

Le Droit Humain History



Foundations

Our Order was established as a Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and has spread globally offering initiatory continuity from the 1st to the 33rd and last degree to sincere and diligent Freemasons. Though we are very similar to other forms of male-only Freemasonry, we pride ourselves on our distinct differences.

The International order of Freemasonry for Men and Women: LE DROIT HUMAIN is an international masonic order that makes no distinction of gender, class, creed, belief, religion, or politics. It imposes no dogma; it is concerned with the nobler things in life and seeks to support its members in their individual and collective search for Truth.

Our Order was founded by Mrs. Maria Desraismes (a journalist and advocate for the rights of women and children) and Dr. Georges Martin (a Senator and Municipal Councillor of Paris), who undertook campaigns in favour of the civic and political rights of women, the defence of the rights of oppressed children, against clerical intolerance and for the establishment of a neutral school respecting the ideas of everyone.



Marie Desraismes

Maria Deraismes was initiated - on 14th January 1882 - into Lodge Les Libres Penseurs of Pecq, a small village to the west of Paris. She was the first female Freemason, symbolising initiatory equality. Eleven years later, on 4th April 1893, Maria Deraismes and Georges Martin, a well-known mason, created in Paris the first co-gendered masonic Lodge. Out of this co-masonic Lodge came the birth of the Grande Loge Symbolique Ecosaise LE DROIT HUMAIN, establishing the equality of men and women, from which came the International Order of Freemasonry for Men and Women LE DROIT HUMAIN.

The Order spread throughout Europe before sowing itself in other parts of the world. The global spread of the Order is often attributed to social activist and theosophist Annie Besant, but there have been many who have spread the light of gender equal Freemasonry.

Freemasons who felt more strongly about social progress and gender equality, than blind adherence to centuries old social traditions that no longer served the common good of society, therefore, were behind the

formation of our Order and LE DROIT HUMAIN was and remains supported and endorsed by the major Masonic bodies of Europe.



Annie Besant

Our obedience is a fully fledged Masonic Order, deriving its authority from French Freemasonry in the 1800's. and our Sisters and Brothers today are custodians of venerable Masonic tradition, founded upon the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and its principles of self-improvement, benevolence and justice.

Our organisation is not a feminist or women's rights movement, but many women have taken the empowering, lifechanging and enriching masonic lessons and applied these in the many aspects of their professional, public, and private lives. It was the hope of our Founders Georges Martin and Maria Desraismes that male dominated social institutions such as Freemasonry could become agents for great social good, not only in women's rights but also the rights of all those who at that time who lacked advocacy and agency.

The International Order of Freemasonry for Men and Women: LE DROIT HUMAIN today, is a place where gender inclusion is taken for granted and women can serve in roles from the Master of their Lodges to the Grand Master of the International Order.

Freemasonry borrows from the symbolic language of many traditions to awaken its members to the fundamentals of life. Great emphasis is placed on the personal inner journey of self-realisation and development, the manifestation of true brotherhood on earth and the unfoldment of true human potential both individually and collectively. Our Sisters and Brothers embrace the principles of our Order

Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité

Australian Federation History



Foundations and Growth

Freemasonry for men and women in Australia had its foundation in Victoria with the formation of the first Co-Masonic Lodge there in 1911 and the story of the journey of the gradual spread of our Order is detailed below. From those early beginnings, fifty-nine years of hard work and dedication followed, culminating in the National Convention held in Sydney on 23rd and 24th March 1970 where, under the able and inspiring chairmanship of the former Representative, The Very Illustrious Brother N. Sri Ram, 33°, an Australian Federation was duly formed.

The G. . I. . G. . of the 33° and Last Degree of the Order of International Co-Freemasonry, "LE DROIT HUMAIN" of the Antient and Accepted Scottish Rite, constituting the Universal Supreme Council of the ORDER, meeting at the Zenith of Paris on 25th January 1970 (E.V.), have authorized, on the proposition of The V. Ills. Bro. SRI NAM, T.M.P.G.C. of the Eastern Federation, and under reservation of the favourable decision of the National Convention which is to be held in SYDNEY on 23rd and 24th March. 1970 (E.V.), the Lodges of all the Degrees in the Australian Administration to constitute themselves into an autonomous Federation, with all the rights and prerogatives accorded by the International Constitution.

Made at the Zenith of Paris the 25th January 1970 (E.V.)
The M.P.S.G.C., Gr. MASTER of the ORDER
T. Ills. Bro. A. CLEMENT, 33°.

This was an historic event for Co-Freemasonry in Australia in that the Convention and the Grand Occasional Combined Meeting which followed it were the first in which the Officers were drawn from all Australian Orients. Members and visitors present represented at least 10 different countries, and messages of goodwill were received from still more.

To all those whose dedication, passion and energy helped our Order develop and flourish through good times and bad and, indeed, to all who have come before us and been the corner stone of our Order both here in Australia and across the globe, may Light Perpetual shine upon them!

Victoria (1911)

The crucible of men's and women's Freemasonry in Australia was certainly Melbourne, the capital city of Victoria, a southern state of Australia. While male craft Freemasonry had been in existence since the 1800s (with its first Grand Lodge in Australia formed in South Australia in 1884), it was not long after the Order of International Co-Freemasonry (Le Droit Humain) was constituted on 11th May 1899 – and that of the first British Lodge, Human Duty No. 6 in 1902 – that a Provisional Warrant was issued (1911) for Australia's first Lodge.

It might have started in 1909, as in December that year, Mr and Mrs H. Hunt had travelled to India and been Initiated, Passed and Raised there, and they were later involved in the founding of a second Lodge in Melbourne, but it really started with a conversation in Adelaide in April 1911 where two male Master Masons, Brother Samuel Studd (English Constitution) and Brother John McConkey (Irish Constitution) explored the idea of establishing a Co-Masonic Lodge in Melbourne.

On their return to Melbourne, and with the assistance of five other male Master Masons, an application for a Warrant was signed and sent to Very Illustrious Brother Annie Besant 33^o, then Vice-President of the Supreme Council. Besant, Martin, Leadbeater and Bennet are names that now begin to play an integral part in the development of Freemasonry for men and women in Australia. A Provisional Warrant was signed on 10th September 1911 and received in Melbourne in late October that same year for the establishment of Victorian Lodge No. 150 with a proviso that the applicants – all male craft Freemasons – affiliate with the Co-Masonic Order 'at the first opportunity'.

On 25th August 1911, while awaiting the arrival of the Provisional Warrant, practice began in earnest to be ready for the formation of the Lodge. Brother Studd acted as Worshipful Master and Worshipful Brother Fred Bennett, a visitor from England working with the authority of the Grand Secretary in England, ran several Lodges of Instruction, created Master Masons, and formed a Triangle with the Hunts for the formation of a second Lodge that became Melbourne Lodge No. 401.

The Brethren of Victorian Lodge visited the Triangle of Melbourne Lodge for the Raising of Brother Constance Radcliffe of Adelaide and Brothers Studd, McConkey and Hill were Affiliated in Universal Co-Masonry.

On the 27th of October the Provisional Warrant was read, officers elected and at 3pm on the 9th of December 1911 the Installation of Victorian Lodge No. 150 took place assisted by Grand Lodge officers from the male craft from Victoria and Queensland. A few hours after the Installation, Mrs Mary Ellen Studd was Initiated.

Meetings were then held fortnightly, and ten candidates were initiated. Key to the success of Freemasonry for men and women was that many of these candidates were subsequently involved in the foundation of lodges in other states of Australia viz: Mrs A. Forsyth and her sister Miss M. Clarke (Brisbane Lodge No. 405 in Queensland); Mr D. Tweedie, Miss Claxton, and Miss Radcliffe (Adelaide Lodge No. 406 in South Australia); and Mrs O. Farmer (St. Cuthbert's Lodge in Western Australia). All these Lodges were under the British Jurisdiction until the formation of the Eastern Jurisdiction in 1934.

The regular Warrant arrived in April 1912 signed by M. Georges Martin as Presiding Master of the Order and dated 25th February 1912. It was discovered at this time that Victorian Lodge (the first lodge established) had been re-numbered 403 and the second Lodge in Victoria, Melbourne Lodge had been numbered 401. No explanation was given for the change by the Grand Secretary in England.

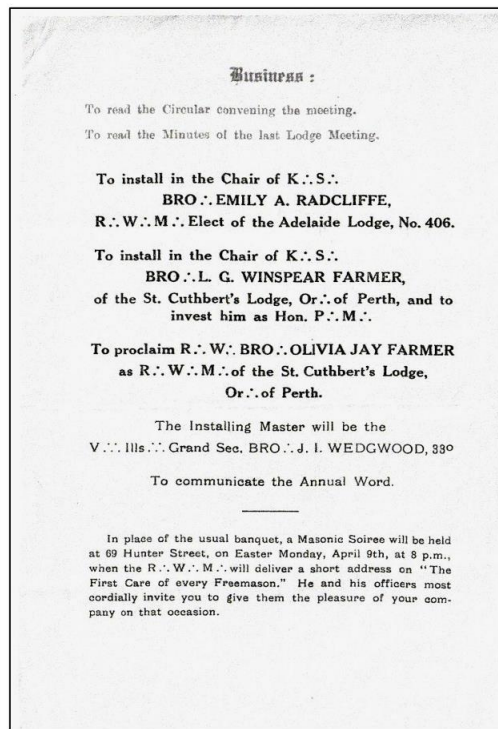
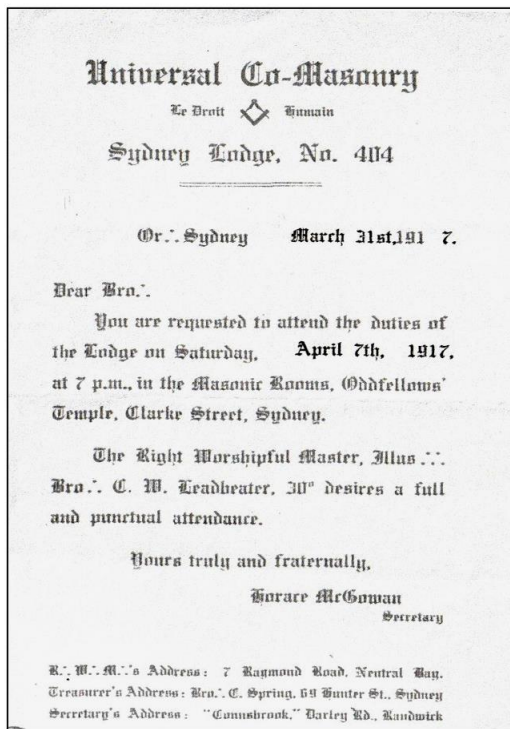
At the end of 1911, Worshipful Brother Bennett, who had contributed so much to the establishment of the two Victorian Lodges, moved to New South Wales to reside in Sydney and was then instrumental in the foundation of Sydney Lodge No. 404.

Freemasonry for men and women now had a strong foundation from which to build, and it is clear the passion and energy of a few provided a great benefit to the many that followed.

The intervention of war, the Depression, and the post-World War II decline in membership of Freemasonry in Australia more broadly has, sadly, seen several Lodges surrender their Warrants in Victoria and in other states of Australia. The Lodges that remain continue to shine brightly, however.

New South Wales (1912)

Sydney Lodge No. 404 was founded 24th February 1912 with Right Worshipful Brother Fred Bennett, who had previously been instrumental in the foundation of the two Lodges in Melbourne, as its Foundation Master.



South Australia (1913)

On the 10th of June 1912 an informal meeting was held in Adelaide to discuss the formation of a Lodge in South Australia. Brothers D. Tweedie, Elsie Claxton, and Constance Radcliffe, who had all been initiated in Victorian Lodge No. 403, were joined in the discussion by Brothers Edith Haycraft, Berthe Mouchette, Marie Levin and Fanny Hawkins. Brother Haycraft, as the only Master Mason present with more than 12 months in that degree, was proposed as Master Elect.

The use of 'Brother' for both genders until 2005 - and initials only in most of the historical documents - perhaps hides the full impact of the women in 'men's and women's Freemasonry'. A glance at the names of the 'brothers' above show the female influence was strong from the very beginning.

A meeting was held on 27th November of that year to develop the application for a charter and to sort through clearances for the members of the proposed new Lodge from their current 'mother' Lodges.

Bro. Haycraft; b. Radcliffe; Hawkins; b. A. Radcliffe; Tweedie; Claxton.
Bro. E. J. Haycraft occupied the Chair.
During Bro. Sydney Ransom's visit to Adelaide in October, a practice meeting had been held, and on her advice it was resolved to at once apply for a charter, and to form a South Australian Lodge, to be called the "Adelaide Lodge of Co-Masonry."

From the Minutes of Adelaide Lodge No. 406, 27th November 1912

These tasks successfully completed, the first Installation meeting of the new Lodge, Adelaide Lodge No. 406, was held in the Theosophical Society Building in Adelaide in March 1913, the Warrant signed by Georges Martin and Annie Besant amongst others. The Installing Master was the Very Illustrious Brother J. I.

Wedgewood, Grand Secretary aided by Illustrious Brother Charles Leadbeater. It was, however, another year before the collars and symbols of office arrived and the investiture of officers could proceed with full regalia.

The connection between Adelaide Lodge No. 406 and Charles Leadbeater had been established, however, and in June 1915, Adelaide Lodge No. 406 founding member, Brother Tweedie, reported on the 'great honour shown to Lodges in Australia' by Leadbeater's joining Sydney Lodge No. 404 (Leadbeater was RWM of Sydney Lodge No. 404 in 1916-17).

Leadbeater visited Adelaide Lodge No. 406 at the Theosophical Society rooms in October 1915 and gave an address on The Religious Aspect of Freemasonry. That same month Leadbeater magnetised and presented a sword for use by the Right Worshipful Master of the Lodge that is still used during the obligation of every candidate in every degree worked. In June 1916, Leadbeater also donated a thurible to Adelaide Lodge No. 406 which, again, is used for all the Orders worked.

Regular meetings of Adelaide Lodge No. 406 are held between the months of February to November each year concluding with a Christmas Dinner in December. A Craft Installation Dinner is also held in March on the night immediately following the Installation meeting.

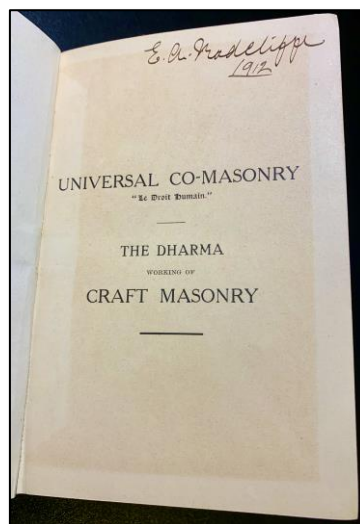
Most months, a few members gather at the Temple on a Saturday morning to work on maintenance, gardening, rehearsing degree ceremonies, etc... and these inevitably include discussion of masonic matters (e.g., the meaning of a section of ritual, etc...) over a coffee and refreshments. The members also run 2 'external' activities – the Saturday Sessions and Societas Lux et Sapientia - that promote the orders and have attracted new members as well as having provided another opportunity for our members to connect. Saturday Sessions are held each month at the Temple (primarily in the winter months) and Societas Lux et Sapientia also meets monthly (including dinner) on a Thursday evening at a city location. Both are open to the public with Pieces of Architecture on a broad range of masonic and philosophical topics.

In 2023 Adelaide Lodge No. 406 celebrated its 110th anniversary in Le Droit Humain's 130th year.

Ritual

The Australian Federation currently has three approved Craft rituals, the Lauderdale Ritual, the Scottish Ritual formerly used by Emulation Lodge No. 436 in Melbourne and the Georges Martin (Symbolic) degrees.

In 1902 at the inauguration of the British constitution, the Georges Martin ritual was used initially. In 1904 the Dharma or British ritual (derived from English, Scottish and Irish Freemasonry) was adopted including some modification to fit with the French Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite ritual.



The Dharma ritual book (signed, and dated 1912) belonging to Emily A. Radcliffe, RWM of Adelaide Lodge No. 406

Theosophy was originally an influence for many members but since then most members have been influenced by a broad range of philosophical schools of thought. The Dharma ritual, as the male craft ritual had in the past, developed over time to include elements from these schools, primarily those of Eastern ideals and spirituality.

As Very Illustrious Brother Ric Thomas, Past Most Puissant Grand Commander of the Australian Federation, points out: 'the current Lauderdale ritual in Australian lodges was developed from the Dharma ritual by CW Leadbeater, JI Wedgewood and Russak-Hotchener with the participation or assent of Annie Besant and George Arundale and others.' The current Australian version dates to 1913, but it is the influence of Le Droit Humain luminaries such as these who were involved in its development that can still be felt in Australian Lodges today.

Sources used for this article include but are not limited to: a range of documents from various Lodges of our Orders in Australia; the *Australian Federation 2021 General Regulations*; Brother Ric Thomas' online history entitled *Freemasonry for Men and Women in Australia*; Brother John McConkey's article in the first quarter of 1950 edition of *The Morning Star* entitled, *Co-Freemasonry in Australia*; a supplement to the July 1973 edition of *The Australian Co-Mason* entitled *Co-Freemasonry Comes to Australia*; and research and documents by Brothers G. Martin, E. E. Backhouse and Enid Hill of St Cuthbert's Lodge, Perth; former Administrator General, Brother F. M. B. Hynes; Brother C. M. Rudy of Remembrance No. 1081, Perth; various authors unknown; and research undertaken by Adelaide Lodge No. 406 Historian/Librarian Sister Helen Hall and compiled and edited by Brother Steve Brown of Adelaide Lodge No. 406.