



The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society

By Jasper Ridley

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For many centuries, since their founding as a guild comprising the master builders of the great castles and cathedrals of the Middle Ages, the freemasons have enjoyed a dual reputation: powerful-often munificent-rulers, politicians, and artists whose works have enhanced our world; and members of a dread secret society bent on evil. Here the eminent historian Jasper Ridley offers a thoughtful, rounded assessment of freemasonry throughout the ages, from its origins to the present day. Not a mason himself, Ridley nonetheless refutes many of the outrageous allegations made against the order and puts into proper perspective its many contributions to civilization over the centuries.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Many books about the Freemasons are hysterical polemics based on ludicrous conspiracy theories. British historian Jasper Ridley offers a welcome antidote to these half-witted tomes with *The Freemasons*, a sober-minded account of a secret society that has survived for centuries. Most important, Ridley provides the one thing missing from many discussions of the masons: facts. For instance, after noting the "well-established legend in the United States that the Freemasons made the American Revolution," Ridley shows that "of the 55 men who signed the Declaration of Independence, only nine were certainly masons." (Prominent members of the founding generation who were *not* masons include Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton.) This shows that masons have played a meaningful role in history, though not the domineering one their critics have alleged. Even though Ridley (who is not a mason) defends the masons against the overblown charges made against them, he doesn't quite buy the explanation that "they are no different from a golf club. ...Members of golf clubs do not take oaths not to reveal the secrets of the club." For a level-headed account of how a medieval guild of stone masons developed over time into an offbeat social organization with a powerful membership, Ridley's book is tough to beat. --John Miller

From Publishers Weekly

As Masonic halls throughout America shut their doors because of declining membership Ridley provides an extended history of the group that was in its prime a couple of generations ago. Although its origins can be traced to stonemasons of the Middle Ages, the Masonic movement as we know it today took root in 18th-century England, where the first Grand Lodge was established in 1717. The movement thrived thanks to its ability to attract aristocratic and influential members of society among them Sir Walter Scott, Frederick the Great and George Washington who joined to socialize, dine and exchange views with like-minded and similarly influential men, and get a frisson from engaging in secret rituals in an exclusive club. Despite the catalogue of powerful members, the book's subtitle is misleading. The Masonic movement, as a sympathetic Ridley himself shows, has generally been benign, and tried to steer clear of political controversy, particularly in the two countries Britain and the United States where it has most firmly taken root. Of course, any secret society that boasts influential members is bound to cause suspicion, and Ridley details the waves of anti-Masonic sentiment that arose throughout the centuries, as well as assorted scandals involving fraud and murder allegations. Yes, its members swear to preserve its secrets on pain of death. But the main reason that Freemasonry's mysteries remain hidden appears largely to be a general lack of interest by society at large. Because of the sweeping scope of his study, Ridley often oversimplifies an age or historical figure. Thus, this is less a book for the serious reader of history than for the simply inquisitive or prospective members of the movement who have no inkling how the Masons differ from Rotarians. 15,000 first printing.

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From Library Journal

Freemasonry is one of the most misunderstood organizations in modern history, and in this lively narrative British historian Ridley (*Bloody Mary's Martyrs*) attempts to set the historical record straight. While it is well known that George Washington was a Mason, other names on the Masons' list might surprise the average reader: Mozart, Pushkin, Churchill, Booker T. Washington, Irving Berlin, Clark Gable, Charles Lindbergh, J. Edgar Hoover, John Glenn, and at least 16 additional U.S. Presidents. Ridley traces the growth of this society from the Middle Ages to the present and interweaves history, politics, and religion in his

survey. Especially fascinating are discussions on the role of Freemasons in the American and French Revolutions, their lingering influence in European politics in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the condition of the organization after World War II. In the final chapter, "Are the Freemasons a Menace?," Ridley deftly assesses the body of recent literature that is highly critical of the Masons. This book is a useful companion to the many scholarly and specialized works on the subject, such as Lynn Dumenil's *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930* (o.p.). Recommended for most public and academic libraries. Thomas A. Karel, Franklin & Marshall Coll. Lib., Lancaster, PA
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Emily Meredith:

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important work, like looking for your favorite e-book and reading a guide. Beside you can solve your long lasting problem; you can add your knowledge by the publication entitled *The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society*. Try to make the book *The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society* as your friend. It means that it can to be your friend when you sense alone and beside associated with course make you smarter than before. Yeah, it is very fortunated in your case. The book makes you much more confidence because you can know anything by the book. So , we need to make new experience as well as knowledge with this book.

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