

# THE GAVEL FREEMASON



*In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century The Grand Lodge and the New South Wales Masonic Club were both founded with the two being very closely linked in history. For instance, many Masons probably don't realise that the first publication of Masonic information issued to Masons was "The Gavel", a publication of the New South Wales Masonic Club, which went to print in 1897. This was later replaced by the "Freemason", however, the Club still issues its own magazine to members. This is the Club's story...*

*Proudly standing tall in the heart of Sydney between Market and Park Streets the New South Wales Masonic Club casts a striking silhouette against the skyline. At the time it was built in 1926-27 it was the tallest building in Sydney. The founding Masons who first conceived the idea of this Club could hardly have imagined the incredible journey they and their successors were about to embark upon....*

On September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1893, the club was formally founded and launched as an active organisation under its constitution by a group of Masons who saw a need for a closer union among the fraternity. At the time it was known as the New South Wales Masonic Musical and Literary Club. At its inception it was decided that it should be a rallying point for all good Masons, that it should be a centre where all points of interest could be freely and fully discussed, where information on Masonic matters could always be gained, and where true fraternity could be cultivated.

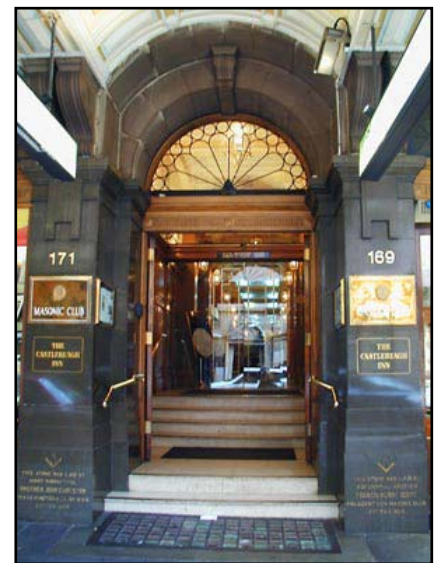
The first president Worshipful Brother Duncan C. McLachlan and his stout-hearted committee of 18 did it fairly tough for the first few years.

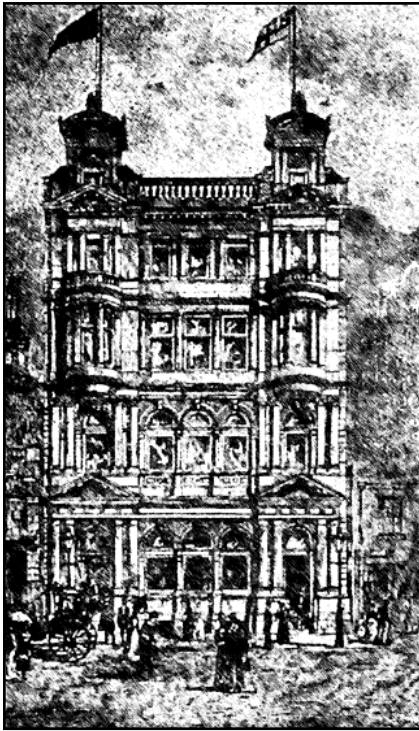
*"The assets at the time were nil and the responsibilities heavy", Brother James*

*King wrote in 1910.*

Debentures to the amount of £350 were issued and the Club was inaugurated with the best of good wishes for its future success. The early years were anything but smooth sailing. With such a big committee there were many conflicts over some issues but that didn't stop the club from progressing.

Members of the club originally met in a room in the Royal Hotel, Five Ways, Glenmore Road in the Eastern Suburbs. Subsequent meetings were held in the Town Hall, Paddington. As the numbers





Above: 289 Pitt Street  
 Top Right: The Library and below  
 The Snooker Room, 1920s

swelled they moved to a more central location, occupying the ground floor of the premises known as the Australian Chambers at 289 Pitt Street, and gained even more members and assets.

The 22nd of June 1906 was a significant date in the history of the Club. The Club was reconstituted and registered as an Association with limited liability. It started afresh with a board consisting of a president, two vice-presidents, a treasurer, five directors and a secretary. *Brother King diligently noted; "From that time to the present success has been assured."*

On September 28<sup>th</sup> 1909 an extraordinary meeting was called for the resolution of purchasing a portion of land at the rear of 216-222 Pitt Street where a clubroom was built. The Pitt Street club served its purpose but the committee wanted something more for the members.

In 1925 it announced that the association had purchased land from the Commercial Travellers Association for £43,000. The land extended from Pitt Street to Castlereagh Street. The club then really hit the jackpot. The Pitt Street frontage was sold for £50,000 so the club's new building venture started

off with the remaining land, at Nos 167-173 Castlereagh Street, and quite a considerable portion of money.

*"The architect has prepared the plans for the building, which will be a monument to the Fraternity and the club, and for all time a home for Masons in NSW," a bulletin to members emphasised on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1925.*

In the background a battle raged. The minutes from the time record a bitter argument over the appearance of the club. Many members – obviously watching the pennies – were in favour of a concrete front while others demanded a sandstone frontage. Incidentally, the building was the first high rise re-enforced concrete building in Sydney.

But the move for sandstone wasn't entirely for aesthetic reasons. The members believed the association would get more money if the venture failed and they needed to sell up.

Their doubts were unfounded. On 12<sup>th</sup> September 1927, the architect handed the key to the club to the President Bro. H. L. Askey, he opened and threw wide the doors which admitted the Members of the NSW Masonic Club into possession and occupation of their future home. The club prospered and it didn't take long for the NSW Masonic Club to establish itself as a place with a proud reputation.

Past and present members include leaders of the professions, the



commercial and industrial sectors, the public service as well as Governors, Ministers and members of parliament of all political parties. The medical profession was well represented and these club members founded the Masonic Hospital. Prominent members of Freemasonry were also members of the club.

Original features of the Club included the library, the ballroom, billiard and card rooms, the main bar, member's lodgings and the magnificent Dining Room. In the 1990s the club's dining room, was restored at a cost of \$350,000 to capture the charm and elegance of a lost era. The traditions of



The Main Lounge - 1927





overseas and the Masonic World. There are many sub-clubs, within the club, that conduct regular meetings and activities and the New South Wales Masonic Club hosts a lively program of luncheons and special events throughout the year. The Royal Commonwealth Society, Old Masonians School, NSW Justices Association and Wildlife Preservation Society are just a few of the diverse array of groups and associations that regularly meet at the club.

Under the banner of The Castlereagh, the Club owns and operates a 3 ½ - 4 star elegantly appointed boutique hotel, Sydney's finest. The hotel has 82 quality business and leisure guest rooms, all with full private facilities. The hotel offers competitive room tariffs. All room tariffs include a daily complimentary buffet breakfast served in the grand dining room.

The Club is heritage listed, renowned for having one of Sydney's last grand dining rooms, Cello's Restaurant, which inspires awe in those who dine there. Cello's boasts ornate high ceilings and 1920s elegance in architecture that is rarely seen today.

Other facilities include fine bars, lounges and function rooms for meetings, conferences and special events. The grand dining room, Cello's,



is also available for banquets and weddings. Visitors are always welcome whether from city or country Australia or Worldwide. Club membership is available to Masons and Non-Masons at Masonic or associate levels. Club members are entitled to a ten percent discount on all personal catering, beverages, accommodation services and special events provided in the Club.

Today the Club holds true to its essence, a meeting place for Mason members, associate members, family and friends. It continues to trade in profitability, flourishing with the activity and fraternity of the many club members, associations, business and leisure guests who call it their own.

Next time you're passing, spare a moment to call in or ask us about arranging a more formal visit. We look forward to meeting you.



For further information on the Club please call (02) 9284 1000 or visit the club's website at:

[www.nswmasonicclub.com.au](http://www.nswmasonicclub.com.au)

more than a century are significant for the NSW Masonic Club. As we enter the 21st century great pride is taken in the preservation of standards set so many years ago. The Club has always enjoyed the patronage of the Grand Masters and the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, and on many occasions has received the highest praise for work done in promulgating Masonry in our State.

The Club's hospitality to visitors has been testified to and resulted in its name being known throughout Australia and

Below: Cello's Restaurant, formerly "The Dining Room"

Above: The club and hotel foyer

Top Right: The ReaghBar and below a hotel bedroom and The Adam Room

