



NUGGET

Masonic Fire

Summary: The Origins of Masonic Fire. This is an extract from, *I Just Didn't Know That* by Neville Barker Cryer, published by Lewis Masonic.

A majority of Lodges follow the custom of 'firing' the toasts at the Festive Board. The firing varies from Lodge to Lodge, so when a new Candidate, or a visitor attends, his attempts to replicate the firing delivered by the Lodge members, can be a source of amusement. To understand why we do it, we need to know its origin. The clue is in the name, firing.

In the 17th century, toasts to King and Country were special, as evidenced by the description of a celebration of the Preston Guild Merchants:

'...the Mayor, with his great attendance is received in the streets by his guards of Soldiers and Companies of Trade, he makes his procession to the Church gates, where he and his attendance are entertained with a speech made by one of the chief Scholars of the School. A Barrel or Hogshead of nappy Ale standing close-by the Barrs is broached, and a glass offered to Mr. Mayor, who begins a good prosperous health to the King, afterwards to the Queen, the Nobility and Gentry having pledged the same; at each health begun by Mr. Mayor, it is attended with a volley of shot from the musketeers attending'.

So, just as Royalty and visiting heads of state were, and still are, greeted with 'feu de joie', by way of a twenty-one-gun salute, so the custom arose of 'giving fire' at the dining table. As gentlemen and the nobility joined the Craft, they brought their customs of firing with them.

It was based on the process of loading and firing a canon, or musket:

- The first command was 'charge your glasses' as if charging a firearm with powder; the glasses used were specially strengthened, so as to withstand the rigors of firing.
- The next command was 'present your glasses', i.e. lifting them up; as if showing the weapon was loaded.
- Followed by 'point', i.e. pushing the glass forward; as if aiming the weapon.
- Then on the command 'fire', the effect of a volley was achieved by striking the toughened base of the 'firing glass' on the table. Rapid fire was simulated by striking the table three or four times in quick succession, sometimes simultaneously, and sometimes in a rolling volley.





The earliest Masonic reference of firing seems to be in 1760;

'Every Man has a Glass set him, and a large Bowl of Punch, set in the centre of the table ...the Master takes up his Glass, and gives a Toast to the 'King and the Craft', with Three Times Three in the Prentice's; and they all say Ditto, and drink all together, minding the Master's Motion. They do the same with the empty glass that he doth; that is, he draws it across his throat three-times..., and then makes three offers to put it down; At the third, they all set their glasses down together, which they call 'firing'. Then they hold the Left-hand Breast-high, and clap nine-times with the right; their foot going at the same time. When this is done, they all sit'.

Later the commands were shortened to 'we will fire the toast, point', followed by 'left, right' etc; possibly suggesting a trowel laying mortar to signify bonding and fellowship. Today this has become a choreographed toast, something like, 'point left-right, point left-right, point' followed by a series of three sets of three claps, led first by the right-hand, then the left, then the right again; and culminating in a final 'crossing' gesture. Though as stated earlier, the actual 'firing-pattern' used varies from Lodge to Lodge.

In many Lodges firing has been replaced entirely by the 'clapping of hands', or the 'singing of a Masonic refrain'; and in some firing and singing are combined. That said, many Lodges do not follow this custom at all, proving that firing was not an essential part of ancient Masonic practice.



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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