

# Newish Tricks for old dogs

Seminar held at Mirfield Masonic Hall on the experiences of the Membership Team during their successful mailshot campaign for Mirfield Lodge 1102.

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W Bros

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# Membership Seminar Agenda

## Introduction: By Garry Burden

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# 1. Overview of Problem

As a Lodge we had an aging membership. In Common with all Lodges, we had not been able to meet for 2 years and over the Last 6 years had only attracted one candidate.

The traditional method of personal introductions was clearly not working and even if some of the older members were to introduce their friends, they would be of a similar age profile and would only prolong the inevitable outcome.

In 2013 we had 55 members and in 2023 we had 35 members, this was caused by the usual reasons of people moving away, resigning, or passing away. Whatever the reason we had lost a third of our membership in 10 years, had we attracted 2 members a year this would likely have maintained the status Quo.

# 2. Solution

My own background is as an IFA. To have a successful practice it is necessary to attract more than just *new* Clients but the right quality Clients.

Having outlined the problem, I viewed the solution as a simple marketing exercise to attract the correct quality Clients who have a need for our product. I therefore proposed that as a lodge, we undertake a mailshot exercise to contact local men of the right profile. My contention was and still is that if you looked no further than 2 miles from any Lodge there will be numerous local men who would love the opportunity to join but don't even know that we exist.

Being honest there was not a huge appetite at the Committee Meeting to spend lodge funds on an unproven exercise, so to bridge the gap, I said that I would cover the costs.

# 3. Subcommittee

Have an honest review of the people involved in the membership team, particularly the Membership Officer and Mentor. You will want people who have the requisite skill set to communicate what we have to offer and are prepared to spend the time and effort to establish contact and maintain the interest throughout. Putting a collar on a spare neck is not likely to achieve the desired result.

Attracting new candidates had been raised before at committee meetings. We had attended the Mirfield show and held Open Days in conjunction with the Kirklees Heritage Weeks. These efforts did not attract the right candidates. Neither did our website. Mailshots had been discussed before, the stumbling block was where to start and, that old Yorkshire saying, "how much?" Garry was at that meeting and said he had experience in using databases and would fund a mailshot himself. That was voted through along with a small committee to start it off.

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The committee comprised of:

Paul Chapman	WM
Graham Shuttleworth	Secretary
Garry Burden	Lodge Membership Officer
Chris Oldfield	Lodge Mentor
And added later.	
Phillip Gaunt	Lodge Almoner

A decent manager would not have put this team together, but it worked.  
The team also now has the current WM but has retained Paul.

- Assess your team for the requisite skills.
- Involve the Master, Mentor and Membership Officer

## 4. Letter: Structure and Language

The context of the letter is that it was sent late 2022, very much in the shadow of Covid and lockdowns. There was evidence in the news that severe loneliness had been a big issue amongst all demographics during this period and that some people had emerged resolving to make better use of limited free time. An opportunity was presenting itself.

The first thing to note is that it contains very few hard facts about Freemasonry. You won't achieve your objective by spewing multiple paragraphs about attending Lodge and practice nights, and alluding to rituals you can't fully explain.

The overall message distilled down, is this:

*You have gone through a bad time and lost touch with some friends. Pubs and clubs can be unpleasant these days for wives and partners and sitting at home watching TV no longer attracts you. The recent pandemic has shown you how easily life and loved ones can be taken away, and you want to make the most of that short interval between work and sleep, hopefully improving yourself along the way. Freemasonry may be the solution you're looking for, give us a call.*

There are paragraphs that manage expectations. Expectations of being accepted for membership, and the commitment required by members. We also highlight the social aspect, as wives and partners must be considered.

The language used must be none-masonic. Joe Public does not know what Ladies Nights, Gala and Lodge Nights are. It's too early to talk fully about Brethren, talk about members.

We refer any interest they may have in the mysteries surrounding Freemasonry to the Corporate stuff included. Concentrate on our USPs, safety, good mates, and an excellent use of limited free time.

No sales letter would be complete without a call to action. This has two methods of contact. We thoroughly tested them both before proceeding.

I'm not claiming the letter is a triumph of content and grammar, but it includes points and phrases which are meant to attract and stimulate interest and ultimately get them through the door for the next stage.

- Appeal to a need or want.
- Don't use masonic words and phrases.
- Avoid deep masonic references.
- Sell the USPs
- Call to action.

## 5. Creation of List

I had experience of establishing mailshot lists and initially approached Selectabase who I had used previously, I was amazed to find that they refused to supply a client list to assist Freemasonry. Having conducted extensive research, I found a Company called UK Datahouse who were happy to assist.

As a team we agreed that it would be sensible to use the WF14 postcode as our local area and the other filters we requested were Males between the ages of 30 and 65. This produced an initial list of 1616 people to contact. The reasoning for that was that below 30 is probably too young and over 65 is not a long-term solution.

If you are doing this exercise and another lodge in the same area is doing the same, you may wish to liaise with each other as sending the same letter to multiple recipients isn't going to look very good.

- Decide your list filters.
- Communicate with other Lodges on the same path.

## 6. Batching, Costs and Results

I then purchased the list of 1616 names and addresses from UK Datahouse at a cost of £302.40 plus vat for a single use. As I had my own team in my business, we prepared the mailshot list and posted the letter and provincial brochure to the prospective candidates in batches of about 300 letters per week.

UK Datahouse will however do a mailshot exercise for you using the purchased list. The costings are 1000 records £871.00 plus Vat, 2000 records £1573.00 plus vat and 4000 records £2000 plus vat. Based on this, the total cost of a 1000 letter mailshot would be £1,269 with VAT and a 2000 letter mailshot would be £2,340 with VAT.

Since starting the exercise, we now have six entered apprentices on board and will be initiating two more early 2024. Of these, one member was a Lewis and one of the initiates for next year was helpfully provided by Chris Maudsley's Provincial team. A 1600 letter mailshot would have cost £2030 and based on six candidates that equates to £338 per candidate.

Anyone who enjoys fishing will know what a feeding frenzy is and that is what we have endeavoured to create. As candidates visited the lodge, they could clearly see a vibrant fun atmosphere with a queue of members waiting to join, a very different situation from where we were twelve months ago. Although Jim Wigglesworth our Lewis didn't come from the mailshot exercise, I am convinced that the success we were having triggered the decision to join when he did.

This has given the lodge purpose and our practices real meaning; the challenge now is to manage expectations and fit everyone in. Our priority will be to initiate the two remaining candidates and we will then have six Passings and eight Raisings to do, so we have no shortage of ceremonies.

- Approve sufficient budget.
- Try creating a critical mass.

## 7. Managing Responses

In the first instance my mobile phone number and a lodge email address was put on the letter so that a prospective candidate could call or email me, the emails were viewed by the team.

I would in the first instance have a telephone conversation with the gentleman concerned which would typically take forty-five minutes or so, then if all was well invite them to the lodge after a practice night.

- Make sure methods of communication work and are monitored.

## 8. Finding the Good Guys

When handling enquiries, a very common theme was that lives had slipped into a routine of, *sleep-work-home-sleep*, and that was their existence. There are a lot of men out there who are desperate to have a social life and a beer and chat with like-minded individuals. We particularly appeal to people who have been in the services, police, fire, i.e., workplace fraternities.

I would thank them for their enquiry and have a chat about the fact that we are a private members club, the only way to join is to be proposed and seconded by an existing member. We are not elitist, but we do have high standards, we pride ourselves on our diverse membership. Let's not water this down, people are honoured to be considered and aspire to rise to our standards. There is no need to try to be all things to all men.

I explain to potential candidates that Masonry isn't for everyone, and they may not be for us. The initial discussion is the beginning of a process and if this goes well, I then invite them to the lodge to see who we are and what we do. As I don't want to waste their time, or mine, I need to make sure that they should be a good fit and give them some information and ask them some questions.

- Get them in for a beer.
- Manage expectations.
- Retain the option to abort.
- Use the Provincial guidance as a template.

## Items For Discussion (Provincial Guidance)

The pro forma provided by Province is a very useful document and the topics I would discuss are:

- Why do you think you would like to join Freemasonry?
- Do you have a belief in a supreme being?
- Do you have a criminal record?
- Do you expect to have any material benefits from Freemasonry?
- Do you have any disabilities?
- Do you have a desire to assist your fellow man in charitable giving?
- Our Practice nights are Thursday nights, and we meet every second Friday – dress codes?
- Lodge fees £240 per annum or £20 per month?
- Cost of meals at festive board £15-£20
- Are you in reasonable financial shape?
- Donations to charity are at your discretion, is this agreeable?
- Partner details, are they okay with Masonry? – discuss social aspect for partners

I would encourage candidates to expand on all these topics and by the time we are done I have a good feeling about who we are dealing with.

Throughout the discussion I am asking myself

1. Are they going to be good for Masonry?
2. Is Masonry going to be good for them?
3. Will they enjoy socialising with us, and will we enjoy socialising with them?

**If the answer to any of these questions is no, I end the conversation pleasantly. Bringing unsuitable people into the organisation is not my aim.**

## 9. Introducing Them to The Lodge and Masonry

Assuming all is well I would ask them to attend one evening, directly after the practice, at 8pm and make sure I am at the door to greet them. We have an initial chat at the bar and introduce them to the team. We would then show them the building including the temple and dining room etc.

The visit to the Temple is a good time to talk about the history of the lodge, the officers and what they do, the ladder, Masonic progression etc. The three ceremonies they will take part in before they are a master mason. We would show them the dining room and talk about socials and the events throughout the year. Back to the bar, it will have been explained that the first visit is just a no obligation look at our Lodge and a chance to meet the members. Ideally, we would introduce one candidate at a time.

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If all has gone well, we would explain the necessity of getting to know each other over time. Over several weeks they get into the idea of meeting on a Thursday and hopefully realise they would miss it. When we are happy, we let them know, and the ball is then in their court.

- Introduce them to the social side.
- A Lodge tour and explanation of our history.
- Various aspects of membership and progression.
- Put on simmer, leave until cooked.

## 10. Getting them to come on Practice Nights

Until their initiation I would make a habit of calling them at least once a week and confirm they are coming to the lodge, less frequent afterwards as this is now more the mentoring team's province.

## 11. Handling Success

Well, they're here now. The candidates have shown great potential and gelled with the members. It creates quite a buzz in the bar after practice, that feel-good feeling. Your secretaries will be familiar with the paperwork, summonses, and scheduling ceremonies with the Master and DC. Due to the rapid intake of candidates we even had an extra meeting by dispensation, turning one of the practice nights into a lodge night. All is well so far, and we will soon start on Passings. There are two scheduled and then it's the Installation in December.

With the new Master and DC, I'm hoping for a positive effort into bringing the new candidates through. We have two initiations to do, one in January and one in February. then it's back to Passings. We hope to double up on Passings so we can quickly move on to Raisings. We may also schedule some more meetings with dispensations.

As a group, we are conscious of keeping the brethren engaged and involved. It will be a fine balance, introducing some new methods as the old attitudes raise their heads. Comments such as "they can wait" will not help with retaining the new membership. The Lodge needs this group to be Master Masons quickly and available to take Office. Maybe we can relax with the next intake. I'm confident that with this team and support from the members, we will be successful.

- Initiate as soon as they are ready.
- Beware of having them wait too long to progress.

## 12. Retention and Staying Away from Old Habits

Now we have them, let's try and keep them.

Before Covid, we had a Mentor but had not appointed a Membership Officer. Both these appointments have matured significantly within Freemasonry in recent years. In the past, the attitude of Mirfield Past Masters has been "sink or swim" and as most candidates had an existing family member or friend in the Lodge, this usually worked out.

In this new intake, we have no such relationships, and the Mentor system is of supreme importance. However, as a group intake, they have naturally bonded with each other and are themselves, their own support structure.

I have appointed some personal mentors and take a direct hands-on approach with initial information, but I have no intention of mentoring them all personally. As relationships and personalities become apparent, I will pair them up with personal mentors.

We have a group email and I encourage them to visit the Solomon resource. On practice nights where they will be asked to leave the temple, I, or another Past Master will go with them to encourage discussion or go over points they bring up.

The membership team all have a deep personal interest in retaining these Masons and unlike the many members who have gone by the wayside during my time in Masonry, if we lose one of these, I will take it badly. This drives me to work harder to keep them.

Unfortunately, as the Membership Team is so focussed on its task, that may not trickle through to the Lodge in general. It is possible that for some members, especially those who just turn up for Lodge night, that the appearance of these members was inevitable and that it is business as usual. Old attitudes have raised their heads.

While ever we have sufficient candidates, I believe that the continuing purpose of the Membership Team should be to educate the other members. To get across that mentoring is a lodge-wide activity and that candidates are hard won and not to be taken for granted.

- Use the Mentoring system.
- Communicate well.
- Change old attitudes with existing members.
- Make them feel valued.

## 13. Feedback from Recent Initiates

I recently sat with four of our six initiates specifically to ask them about the experience from receiving the letter to being initiated. The results, though not scientific, are interesting.

Of the group I queried, most had a knowledge of Freemasonry, one had not. None of them threw the letter away for later retrieval. Response time from receiving the letter to contacting Garry varied from weeks to five minutes.

They were all pleased to receive the letter and said being selected made them feel a little bit special. One was wary.

All considered the letter to be the main factor in making the decision to contact us but did not dismiss the corporate stuff we added to the pack. We have concluded it needs to be in there, if only to enable us to minimise mention Masonic ritual in the letter.

In the main they didn't realise I was attempting to play on isolation and lack of purpose following Covid, but the letter worked so I must have been too subtle.

All were completely satisfied by the preparation and information they received from Garry prior to entering the building and others after they started to come on Thursdays.

All were surprised that Freemasonry usually gets members from family and friends of masons and until recent years has not taken walk-ins, let alone actually recruited, as we have done. This is an important point and one to consider further.

Under previous custom and practice, possibly none of these men would have become Masons. We went out there and against doctrine, scooped them up. You will meet them later, they are all fine examples of what Masonry needs, which suggests a good part of Masonry has been missing a trick for some time.

It would be foolish to think all our problems are over. We have many ceremonies in front of us, but without further candidates they will come to an end.

We have already begun to discuss with these initiates about bringing in friends and relations as soon as they feel ready. When I joined it was not encouraged at this early stage. If that doesn't work, then there's always another mailshot, out to a three-mile radius perhaps. This time though we will be armed with experience.

So not only has the scheme worked but through an ongoing quality control system, mainly applied by Garry, the standard has been high. I know Garry will have alluded to this, but it is so important I'll say it again. You need a Garry Burden, find him in your lodge and empower him to make the decisions on suitability.

- Get the letter right.
- Inform and manage expectations at every stage.
- Embrace that this is a new way, not the old way.
- Plan for the next batch.
- Find your inner Garry.

## 14. Closing Remarks and Questions

I am sure that the situation our lodge found itself in is not unusual and is probably repeated in most Lodges.

When Columbus crossed the Atlantic, the hardest part was not knowing if there was anything on the other side. I am sure, knowing there was land, made the next voyage was a lot easier. Hopefully we have made that first voyage for you.

If you are going to try to replicate what we have achieved in your own lodges, I would suggest that you consider the following points and make any changes necessary.

Ask yourselves honestly and candidly if your lodge has appeal, from a social point of view. In my experience, people have joined to feel that they belong to something, and they look forward to going to talk with each other. The new members, although we have worked hard to integrate them, have naturally formed an affinity group, and get on famously. The ceremonial and charitable giving is nice but is never going to be the primary motivation to join.

If you don't have practices and lodge nights where members stay for a drink and chat afterwards, I would suggest that you think about making changes to make your lodge more welcoming to candidates.

You need to have a serious commitment from the lodge to provide the necessary funding for the exercise, I would suggest at least £1,000 and based on our experience this would produce 3 candidates, £2,000 might be better.

You need to have team of Membership Officer, Mentor, Master, Secretary and at least two other members who can keep the potential candidates occupied, whilst the rest of the team are introducing more.

You will receive by email copies of the letter used, which you will need to amend for your own purposes, the provincial brochure, our notes and contact details for UK datahouse.

I wish you well in your endeavours and look forward to hearing success stories.

Any Questions??