

Why do we have a website?

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Under the quizzical eye of the newly established Community Relations Committee—and with absolutely no consultation with any Grand Lodge officer—in 1996 a website of some dozen pages was uploaded for the Grand Lodge of British Columbia, as it was styled at the time. This website has since grown to over 3,300 pages, establishing itself as a recognized authoritative source of scholarly masonic knowledge.

“Grown” may be the correct term, for there has been little planning in its development. If the curator of our Grand Lodge Library and Archives found an interesting text or image, he would scan and upload it. If our Grand Historian stumbled upon some dusty tome, up on the website it would go. When it occurred to the designer of the proceedings of Grand Masonic Day that they should be on the website, up they went. When the newly-appointed editor of the *Masonic Bulletin* started emailing the artwork to the printers as a pdf file in 1998, it also seemed like a good idea to post it to the website.

Of the three thousand and more pages, more than 400 are on the topic of anti-masonry, 700 on pop culture, and some 500 are biographies. The other half are the usual collection of history, philosophy, symbolism and perhaps the largest collection of high-resolution print-ready masonic graphics online today.

There was no committee struck, there was no master plan or table of contents prepared. If it struck the website administrator’s fancy, up on the website it went. No consultation, no consensus building, no dialogue or discussion. Sixteen years later, perhaps it’s time.

The self-appointed website administrator—appointed perhaps because at the time he was the only brother available who could recognize an HTML tag—continues to be given a startling independence. This may be due in part to the generous praise for our website that our Grand Line officers are subjected to when they attend national and international conferences.

It is not entirely true that there was no planning in the early stages of our website’s development. In 1995 the Community Relations Committee published a media handbook outlining our history and philosophy, with refutations of the anti-masonic attacks of the day, and of course a list of famous members. This handbook was mailed out to every media outlet in the province to provide them with background information in the event that they might be doing a story that touched on Freemasonry. It was these textfiles which were the first pages uploaded to our website. And from that point, the goal was to provide the most accurate information possible on the history, philosophy and symbolism of Freemasonry.

Recognizing that the topic of Freemasonry was encyclopædic, and resources were limited, a broad index of topics based on the Boyden library catalogue system was created. Those topics that generated the most questions—either directly at our Grand Lodge Library or online through forums or Usenet newsgroups frequented by our webmaster—were the first to have pages created for them. Using the resources of our Grand Lodge Library, the questions of freemasons and non-masons were

prioritized and then researched, documented and written up for posting online.

It has only been in the last five or six years that the Grand Master or Grand Secretary has taken much notice of the website. Today the brethren can find texts of our Grand Master’s addresses or reports from various committees of Grand Lodge, while your lodge secretaries can access all the forms and information they require through a password-secured portal. Perhaps next year they will be able to prepare their lodge annual returns online. The three principal publications of Grand Lodge, the *Constitutions*, *Book of Ceremonies* and *Lodge Officers Guide* are all online in updated versions, as well as the *Proceedings* of our Annual Communications.

Every lodge has its own page, detailing its meeting time and place and providing a link to its own website if it has one. Every lodge page is linked to a locator map and, often, pictures or lodge histories, and links to the lodge’s own website.

The future....

The website administrator is interested in expanding the functionality of our website. The Research Committee, under the chairmanship of RW Bro. Aidan C. Gordon, continues to provide web accessible email addresses for all the lodge secretaries and District Deputy Grand Masters, and will shortly implement a set of district, region and masonic family calendars.

The success of the calendars will very much depend on the timeliness of the information posted, and that will require the active support of lodge secretaries and at least one net-savvy brother from each district.

Our principal Grand Lodge officers now use Twitter® and several districts maintain Facebook® accounts, so we obviously are finding a use for emerging technologies. Which brings us back to the website.

Without promoting change for change’s sake, the question should be asked, “What changes should be made?” Perhaps there is nothing that needs to be changed, only things that could be added. Do we need a forum? Should we be posting lodge officers’ personal contact information?

We averaged 3,040 visitors every day last year, each visiting an average 2.8 pages. There were two notable spikes, with 15,077 visitors on 22 September, and 6,967 on 29 September. First time viewers made up 82% of the total. These numbers have not appreciatively moved in the last four years.

The majority of visitors are interested in the appearance of Freemasonry in pop culture, anti-masonry, famous freemasons and symbolism. They also like to download our graphic images. There is a trend towards using the links from the Grand Secretary’s page. What can we add to increase our traffic?

On our tenth anniversary, in the November 2005 issue of the *Masonic Bulletin*, the webmaster asked the brethren for suggestions but received no reply. Today he is asking again.