open it must, in large part, continue to divest itself of the very nature of what it is. The nonsensical cliché about Freemasonry not being a secret society but a society with secrets, just plainly won't do. The antonym to 'secret' is 'open'. So if we are not a 'secret' society we must be an 'open' society. Rather like virginity, one either is or isn't.

So as an open society, why do we have secrets? If one pushes the envelope hard enough it is inevitable that by trying to be more open the Craft is inviting wholesale cultural change. The door having been opened slightly is now being forced by cultural pressure. Can the door be shut? Perhaps. I suggest below a paradigm shift that might restore some dignity and tradition back to the Order.

Suffice it be said here, that without its secrets, without its ritual, without its traditions, standards of dress and dignity *ergo* its enigmatic qualities, Freemasonry is nothing but another service organization.

### ***Membership***

The populist policies of encouraging membership growth - which I might add, appear to be having only patchy results - are aimed at attracting any warm body provided he is of 'good character' and not a 'stupid' atheist.

Whilst this is a laudable and democratic aim, it does not discriminate between the dunderhead and the man who is going to make a positive contribution to Freemasonry, in, I hasten to add, whatever manner that contribution might take.

It is probably true that in the post-war years and the so-called halcyon days of Freemasonry the secrets of the Craft were an extension of the concept of 'mateship'. I have no doubt these were, in many cases, a pathway to social interaction, job security, professional

advancement and so forth. In short, a pathway for all the wrong reasons. But, in the context of the times, it worked and served a purpose.

However, in today's world, I suggest that in the quest for new members the secrets of the Craft are being sold too cheaply. Not only are we telegraphing our punches by offering prospective candidates glossy brochures that coyly hint at various ceremonies, we are actively recruiting any warm body. At one lodge in another constitution with which I had some association, one member was a renowned recruiter to the extent that the Lodge was doing first degree ceremonies every month for twelve months. This particular member constantly referred to the Craft as the 'club' and had less of an intellectual and philosophical understanding of Freemasonry than did the Tyler's sword. The quality of candidates reflected this misdirected zealotry. Most didn't progress with the Craft.

I was also aware that in some lodges so keen were they on gaining candidates that even the formal rigmarole of an investigation committee was often sidelined. Not only were they initiating candidates of sometimes questionable character, many of the lapsed candidates simply hadn't the foggiest idea of what was going on. Indeed, as many of us well appreciate, there is nothing more disheartening than delivering a well-rehearsed charge with passion and commitment to a candidate whose eyes reflect the dull comprehension of an ox.

I would suggest that a review of our current membership dynamic indicates that Freemasonry has lost its appeal to the professional and academic strata of society. Why is that? Where is the intellectual driving force of the Craft? The decline of lodges of research is case to point. How many of our worthy and keen brethren, members of innumerable side degrees, are truly conversant with the wealth of literature and philosophical nuances of the Craft, let alone their side degrees? It has been my sad experience over the years to be disappointed in the lack of depth of understanding of senior masons in their 'art'.

### ***Charity***

As noted above, Masonic charitable endeavours have traditionally been characterised by their unostentatious and oblique nature. Modern Freemasonry, by contrast, is very much upfront about its public spiritedness. Indeed, in its public information brochures Freemasonry makes much about its charitable credentials – obviously with an eye to enhancing its credibility with the public.

Charity is a term used extensively throughout Masonic lore and ritual. In the first degree charge the candidate is adjured to “exercise that virtue which may justly be denominated the distinguishing characteristic of a Freemason's heart ...” The first degree Tracing Board makes ample reference to the excellence of Charity. The top stone of Jacob's Ladder being emblematic of Charity: “which comprehends the whole, and the Mason who is possessed of this virtue in the most ample sense may justly be deemed to have attained the summit of his profession ...” Innumerable other passages refer, but, in accordance with ritual, “I need not here dilate upon its excellences”.

I would suggest however that in the contemporary context the term 'charity' requires clarification.

In the beautiful words of Saint Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians [xiii 2-3] concerning the three virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, the latter is described as being the greatest. It is however commonly accepted that a more sympathetic if not accurate translation of the original Greek would render 'charity' to mean a kindly state of mind towards all men *ergo* 'love'.

This translation renders therefore its omniscience in Freemasonry totally explicable. Every Freemason is expected to be at one with and extend brotherly love to the world. The significance of separating the concept 'charity' from its literal meaning of dispensing material support for the needy becomes readily apparent.

This does not mean however that Freemasons are not ‘charitable’ *per se*. Far from it, but traditionally Freemasons talk about ‘relief’ rather than ‘charity’. This is given ample evidence in the questions to the Second Degree where ‘Relief’ is declared to be one of the three grand principles upon which the order is founded. As is elegantly declared in Mackey, relief is:

To relieve the distress is a duty incumbent on all men. Particularly on Masons, who are linked together by an indissoluble chain of sincere affection. To sooth the unhappy, to sympathise with their misfortunes, to compassionate in their miseries, and to restore peace to their troubled minds, is the great aim we have in view.<sup>7</sup>

Paradoxically, Masonic ritual has in large part contributed to this confusion of terms. In the Northeast Charge of the First Degree the terms ‘relief’ and ‘charity’ are interposed elegantly but carelessly and, upon an impressionable candidate, the notion of charity and relief become interchangeable.

Returning therefore to the immediate question, why then the recent emphasis within Freemasonry on public charity? The Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul are charitable organisations with religious components. The Smith Family, Oxfam and Lifeline are charitable organisations *per se*. Their only *raison d’etre* is the provision of charity to the needy.

In this light is Freemasonry a charitable organisation? Quite obviously not. We are not a religious organisation nor do we exist for the sole function of dispensing charity.

Moreover, it should be noted that the Lodge is not an organisation in the tradition of a cooperative society. Freemasons don’t pay in with the expectation of getting something out. Masons are certainly, and always have been, committed to providing relief to families and fellow Freemasons fallen on hard times. This however is a totally different proposition from being a family oriented cooperative.

There exist in Freemasonry a large number of most worthy brothers who enjoy doing good works for each other and for the community and are happy to be seen and to be acknowledged publicly for doing so. They deserve the credit they receive.

There exists another stratum of brothers who do not enjoy doing good works. Not because they are miserable old curmudgeons but because they feel uncomfortable in the role of beneficer. There are also those who simply do not want to be involved in other people’s families. Whilst happy to contribute financially, these Masons have other expectations from the Craft. To these Masons, the Lodge represents, in a sense, a short retreat from the hurly-burly of life. This group of Masons are likely to be the first to leave the Craft if they become obligated to be more active in charitable and social activities.

The major charitable undertakings of Grand Lodge are laudable and are tangible and worthy expressions of Masonic support for the community. Those brethren that want to support these will of course be received with open arms. But it is important that these undertakings do not become an end in themselves. Charity is more than grand projects. Relief, as ever, starts at home, in the Lodges. Relief is the welcoming hand to a new chum to the community; the genuine interest in a sick Freemason and the genuine love of one brother for the other.

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<sup>7</sup> Mackey, A. *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*. McClure Publishing Philadelphia. 1917.

### ***The Membership and Marketing Committee Report***

This aforementioned report purportedly details the findings of the August 2011 survey of Queensland Freemasons. Let me say at the outset that I consider this report to be far from adequate.

It states that in commissioning the survey: “Our prerequisites were very simply [sic] – all we wanted was to be told what our members truly thought”.<sup>8</sup> The use of the word ‘prerequisite’ is perhaps unfortunate, inferring as it does to something requisite as being an antecedent condition. For example, a certain standard knowledge of Latin might well be a prerequisite for an advanced degree in Classics. Finding out what people think is an aim or objective not a prerequisite.

The report then expands on this ‘prerequisite’ by adding several qualifications, namely: “We insisted that they contacted those who had resigned ...” and “...we asked that ladies be surveyed as well” and, somewhat disingenuously having already given at least two instructions before, “our only request being that 40% of those being contacted had to be from regional Queensland ...”

Having run my own research consultancy I am well aware that precise Terms of Reference are critical to the accurate aggregation, compilation and analysis of appropriate data. I am also aware that the contracted company would have provided a detailed report addressing the Terms of Reference through the extrapolation of the data.

To this end, such an important, indeed seminal, study deserves more than the brief overview provided by the Committee. Given that this study in effect purports to be the underpinning quantitative structure for the direction of Freemasonry in Queensland, it is even more deserving of detailed address.

It will not do, for example, to say: “that the anecdotal evidence that we have been working on for the past four years was indeed correct”. What ‘anecdotal’ evidence? This comment is not further quantified and is therefore meaningless.

The triumphalist passage and paragraph pertaining to a “very vocal and noisy minority” is as alienating as it is insulting. What minority, I for one am unaware of such. Am I, for example, by articulating views contrary to accepted writ, part of this minority? Whomsoever they (or we) might be, I have no doubt they will feel most aggrieved by being slapped down in such a patronising and, dare I say, arrogant manner.

Quite obviously there must have been in the survey some criticism of the workings of the UGLQ and the direction of Freemasonry. I for one was interviewed for forty-five minutes on the subject. I might add that I must be included in the 10% who disagreed with the quality of the magazine!

It is axiomatic that any research programme should analyse all sides of the equation. Criticism, even minor, should be taken seriously and addressed. Research is not just about reaffirming perceptions and prejudices.

It is therefore incumbent upon the Membership and Marketing Committee to provide members with a detailed and open analysis of the survey data. Information to be provided should at the very least include:

- How many respondents were targeted?
- How many were actually interviewed?
- What percentage was this of our overall membership?
- How many women were interviewed?
- How many lapsed Freemasons were interviewed?
- What other comments did they offer?

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<sup>8</sup> *The Old Freemason*. November 2011. Pp14-15.

- What were the demographic, age, socio-economic and regional cohort breakdowns?
- Did regional responses differ from metropolitan responses?
- Did responses differ from region to region?

The foregoing represent only a fraction of questions that, for the money expended, all Queensland Freemasons are entitled to know. Indeed, I would hope that the data reveals a great deal more valuable information about the nature of Freemasonry in Queensland.

Having said thus, I consider this recent survey of members to be only one aspect of a thorough analysis of the direction of the Craft.

Interviewing the converted or even the once converted to glean their ‘opinion’ as to the direction of Freemasonry was indeed a valuable exercise. However, the second and by far the more important research exercise is to glean the opinions of the unconverted or should we say perhaps, the not-yet converted.

Specifically we need to identify those factors and aspects of Freemasonry that will attract younger men into the Craft. We need therefore to clearly define a cohort profile of prospective candidates. Having thus done, we then need to ascertain with a high degree of accuracy how we can communicate the transcendental truths of Freemasonry to that spiritual market niche.

Bland assertions by elderly and / or middle aged men and their wives about the need to be more open just doesn’t cut the marketing mustard. Such decisions need to be made on incontrovertible evidence, not guesswork or assumption.

Although I have been forthright in questioning the brevity of their report, let me commend the integrity, hard work and commitment of the Committee and remind them that their good work is far from complete.



## Inverting the Paradigm

The debate about the cultural direction of the UGLQ brings to mind the perennial question concerning the essence and structure of Freemasonry. The essence of Freemasonry, as exemplified in the Moral Law and the Landmarks, is immutable. Structurally however Freemasonry remains in a vortex of change as the Craft grapples with the question of contemporaneity.

Rather than be accused of being a neo-Canute standing against the tide of Masonic development, let me invert the paradigm. Looking at the question of declining membership laterally, what if we accepted immediate decline as not only being inevitable but desirable? What if we sought to distance ourselves from the populist policy of pursuing warm bodies to fill chairs and saw this as an opportunity to clean the Augean stables and return to our roots, which were unashamedly reticent and exclusive?

Already I can hear the howls of protest about elitism and so forth. So let me confront this criticism immediately. Freemasonry, by its very nature, is elitist in that it has restrictions on membership. Freemasonry's exclusivity and elitism reflects the very essence of the organisation – and let it be said now that I am talking about moral, commitment and intellectual elitism, not social. So, I posit this point for serious consideration. If we are getting smaller, so be it. That reflects the social dynamic. We should look towards adapting to that dynamic. Instead of prostituting ourselves in the shrinking market place of those who want to join a service organisation, we should consider our esoteric nature, get smaller and become more exclusive.

No matter how hard we try to cast ourselves as being part of the contemporary milieu the obvious point is overlooked that Freemasonry is far from being a 'normal' and 'contemporary' society. Freemasonry is, and should be proud of, the fact that it is one of the most unusual associations in the world.

It is a society that claims its roots in the medieval traditions of trades and chivalry and, in doing so, claims that its secrets, rituals and moral truths derived from this era are transcendent and relevant to contemporary society. It is a fraternal association that excludes women from membership, an oddity indeed in today's politically correct environment. The *raison d'être* for Freemasonry is to provide a vehicle for moral men to gather together to contemplate upon the profound moral truths encapsulated in its rituals; and to practice brotherly love, relief and truth for their own sake and not for public recognition.

It is a society whose only precondition for membership is a belief in a Supreme Being. To this end, men from all religious persuasions can gather together in prayer and contemplation - surely a potential gift of inestimable value to the world. And last, but by no means least, it is an association where its members truly share equality, a quality by no means unwanted in society writ large. In a world characterised by flux, political correctness and moral malaise, Freemasonry remains an enigma.

Put another way, Freemasonry is not a secret society but rather a closed society - a closed society centered on moral precepts and traditions extending back into antiquity. It is a society closed to women, closed to men who do not have a faith in a Supreme Being, closed to men of undesirable character, closed to men who are of seditious nature and so forth. Put another way, ours is an exclusive society open only to moral men.

Clearly then, to be a Freemason is to be a man of a different stamp and cast. In this light therefore, why should we want to be anything else except unusual. By stressing our 'usualness' we are pandering to the banal, the commonplace.

Thus, by inverting the paradigm and working from the reality of 'who', 'why' and 'what' we are, we may be better able to address the questions pertaining to the 'where' and 'how' we might craft our future direction.

# PART TWO



## Towards An Alternative Future

Let me stress that the foregoing does not mean a retreat into a ‘Fortress Freemasonry’ mindset. It is rather the recognition of our strengths, of who we are and what we stand for and thereafter building upon these in a more considered manner. The following are some practical directions we might consider in order to put some meat on the inverted paradigm.

What is often overlooked in the debate contemporaneity is the very obvious fact that ‘the Lodge’ is the fundament of Freemasonry. It is at the Lodge level that Freemasonry flourishes or fails. The Lodge is both the *sanctorum* of its members and the public face of the Craft.

All of us need a reason to go to Lodge and what better reason than the simple fact that we enjoy it and that it means something to us. Herein lies the rub. What does it mean? Lodge attendance can mean different things to different brethren. Although we all appreciate the ideals and tenets of the Craft, many of us enjoy the tradition and dignity of ritual; some prefer the spiritual aspect of lodge membership whilst others enjoy the fraternal; many of us enjoy the immediate sense of community Lodge provides us whilst others enjoy visiting other lodges. Lodge attendance is therefore multi-dimensional in its scope.

Freemasonry however is not a pick and choose social club. It is a serious fraternal commitment to each other and the working of the Lodge. This is elegantly and forcibly impressed upon the candidate in his obligation before Raising. It is however a sad fact that skipping Lodge meetings becomes an easy habit to fall into. I am not going to expand on the question of Lodge culture as this has been covered elegantly by many writers elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> However, in the context of populist policy and without meaning to be deliberately provocative the following points are surely obvious:

- There exist too many Lodges that are moribund and need to be closed down
- Too many brethren are Masons in name only and are unwilling to participate in Masonic activities
- Too many of the brethren are either too resistant to change or too desperate in their accepting of any manner of change
- There are too many brethren who shouldn’t have been introduced to Freemasonry in the first place
- There are too many ‘monthly’ Masons
- In common with other organisations, there exist too many malcontent brethren who seek to cause trouble in the wings by their carping comment.

Pursuing a more traditional style of Freemasonry does not mean that Freemasons have to become completely invisible. Many Lodges, particularly in country towns, are characterised by an obscure building, perpetually locked, with no details about when or what happens inside. To the casual observer it would appear that the Lodge is defunct. Moreover, there is often no mention of Freemasonry in any of the community directories and no advertising in the local press. In short, with the exception of the building, there is no indication whatsoever that Freemasonry exists in the community.

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<sup>9</sup> See Goding *et.al.*

The invisible profile of the Lodge clearly will not do. The following are immediate and achievable suggestions to assist promoting the Lodge:

- At the very least the Lodge should register in one of the community directories detailing a readily accessible contact point.
- Run a regular monthly line advertisement in the local paper.
- On special occasions such as Installations issue press releases.
- As a matter of pride, if nothing else, place a notice on the building advising the world that the Lodge is still alive.
- More Brethren should consider wearing Masonic ties and subtle lapel pins as appropriate.
- Choose an appropriate and under-resourced charity not presently being serviced by another community organisation and commit to *discreet* sponsorship. Word of mouth will soon let the community know the Lodge's good works.

It is imperative that the Lodge develop a depth of Masonic culture that is welcoming to newcomers and supportive of established members.

We should remember that we are first and foremost a fraternity. It is at the South that the brethren get to meet each other socially and cement the bonds and virtues that have been extolled in the Temple. It is at the South that matters of Freemasonry and the Lodge can be discussed informally.

The address of the Lodge Hall and Temple is always an important starting point. Many Lodge Rooms are dingy to the point of being depressing. They have every appearance of a Lodge in decline. The interior can be brightened up with a little imagination and without spending a lot of money. Ideas include:

- Some furniture polish and elbow grease.
- Improved lighting
- The addition of some colour eg. dried or artificial flowers.
- Removing outdated notices.
- Hang a few appropriate and colourful prints.
- Bright and welcoming table cloths.
- A sign welcoming visitors (and brethren) to the Lodge.
- A clean and stocked tea and coffee table that invites use.
- A framed photographic portrait of the current Grand Master.

The Lodge rooms are our Masonic home. If we deem them sub-standard they are certainly not good enough for our visitors. And first impressions do count.

Let us then turn to the question of first impressions.

A new candidate is being introduced to the Lodge. The Lodge has been cleaned and 'tizzied' up by the application of elbow-grease, fresh lighting and so forth. Might I suggest then that before the start of every meeting, tea, coffee, sherry and a small plate of cheese and biscuits should be offered to brethren, visitors and the candidate. The provision of hospitality is a traditional precursor to business. It would perhaps engender a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

The time comes for the candidate to enter the Temple; he should immediately be overawed by the majesty of the ritual and the theatre of the Lodge. He should be aware that

he entering a cathedral of history and culture.

After this experience he joins the company of his new found brothers in a splendid evening of fraternity.

On his return at the next meeting he is welcomed with open arms, enjoys a coffee and/or a sherry and during the course of the ceremony is reminded that he is sitting with his brothers in a part of history far greater and far removed from the demands of ordinary workaday life.

Yes, first impressions do count.

Although all members need to be nurtured, non-attending members are a special case. The reasons for their non-attendance need to be identified and an individual approach should be made by appropriate members to encourage them, assuring them that their concerns are being addressed *eg.* they are not going to be dragooned into holding office. They need to be reminded of the contribution they can make to Freemasonry just by physically attending Lodge.

Whilst Freemasons are strictly forbidden to solicit membership, we are encouraged to identify prospective candidates, namely men of moral character, and offer them the opportunity to join. This may be achieved by identifying ourselves as Freemasons, entering into discussion with them on the subject and by offering them literature about the Craft. At a subsequent and appropriate occasion this discussion should be followed up.

This is either not being done, or it is being done ineffectually with the result the wrong people are being admitted to the Craft. Particularly we should aim at attracting people with a more philosophical and spiritual *mien* who are readily going to appreciate fully the deeper, historical and spiritual nature of Freemasonry.

The question of dignity and ceremony is apposite at this point.

Turning again to our newly initiated candidate, his Master invites him to visit another Lodge. He puts on his white apron and enters the Temple and sits in the north east *with his Master*. He then experiences the opening of the Lodge which is interesting enough but then has to suffer through the business of the Lodge, which is likely to have little interest for him.

In this vignette I illustrate what seems to be a commonplace habit serving to diminish the dignity and ceremony of the Lodge. I have yet to see in north Queensland an incumbent, visiting Master receive the protocol and dignity of the Wands. It seems customary for serving Masters and all visitors alike to sit (mainly in the northeast) in the floor of the Temple for the opening of the Lodge. Visitors should be received after the Lodge has been opened and the business completed. Listening to the business of another Lodge, especially the correspondence is wearisome indeed.

Moreover, going to Lodge, whether to one's own or as a visitor, is increasingly a catch-as-catch-can affair. One is never sure whether one is going to get a 'job'. This is a significant deterrent to some Masons, including myself.

This then leads us again to the question of membership and numbers.

I would suggest therefore, that in providing for an alternative future, the UGLQ needs to seriously restructure its operations. In doing so, it should accept the fact that fewer members equate to fewer Lodges. It might consider closing down unviable Lodges, and encourage Lodge meetings at Regional Masonic Centre's, perhaps on a three monthly meeting basis. Thereby may keen brethren visit on a regular basis and circulate around the

existing Lodges. This might lead to a richer Masonic mix.

Having said thus, some Masonic Centre's badly need a cultural makeover. Case in point is the Townsville Masonic Centre. Although a magnificent building with a beautiful and restored Temple, with the exception of a cold water dispenser, no effort has been made to cater for pre-meeting refreshments. After a couple of hours drive to get there from the country there is not even a kettle or coffee machine in sight. Moreover, very few of the Lodges that meet there that I have visited, provide a worthwhile South. Most don't even offer a cold beer – albeit light! The various Junior Wardens need taking to task.

There was a time when Masonic ritual was excellent, the South was a further highlight of the evening and brethren actively looked forward to the next meeting. There existed a sense of spiritual development and exclusivity. Sadly this has been replaced by dreary buildings, dreary ritual delivery and the idea of a Festive Board has become an oxymoron.



## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let me first answer the charge of elitism. If elitism means raising standards, so be it. If being an elitist means that I point out the Emperor's state of undress I plead guilty; and if being an elitist means that I wish only to preserve the secrets of the Craft in the sacred repository of our hearts, I willingly up my hand.

It is my view that the esoteric nature of Freemasonry should serve to guide us into the future. It is my view that many men in this increasingly secular society are looking for something more transcendental in their lives. The Compass programme completely disavowed me of the new direction the Craft is taking and highlighted my fears that we are watering down the 'who' and 'what' we are to the extent that we will become just another service organisation.

It is perhaps possible that there might be two paths toward the Freemasonry of tomorrow. One path might posit an informal 'twin-stream' Craft Masonry which includes one stream of the more open, convivial happy family lodges, the other stream of Lodges catering for the more ascetically inclined.

The other path might posit the surrender of the blue lodge to the public and social masons and those of a more serious *mien* move up to the Royal Arch and one of the side orders.

I for one would be sorry to see the latter option, because in my view the blue lodge is the essence of the Craft and the source of great transcendental pleasure. I would happily pay twice, thrice, my membership fees for fewer lodges of greater quality, where going to lodge actually means something of spiritual and intellectual value.

Contemporary society has never more called for moral direction. To this end might I draw your attention to F. S. Wood's observation that "Masons are called moral builders" [in Mackey]. Let us therefore build. Let us stand tall and exemplify in deed and in discreet discourse the principles of Freemasonry. Thereby each of us can play our part in furthering the direction of the Craft.

