

# The Telegraph

## News

### Freemasons – both men’s and women’s groups – will stay single-sex

Joint statement made following controversy over claims Garrick Club was sexist, paving the way for London establishment to let females join

By **Steve Bird**

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The **Freemasons** will remain a single-sex organisation, its leaders have declared in defiance of claims the fraternity is misogynistic.

The United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) and its female counterpart, the Order of Women Freemasons (OWF), have issued a joint statement stating that each branch will not admit members of the opposite sex.

The move comes after the **Garrick Club in London** voted to accept women after its former male-only policy was embroiled in claims the organisation was sexist.

Numerous other institutions, including golf clubs, have also been persuaded in recent years to open membership to women.

The two Freemasons women’s Grand Lodges were created in the early 20th century and follow the same rituals, rules and regulations as the men-only lodges – even referring to each other as “brother”.

The public declaration, issued last week, was made to try to counter “recurring themes” by critics who claimed the Freemasons were “non-inclusive, misogynistic” and lacking in transparency.

The statement, posted on the Freemasons’ website, says that the female lodges have no “desire or intention to change their exclusively female membership, and their members value the practising of Freemasonry in a safe and single-sex environment”.

This position is supported by the United Grand Lodge of England, with the statement adding how “both women’s orders are entirely supportive of the UGLE remaining an exclusively male organisation”.

They say single-sex organisations are “not uncommon in other aspects of life, for example sports teams” and so are “entirely consistent with the principles of freedom of association so fundamental to the way of life in this country”.

Six years ago, the former Freemasons chief executive contacted the Equality and Human Rights Commission over a number of newspaper reports he felt unfairly discriminated against and stigmatised the group.

The UGLE took out full-page advertisements in The Daily Telegraph and The Times criticising some elements of the media for “misrepresenting” Freemasonry.

This latest joint statement was prompted by an address given by the Right Worshipful Brother Jonathan Spence, the Pro Grand Master at UGLE’s Quarterly Communications, meetings held to discuss the business of Freemasonry.

Speaking in the Grand Temple at Freemasons Hall in London on Thursday, Mr Spence said: “More recently, there have been two recurring themes from different journalists.

“The first is the claim that Freemasonry in this country is a male-only activity and therefore inherently wrong, non-inclusive and misogynistic.

“The second is, once again, a focus on the alleged lack of transparency relating to Freemasonry and yet another push to require full declaration of our membership almost in all circumstances.

#### ‘We have a proud tradition’

“Brethren, we have all had enough of this fake narrative and we should state clearly and unambiguously what Freemasonry is.

“We have a proud tradition as a secular, non-religious, non-political, lawful and law-abiding activity in the United Kingdom, as it is elsewhere in the world.

“Freemasonry is proud of its history of inclusivity and for the last three centuries, we have welcomed members from all walks of life, regardless of religion, ethnicity, sexuality or socioeconomic background.

“Across the world, most nights, in Freemasons’ Lodges, these groups of people come together to enjoy their Freemasonry, united in their commitment to our core values, which this Grand Lodge articulates as integrity, friendship, respect and service.

“These values are based on long-established Enlightenment values and Freemasonry has fundamental ideals including liberty, tolerance, constitutional government and a meritocratic society.”

Included in the joint statement is a commitment for all three Grand Lodges to “work together to remove misconceptions and myths”.

Freemasonry’s first Grand Lodge was formed in 1717 in London when four lodges came together and now UGLE administers the fraternity in England and Wales.

UGLE has around 175,000 members and there are about six million Freemasons worldwide. The female order OWF has about 4,000 members in England.

The Grand Master of UGLE is the Duke of Kent who has been in the role since 1967.

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'We have all had enough of this fake narrative [of sexism],' said Jonathan Spence, left, pictured with fellow Freemasons Peter Lowndes and Sir David Wootton  
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