

# The Star and Garter

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Division One Provost

“Shame on he, who thinks evil of this,” shouted King Edward, III, of England as he strapped a garter to his leg. The garter had been dropped by Joan, Countess of Salisbury, who was rumored to be the King’s mistress, as she danced at a court function. This is, at least, one version of the formation of the Order of the Garter, which began in 1348. However, the true origin of the Order may never be known as the earliest records were destroyed by a fire. It is believed that this apocryphal story was fabricated in France to bring discredit to the highest chivalric order of Knighthood and classify it as only a silly club for courtiers and sycophants. However, it is a more widely accepted belief that the Order of the Garter may have originated with the leather straps used to fasten plates of Knight’s armor, in this case, the suit of armor being a symbol of strength and honor. This is a less romantic beginning; but a more practical and honorable one.

The term ‘The Star and Garter’ as mentioned in the presentation of the apron during the Entered Apprentice Degree comes from the badge of the Order, the Star of the Order of the Garter. The star is an eight-pointed star made of silver, adorned with precious jewels and at its center rests the cross of Saint George (the patron saint of the Order), and worn over the left breast. The star, which was added to the regalia in the seventeenth century, is not the only piece that makes up the Order’s regalia. The namesake of the Order, a garter is worn below the left knee and is the original piece of clothing worn to signify that someone was a member of the highest rank of chivalry. The background of the garter is of blue velvet, and fashioned in diamonds around the garter is the motto of the order, in old French, “Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense,” translated to English means, “Shame on he, who thinks evil of this.” A motto, in my opinion, which could go well with our Fraternity when one takes into account the bad press and rumors that tend to surround Freemasonry. A collar of gold, also added in the seventeenth century, which weighs in at slightly over two pounds, and is made up of twenty-six red enameled Tudor roses, is worn around the neck. The roses are each interspersed with twenty-six golden knots. And hanging from the collar is a pendant representing Saint George and the dragon that he slew. Blue velvet robes complete the regalia.

Membership, which includes both males and females, is very limited and one can only be appointed by the Monarch. Estimable public service, contributions to the nation, or personal services to the Monarch are a few of the ways that a person can be appointed to the Order of the Garter. Membership consists of the Monarch, who is known as the *Sovereign of the Garter*, the Prince of Wales, who is known as *The Knight Companion of the Garter*, and twenty-four companion members, totaling twenty-six members in all. Of these twenty-six members there are six officers. They are the Prelate, Chancellor, Register, Garter Principal King of Arms, Usher, and Secretary. The Prelate is an office traditionally held by one of the Senior Bishops of the Church of England.

The Order of the Garter once held services at Saint George's Chapel, in Windsor Castle, but were discontinued in 1805. In 1948, King George VI revived the services and it has become an annual event. On the Monday of Royal Ascot Week, in June, the members of the Order, wearing their ceremonial vestments and insignia march from the Upper Ward of Windsor Castle, led by the Military Knights of Windsor, through the castle, to Saint George's Chapel for the service. If there are any new knights, they are installed on this occasion. Afterwards, they return by carriage.

Members of the Order of the Garter are assigned order of precedence over all others of a knightly rank. Knight Companions, as the male members are called, prefix the title "Sir" to their forename, while the distaff members prefix the title "Lady."

More ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle, more honorable than the Star and Garter, Freemasonry may carry some similarities of the Order of the Garter, the highest chivalric rank of Knighthood; however, as a moral organization, Masonry still stands out. The Masonic Order does not seek out men who have performed services for a King and invite them to join its ranks. Freemasonry stands with open doors and awaits the men who know, in their heart that, whether the duty was performed for a King, a community, or a neighbor in need, that the good deeds performed by them are what brings them to our door and are what make them the Entered Apprentice, the Fellowcraft, and the Master Mason.