

Comparison of Freemasonry and Humanism

Freemasonry

Humanism

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| <p>Size Freemasonry in the UK is an enormously large organisation. In the UK there are around 175,000 members in 6300 lodges. As an example, the town of Bournemouth has 19 lodges plus a further 8 lodges for higher degrees. The nearby towns of Brockenhurst, Christchurch, New Milton, Ringwood, have a further 18 lodges.</p> | <p>Humanism is tiny in comparison with Freemasonry. In the UK there are around 70 humanist groups. Each humanist group is typically about the same size as a Freemason lodge. Bournemouth has just one Humanist group, and the nearby towns have none.</p> |
| <p>Property Freemasonry owns many large and elegant buildings. Each property contains at least one temple, reception and meetings rooms, and excellent dining facilities. There are six such grand buildings in and near Bournemouth.</p> | <p>Humanist groups own no property</p> |
| <p>Objectives Freemasonry is inwards looking; it exists for the benefit of its members. There is the feeling of brotherhood, of meeting, socialising and dining with fellow businessmen and men with a common interest.</p> | <p>Humanists are outward looking, their objective is to improve society.</p> |
| <p>Gender Freemasonry in the UK has strictly male-only membership. There are no female or mixed lodges within the governing body (ie the United Grand Lodge of England, UGLE). There are two small quite separate organisations for female Freemasons (which is outside UGLE). There is one such female Freemason lodge in Bournemouth. There are no mixed Freemason lodges in the UK.</p> | <p>Humanist groups welcome male and female members.</p> |
| <p>Religion Religion is important to Freemasons. But the particular religion that member believes in is unimportant, so long as he believes in something.</p> | <p>Humanists are generally atheists and agnostics.</p> |
| <p>Initiation An applicant must undergo an initiation procedure. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being blindfolded (to show that he is being led from darkness into light). • Having one breast uncovered (to show that he is not female). • Having one trouser leg rolled up (to show he is unshackled and so is a free man). • Being led into the the temple by a rope around his neck (to show that he is to be governed by the masonic rules). | <p>Humanists have no initiation procedure.</p> |

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| <p>Membership levels</p> <p>The craft Lodge, ie the basic masonic lodge, has three degrees or levels of membership. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entered Apprentice. • Fellow Craft. • Master Mason. <p>Each of these levels have a different initiation procedure. Master Masons qualify for membership of Lodges of higher degree.</p> | <p>Humanists have no varied levels of membership.</p> |
| <p>Regalia</p> <p>Freemasons have regalia consisting of an ornamental apron, a sash or collar, a jewel (ie a badge), and cuffs. Each Lodge, and each degree of membership has its own regalia.</p> | <p>Humanists have no regalia</p> |
| <p>Temples</p> <p>Freemasons have temples in which they hold their formal meetings. Often these temples are on an upper floor to secure them from prying eyes. There are around six such temples in and around Bournemouth, probably more. These temples are built and furnished in the presumed style of the traditional Solomon’s Temple. No non-freemason is allowed to attend any formal event within a temple. A guard, known as a Tyler, traditionally holding a sword, guards the door and verifies the masonic credentials of every person entering.</p> | <p>Humanists have no events limited to members only</p> |
| <p>Rules of membership</p> <p>There are written rules of conduct for Freemasons, which include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Mason must not refer to, discuss, or allude to any of the secret Masonic modes of recognition. • A Mason must not identify any other person as a Freemason unless he has his explicit consent or has already identified himself as such. • A Mason must never discuss the business of a lodge that has been conducted in a temple, ie “behind a Tylered door”. • No Mason shall appear clothed in any of the jewels, collars or badges of the craft, in any procession, meeting or assemblage at which persons other than Masons are present. <p>The specified penalty for a Mason breaking rules of conduct can include being put to death and having his heart buried below the low water mark.</p> | <p>Humanists have no such rules.</p> |
| <p>What do they do</p> <p>They socialise with other Masons. They contribute to Masonically supported charities.</p> | <p>Humanists campaign for humanist principles, and also organise lectures and events for their</p> |

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| <p>They meet at bi-monthly meetings. They don't seem to have visiting speakers except Masons speaking on masonic subjects such as some aspect of Masonic history or ritual. Meetings are usually followed by a meal, known as a "Festive Board". It is basically an opportunity for Masons to socialise with other Masons, and to meet Masons from other lodges.</p> | <p>members. They provide visitors for schools, They maintain a network of pastoral carers in hospitals, hospices, prisons, and other settings to provide like-minded comfort and support to non religious people. They train and provide non religious celebrants for funerals, weddings and baby namings.</p> |
| <p>Charity Collection. Freemasons collect several million pounds for charity each year. This is all collected from their existing membership, ie none is collected from the general public. To collect charity contributions from the general public would require Freemasons to be seen in public, which they prefer to avoid. About half of what they raise as charity is distributed to Freemasons in need.</p> | <p>Humanists do not explicitly collect money for charity</p> |
| <p>Secrecy Freemasonry is criticised for its secrecy. It keeps a low profile in society. Its regalia is never seen in public. Masons are reluctant to discuss Masonry with non members. It has secret handshakes, signs and words by which Freemasons can recognise other Freemasons while remaining unidentified by non-masons. There is the suspicion that this secrecy is used to help each other in business. There have been scandals in the past. The Guardian Newspaper has published several articles criticising Freemasonry, eg: <i>"It's not just the handshakes and rituals of Freemasonry that are secret. As always, its biggest secret is its membership. Who are these 200,000 men? We have the names of their ceremonial leaders, as listed in the Masonic year book, but almost all the brothers are unknown. We have no idea how they relate to each other in society at large, or what deals they may be doing behind our backs to the detriment of everyone else."</i></p> | <p>Humanism is not a secretive organisation. Humanists have no secret methods of identifying other Humanists.</p> |
| <p>Important and Famous Members A large number of notable and famous people have been Freemasons including: George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, The Duke of Wellington, Winston Churchill, Mozart, Sibelius, Rudyard Kipling, Rabbe Burns, Arthur Conan Doyle, both Gilbert and Sullivan, Geoffrey Fisher Archbishop of Canterbury. Prince Edward Duke of Kent. Prince Michael of Kent, George IV, George VI, Edward VII, Edward VIII, Prince Philip Duke of</p> | <p>Bertrand Russell, Sir A J Ayer, Sir Julian Huxley, Sir Hermann Bondi, Claire Rayner, Polly Toynbee, Stephen Fry, George Melly, A. C. Grayling, Vanessa Redgrave, Harold Pinter, John Maynard Smith, Ludovic Kennedy, Jacob Bronowski, Sir Roger Penrose, Joan Bakewell.</p> |

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| Edinburgh. | |
| <p>Reducing Membership</p> <p>Freemasons are struggling to retain membership. To counteract this they have reduced their membership requirements and they are becoming a more open organisation. They now use their grand buildings for hosting weddings, conferences, business events etc. To conceal the fact that they are masonic buildings, they sometimes give the same building two addresses, one masonic, the other non masonic; sometimes the same building will have two website addresses; sometimes masonic insignia will be removed from a building where this is practical.</p> | <p>Humanists are also struggling to retain membership</p> |