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**Civilised men ... members of the craft:  
Freemasonry in Auckland to the formation of  
the Grand Lodge of New Zealand in 1890.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in History  
at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand.

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## INTRODUCTION

The public's fascination with freemasonry seems endless. Freemasons are variously believed to be members of a mysterious brotherhood of enormous influence, a secret society believed to have its roots in the order of the Knights Templar or the Egyptian pyramids and a sect involved in sacrilegious rites. Most will know of the periodic attacks upon freemasonry – claims that it is a secret society of men who conspire to help each other against the rest of the world, that they recognise each other by secret signs and then extend favours, even though this may be in conflict with their public duties – and the response of freemasons that their overriding duty is to obey the law. Their meetings, at which the rich symbolism of freemasonry is displayed in the course of the ceremonies, which are inspiring rituals to their members, may seem to be silly nonsense and play-acting to laymen. Freemasonry was one of the earliest social institutions to appear in Auckland and its members were active and influential. Whenever freemasons are mentioned in Auckland today, almost everyone claims to have had a predecessor who was a freemason. Many people recall seeing a father, grandfather or uncle going to lodge meetings carrying a thin case and wearing a dark suit and wondering what happened when the door of the lodge building closed behind them.

On 7<sup>th</sup> October 1769 Sir Joseph Banks, who paid for his passage on Captain Cook's first voyage, was the first freemason to sight New Zealand. It was inevitable that those who chose to seek a new life in the colony would include a number of masonic brethren who saw themselves as enlightened, peace-loving and the practitioners of social equity, whose purpose was to exert the influence of freemasonry in this new colony which had been claimed for civilisation. As one of the first organised social institutions in the new colony, freemasonry had the benefit of being an already established fraternity with a tried and tested constitution. While the instigators of the first masonic lodges in New Zealand were men of means and influence (early members included lawyers, engineers, architects, civil servants and merchants) they struggled in the first fifteen years to

attract members to their fraternity as men used their energy to build homes and businesses. From about 1850, freemasonry enjoyed a period of rapid expansion, and they attracted a new type of membership. Occupations were then recorded as shopkeeper, school teacher, shipping clerk, butcher, carrier and gardener. In the 1870s occupational changes of political or economic origin saw less of the workforce involved in defence and a rising proportion concerned with commerce, transport, trades and services. Local activities began to provide private rather than public services in the processing and distribution of food and clothing and businesses were started by people with very little capital.<sup>1</sup>

Lodges welcomed men of all stations. However, members needed to be able to pay lodge dues – the first recorded receipt of money appears in the minutes of the Ara Lodge of 16<sup>th</sup> May 1843 “The sum of £2.2s.6d. was received from Brother Harding for initiation fee.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, punctuality and regularity of attendance were qualities of significance to a lodge and difficult to enforce in a new colony with a shifting population. Offences were punishable by censure, fine and expulsion. Early minutes reveal that a great deal of lodge time was spent dealing with the exercise of discipline in this regard.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of freemasonry in Auckland. By viewing early Auckland through the first freemasons and masonic lodges some insight can be gained into those who arrived here and their hopes and aspirations. It is also possible to look at power relationships within the community, those who had influence and how they used it. Changes and developments in local government were paralleled by freemasonry, probably through the influence of those politicians who were also members of lodges.

For the freemasons, their lodges were a powerful tool in creating social bonds that bound not only the masons but their wives and families. At a time when there was increasing concern throughout the western world that mothers were having too much influence upon their sons’ lives, men were taking a more active role in the lives of masculine relatives. Freemasonry was a leisure activity to be shared

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. J. Stone, *Makers of Fortune: A Colonial Business Community And its Fall*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, Oxford University Press, 1973, p.32

<sup>2</sup> G. A. Gribbin, *The History of the Ara Lodges*, Auckland: Geddis and Blomfield, 1909, p. 96

by men of all ages. Early lodge records show families with several members belonging to the same lodge. Freemasons were not 'atomised' as described by Fairburn but rather were part of a world in which kin, neighbours and associates worked together to develop and maintain their order. Because freemasonry does not allow soliciting for new members, membership is expanded through family, friends and acquaintances of the existing members. In particular, it is traditional for sons to follow fathers but also brothers, uncles and cousins. Freemasons banded together in a spirit of co-operation and hard work in their endeavours which included the building of their lodge rooms, support for the community by providing charity where they saw a need and assisting with education. This type of community has been dismissed by Fairburn as he rejects the idea of men bound together by shared experiences and kinship and friendship being used to build a voluntary and leisure organisation. The masonic ethos of brotherly love, charity and truth was strong and in early Auckland there was ample opportunity to pursue these ideals as freemasons were drawn together in community service through masonic initiatives.

The period covered in this thesis is from 1841 to 1890. The first recorded assembly of freemasons was an informal gathering on board a ship at Banks Peninsula in 1837. There were four whaling ships at anchor there and the captain of one of them, a freemason under the Grand Orient of France, took the opportunity of gathering freemasons from all four ships for "fraternal converse".<sup>3</sup>

The first chapter will look at the heritage and ethos that those first freemasons brought with them from Great Britain and what it was that set the early operative stonemasons of medieval times apart and destined them for a future that was unique as compared to other trades and crafts. It looks at why the form of the craft guilds of most trades was inappropriate for the stonemasons and the evolution of their own form of guild which came to be known as lodges. It also looks at the move from a trade union of working masons to an organisation

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<sup>3</sup> R. C. G. Weston, *Centennial History of the New Zealand Pacific Lodge No. 2*, Wellington: Ferguson & Osborn, Ltd, 1942, p. 8. In 1880, in the first issue of *The New Zealand Freemason*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Tuesday, January 6, 1880, p.6, it was reported that neither the English, Irish or Scottish lodges in New Zealand acknowledged the Grand Orient of France because the constitution of that organisation allowed for the initiation of atheists.

claiming intellectual status in which 'operative masons' were replaced by 'admitted masons' or 'speculative masons'. Jasper Ridley's book *The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society* traces the development of freemasonry from the guilds of freestone masons of the Middle Ages to the formation of the Grand Lodge in London in 1717 and has provided a helpful insight into the myths and legends surrounding the order, as did David Stevenson's book *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century 1590–1710*.

Chapter Two will investigate the setting and background for the development of freemasonry that followed in Auckland. In 1840 Auckland was seen by many as a struggling seaport occupied largely by undesirables brought here by overseas ships and traders. Law and order were doubtful and the more respectable citizens joined together in tight social groups. Poverty and excesses went hand in hand and there was no method of civic benevolence. For those in the town with masonic backgrounds it seemed imperative to instigate masonic activity. The ruling custom for the formation of lodges in the colonies was to seek a dispensation from an existing lodge, usually for a limited time, until a warrant was issued by a Grand Lodge. Early freemasons in Auckland were active in seeking the necessary dispensation and locating and developing suitable premises for their purposes. In Auckland, and throughout the country, an early priority was to erect buildings deemed to be a credit to their fraternity. Initially most lodges met in hotel rooms, sometimes specifically designed for the purpose, but the provision of appropriate buildings was thought to be essential if they were to achieve the required standards in behavior and for the performance of their impressive ceremonies. No doubt, the temperance movement caused some new members to feel disinclined to attend meetings in public houses and many members felt that meeting in hotels did not reflect the high character of the brotherhood, may put members in a position of temptation and was not conducive to the development and practice of every moral and social virtue.

Chapter Three covering the period 1849 to 1881 looks at the first lodge in Auckland and those that followed prior to the formation of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand and the countries and constitutions to which they belonged. Although freemasons were among the earliest voluntary organisations to meet,



they made slow progress until the 1850s when, within the respectable classes, concern for the moral future of the colony<sup>4</sup> resulted in the reproduction of the social institutions of the homeland. By 1860, as well as two masonic lodges, Auckland had the following public institutions or societies: Mechanics' Institute, Choral Society, Chamber of Commerce, British and Foreign Bible Society, Auckland Museum, Auckland Dispensary, Young Man's Christian Association, St. Andrew's Society, Hibernian Benevolent Society, Auckland Land Association, Auckland Agricultural and Horticultural Society, Auckland Homeopathic Hospital and Dispensary, and Auckland Bethel Union.<sup>5</sup> G. A. Gribbin's *The History of the Ara Lodges* and R. C. G. Weston's *Centennial History of the New Zealand Pacific Lodge No. 2*, give a masonic perspective to the early years of freemasonry and make an interesting comparison with Una Platts *The Lively Capital* when looking for the flavour of life in early Auckland. This chapter looks at how freemasons fitted into colonial life and their impact on it, why the early brethren acted they way they did, the way they lived and the influences to which they were subjected. At a time when there were little in the way of legal controls over drinking, refreshments at lodge meetings could provide some of the social control missing in society generally. Banquets, balls and feasting were an important part of masonic activity and, in later years, questions were raised about the funds expended in this way. The minutes of the Ara Lodge dated 7<sup>th</sup> August 1843 record "that only half the receipts for each night be available for refreshments".<sup>6</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1844 the minutes note that members are to pay for their refreshments personally if they choose to remain when lodge adjourns so that lodge funds are not used for refreshments and bearing in mind that no brother is obliged to remain.<sup>7</sup> In 1880 the freemasons of Napier, on their festival day, elected to march to church and the money which would have been expended on festivities was donated to the local hospital.<sup>8</sup> Charity is pivotal to freemasonry and in the young colony there were many cases of distress which the freemasons felt obliged to

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<sup>4</sup> Jock Phillips, *A Mans Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1996, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> B. Duder, J. Winstone and T. J. Warren, *Auckland's Historical Background: Its Relation to Central City Planning*. Report, City Development Section, Town Planning Division April, 1969, Auckland: Auckland City Council, Department of Works and Services, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Gribbin, p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> Gribbin, p. 84

<sup>8</sup> *The New Zealand Freemason, Vol. 1 No. 1*, p.5

address. The principles of freemasonry are presented in symbolic form in the visible ornamentation of the lodge buildings and such symbols as the three pillars of wisdom, strength and beauty representing divine omniscience and omnipotence, displayed in material form as Ionic, Doric and Corinthian columns,<sup>9</sup> serve to remind members of the masonic ideals of brotherly love, charity and truth. In the young colony there were many opportunities for the freemasons to carry out their masonic duty, particularly as regards charity and this chapter will explore both the general charity schemes promoted by the lodges as well as particular cases addressed by the various lodges. While it is forbidden to discuss either politics or religion at lodge, it is interesting to note that such matters were taken up outside the lodge and *The New Zealand Freemason* documents opinions on such subjects as the Vagrant Act<sup>10</sup> and the ever present discussion about the Roman Catholic Church.

Chapter Four looks at the formation of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand. In the almost half a century since the freemasons of Auckland first gathered at St Paul's Church, the changes from provincial to national government were influential in the changes in masonic organisation from the control of British and provincial grand lodges to the creation of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand. Freemasonry had grown with the population of New Zealand and at the end of 1889 one hundred and seventy lodges had been established throughout the colony. The economic climate of the time had resulted in twenty of those becoming extinct and another ten were dormant and eventually disappeared. The formation of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand was a natural progression for an organisation that had become over-governed with ten District and Provincial Grand Lodges of three Constitutions.<sup>11</sup>

Chapter Five investigates the links early freemasons in the colony perceived to exist between their fraternity and Maori lore. They believed in a common origin which gave Maori access to stories of Eve and the Serpent and the Deluge. They also saw a link with the Maori custom of transmitting their sacred and secret

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<sup>9</sup> Hamill, Gilbert, p. 57

<sup>10</sup> *New Zealand Freemason*, 6 April 1880, p. 7

<sup>11</sup> R. C. Groves, 'The Foundation and Brief Early History of the Founding of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand', *Transactions of the United Masters Lodge, No. 167*, Vol. 28, p. 148

teachings, to those who proved they were worthy, by verbal ritual and rote. This understanding of Maori tradition has not resulted in a large number of Maori becoming freemasons but those who have are celebrated as fine ritualists and orators.

The development of freemasonry in Auckland reveals a small group of settlers who were not part of the frontier culture of early New Zealand. The colonies were seen to provide opportunities that were not available to all in Britain and where settlers could attain the Victorian middle-class ideal of self-improvement.<sup>12</sup> As with the majority of settlers, freemasons saw an opportunity for material independence through their own industry and diligence. They believed in hard work, economic prudence and self-discipline. Unlike the churches, their purpose was not to 'convert' men to freemasonry but their organisation was open to any who had an interest in joining. Freemasonry does not advertise or solicit for new members and those interested in joining must approach a freemason with an expression of interest so early freemasons were able to devote their energies to the physical requirements of their organisation, such as acquiring land and buildings, rather than attracting members.

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<sup>12</sup> Stone, *Makers of Fortune*, p.39