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 7th 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.