

Brethren, Bikers and Brothers –

Inside the World of the UK Widows Sons Masonic Bikers Association

Wayne Owens



Widows Sons Masonic Bikers Association Emblem Patch.

This year (2019) marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Widows Sons arriving in the United Kingdom, with last year being the twentieth anniversary of the formation of the Widows Sons as an organisation. And yet, until recently, not many people had heard of us, or knew what it is we do. It is possible that they may have just seen us as an Outlaw biker gang, or a bunch of Freemasons who have seen one too many episodes of "Sons of Anarchy". To be fair we do have some scary looking members!

It could actually surprise people to learn that not only are we fully recognised, and approved by the United Grand Lodge of England, but in fact we are now the largest Masonic Group in the UK that is not an actual side order, and I believe we are now even included in the Grand Lodge Year Book. We are featured prominently on the main page of the UGLE website and were the main part of the third episode of Sky's five-part documentary series "Inside the Freemasons". Due to this we are just now starting to get some notice, with lodges and groups across the UK asking for Widows Sons to come and give talks.

This article was written to let me try and answer three of the questions we get asked the most by various groups. They are: Where do we come from? What do we do? And most importantly just who are the Widows Sons?

Where do we come from?

It all began in February 1998, at the Mirage Restaurant in Schiller Park, Illinois, with the formation of the first Chapter of The Widows Sons. In June, a second Chapter of Widows Sons was formed in the Netherlands, making



Right, top to bottom:

Widows Sons Talk for lodge.

300 Year Celebrations Big Party.

Easter Egg Run.

Below: Lift for Life Lites.



it an international organisation. In 1999, Chapters were formed in Connecticut, and Florida, with requests from potential members wanting to start Chapters coming in from across the United States and Europe.

By 2004, the Widows Sons had grown to have Chapters spread across eleven states, and five countries outside the U.S. Therefore, in February 2004, to help administrate this growing association the first two Grand Chapters were formed, quickly followed by a third a month later. At the same time, in recognition of the groups growing International status the name was changed to "The International Widows Sons Masonic Riders Association" or "Widows Sons MRA" for short.

It was also in 2004 that the Widows Sons arrived in the United Kingdom with a Chapter formed by a group of Freemasons in the Nottinghamshire area. The United Kingdom and Ireland Chapters of the Widows Sons did make a few changes, firstly they introduced their own alternative patch, and separated themselves from the Masonic Riders

Association by calling themselves the Masonic Bikers Association.

In February 2010, the Presidents Governing Board was formed as the ruling body for the Widows Sons MBA; the membership is made up of the Presidents, Vice Presidents and the Past Presidents of each Chapter in Great Britain. The Board meets twice a year and are constant contact by electronic means.

In June 2018, the UK Widows Sons had a membership of around 850, spread across 25 Chapters. These figures have since grown.

What do we do?

We simply have fun with our hobby, while at the same time introduce Freemasonry to the world of motorcycling. Seeing leather clad bikers, at various events sporting the square and compasses helps to possibly attract new members who may not otherwise be attracted to the traditional idea of suit and tie Masonry. This seems to be working, since over the past few years we have introduced over 50 Candidates into Freemasonry. We have even managed to save lodges and Chapters from having to hand in their warrants.

Every year our Chapters take it in turns to host a national rally which has hundreds of Widows Sons turning up from all over the world, along with their families, for a weekend of drinking, live music, and fun.

We also try and do our small bit for charity: organising runs, tours, ride-outs, and events to raise money and awareness for different causes. As an organisation in the three years between 2015 and 2018, Widows Sons UK raised around £250,000 for various charitable causes.

Every Easter we organise Easter Egg Runs. This is where we collect Easter eggs, toys, and money and then ride out to give them to sick or disadvantaged children in hospitals, or hospices and care homes. The money pays for more toys for the children or is donated to the group looking after them. At Christmas we do Santa Runs which is the same idea, but often with people dressed up as Santa or elves, and we distribute presents instead of eggs.

Every year on the first Saturday of October, Widows Sons from all over the UK meet up to be part of the Ride to The Wall, where several thousand motorcycles ride to the National Memorial Arboretum to pay respects to those who have died in conflicts around the world. We then meet up in the Arboretum's Masonic Garden to pay our respect, to those Masons who gave their lives.

Thanks to the unusualness of a "Masonic Biker Gang", and the photogenic nature of big shiny motorcycles, our charitable works are more likely to be featured in newspapers,



and shared over social media, which helps promote both the Charity, and Freemasonry.

Most Widows Sons Chapters also have a strong connection with the various Blood Bikes Charities, with our members donating their time as Riders or Controllers, or simply raising funds to keep the service running.

So just who are the Widows Sons?

It should be noted that while we wear identifying regalia, or patches, the Widows Sons are not a biker gang, MC or 1% Club. We are required to represent the fraternity in a positive light at all times. It has been said that there is no other group of Freemasons with the eyes of the public on them more than the Widows Sons.

The Widows Sons serve to raise money for charitable causes, raise Masonic awareness while attending public motorcycling events and support our regular Lodges in whatever capacity we are able. Widows Sons Chapters have helped to increase Masonic membership through our presence and visibility during public motorcycle events and rallies.

So who are we? We are quite simply an internationally based motorcycle-riding club. We are non-brand specific, so no matter what brand of motorcycle you ride, as long as you are a Master Mason in good standing you are welcome as a member. We also have Associate-Membership for none-riding Brethren, and also have support groups open to non-Masons, which helps us introduce Freemasonry to prospective new members. We serve as a Masonic Booster Club by helping to raise Masonic Awareness while we attend public events and rallies.

Put simply We are Brethren, We are Bikers, We are Brothers!

More information, including links to the various local Chapters can be found on the official Widows Sons Masonic Bikers Association website <https://www.widowssons.org.uk/>

Masonic Fete.

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