

A compilation of
sources on the History
and Ceremony of the
LOVING CUP

LOVING CUP HISTORY

There is a degree of uncertainty about the origin of the ceremony surrounding the Loving or Grace Cup. The custom is said to have originated in the precaution to keep the right, or 'dagger' hand, employed so that the person who drinks may be assured of no treachery, like that practised by Elfrida (step-mother to King Edward the Martyr) on the unsuspecting King at Corfe Castle in Dorset on 18 March 978 AD, who was slain while drinking. This is why the Loving Cup has a Cover to keep the right hand of one's neighbour visible and engaged.

In Saxon days an enemy was sometimes stabbed when both hands were engaged holding the heavy drinking horns then used and whilst the arms were raised leaving exposed the vulnerable frontal sides of the body. Curiously enough it is anatomically not so effective to "stab in the back" because of the tough wall of muscle which has to be penetrated.

THE CEREMONY OF THE LOVING CUP

The Cups are of silver or silver-gilt with a Cover and a napkin tied to one of the handles. They are traditionally filled with spiced wine immemorially termed "Sack".

1. The Master will begin the Ceremony. When your neighbour stands and takes part in the Ceremony, get ready for your turn.
2. When your neighbour turns to you holding the Cup, you will stand and bow to each other. You will then remove the Cover of the Cup with your right hand, holding it at shoulder-height for all to see.
3. Your neighbour holding the Cup drinks and applies the napkin to the lip of the Cup. You will then replace the Cover of the Cup.
4. Your neighbour who has just drunk from the Cup then passes it to you in a way so that you can grasp it with both hands. You both bow to each other.
5. You turn to the person on your other side and your neighbour who just drunk stays standing and turns to protect your back.
6. With the Cup in your hands, you and your other neighbour perform the steps from item 2 above. Bowing before each other, this neighbour removes the Cover so that you can drink and wipe the lip – all while your first neighbour is guarding your back.
7. Now this neighbour puts the Cover back on the Cup, you both bow and you will hand it with two hands to him or her.
8. You will then turn about to protect the next drinker from attack; thus there are always three people on their feet, the drinker being in the middle.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Both participants bow when they first come face to face, and again at the end of their joint activity before turning about.
- The Cup is always passed with two hands; the holder of the Cup continues to grasp it with both hands, except whilst wiping the lip.
- It is useful to advise the party guarding your back (as they were standing back to back to you) when it is time to sit, usually by a light tap on the shoulder.
- In some liveries, if you do not wish to drink from the Cup, it is a sufficient gesture of loyalty to receive and pass the Cup on to the next person with a slight bow. It is best to find out before the ceremony if this is true for the occasion you attend, if you wish not to drink.
- Read the banquet menu card on the table to see if there are any variations to the above Ceremony.
- Practice at home with the Master and a trusted friend.