

# SECRET SOCIETY revealed

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The world-wide fraternal organisation that is Freemasonry has silently endured condemnation and even persecution. Rumours of human sacrifice and satanic worship were rife.

The Levuka Masonic Lodge – the oldest in the Pacific – was burnt down during the 2000 coup because villagers believed that something dark and sinister transpired within the building.

Who are these men and what were they doing in their Lodges? *maiLife* was granted an exclusive interview with a high-standing member of the Freemasons in Fiji and the Pacific, Ross McDonald.

This is his story.

Story by WAMEVALENTINE

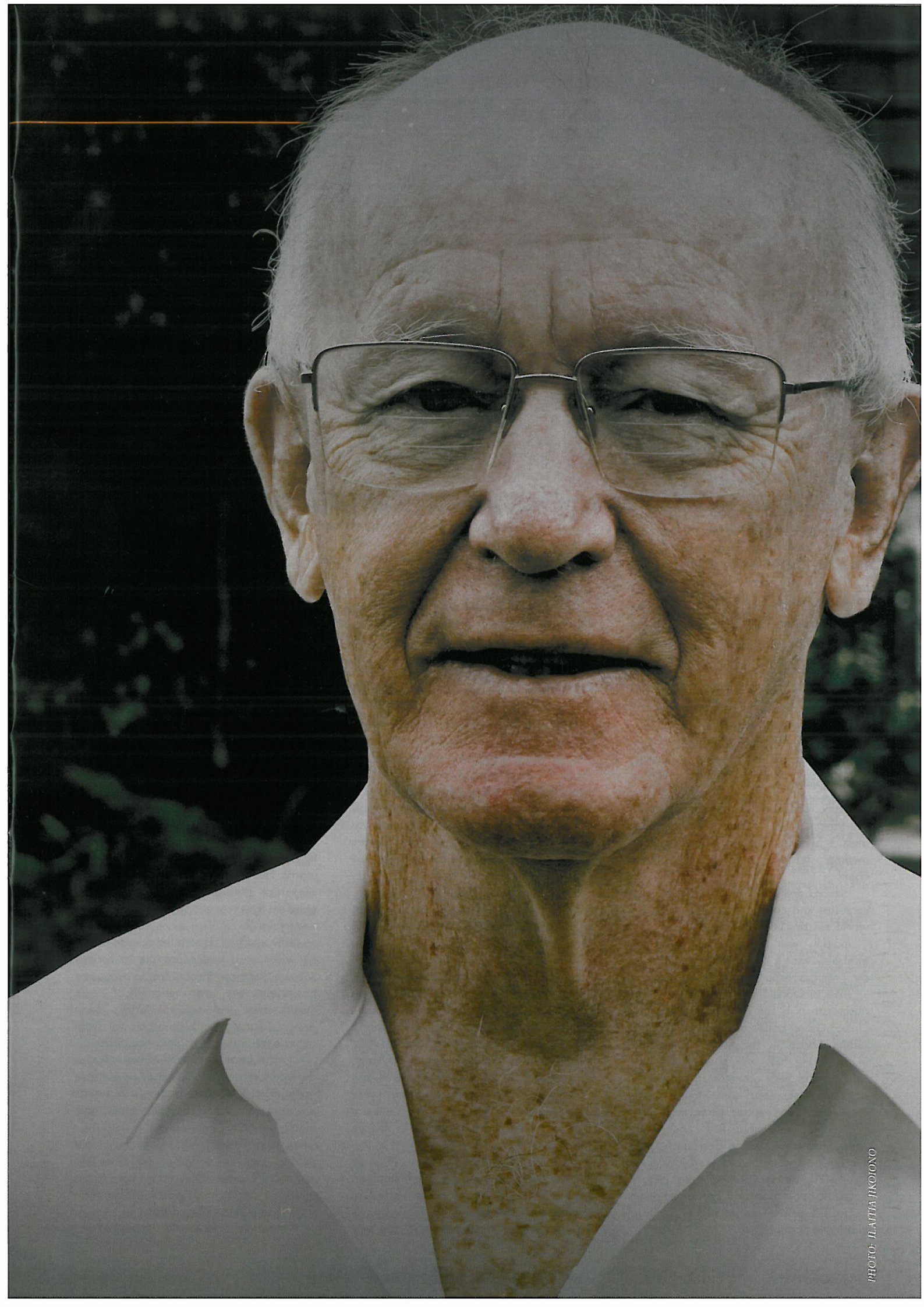


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Ross McDonald at his home in Suva

**B**lood drinking, cannibalism, secret handshakes, a code of silence and weird little rituals conducted by shadowy men who go to great lengths to protect their identities.

These are some of the disturbing images that are conjured up when the word Freemasonry is uttered in Fiji.

Some people relate their own cringe-worthy tales of what they apparently believe goes on inside masonic meetings in Fiji.

Many associate Freemasonry with everything from human sacrifice and murder and the alleged reluctance of its members to testify against each other in court.

Masons are rated as one of the most secretive and controversial groups in the world, existing covertly for centuries.

*maLife* was granted an exclusive interview with a high-standing member of the Freemasons in Fiji and the Pacific.

Ross McDonald, a 70 year old respected businessman, is the representative of the United Grand Lodge of England, the oldest Grand Lodge in the world established in 1813. He was willing to shed some light on this very secretive group and in doing so, help clear some long-standing "misconceptions" about the society.

Rumour, suspicion, fear and wildly speculative tales abound over the group's secretive activities that McDonald is quick to allay. He paints a totally different picture. In fact he coolly states the group comprises "a society of men concerned with moral and spiritual values".

"Simply put Freemasonry is kindness in the home, honesty in business, courtesy in society, fairness in work, concern for the unfortunate, resistance to evil, help for the weak, forgiveness for the penitent, love for one another, and above all reverence and love for God."

Although it is difficult to determine precisely when Freemasonry in its current form began, the earliest records about Freemasonry can be found in the documents known as the Old Charges. Some of these records date from the end of the 14th century, with the majority dated after 1600. They set out a series of regulations for the social behaviour of Masons.

The Freemason's precise origins are largely unknown and may, perhaps, remain so, despite the many theories that exist about the group.

The Mackey's Dictionary of Freemasonry lists twelve possible origins. Some maintain it was established by the architects, surveyors and stone masons involved in the building of King Solomon's temple; others source the stone masons' guilds of the Middle Ages or through the convention of Oliver Cromwell and associates in 1648 when proposals were made to advance democracy, liberty, liberal thought and equality to all men in the world as a whole.

McDonald did admit to a Masonic secret and acknowledge that members communicate with each other by use of "signs, tokens and words".

"The secret relates only to the way

we recognize and verify each other's membership. There are no other secrets that involve attaining powers of any kind, political or otherwise."

"What we do have are the 'Signs, Tokens and Words' which we have inherited from the operative masons – people who were actually involved in the construction of churches and important buildings of those earlier days."

"They invented this kind of system so that an 'Operative Brother' asking for work at a building site where he was unknown was able to prove his abilities, along with the time he had served as an apprentice, by use of these secret signs, tokens and words. This was necessary to maintain the very high standards of workmanship so essential for the great building works being undertaken."

McDonald said with education being so widespread and accessible in today's society, trade certificates from recognised institutions are proof enough of one's qualifications and referral letters from previous employers also attest to skills, experience and professional reputation.

"In the same way, our secrets refer to the skill levels of the stonemasons in those early days. The signs, token and words are now only used ceremonially and only within the Lodge.

"It is no wonder that the uninformed public have for so long had a natural suspicion about 'secrets', but once informed of their original purpose one finds they take a different view."

Meanwhile McDonald debunked as



The Levuka Masonic Lodge lies in ruins after it was burnt down by villagers this month 14 years ago.

“nonsense and simply not true” that once a Mason breaks the oath and divulges ‘the secret’, his misdemeanour is punishable by death. Members are also allowed to leave the secret society whenever they wish, contrary to popular opinion.

“A Mason may leave the Lodge at any time he wishes to do so. There is no rule to stop him from doing this. It is preferred that he formally resigns from his Lodge. This way it makes it easier for him to rejoin if he decides to do so at a later date.”

He did admit, though, that society members do undergo certain rituals which “are best described as one act dramas or plays that help teach the precepts of our organisation”.

“The dramas are used in the three degrees to initiate, pass and raise a member. The three degrees take a new member from being an Initiate (First Degree), to a Fellowcraft (Second Degree) and finally to a Master Mason (Third Degree). We prefer not to greatly publicise the traditional content of our meetings as we feel this spoils it for our members experiencing the ceremonies for the first time – rather like being told the plot of a play before you go to see it.”

McDonald has been the representative of the United Grand Lodge of England since his appointment as Grand Inspector for the Southwest Pacific Group of Lodges in 1999. In this capacity he is responsible for the interests and welfare of the members of the Lodge of Fiji based in Suva, Lodge of Lautoka in Nadi and Lodge of Discovery

in Port Vila, Vanuatu. He is also a Past Master of the Lodge of Fiji and has been its Treasurer for the past 30 years.

Born and bred in Perth, Western Australia, Ross McDonald is the youngest of three children of a happy middle-class family.

“I first came to the Pacific in 1955 for two years when we moved to Fanning Island because my father was transferred there by Cable & Wireless (a British communications company). After returning to Australia and completing my education, I accompanied my parents to Fiji when my father, still with Cable & Wireless, was transferred here in 1960. Fiji has been my home ever since,” recalls the former Credit Corporation (Fiji) Ltd managing director.

It was an early initiation into the Freemasons for McDonald as close family members were members of the group.

“I have known about Freemasonry as far back as I can remember. My father and both my maternal and paternal grandfathers were Freemasons and I can remember when I was a little boy my father going to the Lodge once a month, dressed in his dinner suit. I would usually carry his case containing his apron and ritual book to the door when he left home.”

“Most of the men in our extended family and most of Dad’s friends were Freemasons, so it is something I have been familiar with my whole life and wanted to be part of. It was therefore a natural follow-on when I got older that I would join Freemasonry or the Craft as we’ll call it sometimes.”

“My wife is very comfortable with my being a Freemason because her father was also a Freemason here in Fiji. I think all of my family and friends are aware I am a Freemason and they are very comfortable with it because they are aware of the charitable work being carried out by our organization in Fiji.”

Like other parts of the world, Fiji has its own Freemasonic hierarchy who are elected annually.

“The Lodge of Fiji, like all other English constitution lodges worldwide, has a Worshipful Master who is elected in June every year supported by a group of officers including a Secretary and Treasurer,” McDonald explained.

“The term ‘worshipful’ simply means ‘honourable’, an honorific which is still currently used for Mayors, judges and even parliamentarians. The other officers of the Lodge are two wardens, two deacons, an Inner Guard and a Tyler.”

“Each officer has a very specific duty to play in the conduct of our meetings and especially in the degree ceremonies for members.”

“We are no different from many other organisations that have annual elections for office-bearers.”

“To suggest that the Lodge of Fiji is involved in human sacrifice or murder, itself a capital crime is simply untrue and ludicrous.”



**Blood drinking rituals**

**W**idely circulated rumours of blood drinking and human sacrifice during Masonic meetings were put down to Freemasonry's own reluctance to tell its own story. This changed in the 1960s with the appointment of Prince Edward the Duke of Kent as Grand Master, who strongly advocated for English Masonry to be as transparent as possible in its activities and more responsive to Press inquiries, McDonald said.

"To suggest that the Lodge of Fiji is involved in human sacrifice or murder, a capital crime, is simply untrue and ludicrous."

"This is an insult to the many fine men who have passed through the doors of Freemasonry in Fiji and who were leaders in Government, the legal profession, bankers, business people and prominent citizens of all races."

"They rigidly followed a demand of Freemasonry from its members to respect the law of any country in which they are working and living."

**Not a religion**

**F**reemasonry is not a religion nor is it a substitute for religion, McDonald said when replying to questions about the drinking of blood was being practised as a symbolic gesture that mirrors the act of the Christian communion. He said members didn't have any symbolic ritual like communion that could cause this misconception.

"It's a natural tendency, I assume, for people to conjure up all kinds of outlandish facts about organisations they do not know much about. One of the things we have done to dispel some of these horrible rumours is to have open evenings in the Lodge to enable the public to visit our meeting place in Suva, talk to members of the Lodge and ask any questions they wish about our organisation."

Contrary to speculation that states otherwise, he said organized Freemasonry for women has been in existence in one form or another since 1882, with women's Lodges in England, USA, Australia, India and many other countries.

McDonald said the basic requirements for a person to be considered to join a Lodge is that he must be over 21 years, believe in the existence of a Supreme Being (God) and must be both a good citizen and of good character.

"He has to be recommended by a member of the Lodge or someone of good standing who would vouch for his good character. Once past this process, his name is submitted for consideration and approval in one of our meetings," he said.

**Masonic relief**

**L**ike other organisations made up of successful people, McDonald insists that Freemasons are eager to give back to society and has proven this by its actions over the years.

"Our Lodge has given about \$100,000 to various charities in the past 10 years. These include donations to the Home of Compassion, Pearce Home, Samabula Home For Seniors, Dilkusha Home, and Father Law Home, to name a few."

"In past years, following hurricanes we donated water tanks and school textbooks to schools in Vanua Levu. We have been the conduit for funds coming from Grand Charity in England, the charity wing of the Grand Lodge of England, for hurricane and flood relief over the years. In the past 30 years, the Freemasons' Grand Charity alone, never mind the other central Masonic charities or the thousands of individual lodge and local projects, has given 49 million pounds (\$152 million) to charities with no Masonic connection."

McDonald eagerly pointed out that over the past two years the group has assigned over \$20,000 to assist 17 disadvantaged children studying in three schools in Nadroga, Rakiraki and Suva, and just last month completed the assignment of eleven 5,200 litre water tanks to 11 schools in Nadroga, and the Nadi and Lautoka education districts.

"We plan to continue assisting needy children to improve their education as well as install infrastructure such as water supplies where it is most needed," he said.

Following destructive hurricanes and severe flooding in Fiji in late 2012 and early 2013, the Masonic 'brethren' in Fiji quickly assisted schools in the remote areas of the main islands and in outer islands that suffered subsequent water supply

problems.

"Many of these schools also have continuing water shortages as they rely for water from rain, streams and bores. When these sources dry up as a result of drought, schools are closed and children are sent home because they cannot operate without water," he said.

"With help from Grand Charity with a grant of 5,000 pounds (\$15,000), the Fiji brethren have over the past 18 months have donated 12 water tanks to schools to assist them with regular water supply for a total cost of around 11,000 pounds (\$34,000)."

These schools are mainly in remote, isolated areas with poor communities who rely on subsistence crops for income and simply do not have the funds to meet tank installation costs. McDonald said it costs around 850 pounds (\$2,600) to supply and install a water tank and any brethren or lodges wishing to assist in this ongoing project to provide this basic need can contact him.

Notwithstanding their shows of largesse and acts of kindness towards society, it is doubtful this puts entirely to rest the widespread "misconceptions" about the activities of Freemasons in Fiji.

Freemasons will no doubt continue to court controversy, particularly in a largely unaware and uninformed society such as Fiji's, and this is probably the greatest challenge this still somewhat secretive group will face as it continues its operations into the future.

For Freemasonry inquiries, you can contact the Lodge Secretary on 331-2309.



L-R: Grand Inspector SWP Ross McDonald, two school principals, education officer and WM of the Lodge of Fiji Don Bruce.