

(The opinions expressed in the following paper are those of the writer and do not necessarily express those of the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research)

BRINGING FREEMASONRY BACK INTO THE COMMUNITY

by V. W. Bro. Aidan Gordon, Worshipful Master
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There are many problems facing Freemasonry today. We hear repeated laments of declining membership, the plethora of demits, 80% non-participating membership, unfavourable media coverage in Britain, financial difficulties in keeping Lodge buildings in good repair, ...the list seemingly goes on and on.

We know these same challenges, in varying degrees, have been faced by our Brethren before us, and will be faced again by those who follow us. There is, however, one fundamental problem which we tend to overlook. It may in fact be considered the root cause of many of the challenges ailing our Craft; "**Public Perception**".

By the "public" I refer to anyone not already associated with Freemasonry. It is important to differentiate between the public and the media. Certainly, the public can be strongly influenced by the media but the Public is ultimately the *raison d'etre* of the media and as such can in turn influence reporting by voicing antipathy or perhaps more effectively by enacting apathy. I originally chose this topic based on the comments of three very different people.

The first person is W Bro. John Hamill, Director of Communication for the United Grand Lodge of England. The second is Joe Clark's daughter, Catherine. The third is one of my best friends for years, Diana.

W. Bro. John Hamill, as I mentioned is Director of Communication for the Grand Lodge of England, and obviously an extremely well informed speaker. He presented a paper entitled "The Current State of Freemasonry in Britain" at the Vancouver Lodge of Education's Grand Masonic Day in October 2000. His complete paper is available on the Grand Lodge website; <<http://freemasonry.bcy.ca>>. I have a fair bit to expound upon regarding W. Bro Hamill's work and we'll come back to this shortly.

But first I'd like to relate an anecdote about Catherine Clark. During an interview on CBC Radio during the last federal election campaign, Shelagh Rogers asked her about her experience with the media. Catherine explained how she had very purposefully stayed out of the media scrum at the start of the last election campaign because she wanted the press to focus on her father the head of the Conservative Party, not his young and very attractive blonde daughter.

What she soon realized was that the press wanted **her** as the story anyway — so if she didn't give interviews, they just made material up and printed it. She read several of these ridiculous stories in horror then finally said, "That's enough," and consented to interviews and media

coverage. Whereupon the press discovered this "Blonde Bimbo" they'd been portraying was actually an extremely intelligent and very articulate young woman with excellent communication skills and strong political views of her own. The result was that her own views were reported in the media, along with coverage of her father, doubling the amount of attention for the Conservative Party.

I find this an interesting parallel to the way Freemasonry has dealt with the media in the past. Not that we're stunningly attractive, more that we too have a lot to say and to be respected for and that we too have been media fodder for too long.

Then there were the comments of my good friend Diana, who knows I'm very active in Freemasonry. She mentioned to me the other day that she often sees the "Meals on Wheels" cars with the Masonic symbol on them near where she lives. I then spent a few minutes explaining what the "Cancer Cars" actually do. It struck me afterwards that if this was Diana's opinion and she knows a little about Freemasonry, what on earth do the rest of the public think these cars are doing!

So combining the views of John Hamill, Catherine Clark and my friend Diana, what this paper is trying to do is stress the importance of communication with people outside of the Masonic family, both through the media and through word of mouth.

We'll diverge a little now. When I was originally researching this topic, I needed to get a feel for what percentage of the population were Freemasons. So I did some statistical research and I must admit I found these numbers absolutely fascinating. I'll probably give them far too much attention but please bear with me.

There are a few things to remember at this point:

- The first is that old adage of the hierarchy of untruths. There are Lies, Damned Lies and then there are Statistics.
- The second is that these are very simplistic stats. There is no complex mathematical analysis here, just basic division. No skewing, weighting or other data manipulation. I have taken some liberties where exact numbers weren't readily available to me and have simply extrapolated from known data or in some cases assumed the population change in one area is the same as another — which it probably isn't — but it won't be too far off.
- And third, think of these numbers as indicators of Masonic influence. Once we know how many Masons there are in the community, we can better gauge what effort is required in using the "uprightness of our minds" and the "rectitude our actions" to help create a better "Public Perception" by making an identifiable difference in the community.

Now let's take a look at the numbers (Please consult the accompanying "A Study of the Masonic Population").

World-wide, the "Public" comprises some six billion people of which there is arguably something in the order of five million Freemasons (*). Hence, as a Freemason, you are about 1 in 1,200 on this planet

(*) It is difficult to get an accurate figure on the number of Freemasons worldwide. On the UGLE website they vaguely refer to 5 million Masons worldwide. In Britain and North America there has been about a 50% drop in membership in the last 35 years. However, there has been tremendous growth in South America and South East Asia which has helped counter this.

But the story in North America is dramatically different. The United States has a population of approximately 280 million people of which over 2 million are Freemasons. That my Brethren is 1 in 139.

We can go a little further now and see what population is actually technically eligible for membership. Using the latest available Census information, we can take the male population of 48.9%, and then discount the youth population under the age of 18 of 26%. Remember this is not entirely accurate because you must be "a man, freeborn of the mature age of 21." Unfortunately, the Stats readily available are for age 18 so we'll just use that age for the purpose of this overview. When you crunch the numbers through, it turns out that the United States already have 1 in 50 technically eligible men. The next question to ask is how many of the remaining 49 have the right character to be Freemasons and that's certainly one I don't have a statistic for!

Let's think about that again: In the USA they already have **at least** 1 in 50 eligible men. **I really don't think that's bad. In fact, I think that's pretty damned impressive!**

Now let's take a look at England, with a population of 50 million and 320,000 Freemasons, we get 1 in 155 of the general population or 1 in 56 of those eligible to join. That's very close to what we see today in the U.S.A.

However, when we look at British Columbia, our population here stands at just over four million, of which there are about 14,000 Freemasons. This works out to be about 1 in 294 of the population, or 1 in 107 eligible men. So in B.C. we are actually about half the national average of the U.S.A. or Britain.

Canada as a whole fairs better than B.C. but still noticeably lower than the US. or Britain with about 120,000 Freemasons in a population of 30 million. That's 1 in 257 of the population or one in 93 of eligible men.

There is a wide variation between the States. The worst by far is Utah which has only 2,531 Freemasons in a State of 2.2 million people (that's 1 in 882 of the population). But the best state is Maine, where there are over 27,000 Masons in a state of just 1.3 million. The odds of meeting a Freemason in a street in Maine are 1 in 47 of the population or an incredible 1 in 17 of the eligible men. But that's the same percentage as Freemasonry used to boast as a whole across the U.S.A.

I have the statistics here for the last fifty years for the United States, comparing the number of Freemasons with the overall population. Back in the heyday of Freemasonry, in terms of numbers at least which was most certainly the 50's and 60's, 1 out of every 15 eligible men were Freemasons. If we look at the State of Maine at its peak in 1958, 1 in 6 men over the age of eighteen were Freemasons.

That is a shocking statistic to me. A real wake up call as to the influence that Freemasonry had on society, especially if these men were all practicing the genuine tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. No wonder the economy was so strong and the world so progressive. In truth we'll never really know what influence Masonry had but then again, we are Speculative Freemasons and that's something interesting to speculate about.

Enough statistics. Where is this taking us?

What I'd like to focus on this evening is the other 297 million people in North America.

They are the "public" with which we have daily contact; we work with them, they are our relatives, our friends, relatives of our friends and friends of our relatives.

Let's look again at that statistic. If we add U.S. and Canada together to get the North American picture; we have 1 in 147 of the population or 1 in 53 of eligible men. I would hazard a guess that it is statistically unlikely for anyone in North America not to know a Freemason. In fact they may know several Freemasons and quite possibly know one of them very well. But the real point is **they probably don't know that they are Freemasons.**

So why the indifference or negative reaction to Freemasonry we currently sense?

What appears to have happened in recent years, is that Freemasonry has become introspective. We have lost our community connection and with that we are rapidly losing respect, credibility and understandably, membership.

In the early days of Freemasonry, membership was certainly "secret". This may well have been initially from fear of persecution since those were not tolerant times. However, what appeared to happen, whether by design or by nature, is that Freemasonry grew to become a much more visible part of the community.

As Freemasonry grew in stature in the Community, Lodge Halls were constructed as great edifices proudly emblazoned with the Square and Compasses. For all large public buildings corner stones were dedicated with groups of regalia-clad Freemasons appearing in public and in the press. Pubs in Britain took Masonic names and were known as the "Mason's Arms," the "Square and Compasses" and the "Trowel." Masonic symbols appeared on stamps in Britain and on currency in the U.S. Masonic symbols and indeed Freemasonry itself was everywhere in the community.

The "public" still didn't know what these men actually did but they were pretty sure that they did good things and thought good thoughts. This was reinforced by the fact that many of the people they knew to be Freemasons were leading figures in the Community; the Mayor, the Bank Manager, the Doctor and the Lawyer. Many other men with a wide diversity of occupations were Freemasons too., of course but they were perhaps less visible in the community.

When the popularity of Masonry grew rapidly after the Second World War, things began to change particularly in England and to a fair degree in Canada too, It may be argued that the U.S.A. did not follow quite the same path.

What seems to have happened is that Freemasonry began to believe its own critics who labeled the Craft as a "secret society" and Masons themselves began to perpetuate the mystique of a secret order. They became more withdrawn, less in the public eye, shunned attention in the press, offered no rebuttal to the outlandish claims in the media and stopped talking about Freemasonry outside of the Lodge. As a consequence, the public's perception began to change.

It is a well established sociological theory that societies need and use scapegoats. Freemasons fitted the bill beautifully because they didn't fight back! This previously well respected group became a scapegoat for the general malaise and disaffection that was pervasive in the post boom times. The 70's brought the oil crisis, a serious economic recession particularly in the U.K. and a lot of civil unrest. In times of prosperity, society will overlook many things but when things get tough, society is quick to find someone or something to blame and certainly, in

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Back to John Hamill. Some of you here may have been privileged to hear his excellent speech at Grand Masonic Day in Vancouver or at the Victoria Lodge of Education & Research in October 2000. He really enlightened everyone present as to the state of Freemasonry in Britain. There is a strong anti-masonic movement still in Britain but it is not being fueled by the media anymore, as you may have expected. The problem is based on the perception that there is the possibility of conflict of interest in the Judiciary, the Police Force, the National Defense and many areas of local and national Government.

It is the government bureaucracy that has the bit between its teeth these days. But much of the current hullabaloo has been fueled by an otherwise ineffectual back-bench MP, by the name of Chris Mullen, who latched onto Freemasonry in the Public Sector as a kind of desperate crusade to garner attention.

Initially it was a major concern of the United Grand Lodge of England. Men in the Public Sector were asked to publicly state any Masonic affiliation. Incidentally no other groups were targeted in any way. There were very high Government Orders issued demanding a list of members be submitted to the House of Commons, which of course the Grand Lodge refused. These were dark days for Freemasonry in Britain with questions asked being very reminiscent of the Masonic intolerance exhibited by such demagogues as Hitler and Franco.

However, things are certainly looking up. The Human Rights Codes, adopted as part of Britain's involvement in the European Community, have forced the various levels of Government to seriously re-evaluate their stance on requiring employees and job applicants to declare if they are Freemasons. There has been a complete about face in many respects. Interestingly the press, in particular the local media, are now giving positive coverage of Freemasonry. After many years of derisive press from the Tabloids, this seems like a miraculous turnaround but the reason for it is really quite simple. Lodges at the local level began to approach the local community newspapers, offering interviews and local interest stories about Freemasonry for publication.

They took a way much of the "mystery" and threw the doors of the Lodges open to show there was nothing to hide.

What the United Grand Lodge of England did was reiterate publicly that Freemasonry was not a Secret Society but was an important part of the community. However, they did state that there were certain elements that were "private", membership lists for example, and that the only "secrets" were the modes of recognition which they stated were part of the heritage and tradition of Freemasonry and weren't to be compromised. This approach has been very well received. After all how "secret" is a secret society who's first exposure was in the 1720's and whose entire ritual, passwords and modes of recognition are to be found in Libraries and Internet sites around the world.

The media, it turns out, have nothing against Freemasonry. They were just looking for something to print! So if you hand them something on a plate, they'll be happy to oblige by printing it.

What really happened was that Freemasons came out of their Lodge Halls, "as Freemasons". They started making public appearances again in regalia at approved functions. They came **back into the community**.

This has all happened in a relatively short period of time but the results have been very rewarding. The biggest mistake Freemasonry made in recent years was in forgetting their attachment to the community. We aren't members of a Monastic retreat who've taken vows of silence. We are here to improve society by our presence and influence and to lead by example. Let's take a closer look at British Columbia.. Perhaps one indicator of the relative health of the "Public Perception" of Freemasonry could be measured through frequency of our public ceremonies. I quote from the "History of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia 1871 to 1970:" "There are two Masonic ceremonies which are performed in the presence of all who wish to attend them, whether Freemasons or non-Masons. One is the laying of corner or foundation stones of certain classes of buildings, the other is the funeral service ..." Certainly the most public of these is the cornerstone laying. The first Masonic cornerstone laid in British Columbia was here in Victoria in 1873 at the Synagogue of the Congregational Emanuel at the corner of Pandora Avenue and Blanshard Street.

However if we examine the number of ceremonies performed over time, we see a disturbing trend. In the period of about sixty years between 1871, forty-seven public ceremonies were performed all over the Province of B.C. In the period of about fifty years between 1931 and 1980, only nine public ceremonies held.

Date	Cornerstones Laid	Date	C ornerst
1871-1884	4	1941-1950	1
1885-1894	12	1951-1960	1
1895-1901	4	1961-1970	0
1902-1910	5	1971-1980	3
1911-1920	10	1981-1990	6
1921-1930	12	1991-2000	4
1931-1940	4	2001-date	2

Freemasons are restricted to lay cornerstones only in cases of structures of "public utility and of stately, superb or sacred edifices," many of these buildings were Lodge halls or churches. Perhaps it could be said that they simply aren't building as many Lodges or churches in recent years.

However, grave concern was expressed in the paragraph entitled "Death of a Ceremony" on page 405 of the "History of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia 1871 - 1970. R. W. Bro. John T. Marshall writes"

"It would-appear ... that the practice of laying cornerstones on public buildings and stately edifices is dead, and it began to wane at the close of the 1930's. In the forty years from 1931 to 1970, the Grand Lodge laid only six cornerstones, and all of these were for new Masonic Temples... What ever the cause, there appears to be a deep feeling of regret among most people that this colourful public ceremony of Freemasonry has been allowed to die out in the jurisdiction of British Columbia."

The revival period from 1971 - 1995 was received with much optimism in the later "History of the Grand Lodge of B.C." by R. W. Bro. William G. Robinson for twelve Masonic cornerstones were laid during that time.

Certainly the cornerstone laying in Trail last year (2002) that was covered so well in the local media, was a tremendous step in the right direction.

It is certainly the local media, mainly community newspapers, that seems to be supporting the resurgence of favourable media coverage in the UK. It seems to be the unwritten rule of journalism that community newspapers favour good news and upbeat stories whereas the national media, both printed and on television are obsessed with natural disasters, wars, human tragedy and generally bad, depressing news.

Perhaps it is for this reason that BCTV, when asked if they would like to cover the cornerstone laying ceremony for the new Ambulatory Unit in Trail, replied somewhat tersely, and I quote, "That's not News." I must admit that I find it disturbing that the diverse group of people who read The Vancouver Sun, The Province, Times Colonist, Nanaimo Daily News or National Post (to name but a few) and who watch BCTV or CH are getting their information from the same media group, Can-West Global.

However, I find it even more disturbing that the small circulation local newspapers we tend to think of as being the eyes, ears and in many respects the pulse of community life itself, are increasingly becoming part of large media groups. If you'd like to think that small rural paper in Parksville, Sooke, Campbell River or Port Hardy is owned by a local pillar of the community you are about to be sadly disillusioned.

There are approximately one hundred fifty-six daily and community newspapers in B.C. with ownership as follows:

Independent	41	
B.C. Newspaper Group	60	(David Black of Victoria)
CanWest Global	24	(Izzy Asper)
Sterling	16	(Conrad Black - Hollinger)

Bowes	6	(Sun Media / Quebecor)
Madison	5	
Okanagan Group	4	(Horizon Operations Canada)

One of the benefits of computer technology and digital archiving is that you can search large numbers of newspapers for information very quickly. I selected **Infomartca** for my mouse driven research. The site covers thirty-nine community newspapers in B.C., including The Sun, The Province, Times Colonist and the National Post, ninety-eight other community newspapers in Canada and sixty financial and trade publications totalling over two hundred sources.

On my first attempt to find how many articles in this group of newspapers were about Freemasonry, I optimistically set the search history for six months, typed in "freemasonry," clicked the mouse and waited - There were ZERO results. Rather disheartened, I set the search for Jan. 1997 to Feb. 2003, a little over six years and tried again, this time opting for the common term "Masons." Searching the header or lead of the article returned twelve documents, some of which referred to stone masons, others to just one word references out of context, several to the location of an event at a Masonic Hall. However, **eight** articles actually referred to Masons themselves in a Masonic context. I was mildly encouraged. Searching for "Freemasons" gave us twenty-five hits, sixteen of which were relevant, Doing a detailed search for "Freemasons" searching all text in the articles not just the leader, provided 218 hits.

Just for comparison I performed the same search on "Shriners" and hit 934 documents; over four times as many. Yes, those guys know how to get access to the media.

This was by no means quantitative research, I'd be the first to admit there were many deficiencies in my methods (for example the B.C. Newspaper Group is not part of infomartca). However, the results could be deemed somewhat of a qualitative view of our exposure in the media. With twenty-five articles in a database of tens or perhaps hundreds of thousands, that's very poor indeed.

Now on to the bright side; examples where Freemasonry has gained good local press coverage. Look at these articles on display, Brethren. They aren't penned by a PR company for Grand Lodge. They are written by local reporters after talking to Freemasons from local Lodges. Sometimes they are even written by members of the Lodges themselves in the form of paid advertisements.

I challenge you now, if your Lodge is doing something worthwhile in the community, tell the local press. They'd love to hear about it. We have to just let them know what we are doing! If your Lodge is not doing anything worthwhile in your community, you have to ask yourself, "Why not?"

The level of acceptance of Freemasons in British Columbia is relatively high, certainly much better than in Britain, for example. But don't let complacency lead us down the dark path of introspection.

Historically, Freemasonry has had an enormous role in the building of this city, this province and this continent. I'm sure you'll all agree that we don't want that role confined to Masonic history texts. The one sure way of continuing Freemasonry's positive influence in our society is to ensure society's positive opinion of Freemasonry.

Let's start talking about Freemasonry and about the good things Masons do. It's about time we tooted our own horn because no one else is going to toot it for us!

When we leave tonight, go outside and talk about Freemasonry with your friends and relatives. Tell them about what happened in Lodge. Tell them about the statistics. Tell them about the Cancer Cars. **Tell them about the three million dollars a day that Masonry raises for charity. That's over \$ one billion a year in North America alone.**

Now I'm not saying you should recite your E.A. obligation on the bus on the way home. What I am saying is that there is very little to hide about Freemasonry and almost everything to show and tell!

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19 February 2003

Minutes of the Regular Communication of 18 February 2003

W. Bro. Bill Down opened the Lodge at 8 p.m. then welcomed the fifteen members and two visitors in attendance. Brother David Hannigan of Manoah Lodge #141 was the first time visitor.

W. Bro. Tony Akouri, Junior Warden, welcomed the guest lecturer, V. W. Bro. Aidan Gordon, Worshipful Master of the Vancouver Lodge of Education and Research. His mystery topic, "Bringing Freemasonry Back into the Community" was very well received. His presentation was effectively supplemented with a statistical handout and a display of pertinent newspaper clippings. W. Bro. Ruben Patrick, acting Senior Warden, thanked the speaker. After the usual break the Secretary, V. W. Bro. Gordon Smith, moved and the Inner Guard, W. Bro. Ernie Hogg, seconded that the minutes of the Regular Communication of 19 November 2002 be adopted as circulated. Carried. The following Accounts were presented:

Postage	\$123.03
Printing	109.12
Supplies & Miscellaneous	157.62
Sub-total	\$389.77
\$200.00	Lodgeroom Rental
50.00	Speaker's Honorarium
55.00	Quator Coronati Dues
Total	\$694.77

V. W. Bro. Art Scott, the Immediate Past Master, moved and Bro. Senior Warden seconded that the accounts be paid. Carried.

Under correspondence, local Lodge notices were pointed out, some letters from out-of-