

50 Cool Words I Learned From Freemasonry

Shôn Ellerton, May 24, 2026

From Freemasonry to Shakespeare, it seems one can never exhaust the number of words in the English language.



I love learning new words and try, when appropriate, to use them in day-to-day conversation. Since I joined Freemasonry, I came across a variety of obscure and arcane words, and also some words that I might have encountered before but used within a totally different context.

Freemasonry is rich in language and its rituals and charges are abundant with wonderfully luxuriant phrases reminding us just how beautiful the English language can be. It's also given us so many words and expressions which we use in everyday conversation. Eavesdropping, being blackballed, three square meals, moral compass, being given the third degree, lodge, being on the level or on the square, and many more.

In Freemasonry, members are encouraged to take part in memorising pieces of ritual. Experienced ritualists can remember more than thirty thousand words and sometimes, much more. I think, by design, memorising, and more importantly, understanding the ritual is a clever ploy to keep the minds of men as active as possible, especially when they reach their autumn years and beyond.

Below are fifty words which I've come across in Freemasonry coming from bits of ritual, many of which, originate from Judaic stories in religious texts.

And without further ado.

1. Affability

Example in Freemasonry: *'you are always to recommend to inferiors, obedience and submission; to equals, courtesy and affability'*

Definition: Affability is the quality of being friendly, courteous, approachable, and easy to talk to. It represents a warm, sociable demeanour that makes others feel comfortable and valued, often marked by polite conversation, smiling, and active listening.

My comment: It's not a particularly unusual word; however, I've never encountered someone using it in day-to-day language. I did hear it being used in an episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* by Larry David when he pronounced himself to be an extremely affable person.

Which he isn't.

2. Apprise

Example in Freemasonry: *'...but timely to apprise them of approaching danger...'*

Definition: To inform, tell, or make someone aware of something, often implying formal or important communication.

My comment: I've very seldom heard anyone use this in conversation, the more common word used being simply, 'inform'.

3. Approbation

Example in Freemasonry: *'held upon a plot of ground which had been rendered holy by three grand offerings thereon made, which met with Divine approbation'*

Definition: Signifying high-level endorsement or validation, often from an official body or a crowd.

My comment: I can't recollect ever coming across this word before joining Freemasonry. Apparently it's rather old-school originating from the 14th century.

4. Ashlar

Example in Freemasonry: *'The immovable Jewels are the Tracing Board, and the Rough and Perfect Ashlars.'*

Definition: Finely dressed, squared stone masonry, characterized by accurately cut rectangular blocks and very thin, consistent joints.

My comment: Ashlar is one of those words you'll never hear of unless you're an architect or a Freemason. Essentially, a rough ashlar is cube of stone which has lots of knobs and excrescences all over it representing an immature mind. Whereas a perfect ashlar is a smooth cube which represents an older and wiser mind.

5. Avocations

Example in Freemasonry: *'...plead no excuse except sickness of the pressing emergencies of my public or private avocations.'*

Definition: A regular activity, hobby, or passion pursued for enjoyment outside of one's main occupation or job'

My comment: When you think about it, it makes sense. A *vocation* is someone's career or work line, whereas an *avocation* is basically a hobby. Just never heard the term before.

6. Chapter

Example in Freemasonry: *'Those pillars were adorned with two chapters, each five cubits high; the chapters were enriched with net-work...'*

Definition: The capital or uppermost part of a column, pillar, or pilaster, functioning as the architectural member that supports the entablature.

My comment: I suppose architects have come across this word, but I never did. Took me a couple of reads to realise it wasn't '*chapter*'!

7. Circumscribed

Example in Freemasonry: *'...likewise on the Volume of Sacred Law, and while a Freemason keeps himself this circumscribed, he cannot err.'*

Definition: To restrict, limit, or define the boundaries of something, often acting to restrain freedom or scope.

My comment: There have been occasional ritual slipups when the word *circumcised* was used instead of *circumscribed*.

8. Cowans

Example in Freemasonry: *'Being armed with a drawn sword, to keep off all cowans and intruders, to see that the Brethren are correctly clothed, and the candidates properly prepared.'*

Definition: An uninitiated person, specifically someone who is not a Freemason or a stonemason who has not served a formal apprenticeship.

My comment: Had no idea what a cowan was but clearly someone who should be kept at arm's length with respect to Freemasonry. But interestingly, a cowan is also someone who builds those dry stone walls which are so common in all of Britain.

9. Diadem

Example in Freemasonry: *'He crowns His Temple with stars as with a diadem.'*

Definition: A crown, headband, or ornamental fillet worn as a symbol of royalty, authority, or distinction.

My comment: Basically, it's a fancy but old Greek-inspired word for tiara. I would have never guessed the meaning considering that diadem sounds anything but what a tiara is.

10. Diffidence

Example in Freemasonry: *'...and without diffidence, from the great reliance they placed on the integrity of their employers in those days.'*

Definition: The quality of being shy, timid, or hesitant due to a lack of self-confidence in one's own abilities, worth, or fitness.

My comment: Never had any idea that this word means being shy, timid or insecure.

11. Dilate

Example in Freemasonry: *'I need not here dilate on its excellencies.'*

Definition: To speak or write at length on a particular subject, broadening the topic.

My comment: I've always heard of people *expanding* the topic, but as for dilating it? Nope. Usually I hear it in context of someone's pupils becoming dilated.

12. Divested

Example in Freemasonry: *'You were divested of all metals and valuables.'*

Definition: To sell off, dispose of, or rid oneself of assets, investments, or property, often to improve financial focus or for ethical reasons.

My comment: I might have come across the word from time to time but can you imagine being asked at the airport to divest yourself from all metals before going in the scanner?

13. Effaced

Example in Freemasonry: *'...and never will be, effaced from your memory...'*

Definition: To be erased, rubbed out, or made indistinct.

My comment: Never heard of this word before, probably, because 'erased' works equally well.

14. Encroachment

Example in Freemasonry: *'who will guard the landmarks against encroachment'*

Definition: When something illegally extends beyond its property boundary onto neighbouring land or public space.

My comment: Turns out that this quite a common word in property management and surveying but I'll include it here because it's not a word that comes out much in casual discussion.

15. Especial

Example in Freemasonry: *'It was made for three especial reasons.'*

Definition: Formal meaning of being exceptional, particular, or of special importance.

My comment: I've never ever seen this word having always used the adjective, 'special', instead. Apparently, 'especial' is a more formal version.

16. Evince

Example in Freemasonry: *'Secondly, to evince to the Brethren that you had neither metals nor valuables about you.'*

Definition: To show, reveal, or display a feeling, quality, or trait clearly.

My comment: A fancy way to say, ‘to show off’, I guess. Guaranteed, if I used this in day-to-day conversation, I’d get a few inquisitive looks.

17. Exalted

Example in Freemasonry: ‘...*extort from him the secrets of his exalted degree.*’

Definition: Describes someone or something held in high regard, elevated in rank, power, or dignity, or characterized by noble ideals.

My comment: Freemasonry is rich in rituals with such terms as exemplifications, exhortations, investitures, exaltations, installations and perfections. However, in other loftier walks of life, we have inaugurations and coronations as well.

18. Excrescences

Example in Freemasonry: ‘*knock off all superfluous knobs and excrescences*’

Definition: Abnormal, usually harmless, outgrowths or projections.

My comment: I just love this word, and it occurs only once in Freemasonry. Imagine being a workman in a quarry and you try explaining to the foreman that you need to knock out all the excrescences from a block of stone before installing it. You’d be accused of being a smartarse.

19. Exhort

Example in Freemasonry: ‘*Let me exhort you to dedicate yourself to such pursuits...*’

Definition: To strongly urge, earnestly advise, or persuade someone to take a specific course of action.

My comment: I love all these words that start with ‘x’. Here’s another one. To exhort. It’s quite direct to the point, don’t you think? Instead of saying ‘I strongly

urge you to read up on the subject matter beforehand’, why not replace ‘strongly urge’ with the pithier word, ‘exhort’?

20. Fervency

Example in Freemasonry: *‘we shall not fail to discharge our duty towards Him with fervency and zeal’*

Definition: The state of having intense, passionate, and sincere feelings, often described as great warmth, zeal, or enthusiasm.

My comment: Not a grossly uncommon word, but it’s not something I hear much in day-to-day conversation.

21. Hele

Example in Freemasonry: *‘I will always hele, conceal, and never improperly reveal any part or parts...’*

Definition: Old English meaning for to conceal or hide.

My comment: Unless you’re into old English words which aren’t used anymore or into Freemasonry, it’s unlikely you’ll ever stumble onto this word.

22. Illumine

Example in Freemasonry: *‘As the sun rises in the East to open and illumine the day...’*

Definition: To shine light on something or to make it clearer and easier to understand.

My comment: Illuminate is the more common word today but illumine also refers to enlightening the mind or soul spiritually.

23. Impart

Example in Freemasonry: ‘...to impart the afflicting intelligence to King Solomon’

Definition: To communicate information or to give a specific quality to something.

My comment: Being rather a formal version of *disclose*, *convey*, or *reveal*, *impart* sounds a bit strange in most casual conversation.

24. Indissoluble

Example in Freemasonry: ‘...has implanted in your breast a sacred and indissoluble attachment towards that country.’

Definition: Something that is impossible to break, dissolve, undo, or end.

My comment: This is, by no means, an archaic, arcane, or obscure word. However, with words like *unbreakable* and *indestructible*, most of us don’t use it. Also, it sounds like it should be associated with something that refuses to fizz away in water like an Alka Seltzer.

25. Indite

Example in Freemasonry: ‘I further solemnly promise that I will not write those secrets, indite, carve, ...’

Definition: To write, compose, or put words down in writing.

My comment: This, basically, means to write but sounds somewhat more formal having originated from the 14th century. Not to be confused with *indict*.

26. Inducement

Example in Freemasonry: *'What inducement have you to leave the East and go to the West?'*

Definition: A motive, incentive, or enticement designed to persuade someone to act, often a benefit offered to prompt a specific action.

My comment: A fancy and seldom-used way to say *motive* or *reason*. However, the verb format, *induced*, tends to be used quite often. Especially during childbirth!

27. Inviolable

Example in Freemasonry: *'to keep inviolable the secrets and mysteries...'*

Definition: Something that must be kept sacred, pure, or secure, meaning it is not, or cannot be, violated, broken, harmed, or infringed upon.

My comment: I'm sure I might have come across it before in literature involving sacred secrets or something of that ilk.

28. Oblations

Example in Freemasonry: *'The third, the many thanksgivings, oblations, burnt sacrifices and costly offerings which Solomon...'*

Definition: A formal, solemn offering or sacrifice made to God, a deity, or for a religious/charitable cause. Or, minimally invasive medical procedure used to remove abnormal tissue.

My comment: Interesting how this word can have two entirely different meanings. I had no idea what this word meant.

29. Obtrude

Example in Freemasonry: *'keep in subjection all vain and unbecoming thoughts, which may obtrude themselves...'*

Definition: To force or impose something or unwanted attention upon others without invitation, or to become inappropriately noticeable.

My comment: Nearly one-hundred percent, most of us would rather use the word, *impose*.

30. Palliate

Example in Freemasonry: *'You are not to palliate or aggravate the offences of your Brethren...'*

Definition: To make a disease, pain, or negative situation less severe or intense without removing the root cause.

My comment: Basically, this word means, *to cover up*. Never came across this word before. Importantly, this reinforces the code in Freemasonry that covering up the offences by another Brethren is simply not acceptable, despite what others may think of Freemasons.

31. Parallelepipedon

Example in Freemasonry: *'Let me first call your attention to the form of the lodge, which is a regular parallelepipedon, in length from East to West.'*

Definition: Basically, it's a three-dimensional rectangle.

My comment: This wonderfully geometrically-avowed word has no less than seven syllables! Most of us know that a cube is a three-dimensional square, but how many of us know that a three-dimensional rectangle is a *parallelepiped*? I actually didn't know this or, at least, had forgotten about it. *Parallelepipedon* is less used because this is the Greek form of the word.

32. Pendent

Example in Freemasonry: *'Pendent to the corners of the lodge are four tassels, meant to remind us of the four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice.'*

Definition: Hanging, suspended, or jutting out.

My comment: On each corner of the mosaic pavement in a Freemason's lodge is a tassel which *juts* out. Pendent seems a fitting word. I know the word only in the context of something hanging *in time* like pendent to being called in the room to hear the case, or whatever.

33. Pentalphas

Example in Freemasonry: *'The three pentalphas or five-pointed stars refer to the three lodges.'*

Definition: This is simply a five-pointed star which, in Christianity, represents the five wounds of Christ. It is also used in Freemasonry and by the Pythagoreans.

My comment: Never came across this one before but it makes sense. Coming from the Greek, *penta* means five and *alpha* refers to the letter A which is made in the middle.

34. Perjured

Example in Freemasonry: *'I shall be branded as a wilfully perjured individual...'*

Definition: A false, deceitful, or dishonest statement made after someone has sworn an oath to tell the truth.

My comment: Clearly, there's nothing very good if one is described as being *perjured!*

35. Poignard

Definition: A short dagger-like sword used for close-combat. Often used in conjunction with a rapier or longer sword.

My comment: Poignards make damn fine letter openers!

36. Privations

Example in Freemasonry: ‘...*having suffered many privations and much personal fatigue...*’

Definition: Lack or loss of basic necessities and comforts required for a standard, acceptable quality of life.

My comment: Okay. So it’s nothing to do about being *private*. Kind of like *restive* has nothing to do with being *restful*. English can be quite the confusing language we take for granted.

37. Profusion

Example in Freemasonry: ‘*To conduct himself towards this world; to observe a due medium between avarice and profusion.*’

Definition: An extremely large amount, abundant quantity, or lavish display of something.

My comment: I never thought about using this word in tandem with *avarice* or describing a large amount of items. However, I’ve certainly heard this word being used with describing a large amounts of sound or colours.

38. Recanted

Example in Freemasonry: ‘...*fifteen recanted, but three, of a more determined and atrocious character...*’

Definition: To formally withdraw or publicly take back a previously stated belief, opinion, or statement.

My comment: *Withdraw* and *retract* are words I hear commonly, but *recant* is a new one for me. I certainly use *decant* often enough. Especially when pouring wine!

39. Recapitulate

Example in Freemasonry: *'It is unnecessary to recapitulate the duties which, as a Freemason, you are bound to discharge...'*

Definition: To summarize, review, or state again the main points of a discussion, argument, or presentation.

My comment: This is one of those words that almost everyone only knows its shortened version, *recap*. Imagine going into a meeting and state, 'OK everybody, let's do a recapitulation!' Sounds a bit like chopping someone's head off in a strange sort of way. Oh wait! That's decapitation!

40. Scruple

Example in Freemasonry: *'without scruple, well knowing they were justly entitled to them'*

Definition: A moral or ethical consideration, feeling, or doubt that acts as a guiding principle, making you uneasy or reluctant to do something you believe is wrong.

My comment: Yes. I've heard this word being used many times. For example, not having any *scruples* on accepting a gift from a dodgy person, or something like that. But having learnt the definition gives a new light on the meaning for me.

41. Sepulture

Example in Freemasonry: *'raise the body of our Master to such a sepulture as became his rank and exalted degree'*

Definition: The act of placing a deceased person in a grave or tomb, or the actual burial chamber itself.

My comment: This is a rather curious and sombre word I was to find out. The example given above didn't make much sense, and, in a way, it still seems convoluted when compared to its formal definition. The word comes from the Latin, *sepultura*, which means burial.

42. Skirret

Example in Freemasonry: *'The Skirret is an implement which acts on a centre pin, whence a line is drawn to mark out ground for the intended structure.'*

Definition: An obscure and obsolete term for an instrument consisting of a wrapped bit of twine around a rotating spindle to lay out lines for building foundations.

My comment: Not knowing the word, I've used my own form of *skirrets* many times. For example, when I built my circular fire pit, I made a crude skirret made of a centre pin and a bit of twine to which I scribed a circle to define the boundaries of a pit. Unless you're an old-school carpenter or a Freemason, I doubt this word is ever used anymore.

43. Slipshod

Example in Freemasonry: *'Your right heel was slipshod.'*

Definition: Characterized by a lack of care, thought, or organization.

My comment: This is interesting. Today it is used to describing something being shabby or of being bad quality. For example, a workman's slipshod attempt in building a straight brick wall. However, back in the 1500s, it was to describe someone wearing over-loose slippers or shabby shoes.

44. Smote

Example in Freemasonry: *'smote their own in sympathy with his sufferings'*

Definition: To hit or strike heavily or to destroy, defeat, or severely injure.

My comment: 80s kids playing Dungeons & Dragons might have felt all cool using this word against their opponents. 'Let's *smite* the dragon!' I first heard this when reading some excerpt from a King Arthur legend when Lancelot *smote* the Black Knight. How cool is that?

45. Specie

Example in Freemasonry: *'the Fellow Crafts were paid their wages in specie..'*

Definition: Money in the form of physical coins rather than paper banknotes or bullion.

My comment: Not to be confused with *species*, clearly! I had no idea that it meant hard money nor did I know that it means *in kind* in Latin. Go into a shop and ask if they accept *specie* in terms of payment.

46. Stablish

Example in Freemasonry: *'He shall build me an house and I will stablish his throne for ever'*.

Definition: Archaic definition of setting up, founding, ratifying, or making something firm and secure.

My comment: While all of us knows what *establish* stands for, *stablish* is more often found in historical texts and has a deeper nuance of setting up principles rather than simply to begin something new.

47. Sublunary and Superlunary

Example in Freemasonry: *'so that when we shall be summoned from this sublunary abode'*

Definition: Earthly, worldly, or relating to the physical world beneath the Moon.

My comment: Perhaps my favourite new word because it just sounds so cool. In essence, it can describe mortality or of this Earth. Likewise, although not in Freemasonry, I assumed *superlunary* refers to the ethereal or otherworldly, and I was right. Love these two words.

48. Succour

Example in Freemasonry: *'dispose my heart to succour his weakness and relieve his necessities'*

Definition: Assisting, supporting, or giving relief to someone who is suffering, in distress, or facing difficulties.

My comment: *Succour* is a nice short and sweet way of providing relief and assistance to someone suffering in distress.

49. Supplicate

Example in Freemasonry: *'We supplicate the continuance of Thine aid, O merciful Lord, on behalf of ourselves and him who kneels before Thee.'*

Definition: To ask for something in a deeply humble, earnest, or pleading manner.

My comment: Used a lot in religious context, but having looked the word up, now I know that this is a better way than to beg for something.

50. Tyled

Example in Freemasonry: *'To see that the lodge is properly tyled.'*

Definition: To securely guard a meeting from non-members or eavesdroppers. Also, an alternative spelling for *tiled*. For example, when a bathroom is tiled.

My comment: The word *tyled* is almost exclusively used in Freemasonry to describe the meeting being in session and guarded from outsiders. Outside the

door of the lodge is a *tyler* or *outer guard* who guards the door with a great big sword. Presumably used always in a figurative way!

...and Finally

And finally to point out that this just brushes the surface of new words and expressions I came across in the world of Freemasonry. There are other orders of Freemasonry which have given rise to some quite peculiar words I didn't have time to include in this piece.

Perhaps for another time?