

Freemasons appoint women to new body

Leadership council breaks with tradition as the organisation counters accusations of misogyny

By Patrick Sawyer
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THE Freemasons have appointed two women to head a new leadership council in a move designed to counter accusations of misogyny.

England's Freemasons say the appointment is "an unprecedented and historic move" which it is hoped will dismiss the mistaken belief that the organisation is exclusively male.

It comes after Freemasons of both sexes rejected suggestions they follow the recent moves by London's Garrick Club by forcing the men's masonic lodges to accept women members and vice versa.

The Garrick's all-male membership recently voted to admit women for the first time in its 190-year history.

England's largest masonic lodges have made it clear that they have no

intention of trying to force the men's and women's lodges together. But a new Council for Freemasonry has been established as a governing body to cover female as well as male members of the order in England and Wales.

It will bring together the men's United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) and the two female bodies, the Order of Women Freemasons and the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons.

Announcing the move, the UGLE said: "Even in 2024, Freemasonry continues to face various unfounded criticisms and inaccurate misconceptions, often stemming from deep-rooted prejudices or preconceived falsehoods.

"Contrary to the erroneous claim that Freemasonry is exclusively male, women's Freemasonry has been an integral part of Freemasonry in the UK for over a century.

"While Freemasonry is practiced in single-sex lodges, this is no different from many other activities, including most sports, as well as many other community groups."

The Council for Freemasonry's first president will be Grand Master Zuzanka Penn, supported by Grand Master Carol

Cole and a senior man, Pro Grand Master Jonathan Spence.

Sources say the newly established Council for Freemasonry will work to "ensure that the founding principles of meritocracy, tolerance, diversity and inclusion are advanced and respected" without detracting from the membership of the women's lodges "wishing to carry out their freemasonry in a single-sex safe space".

The presence of two women at the head of the Council for Freemasonry is designed to head off pressure on the UGLE to admit women to male lodges.

A source at the UGLE told *The Telegraph*: "The women's lodges are happy to operate separately from the men. They are happy to have their own separate lodges and don't want the men to join them and they don't want to join the men's lodges."

In a joint statement, the three governing bodies of the country's Freemasons, said: "Neither The Order of Women Freemasons, nor the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons has any desire or intention to change their exclusively female membership. This is supported by UGLE."