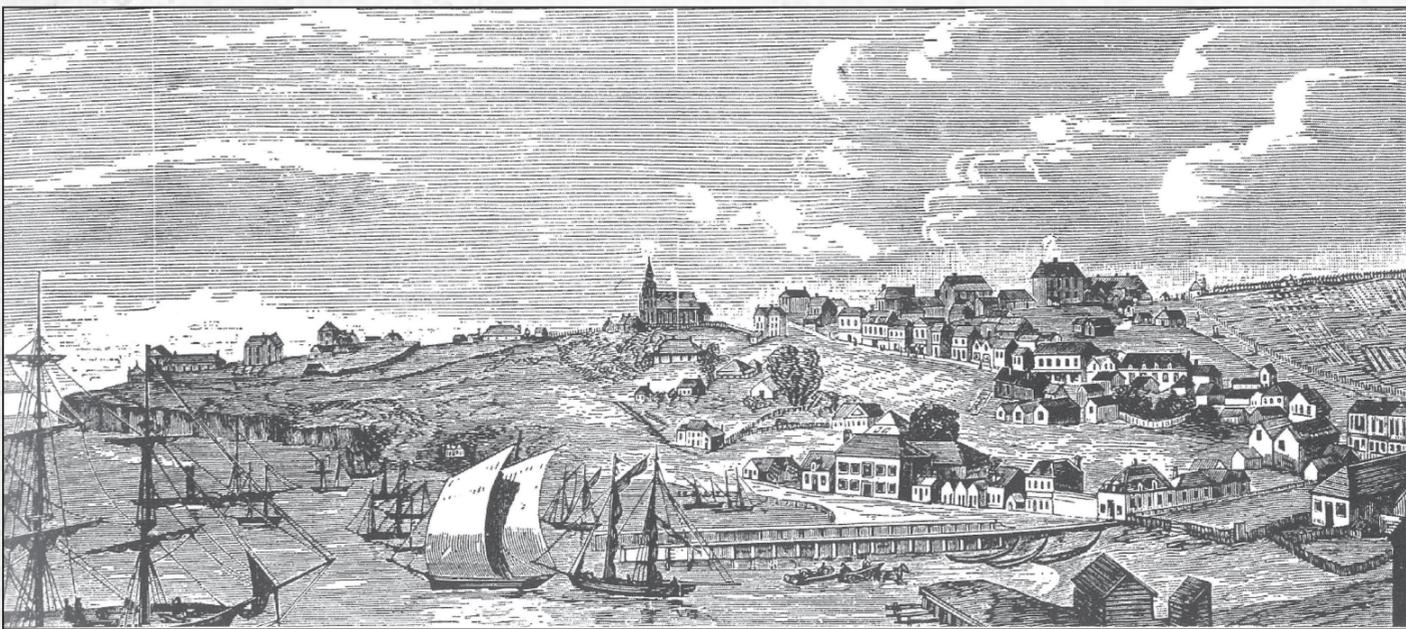


Celebrating 175 Years



Auckland 1844. St. Pauls Church - Princes Street with Woods Hotel on the skyline, centre right

later Premier of NZ, Charles Ligar Surveyor General, William Wilson founder of the NZ Herald, Frederick Merriman Solicitor General of the Auckland Provincial Council and MP, Andrew Rooney a large land holder, John Macfarlane Co-Principal of the Circular Saw Line the largest employer in early Auckland, and others of similar standing.

From the outset its members put a high priority on benevolence. Merriman was the founder of the first benevolent fund in the colony and the Lodge gave frequent and substantial grants to deserving recipients. Meetings in the first decade were held in a variety of premises but in 1846 the Lodge bought land in Princes Street, the most sought after location in Auckland, and by 1849 had built the Masonic Hotel on that site. This became the hub of Freemasonry in Auckland for the next thirty years and the meeting place for not only Ara but future lodges of all three "home" constitutions, Ireland, Scotland and England.

The years 1850-1890 saw a rapid expansion of Freemasonry in NZ. Ara and the Irish Constitution were particularly active with twenty new lodges granted dispensations firstly by Ara and later by the newly created Irish Provincial Grand Lodge, the first in the country. Major Henry de Burgh Adams the Principal Purveyor for the British Armed Forces in the colony and the first



Grand Hotel 1890's

actual Provincial Grand Master gave it great initial impetus opening five lodges in the space of three years. His successor was George Patrick Pierce whose legacy is one of consolidation and expansion of the Irish order over the next three decades.

The NZ Land Wars of the 1850-60s had a significant impact on the Ara Lodge. Its membership burgeoned and many of the leading members of this period were from the British regiments mostly stationed in Auckland. Apart from Henry de Burgh

The Ara Lodge No. 348 IC New Zealand's Foundation Lodge 1842 - 2017

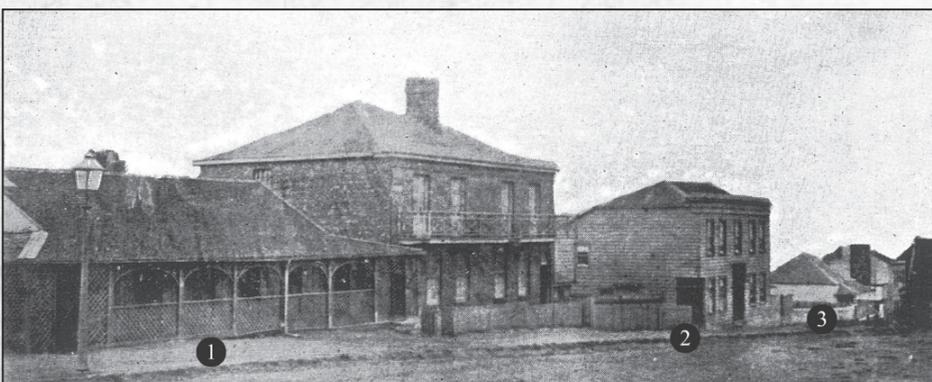
Ara 348 Irish Constitution, the oldest Masonic Lodge in New Zealand has also been considered the pre-eminent Lodge throughout its history. How is this so? What is its history and how does it merit this accolade? This year 2017, marks its founding 175 years ago and so it is appropriate to take stock and reflect and analyse the character of the Ara (pronounced Ah-rah) Lodge 348, to explain why it is so special. Why

also charged with the advancement of those time honoured Masonic tenets of brotherly love, relief and truth which can be further amplified in the practices of those virtues of temperance, prudence, fortitude and justice. Within the whole however, it goes without saying that in the life of any organisation there are individuals who stand out for their service and leadership and in the case of Ara not only in this regard but also for their contributions to the community at large. That being so there will be special mention throughout this account of some of our brethren who merit this acknowledgement.

Sometime in the first half of 1842 three Irish Freemasons William Leech, William Mason and William Turner at a meeting somewhere in Auckland town composed a request to their mother Lodge, the Australian Social Lodge No 260 on the roll of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, for a dispensation to form a Lodge in Auckland. Due to the contingencies of time and distance then (Lodge No 260 was situated in Sydney), it was not executed until 5th September of that year and the Lodge did not hold its first two meetings until after the summer recess on 9th & 11th February 1843. This was the first such dispensation approved for a Lodge in New Zealand and that was 175 years ago.

Originally called the Auckland Social Lodge it was accorded the number 348 in a subsequent Warrant issued by the Grand Lodge of Ireland. However, in 1850 with no explanatory record for the change, it began calling itself the Ara Lodge 348 Irish Constitution. Since then various opinions have been advanced about the origin of the word Ara. These have included the altar of the Gods from ancient times, from the Maori, meaning a pathway, after a river in Ireland, all possible clues, but most probably the name was taken from the Ara Constellation only seen in the Southern Hemisphere. As a Grand Lodge record later stated, "from these [possible sources] we can deduce that Ara was an emblem of light communicated around an altar whence the candidate is awakened from darkness and guided along the pathway leading to Masonic Light."

Ara's early brethren were influential men in the new capital of New Zealand. They included Sir Frederick Whitaker, prominent lawyer, land speculator and



Princes Street

1. Royal Hotel 2. Masonic Hotel 3. Site of Freemasons' Hall

it has a unique place in the history of Freemasonry in NZ and in other respects in wider realms. As Sir Arthur Porritt, Governor General of NZ, and Grand Master of the New Zealand Grand Lodge said on a visit to Ara in February 1970, "of course the history of this Lodge is the history of New Zealand."

It is an axiom that any organisation's strength lies in the collective as well as the individual contributions of its members. A successful Lodge is not only subject to those fundamentals but it is

The Lodge's chronicle can be neatly divided in to three contrasting periods. These are 1842-90, 1890-1990 and 1990-2017. Each dividing point marked a critical period in the Lodge's history threatening its stability and even its existence. Perhaps it is a mark of the Lodge's character and the strength of its leaders that each time it survived to grow and prosper anew after these times of crisis. Let us therefore ponder on what makes the Ara Lodge 348 so special and Masonically unique before speculating on its role in the Auckland of the future.

Adams, others to hold office in the Lodge were Col. Alfred Wyatt, 65th Regiment, Col. Frederick Mould, Royal Engineers, Col. H Balneavis, 58th Regiment and Major Charles Heaphy, the first colonial to win a Victoria Cross.

It was towards the end of this first era that Ara was as usual the leader and the financial backstay in the building of the Freemasons' Hall in Princes Street in 1880. It also donated the land for the hall which was next to the Masonic Hotel. About this time the old wooden hotel was demolished and rebuilt in brick and stone. It was renamed The Grand Hotel by its first lessee, Sir Ernest Davis. This prime real estate became the Lodge's principal financial asset for the next 100 years. During these years Ara was renowned for the distribution of its income by way of charitable donations, not only throughout NZ, but worldwide and particularly Ireland. The minute and correspondence books of this period bear witness to this.

During the latter part of the 19th Century the Lodge continued to be led by stalwarts of the Auckland community such as Dr Robert Kidd, Dr of Laws Trinity College, Dublin, 1st Headmaster of Auckland Grammar School and Registrar of Auckland University College; Alfred Kidd [no relation] publican of the Commercial Hotel and later Mayor of Auckland and MP; Alexander Russell lawyer and later Grand Master of the New Zealand Grand Lodge, Dr John Hooper a widely respected medical practitioner and James Buchanan, a Master of the 1850s and father of the Lodge for a further 50 years. Mention should also be made of the Lodge's continued association with members of the Jewish community of the city; Asher Asher founder of the Auckland Fire Service and Philip Philips 1st Mayor of Auckland and Town Clerk for twenty years.

As 1890 approached, the first of the Lodge's crises arose. During the last years of this decade a strong nationalistic movement gained momentum for the formation of a NZ Grand Lodge, mainly amongst the Freemasons of the West Coast of NZ and in the Wellington region. In Auckland there was no such general interest but at Ara there were a number of senior and influential members who came out in support. In 1890 after two years of debate and indecision some of the members made the decision to give allegiance to the new NZ Grand Lodge, and left the Lodge. In doing so Ara No 1 was born. This Lodge consecrated in 1890 was awarded the number 1 on the roll of the NZ Grand Lodge, acknowledging that its foundation members came from the Irish stock. The remaining members, with the approval of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, kept the oldest lodge in New Zealand alive, albeit with reduced numbers.

— 1890 - 1990 —

This century was the golden one for Freemasonry worldwide and no less so in NZ. Prominent men including kings, presidents, prime ministers and leaders across the whole social spectrum were amongst those from more humble backgrounds who joined the Craft. Ara 348 rapidly recovered from the schism of 1890. Candidates came forth in numbers and multiple degrees were common throughout the next hundred years. The Lodge's membership was amongst the highest in the country. Not even the traumas of two world wars and the Great Depression of the 1930s impinged upon

its solidity or dented its reputation.

In 1900, Frederick Prime, an accomplished violinist, established the Ara orchestra which for several decades was a remarkable feature in the life of the Lodge. The orchestra played at Lodge meetings and in the Refectory a special stage was built for its performances. Ara was renowned as the Musical Lodge and its orchestra was sought after by other Lodges seeking to enhance their programmes.

A major milestone in 1927 was the building of the Airedale Street Masonic Centre. It was a remarkable achievement and epitomises the spirit and character of Irish Freemasonry in NZ. Without doubt it became and still is the most impressive Masonic building in the country. This legacy, guided by the vision of Charles Schnauer and its architect Malcolm Draffin, a long standing member of the Lodge, remains to inspire us today.

Another facet of the Lodge during this time was the extent to which it carefully and wisely husbanded its real estate property, ever bearing in mind its duties to promote Masonic virtues including benevolence. Its continuing record of generosity and support across a range of charities was never neglected. The Lodge's portfolio of real estate in Princes Street grew substantially over time, to the point when in 1975 under the guidance of Percy Shieff and Daniel Virtue its assets were transferred to the Ara Charitable Trust, dedicated to making large annual grants to Auckland charitable causes.

The Lodge during this period was at its greatest with 180 members and was singularly blessed in the quality of its Masters. Such was the pool of Masonic talent available that many able men had to wait for a decade and more before they could gain a foothold in the chain of offices. On only three occasions was a Worshipful Master re-elected for a second term of office and none between 1915-1987. From the many outstanding members who graced the Lodge in this period, Charles Schnauer lawyer, George Gribbin lawyer and the first historian, Sir Jack Butland industrialist and philanthropist, Sir John Allum Mayor of Auckland and Chairman of the Auckland Harbour Bridge Authority, Malcolm Draffin architect of the Lodge and of the Auckland War Memorial Museum, Richard Gross CMG, nationally acclaimed sculptor and Percy Shieff, manufacturer and property investor, are but a few who bear mention. It should also not be overlooked that in each of the world wars over twenty members served in the armed services overseas, of which six paid the supreme price.

The end of this long and Masonically rewarding period came in the 1980s. In the concluding years of this decade the harmony of the Lodge was severely tested. The origin of this was in the sale of the Princes Street properties. However the Lodge regrouped and after four years of travail its second time of crisis passed.

— 1990 - 2000 —

In the last decade of the twentieth century the revival of the Lodge was assured by the void of eligible Masters being filled by affiliated Brethren mostly from the English Constitution. They returned stability and normality back into the life of the Lodge. Candidates after a hiatus of four years came forward and

affiliated members from the three other constitutions returned. Throughout the life of the Lodge these have always been a source of welcome membership. The growth of the Lodge accelerated with the turn of the century, so much so that nearly two thirds of the present brethren are of the last fifteen years. Ara has not lost its allure as a Masonic lodge which aspiring masons and those seeking affiliation wish to join.

Over the past 10 years the Lodge has undertaken an extensive programme of upgrading and restoring its array of records, photographs and other memorabilia. Much was in a state of disorder and even decay. As an example the Dispensation document which is central to this year's celebrations was discovered in a wretched condition in a cupboard, one of many such precious mementos so retrieved. Following professional restoration it now graces the north wall of the Lodge close to the Warrant of the Lodge. Additionally considerable efforts have been made to rebind valuable historical records such as minute books and to display long hidden photographs, Masonic jewels and regalia. The Lodge building now reflects Ara's historical past and its proud traditions. This valuable work and that of the writing and publishing of the History of the Lodge 1842-2008 entitled "The Foundation Stone" was accomplished by Geoffrey Grenfell, emeritus member of Ara.

— 175 YEARS OF BENEVOLENCE —

Since the full records of correspondence, finances and minutes exist it could be possible to give a comprehensive account of the Lodge's charitable activities since 1842. However making comparisons of the value of currency between the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries is always a difficult exercise. Suffice to say that the Lodge has always been a major contributor to charitable causes, to supporting the widow and the orphan, to assisting those in need, to helping in times of disaster both internationally and at home and to sponsoring the Arts. To illustrate; An early member, Frederick Merriman the Solicitor General of the Auckland Provincial Council, established the first benevolent fund in the colony in 1850. In 1884 an Irish mason died on his arrival in Wellington and left a widow with nine children. Sufficient funds to build a house for the family in the Kaipara were raised by the Ara brethren in the course of a few months; Ara was a major financial supporter of the Parnell Anglican Orphanage for well over 50 years, and for more than 70 years the Lodge donated annually, significant sums to three Grand Lodge charities in Dublin.

In more recent times the Lodge's Charitable Trust established in 1975 has gifted over \$4 million to mostly medical causes and the Lodge itself has presented prize money over \$300,000 to Secondary School Art Students over the past 12 years in the Art Awards programme. This year the Lodge in conjunction with the Auckland Primary Principals Association will be organising and financially supporting an annual competition to encourage and recognise solo musicians towards excellence in performance, and \$175,000 has been donated to St. John NZ Ltd to provide a patient transfer ambulance for the citizens of Auckland. Benevolence is a corner stone of Freemasonry and the

Members of the Lodge over the years have been generous in this regard.

— HERE AND NOW —

Which brings us to ponder on the Lodge today. What is its image, its essence and what makes it special? How has it managed to successfully maintain with a few glitches, its traditions, and usages so that it has commanded the commitment of so many worthy men over the last 175 years? This when so many similarly placed Lodges have long since gone.

Ara 348 Irish Constitution is special for many reasons. Firstly by virtue of its long standing renown and reputation; for portraying the very best of Irish Freemasonry; for the quality of its culture, a term much used today, but which has particular significance in the case of Ara; for the wonderful ambience of the Lodge rooms; for the manner in which the presence of its history is communicated through the Airedale Street building and for the quality of its ceremonies. But of supreme importance is the legacy of leadership of those men who gave so much and who practised those exclusive Masonic virtues of brotherly love, relief and truth, to which all Freemasons aspire to follow. This can be encapsulated in the commitment of "Service before Self" and the philosophy of Percy Shieff who at the time of his last address to the Lodge stated that everything he had done was, "For the love he had for his Lodge."

— THE FUTURE —

What course must the Lodge plot in the years to come? The present members of this Lodge must continue to embrace and further enhance this heritage of distinguished and remarkable tradition of service, dedication and practice of those Masonic usages established so long ago. In a rapidly changing world the Lodge while holding fast to the ancient landmarks and precepts of the Craft must adapt to new situations so that its appeal to aspiring Freemasons remains undiminished. The social and ethnic trends which Auckland is undergoing will surely alter the composition of the Lodge membership in the years to come. This especially will require special accommodation. The legacy of more recent eminent brethren needs to be acknowledged and used as an example for all to follow. Programmes which highlight and bring to the notice of the public at large the Lodge's generosity and benevolence and which demonstrate those fine humanitarian practices of Freemasonry are essential. And above all those practices which display those exclusive Irish Masonic qualities as exemplified in the ritual and protocols and for which it is uniquely renowned should never be demeaned and allowed to deteriorate from the high standards which we have inherited from the departed brethren. Long may Ara epitomise the very best in Irish Masonic practice and continue to play an important part in the life of Auckland City and New Zealand Freemasonry. 175 years of uninterrupted existence is surely something to be admired and celebrated.

In Te Ao Maori you will often hear it said that we "walk backwards into the future" - ka mua, ka muri. Our vision fixed on history, learning from those gone before us as we forge new paths.