



Internet Lodge 9659
United Grand Lodge of England
Province of East Lancashire
<http://internet.lodge.org.uk>

Short Papers Competition 2007

*The opinions reflected by the author are not necessarily those of Internet Lodge,
The Province of East Lancashire or the United Grand Lodge of England.*

Paper 14/2007

Title **An Internet Paper Argues...**
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An Internet Lodge paper argues that the average length of service in the craft is less than four years. (1) Evidence I have obtained shows no improvement five years after that study. In 2004, senior officers in Buckinghamshire, England conducted a survey about recruitment and retention. The research revealed that a third of all recruits resigned or stopped attending their lodges within just four years of joining. (2)

My own experience of my mother lodge bears this out. I got fed up with the thoughtlessness and rudeness of some of the senior brethren. So I left. Sadly, I don't think my experience is unusual. Author John Hamill writes: "One of the contributions to falling membership is new members dropping out in a short time. In some cases... it's because of neglect.... Past masters hang on to offices for too long."

In fact, Hamill observes: "It is impossible for long serving officers not to begin to regard their lodge as their personal bailiwick. That cannot be healthy." (3)

Exactly.

Hamill is now Director of Communications at the United Grand Lodge of England. So Great Queen Street knew of the problem 15 years ago, yet has been unable to stop it. The question is -- why?

My enquiries suggest an unfortunate reality. That is, it is simply impossible to impose a new value system on private lodges by diktat. Instead, Grand Lodge has tried to encourage new attitudes through piecemeal provincial initiatives. But things move slowly in Freemasonry.

It's time for Grand Lodge to up its game in this area. Culture change is never easy in any organisation, but we could achieve it if we devoted the next decade to solving the problem through making education and internal communications our absolute priority. The main target audience would be Lodge Secretaries and Directors of Ceremonies.

At lodge level, a new post should be created, that of Education Officer. It would provide the ideal role for the departing past master, and would enthuse and motivate the leaders of the craft to stay in Freemasonry, while making sure their knowledge was passed onto the next generation. They should be able to access high quality visual aids and other support material from a Grand Lodge intranet, safeguarded by passwords. Each initiate should have an education record, a passport to Masonry, if you like, and the appropriate lectures would have to be mastered before he progressed to his Passing and Raising.

The best way of guaranteeing the initiative would be through the setting up of a Masonic Development Charity, operating at arm's length from Grand Lodge, tasked with speedily improving education and internal communications within the English craft.

Doubtless some will criticise the idea of using charity cash to spend on Freemasonry. But, if we do not start investing in modernising the craft now, there will be precious little to hand on to the next generation of Freemasons. And that means our widows won't have the kind of security that pensioners in our care homes currently enjoy.

Charity begins at home.

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References:

1. "The Missing Master Mason." - John Belton, 1999. (www.internet.lodge.org)
2. Interview with Buckinghamshire Provincial source, August 2nd, 2007.
3. "Masonic Perspectives" - John Hamill, page 23. Published in 1992 by the Australian Masonic Research Council.

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