

## **The Loving Cup Ceremony**

There is a degree of uncertainty about the origin of the ceremony surrounding the Loving or Grace Cup, but it is possible that it dates from the time of King Alfred.

The Cups are of silver or silver-gilt with a cover and are filled with spiced wine immemorially termed "Sack". Immediately after dinner and Grace, the Master and Wardens drink to their guests a hearty welcome. The cups are then passed round the tables and each person after he has drunk, applies the napkin to the lip of the cup before he passes it to his neighbour. While the drinker is occupied his neighbour on one side stands holding the cover of the cup in his right or dagger hand and his neighbour on the other side remains standing to protect him.

This custom is to ensure that the drinker is protected from treachery like that practised by Elfrida on the unsuspecting King Edward the Martyr at Corfe Castle who was slain while drinking. 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.

It is a constant source of argument which way the protector should face. At some Company banquets he turns his back on the drinker and at others he faces his back. The Armourers and Brasiers face the back of the drinker.

### **The Ceremony as celebrated by the Worshipful Company of Plumbers.**

1. When the person on your right receives the cup, you stand, face the holder of the cup and bow to him. With your right hand you remove the lid (with a flourish holding the lid at arms length).
2. He will then drink from the cup and after he has wiped the rim of the cup (with the napkin tied to the cup), you replace the lid. He will then pass you the cup which you take with both hands and again you bow to each other.
3. You then turn clockwise (to avoid tangling up your sword with your feet!) to face the person on your left (who has stood up to face you) and you bow to each other.
4. He will then remove the lid with his right hand (with a flourish holding the lid at arms length) and you then drink (sip) from the cup and wipe the rim of the cup (with the napkin tied to the cup). The person on your left will then replace the lid and you pass the cup to him and bow again.
5. He will then turn about with the cup and you turn clockwise so that you are back to back with him ready to guard his back while he drinks from the cup. When he passes the cup to the person on his left, you may sit down.