

# Melbourne Observer Magazine

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# SECRET MEN'S BUSINESS

Victoria's Masons try to 'lift the lid' on their mysteries, and tell the story of what they do

Many Victorian families will claim some link to **Freemasonry**. Their fathers or grandfathers, or perhaps an uncle, were members, and we were seen heading off to a **Lodge** meeting once a month.

The **Lodge** membership would often be shrouded with mystery or secrecy. Why was **Dad** wearing a dinner suit with bow-tie? What was in **Grandpa's** little black case that they carried? What did they do at these meetings?

**Freemasons Victoria** is working to peel off these layers of mystery, and reveal itself as a modern-day organisation that involves itself in many charitable activities such as hospitals, nursing homes and education, and a meeting place "to help good men to lead better lives".

**Freemasonry** claims to be the oldest and largest existing fraternal organisation in the world. It comprises an estimated five million members worldwide.

In **Victoria**, there are 13,500 members amongst 327 lodges. Membership across **Australia** and **New Zealand** totals about 40,000.

Compare that to about 200,000 when there was a surge of membership after **World War II**, when many men - particularly returned soldiers - sought out the company of their peers. The state leader, **Garry Sebo**,



● **Garry Sebo, Grand Master of Freemasons Victoria**

who is addressed by members with the title of '**Grand Master**', concedes that the average age of **Freemasons** in **Victoria** is "too old".

**Sebo** says the organisation is "opening the doors to what is essentially an ancient fraternal organisation which

has a very modern relevance". He made the comment at the launching of a book, *It's No Secret - Real Men Wear Aprons*, by **Peter Lazar**.

**Sebo** continues: "I see the **Freemasons** who work tirelessly behind the scenes and make a positive difference to the lives of our members, their families and the community.

"Our contribution to charitable causes alone exceeds \$1 million annually."

The **Freemasons** raised \$1.2 million following the **Black Saturday** fires, to distribute directly to help affected families.

But apart from these public charitable works, what are the **Freemasons**, why has it all been shrouded in secrecy?

"It's our own fault. It's the way we conducted ourselves," admits author **Peter Lazar**, who has been a member of the organisation for 52 years.

"We wonder why our forebears conducted themselves in the way that they did."

**Lazar** says: "**Freemasonry** exists to help good men to lead better lives. It promotes self-discipline, personal development, compassion and concern for others and the value of community service - as evidence by the fact that **Freemasons** are one of the largest providers of affordable aged care facilities in **Australia**."

**Lazar** explains that **Freemasonry**

centres around the teaching of morality, illustrated by acting out stories and 'theatre', with small dramas involving its members as leading actors.

He says the 'theatre' is much more powerful than any writings. Some contain elements of surprise, and this feature would disappear from the teachings if the 'surprise endings' were widely distributed.

**Lazar** admits that all the 'scripts' of these theatrical ceremonies are in public libraries and widely available on the internet, but **Masons** do keep them confidential.

"Ceremonies play an important part in all our lives. Coming of age, marriage, the naming of children, birthdays and the passing of loved ones are all marked by some form of ceremony."

**Lazar** and **Sebo** say that **Freemasonry** had its origins more than 400 years, and had symbolic links back to the stonemasons involved with the construction of **Solomon's Temple** about 960 BC.

"Ceremonies were used as learning tools. Through repetition of these ceremonies **Freemasons** were able to learn elements of the **Craft**, in much the same way as children today learn the national anthem or other school songs," **Lazar** says.

**Sebo** says modes of recognition were developed, and these continue today. These include the much-talked about **Masonic** handshakes.

Pressed by journalists at last week's media conference, **Sebo** refused to divulge the secret modes of recognition.

"That's a contradiction in terms. A secret is what it is."

He said the modern day equivalent is a password or 'PIN number'. He said the confidentiality was similar to how people today would not reveal their incomes or assets and liabilities, or what they were being paid.

Apart from these confidential details, **Sebo** says **Freemasons** are keen to see the "information vacuum" disappear.

"To win new members, the **Freemasons** are now encouraging members to talk about the organisation and the useful role it plays in men's lives and in many communities."

One female journalist at last Thursday's media conference pushed the point that women could not enjoy membership.

"There is no great push for it," **Sebo** replied, adding that there were similar kindred organisations (**Order of the Eastern Star**, for example) that catered for women.

The journalist snapped back that it appeared that women were only welcome in the kitchen.

**Sebo** said that **Lodges** these days had meals provided by caterers.

Another journalist seemed upset that he, as an atheist, would not be able to achieve membership.

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● **Don Bradman**

## The 'Don' heads list of prominent Freemasons

Legendary cricketer **Don Bradman** is listed as one of **Australia's** famous **Freemasons**.

He joins 10 of **Australia's** 25 Prime Ministers who were members. They included the first PM **Edmund Barton**, **Stanley Melbourne Bruce**, **Joseph Cook**, **Artie Fadden**, **George Reid**, **Earle Page**, **John Gorton**, **John McEwen**, **Sir Robert Menzies** and **Sir William McMahon**.

In **Victoria**, TV star **Graham Kennedy** was a member, as were actors **Charles 'Bud' Tingwell** and **Chips Rafferty**.

Six **Victorian** Governors have been **Freemasons**. These included **Sir Dallas Brooks**, after whom the **Masonic Centre** in **Albert St, East Melbourne**, is named.

Other famous **Australian Freemasons** include botanist **Joseph Banks**, billiards player **Eddie Charlton**, radio pioneer **Ernest Fisk**, explorers **Matthew Flinders** and **William Wentworth**, **Oxley** and **Hume**.

So too were airman **Sir Charles Kingsford Smith**, yachtsman **Sir James Hardy**, soldier **Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop**, and cinema producer **Ken G Hall**.

Author **Peter Lazar** says a cricket team of **Australian Freemasons** would include **Bill Ponsford**, **Bill Lawrey**, **Don Bradman**, **Bob Simpson**, **C.G. Maccartney**, **M.A. Noble**, **Alan Davidson**, **Albert 'Tibby' Cotter**, **Geoffrey Dymock**, **Arthur Mailey**, **Arthur Morris**, **Bert Oldfield**. Umpires would be **G.E. Borwick** and **R.A. French**; with **Allan McGilvray** as commentator.

● *It's No Secret*. Available at bookstores nationally from March 15.



● **Senior Freemasons Mervyn Hallam and David George** take a look at the new book, *It's No Secret*, by **Peter Lazar**