



Nugget

The Foundation Stone

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The importance of the Foundation Stone.

Summary

An exploration of the link between foundation stones and the North-East corner in Masonic ritual, and an explanation of its associated symbolism.

Keywords

Foundation, North-East, Corner

The Foundation Stone

Carefully, the newly initiated candidate is placed in a certain position but not, as one might expect, in front of the Worshipful Master who is about to address him ‘. . . it is customary at the erection of all stately and superb edifices, to lay the first, or foundation stone at the North-East corner of the building . . .’

Why is the candidate in the North-East corner? Why not just anywhere in the Lodge that happens to be convenient?

The North-East point of the heavens was especially sacred among the Hindus and, according to Egyptian mythology the sun rose in this quarter on the day of its creation mythology.

Thus, the North-East corner in ancient times acquired peculiar sanctity and significance. At the erection of an ancient building, it was often the practice to offer human sacrifice by building a workman into the structure at the North East corner, so that the building might become identified with his strength and spirit.

We are told that the candidate is placed in the North-East corner of the Lodge, figuratively to represent the foundation stone; it symbolizes the Entered Apprentice beginning his Masonic Journey by turning the corner from the darkness of ignorance and facing the dawning light of the East.

He has received some light in the East and is seeking more; the North refers to the outer or profane world and the East, the inner world of Masonry; the North-East is symbolic of the double position of the Initiate, partly in the darkness of the former and partly in the light of the latter.

The high symbolic importance of the foundation stone was well established by the time of the building of King Solomon’s temple; the builders of ancient times were highly skilled in constructing walls. They knew how to economise without compromising the integrity of the buildings by constructing corners and supports of carefully dressed stone. These cornerstones which guaranteed strength and stability became a colloquial term to describe prominent men. At the turn of the 18th century when our original rituals were written, it was traditional to lay the foundation stones of stately and superb edifices at the North-East corner. But a great deal of ritual was performed at such stone laying long before the advent of Freemasonry.

The Cornerstone (Foundation Stone) is the first stone set in the construction of a new edifice, it is very important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure. Many old records show the stone as having been set at the North-East corner. There is no documentation to support the theory that this had any influence on those who wrote the ritual but it does seem likely that this was the case as it would seem to be too much of a coincidence.

On Thursday 20 May, 1880, the Grand Master, HRH the Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall and later King Edward VII, laid the Foundation Stone of Truro Cathedral. As far as we know, this was the only time that a foundation stone of a Cathedral has been laid by a Grand Master, supported by Grand Lodge, in full Masonic splendour.

Until 1919, an approved form of procedure for the laying of a foundation stone was prescribed in the Book of Constitutions. It was one of the few surviving links between our Operative predecessors and us. For some unknown reason it was dropped at that date.

Each of us can ask ourselves 'Have I moved from the North East corner and, from the foundation laid, made an attempt to raise a superstructure perfect in its parts and honourable to the Builder?'

##END##

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.

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