



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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BRO. Sir Joseph Banks & Lodge Sir Joseph Banks No. 300

Sir Joseph Banks - The 'Father of Australia' was a Freemason.

In view of the importance of this matter to Australian Freemasonry some time will be devoted to this aspect of Sir Joseph Banks.

Sir Joseph Banks has often been referred to as the 'Father of Australia' due to his intense & on-going interest in the establishment & promotion of the colony of New South Wales following his visit here with Lieutenant James Cook R.N. during 1770. Sir Joseph Banks is documented (and accepted as such) for being the first Freemason to set foot on the continent of Australia. This event occurred on April the 29th. of 1770. It is highly unlikely that anyone will be able to take this particular honour from him at this late stage as that incident occurred soon after Captain Cook had anchored his vessel "Endeavour" in Stingray Bay (since renamed Botany Bay).

Note A: The cost of the Cook's expedition voyage was, in part, under-written by Banks. A considerable part of the expense involved the necessary modification to the ship which included ample storage-spaced for Banks intended collection of natural science exhibits. One figure given for Banks financial outlay for Cook's voyage is given as in excess of £12,000 sterling (\$A24,000) in 1770 - quite an enormous sum in those far-off days.

For many years (prior to 1950) the knowledge as to whether Sir Joseph Banks was actually a Freemason and of which lodge(s) he was a member & when, was unknown to Australian Freemasons and apparently no-one had made any real attempt to clarify the matter. Certainly, in 1915, the founder members of the lodge bearing his illustrious name could have had no idea as to the actual truth of the matter.

There had been some interest in the matter amongst some Masonic scholars in Australia prior to 1950 but this had remained vaguely 'academic' until the first positive attempt was made by Rt.Wor.Bro.K.R.Cramp, O.B.E., M.A., F.R.A.H.S. (a Past Deputy Grand Master of this constitution - and a Past Master of the Lodge University of Sydney), during a visit to Britain (c.1950). He was assisted in his efforts by the Reverend Cook, who was at that time, the Sub-Dean of Lincoln Cathedral. The basis of Cramp's enquiries was to establish & verify (if possible) any of the Sir Joseph's Masonic activities using Lincolnshire as a starting point, due to his deep personal involvement in that county, which had also been the Banks 'family seat' from 1710.

The Reverend Cook was able to confirm from correspondence held in Lincoln Cathedral, that, in the year 1801 the Freemasons of Lincolnshire were more than somewhat dissatisfied with the lack of activity of their incumbent Provincial Grand Master (Prov.G.M.) and that on the 31 March of that year Sir Joseph Banks had been invited by a Bro. S. Thorold of Harviston, Lincolnshire, to stand for the position of Prov.G.M. of Lincolnshire. Sir Joseph wrote back to Bro.Thorold words to the effect that whilst he had long been, and continued to be a member of the Craft, his extreme ill health (chronic gout & renal problems), and being confined to a wheelchair, plus his commitments in London prevented his accepting the honour. The text of both letters are given at the conclusion of this appendix.

