



NUGGET

Masonic Fire

Summary: An explanation of the custom of 'firing' toasts at Festive-Boards.

Firing

When the new Entered Apprentice Mason attends the Festive-Board (meal) following his Initiation ceremony, he will encounter a tradition that will appear rather odd at first. After each toast is proposed, the Freemasons present make gestures, clap and bang their glasses on the table in unison. This custom is known as Masonic Fire.

Below is an explanation of Masonic Fire based on the writings of that font of Masonic knowledge, the late Harry Carr.

Masonic Fire seems to have been adapted from the military custom of firing guns after toasts. The records of the Preston Merchants' Guild describe an annual procession led by the Mayor, followed by soldiers and representatives of the Guilds, that stopped at each of the City Gates, where a toast was drunk, followed by a volley of shots into the air by the musketeers. Another early source, *'Le Secret des Francs-Maçons'* (*'The Secret of the Freemasons'*), a French exposure published in 1742, states:

'All the terms they use in drinking are borrowed from the Artillery... the Bottle is called a barrel... Wine is called Red Powder and [Water] White Powder... The routine they observe in drinking does not permit the use of glasses, for there would not be a whole glass left after they had finished; they only use goblets, which they call Cannon... When they drink in ceremony, the order is given: 'Take your Powder', everybody rises and the Worshipful Master says 'Charge'. Then each of them fills his goblet.

The commands follow: 'Present Arms', 'Take Aim', 'Grand Fire'. On the first, they stretch their hands to the goblet, on the second, they raise them as though presenting arms, and on the last, they drink... they all watch the Worshipful Master so that they keep perfect time throughout.



1723 Firing or dram glass for Bezaleel Select Lodge No. 179
©Museum of Freemasonry, London



When taking up their goblets, they carry them forwards a little at first, then tap the left breast and across to the right, then, in three movements, they replace their goblets on the Table, clap their hands three times and cry out three times 'Vivat!'.

There is no Military Academy where the drill is performed with greater exactitude, precision, pomp and majesty...you will see no stragglers. The noise as they place their goblets on the table is quite considerable...a clear and uniform stroke, hard enough to shatter any but the strongest vessels.'

Many different descriptions have been published since, and the practice still varies enormously in English Lodges today, in the absence of any 'official' procedure.

A typical Masonic Fire is performed as follows, with the Worshipful Master, Director of Ceremonies or Brother giving the toast setting the rhythm: *'Point, Left, Right; Point, Left, Right; Point, Left, Right. 1-2-3; 1-2-3; 1-2-3. One [point Left], Two [point Right], [clap] [pause], [clap, clap, clap]; [clap, clap, clap].'*

Note that the Festive-Board room is usually Tyled for the Masonic Fire.



Recommended use of Nuggets

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings.

They can be:

- Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.
- Themed with the meeting or activity.
- Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.
- Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.
- Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

For further papers and other learning materials visit *Solomon* at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

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