

RW Bro Gudsell, District Grand Master, our honoured guest, RW Bro Fulford-Dobson, PJGW and Brethren all.

Thank you RW for honouring me by inviting me to prepare and present this paper.

Brethren, during thirty something years in my profession as a lecturer in Engineering I find that I have developed an interesting personal faculty which is the ability to hypnotise. Consequently I will not be offended if any of you decide to drop off.

After all it is summertime and mid afternoon and most of us have reached the age where an afternoon nap has become the norm.

When our District Grand Secretary informed me of the invitation by our District Grand Master to present a paper to this meeting I am sure I heard the words twenty minutes and as is the case with most papers, the difficulty has been deciding not what to put in, but what to leave out.

I shall endeavour to keep within the prescribed limits and if I appear to be exceeding the allotted time am sure I will receive the 'hurry up' sign.

Most will have read the pre publicity for this meeting where you were informed the topic is: "Masonry in New Zealand, prior to the formation of the District."

Of early Freemasonry, much has already been written so I have decided to place emphasis on how difficult it must have been in those times as well as being a Freemason, to be a pioneer, work for a living, be a family man or maybe even all four.

After dropping a few obvious hints to my family I was suitably surprised to receive as a Christmas gift a copy of the recently published book "The Penguin History of New Zealand" written by Michael King.

Reading this as well as out of interest but also as part of my research for this paper, I find that during our early Masonic years, life was extremely tough in New Zealand. There was a major earthquake in the Wellington region in 1855, the eighteen sixties saw a great plague of caterpillars brought in with plants from Europe which was followed by a major depression called the "The Long Depression" and not "The Great Depression" of the nineteen twenties. Mt Tarawera erupted in 1886; shots were still being fired in anger and continued until well after the genesis of Freemasonry in New Zealand.

I am sure that all Freemasons in this country today, whatever their Constitutional persuasion, have paid little or no thought to just what it must have been like in those times. Of this I know that I am guilty

Much of this paper is devoted to the beginnings of Ara Lodge 348 I.C. and their contribution to early Freemasonry in this District. Without Ara, it is likely that we would not be here today and it is for that reason the Irish Constitution deserves special mention.

It has been well documented that the first Masonic meeting in New Zealand took place in either 1837 or 1838 at Port Levy, or Akaroa Harbour on one of four French whaling vessels moored there.

The master of one of these vessels, the Comte de Paris, was Captain L'Anglois, a Freemason under the Grand Orient of France and he gathered together brethren from the other vessels for this first meeting. Further activities have been documented in papers presented to the Masters and Past Masters Lodge of Research in Christchurch in which mention is made of an association for a short while with New Zealand Pacific Lodge.

The beginnings.

From a book entitled 'The History of the Ara Lodges' written in 1909 by VW Bro GA Gribben I quote:

'It is a proud boast of Freemasons that the sun is always at the meridian with respect to Freemasonry, or in the language of the uninitiated and popular world, that the science they practice is universal. The boast is not an empty one, for wherever civilized men are gathered together there will be found members of the Craft. The exigencies of circumstances, or many other causes, may have the effect of sending men forth to found new settlements, in lands far distant from the country of their birth, and in every community formed, however small it may be, there are some freemasons.' Unquote:

Splendid words Brethren.

Several members of the order were among the first settlers to arrive in New Zealand and in a newspaper of the time, the 'New Zealand Herald and Auckland Gazette' dated July 31st 1841 reporting on the laying of the foundation stone of St Paul's Church states that on the 24th July as follows:- "The gentlemen in Auckland, who are Freemasons, appeared with the decorations and insignia of their Order" This is the first published record of the presence of Masonic Brethren in Auckland or in New Zealand.

To those Brethren must be ascribed the honour and our gratitude for the founding of freemasonry in this country.

Two Lodges have laid claims to being the first in New Zealand. Ara 348, under the Irish Constitution in Auckland and New Zealand Pacific 517, under the English Constitution in Wellington or as it was then known, Port Nicholson. New Zealand Pacific was latterly to become No 2 under the Grand Lodge of New Zealand.

The distance from their Mother Country for the first settlers, the irregularity of postal services and the many months between sending mail and receiving a reply would have tested the patience of any man even more so that of those enthusiastic brethren thirsting for the commencement of the practice of the rites of Freemasonry.

For this reason a closer source was needed to make the required Masonic connection and obtain Dispensation.

In 1841 in Australia, and enjoying its 20th year of existence was the Social Lodge No 260 I.C. and it was to this Lodge that the Brethren of Auckland applied for Dispensation to constitute a Lodge operating under the Irish Constitution.

The Ara book quoted earlier states that a Dispensation was signed on September 12th 1842, but close inspection of a facsimile of the original, clearly shows the date of signature to be September 5th 1842. The importance of this seven day difference will become obvious later in this paper.

The document was not immediately forwarded to New Zealand but was entrusted to the hands of some unnamed Brother who visited this country in 1843 when it was presented to the brethren at the meeting of the Lodge on February 9th

This meeting was presided over by Bro Frederick Whittaker the first Master of the Lodge. Bro Whittaker was later to become RW Bro Sir Frederick Whittaker, Provincial Grand Master of the Scottish Constitution from 1877 to 1891

At an emergency meeting of the Lodge, held two days later a letter thanking Lodge 260 in Sydney for their early attention with respect to the request for Dispensation for the Auckland Social Lodge and also for the loan of their Jewels was approved.

It was also approved that the bye-laws of the Australian Social Lodge, 260 be in force for this Lodge for the present.

I mention the name of the Lodge because the name Ara is not used until October 7th 1850 when the minutes commence 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Lodge Ara'. Prior to this date It is referred to as 'a Masonic Lodge held at Auckland' or as the 'Auckland Social Lodge' During their first two years, twenty-six meetings were held, twenty Brethren were initiated and six affiliated. Although appearing to be a small number we must be aware that the total population spread throughout the whole country was at the time approximately 60,000 and Auckland was still a relatively small settlement.

The first member to be admitted by initiation was Mr. James Harding, described as a seafaring man and being about to sail for Sydney the Lodge deemed the circumstances sufficient to justify them in their departure, in this instance, from the regular bye-laws. No reference can be found to the subsequent Passing or Raising of Bro Harding.

One can only assume that it occurred.

The Lodge continued to function by virtue of the Dispensation from Social Lodge until its meeting of January 1849 held under its Warrant or Charter from the Grand Lodge of Ireland dated June 12th 1844. It is in the minutes of this meeting that the number 348 first appears.

May 7th 1849 saw the initiation of a young man who had been in New Zealand for over ten years and was to go on to a position of some fame. He was by profession a Surveyor, Draughtsman and Artist with the New Zealand Company and had been sent here to assist in mapping this new country. After surveying and painting much of the country and having located the 'Geographic centre' of New Zealand, he published a short book describing his experiences.

The book became to some extent a marketing exercise for the New Zealand Company in their endeavours to encourage immigration and in it he claimed that summer in New Zealand lasted five months and that although Maori had acquired firearms, they only used them to shoot in the air at parties. This generous description of the climate was soon under fire as disillusioned settlers who had read the propaganda were complaining in correspondence back to Britain of incessant wind, heavy rainfall and changeable weather. Ironically, he was himself soon under fire and earned the Victoria Cross during action at the Battle of Rangiriri in November 1863. I speak of course of Major Charles Heaphey V.C. We all well know his name is commemorated in the 'Heaphey Track' which he surveyed as an access between Northern Nelson and the West Coast.

Another name of note which appears as a Founder of Ara Lodge is Charles Wybrow Ligar. Bro Ligar, a three time Master of the Lodge was a highly esteemed Civil Engineer of the time and one should feel sorry for him in that he had the dubious honour of having named after him the Ligar Canal. This canal ran the length of what is now Queen Street. It had originally been a meandering stream and he designed its change into a brick sided flume to channel waters more quickly into the Waitemata Harbour. Unfortunately it soon became an open sewer in that the residents took advantage of being able to dispose of waste products of all types. Ligar Canal still exists and runs empty under Queen Street and as recently as 2002 its form as an unused brick tunnel was unearthed when storm water drainage was being re-laid.

The formation of many Lodges under both the Irish and other Constitutions occurred under the auspices of Ara Lodge.

The first Irish Lodge spawned from Ara was Lodge Egmont in New Plymouth. Instrumental in its founding was WBro Leech, a founding member and second Master of Ara Lodge. He had left Auckland to settle in Taranaki and made application for dispensation on August 1st 1853. This was issued on August 10th 1853. This allegiance to the Irish Constitution was short lived as this Lodge became Mt Egmont Lodge No 670 under the English Constitution in 1856.

The first to be constituted directly under a Sister Constitution was Waitemata 990 EC. I can hear the murmur of disbelief going around the room. What's wrong with him, we all know the number is 689? Quite correct Brethren, it is 689 but originally it was 990. Waitemata occupies the unique position of having been founded almost entirely by members of the Ara Lodge.

I can find no record of when it was decided that a new Lodge operating under the English Constitution should be formed. One can only assume that those who had been initiated under the Grand Lodge of England and held affiliation to Ara Lodge as joining members had reached a stage where, the prosperity of the craft indicated that a new Lodge was a viable proposition.

A petition for dispensation had been sent to the Provincial Grand Lodge of New South Wales over the signatures of:-

Sir Samuel Osborne-Gibbes Bart., PM 199 & 843 P.P.S.G.W.

James Buchanan, WM Ara 348

Francis Campbell, SW Ara 348

William Mason, British Union Lodge 114, Ipswich

James Baylis, 4, IC Dublin

William Young Ara 348

In the minutes of Ara Lodge on September 3rd 1855 the following is stated:-

“Decided that the Lodge room, together with the Jewels, be lent to the Waitemata Lodge, about to be established, for Thursday next, and that all brethren be requested to attend.”

Subsequently, at the meeting of Thursday September 6th there were 35 Masons present; 27 being members of Ara 348.

The Master opened the Lodge in the 1st degree and stated that the object of the meeting was to constitute the Waitemata Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons according to the ancient usage of the United Grand Lodge of England and as no Provincial Grand Lodge had yet been established in New Zealand, it was his duty, as Master of the only Lodge in Auckland, to act as Deputy Provincial Grand Master, pro tempore, and install the W.M. elect in due form.

It is interesting to note that Bro Sir Samuel Osborne-Gibbes, who was installed as the first Master, was himself a member of Ara 348 as were, with the exception of one, all the Officers invested on that occasion.

None severed their connection with Ara 348 but retained membership of both Lodges. On many occasions whenever necessity required it, the Master of the Waitemata Lodge occupied the Chair of Ara Lodge and vice versa, even to the point of conferring degrees. This strong association between Waitemata and Ara is best illustrated by the number of brethren who served both Lodges in the capacity of Master. James Buchanan was three times Master of Ara in 1854, 56 & 59 and in between times was Master of Waitemata in 1857. Francis Campbell, SW in Sept. was Master of Ara in 1855 and Master of Waitemata in 1858.

Two District Grand Masters under the English Constitution served Ara as members. RW Bro George Samuel Graham, while a member of Waitemata, joined Ara in 1861, became Master of Waitemata in 1862 and was DGM from 1877 to 1896. RW Bro Graham was followed by RW Bro Charles Cookman McMillan from 1897 to 1906 but not before having served Ara Lodge as Master in 1888 and 1890 and Waitemata as Master in 1905. Waitemata Lodge held its meetings for some time in the William Denny Hotel which was situated at the corner of Queen and Swanson Streets. This continued until 1858 when at the time of the Long Depression, Waitemata became the tenants of Ara Lodge.

The reasons for this Long Depression have been attributed to many causes.

Members of the Militia were being moved to other parts of the country where battles in the New Zealand wars continued, the bonanza created by the discovery of gold in the Thames/Coromandel district had ended, the price for wool had dropped and the caterpillar plague mentioned earlier had wiped out complete crops throughout the country.

Reported at the time was unemployment, poverty, the exploitation of both male and female workers, ragged children in the streets, threadbare men on the tramp and damp dark cottages.

Also at this time a severe earthquake in the Wellington district had stretched resources.

There was one outcome of this earthquake that was to prove beneficial not only to Wellington but to the country as a whole in that it provided unexpected employment.

The shoreline along the coast towards the Hutt Valley rose some 5m out of the sea providing the basis for the Railway tracks.

It might be of interest that the area we know in Wellington as the Basin Reserve was in fact a swampy marsh connected to the sea. It had been set aside to be dredged to become a basin to carry out ship repairs, hence the name.

Very early in its career as a cricket ground, in 1873, a record was set in a first class cricket match in a match between Auckland and Canterbury. One side was bowled out for a total of 17 runs.

At this time in Auckland work commenced on a large scale on changes to the Waitemata Harbour foreshore with the removal of Britomart Point. This was situated at the end of Princes Street and the spoil removed used to create Victoria Park and move the shoreline from Fort Street to where it is located to this day.

Even with these changes to employment and the prospect of a brighter future the finances of both Waitemata and Ara Lodges still suffered and care had to be taken that both lived within their means.

The establishment of new Lodges continued in Auckland City with the establishment of St Andrew No 418 of the Scottish Constitution on December 9th 1861. In the same year but on an earlier date the first Scottish Lodge in New Zealand had been constituted in Dunedin, namely Otago Kilwinning No 417. I have been reliably informed that the only reason that Otago Kilwinning became the first was due to the fact that the ship delivering the respective Charters or Warrants called in at Dunedin before Auckland. Someone had to be second. Next, in May 1864 came United Service No 424 IC which in 1890 transferred its allegiance to the New Zealand Constitution and became No 10

June 26th 1866 saw the constitution of St Johns Lodge 464 SC at a widely publicised ceremony. Otahuhu was originally established as a pensioner village by Sir George Grey in 1847 or 1848 and remained a quiet little town until 1861 when 100 acres of land was obtained for military purposes. The establishment of the Lodge was no doubt as a result of the number of troops in the area in 1866 but unfortunately with the return of these troops to their homes locally or overseas in 1870 the Lodge became moribund.

Alexandra 1188 EC on the 2nd of August, 1867 was constituted at the township of Alexandra, west of Hamilton. Although this township has been renamed in its original form of Pirongia. An hotel bearing the name Alexandra at which the Lodge held its meetings still stands. Although the New Zealand Wars were said to have ended, skirmishes were still occurring in this area and with the establishment of Hamilton as the commercial hub of the Waikato district, Alexandra moved to Hamilton after a very short time.

Then came the third lodge under the English Constitution which of course paved the way for the formation of a District in Auckland. Three being the minimum requisite number. On December 18th 1869, two Past Masters and seven Master Masons came together to lay the foundations of what is the Prince of Wales Lodge.

A petition seeking the support of the Waitemata Lodge for the establishment of a new Lodge to be named the Prince of Wales Lodge was tabled at the meeting of December 20th 1869 and after a lengthy discussion the resolution to form a new Lodge was put to the meeting and the result was declared to be: For the resolution, 6: Against 4.

Hardly a convincing victory.

The first Master of this new Lodge was WBro AH Diethelm who as well as being a signatory to the petition had been at that time the SW of Waitemata Lodge.

Another of the signatories was Bro EA Plumley, a MM of Ara Lodge who had been elected SW. When the petition arrived in England the Grand Secretary pointed out that Bro Plumley being a MM in Ara Lodge 348 IC, he could not be made SW as Grand Lodge Decrees that proposed office holders must be registered English Masons.

This had taken six months to find out and the matter needed to be dealt with swiftly.

This and was done at the third meeting of the Lodge held at the Masonic Hotel in Princes Street on June 16th 1870 when Bro WH Kissling, a MM of Waitemata Lodge was made SW.

The First Treasurer of the Lodge was a joining member from Ara Lodge 348, one Major Charles Heaphy VC. His skills as a draughtsman were called upon almost immediately when it was found that during the journey from England the Lodge Warrant had been damaged by rats. A close inspection of this document still shows these repairs.

The membership of Lodges across Constitutions that was prevalent during those early establishment years has continued to this day as is evident from the close association between the Irish and English constitution Lodges and long may it continue.

Now was the time for the establishment of a District Grand Lodge to serve the Auckland area. This has been covered sufficiently well by WBro Alan Bevins in his recent book and it is not my intention to go down that line.

However I will say that by the time the District Grand Lodge of Auckland was formed the number of English Lodges had swollen to nine.

The six additional Lodges being Turanganui (Gisborne), Eden, Star of the North (Whangarei), Corinthian (Thames), Remuera and Rodney (Warworth) .

I shall finish by referring back to my statement about the importance of the seven day difference between the dates for the Ara Lodge and New Zealand Pacific Lodge

The first moves towards founding a Masonic Lodge in Wellington had occurred on August 9th 1842 when an advertisement appeared in the Colonist and Port Nicholson Advertiser. The advertisement was headed 'Freemasonry' and said; The Brethren of the above order are requested to attend a meeting of the fraternity at the 'Southern Cross Hotel' this evening, Tuesday August 9th, at half-past eight o'clock, to consider the propriety of applying for a warrant to hold a Lodge in Port Nicholson.

Due to the distance from England and that a Deputy Provincial Grand Master of the Lodges in New South Wales, South Australia and Van Diemen's Land had been appointed by the Grand Lodge of England in 1839 it was decided at this meeting that application be made for a dispensation from Australia, that source being much closer.

No time was lost and one of those present, WBro George Smith, a Past Master of which Lodge I know not, was delegated to travel there and make application in person.

On September 9th on the recommendation of the Lodge of Australia, No 548 EC a dispensation was granted to the brethren of Wellington.

WBro Smith was installed as Master of the 'New Zealand Pacific Lodge' to be opened at Port Nicholson, New Zealand on September 20th in the Lodge rooms of the Lodge of Australia and at the same time was made a Country Member of the Lodge of Australia.

Being installed as Master of a Lodge, 1900 km away from its location must be a rare event.

WBro Smith arrived back in New Zealand, Dispensation in hand on October 17th

The document was signed by George R Nichols as Deputy Provincial Grand Master, Australia and was dated incorrectly AL 5843, AL 1842.

This error was one of many among which some petitioners names appear twice and most names were spelt incorrectly. (W.M., what else would one expect from a document prepared in Australia) The New Zealand Pacific Lodge was constituted on November 23rd 1842 with ten members and two visitors from Lodges in Australia being present.

The Lodge continued under this Dispensation for three years until the Warrant dated July 29th 1845 arrived from England late in the same year. The first meeting under this Warrant was held on July 1st 1846. Not until it arrived bearing the number 571 did the Lodge operate with any sort of number.

The importance of this difference of seven days has two effects. First it gives credence to the claim that Ara Lodge was the first in New Zealand. Secondly it allowed the offshoot Ara Lodge formed in 1890 to lay claim to the number one, and New Zealand Pacific having to be satisfied with number two under the New Zealand Constitution.

RW District Grand Master and Brethren all, thank you for allowing me to share this with you. I trust the listening has been as interesting to you as the research has been to me.

As I said at the beginning, much has been left out and it is my hope that I will in time have time to cobble together all or most of what remains.