

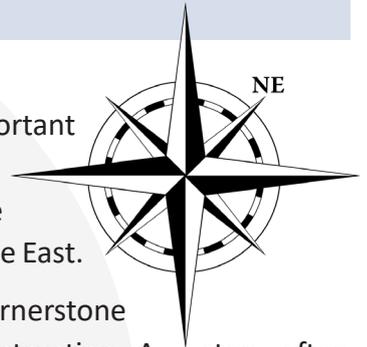


# NUGGET

## North-East corner

**Summary:** The roots and significance of the North-East Corner to both operative and speculative Masons, and to society in general.

In the many lessons within the Entered Apprentice Degree, few can be more important or dramatic than those of the North-East corner. It is a significant moment in a Freemason's journey, marking the point at which he leaves the North, the profane world of darkness, of ignorance and turns the corner to see the dawning light of the East.



His placement in the north-east is crucial, as he figuratively represents the cornerstone of the building, which from time immemorial, has been the first step its construction. A step often accompanied by an elaborate ceremony, a custom still practiced today. It is highly symbolic, and even before the advent of Freemasonry, a great deal of ritual was performed at a stone laying; a direct link with Operative Stone-Masons.

The Ceremony of Laying the Foundation Stone is a modern remnant of the barbarous practices of a by-gone age, first pagan,<sup>1</sup> and then Christian,<sup>2</sup> whereby both people and animals were entombed alive or dead as a sacrifice. They were later replaced, by effigies, coins and other artefacts, and nowadays by plaques and time capsules. In mediaeval churches, the north-east corner is the place where the Easter sepulchre or symbolic tomb of Christ was set.<sup>3</sup>

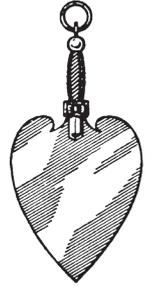
By the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when our original ritual was written, it was traditional to lay the cornerstones of



*Washington laying cornerstone at U.S. Capitol in 1793 by Allyn Cox  
Architect of the Capitol*

stately and superb edifices at the north-east corner. A practice which only ended in England in 1919, when the laying the first stone in the north-east ceased to be prescribed. Since all other stones would be set in reference to this stone, it determined the position of the entire structure. Perhaps the most famous such stone laying, was that done by George Washington, who laid the cornerstone of the Capitol Building, home of the Senate, the legislative branch of American Government, on 18 September 1793. It is the subject of some famous paintings, one of which shows him wearing his Masonic apron.

It remains a place of significance and sanctity, and Freemasons still consecrate a new Lodge or Chapter with corn, wine and oil.<sup>4</sup> Masonic legend and Ritual recognise the north-east as the only place to properly lay a cornerstone. It provides the perfect spot for a new Entered Apprentice to begin his moral and intellectual task of building a spiritual superstructure and become part of his Lodge's future.



It is also where an Entered Apprentice is taught the importance of charity and benevolence. Reminding him that a Mason's kind and generous fraternal heart, never forgets a poor and distressed Brother, and gives quietly, with a secret hand. Hopefully, he then begins to see charity as something *'wider, deeper, and grander than the casual dispensing of monetary help, but rather as love for our fellow man'*.<sup>5</sup>

Incidentally,

*'when the new Mason is then asked for alms, he would at one time have been presented with a trowel, flat side upwards, because that was the symbol of benevolence and care. That is why, when the Grand Lodge created the office of Charity Steward, the trowel was re-introduced as his jewel.*

*The new Mason would also have been unprompted as to what to say, when alms are demanded, having to reply without help. Even now, when prompted, this moment will forever be imprinted on this memory.'*<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps now you see why standing in the north-east is such a pivotal point in the Masonic journey of a Freemason.

## References

1. Baring-Gould, S., (March 1887), *Murray's Mag., On Foundations*, *'...the old Pagan laid the foundation of his house and fortress in blood.'*
2. Speth, G. W., (1893) *Builders' Rites and Ceremonies, Two Lectures on the Folk-Lore of Masonry*, p.6.
3. Barker Cryer, Revd. N., (2008), *What Do You Know about Ritual?*, pp. 13–14, Lewis Masonic.
4. Symbolism of the Corner-Stone, 'Collectively, they allude to the Corn of Nourishment (the symbol of plenty), the Wine of Refreshment (the symbol of that inward and abiding comfort), and the Oil of Joy (the symbol of prosperity, happiness, and joy), which are the promised rewards of a faithful and diligent performance of duty, and were enumerated by King David, in his catalogue of blessings, as *'wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart'*.' <https://www.sacred-texts.com/mas/sof/sof25.htm> [Accessed 09/04/20].
5. Harvey, W., (1946), *The North-East Corner, Anthology - Book 2*, (Ed) James Green, Temple Arch, 2000, P46
6. Barker Cryer, Revd. N., (2008), *What Do You Know about Ritual?*, pp. 13–14, Lewis Masonic.



## 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 and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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