

Livery Committee Website Content

Protocol and Etiquette at Livery Functions

Introduction

From time-to-time Liverymen (especially new liverymen), and their guests, raise questions about etiquette at livery dinners. It is hoped that the following comments will deal with the majority of such queries.

The following points about etiquette apply to all formal Livery functions and should be observed by the hosts and their guests. It is important to emphasise that whilst Liverymen will be familiar with the etiquette expected, the onus is on them to brief their guests for whom they are responsible.

Dress Code

There is sometimes confusion about how to interpret the dress indicated on a formal invitation. The expected dress code should always be clearly shown on invitations and “pour memoire” cards.

In Livery terms “*Lounge Suit*” and “*Business Attire*” or “*Business Wear*” are used interchangeably to mean smart clothing appropriate for a business occasion. Miniskirts, off the shoulder or one-shoulder tops or dresses, jeans, polo shirts, sportswear and trainers would not be appropriate for a daytime Livery function.

“*Evening dress*” or “*White Tie*” means a black tail coat and white waistcoat and white bow tie (worn with a wing collared shirt) for men. Ladies are expected to wear full length dresses (or skirts with appropriate tops) in evening fabrics. Shoulders should be covered. Evening Dress is worn with any orders and decorations to which the wearer may be entitled (miniature medals and neck decorations). Military mess dress and formal national dress equivalents are welcomed.

“*Dinner jacket*” or “*Black Tie*” means a black dinner suit and black bow tie with white dress shirt for men and, if no mention is made of decorations, should not include orders and decorations. However, if the invitation states that decorations should be worn with dinner jacket, it is of course incumbent on the guest to comply with the wishes of the host.

Appropriate “Black Tie” wear for ladies includes midi, calf-length or long dresses, evening suits comprising a jacket with dress, trousers or a skirt, or smart trousers or mid-length skirt with a jacket or sleeved top in an evening fabric.

Other than for specially-themed evenings, or at the specific wish of the host, the following are unacceptable for evening wear at Livery functions:

Gentlemen: denim, leather, coloured jackets/suits/waistcoats/ties, “bootlace” ties, brown shoes.

Ladies: jumpsuits, leggings, denim, leather, dresses or skirts above knee length.

The term “*Badges*” on an invitation refers to the badges of office for members of the Court, the Livery and the Clerk (if provided) and should not be confused with orders and decorations.

Reception

Members and their guests should wait to be announced by the Beadle/Toastmaster and welcomed individually by the Master and Wardens. Best practice is for the receiving line to be made up of the Master and Wardens; occasionally a Consort may also be asked to receive guests. At all times the Master/Prime Warden/Upper Bailiff should be greeted and referred to as their title, not by their first name.

Processions into and recessions out of dinner

Typically, The Master, principal guest(s), Wardens, and the Clerk process into, and out of, the dining room, led by the Beadle. Those standing at their places at table will, in most instances, clap in a slow rhythm (in time to the music if there is any). Some companies practice a silent procession.

The host Clerk will advise on the day whether or not a visiting Master is expected to process.

Dining arrangements

As a courtesy to other guests and to ensure that the event keeps to time, it is important that everyone takes their place at the table immediately once the Beadle or Toastmaster announces that dinner is about to be served.

Grace is said before sitting down to eat. The Beadle should gavel promptly if speeches or presentations are to take place after Grace but before eating. No-one should commence eating until the Master has started to do so. Port carafes should always be passed to the left and never across the table, other than at the end of a sprig.

Sung Grace

Grace is sung at the end of the meal following completion of the dessert course at both Livery dinners and the Mansion House and Guildhall banquets. Liverymen are encouraged to learn both the tune and words, although the latter are always printed on the menu. If musical accompaniment is not available for the sung grace, The Clerk should take the lead.

The Rose Bowl

Occasionally rose bowls are circulated after the meal. The Rose Bowl is not a finger bowl. The correct procedure is to dip a corner of your napkin into the water to make it damp, then dab it on the pulse points behind your ears and on the inside of your wrists. The coolness is believed to aid the digestion.

The Loving Cup

As company customs can vary, the loving cup ceremony (or any equivalent,) should be set out clearly on the menu. The majority of companies proceed as follows.

The key rule is that there must never be more than 3 people standing at any one time. Unless you are starting the circulation of the cup then you do not stand until the person who has it turns to you with the cup in his or her hands.

As that person turns to you, you rise; you (head) bow; you raise the lid in your right hand with a flourish and wait while they drink and wipe the rim with the napkin tied to the cup handle. You then replace the lid and take the cup by its handles with a bow; you turn to the next person who rises, bows, raises the lid and so on. When you have handed the cup over, and the recipient has turned away from you, you then turn round and guard their back and make sure that the person who was guarding your back is sitting down. When the cup is again handed on, your job is done, and you sit down.

[PDF download 'Livery Dinner Ceremonies']

[PDF download 'Loving Cup Plans']

Since the COVID 19 Pandemic, many companies have not re-introduced drinking wine from the shared Loving Cup on hygiene grounds. Sometimes wrapped sweets are substituted to keep the tradition alive.

The order of events after the meal is normally sung grace, loving cup, and loyal toasts after which coffee is served; any musical entertainment then follows, before the speeches.

Comfort Breaks

Whilst we do not expect members and their guests to be uncomfortable, strictly speaking no one should leave the table for any reason until after the loyal toast, preferably not at all.

The most convenient and least disruptive time to leave the table is when coffee is being served. Guests who do so should leave and return to their seat discreetly and without disturbing other guests.

It is considered most impolite to leave the table during the speeches.

The Toasts

There are usually five formal toasts. In most cases, those present will sit down immediately after each Toast. In companies where there are only one or two Toasts, the Beadle will announce if guests may continue to stand until the Toasts are completed.

- The Loyal Toast is proposed by the Master. At formal dinners the Master rises, without any introduction, and stands to say, "The King". the whole company rises and stands to attention; the music strikes up immediately and all sing the first verse of the National Anthem. Glasses are not lifted or even touched until the singing is finished All present raise their glasses and join in the toast, "The King". Where there is no music provided, the Master rises, says, "The King" then everyone rises, glasses are raised and all join in the toast saying, "The King."
- The Royal Toast is proposed by the Master. The Master rises and says loudly, "Queen Camilla, The Prince and Princess of Wales and other members of the Royal Family". All rise and stand to attention whilst the first few bars of the National Anthem are played, but we do not sing. Glasses stay on the table until the music stops, then we raise our glasses and join in the toast saying, "The Royal Family". When no music is provided, all rise, glasses are raised and all join in the toast saying, "The Royal Family".
- The third toast is proposed by the Master. The Master rises and says loudly, "The Lord Mayor and the City of London Corporation" (or, if the Sheriffs are present, "The Lord Mayor, the City of London Corporation and the Sheriffs"). As soon as the Master has done so, all rise and raise their glasses saying those same words. We sit down. If the Lord Mayor or a Locum Tenens is present, they will respond.
- The Fourth toast is to the Guests and will be proposed by a member of the Company, who first makes a short speech of welcome, saying a few words about the principal, and other, guests. The speaker will then invite members of the Company to rise, say "the Guests" and all members of the Company rise, raise glasses (often pledging nearby guests, who remain seated), repeat "the Guests" and drink, then sit down.
- The fifth and final toast follows the response to the toast to the guests and is usually proposed by the principal guest. The Clerk should advise the principal guest if there is a specific Company toast. If not, the principal guest will, at the end of their short speech, propose the traditional livery toast "The Worshipful Company of [name], may it flourish root and branch and good health to the Master". At which point all present stand and raise our glasses, join in the toast, drink and sit down.

Taking Wine

If at any time during the dinner, the Beadle says that the Master will take wine with [name]... and mentions your name, rise, with your glass, pledge it in the direction of the Master, look pleased and sit down. The Company will usually applaud.

Mobile Phones and Photography

Mobile phones are to be switched off on entering the venue and should not be used during a formal meal to make or answer calls, text, post on social media or take photographs or videos.

Whilst it is very difficult to prevent members and guests from using phones to take photographs before or after a function, attendees should be reminded in advance of any “House rules” and the requirement to observe general rules of courtesy and data privacy. Company members should inform their own guests accordingly.

Guests should be advised in advance about official photography so that anyone who does not want their image to appear in public has an opportunity to make that clear to the Clerk or to the photographer.

Smoking

Smoking is not permitted anywhere in Livery Halls or other event venue property. This restriction also includes e-cigarette devices.

The Reception and the Stirrup Cup (Late Bar)

The traditional reception held before each formal dinner, and the frequently occurring late bar or ‘Stirrup Cup’ that occurs after the Master rises present the perfect time to greet friends and meet new guests and acquaintances. Both these opportunities should obviate the need for guests to leave the table during dinner to chat with others. This practice is frowned upon as it is inconsiderate to other guests and disrupts service.

Dining Out

It would be unwise for Masters and Clerks to presume that invitations from others will be forthcoming at a particular time, even if there has been a history of reciprocal invitations. Invitations to formal lunches and dinners should always be addressed formally and personally. They should not be sent via text or WhatsApp message. Whilst it is traditional to write a formal invitation, it is now common for invitations to be sent by email. A PDF letter or invitation card with a brief covering email message is the preferred format. Invitations should be sent by the Clerk, or the Clerk’s office, on behalf of the Master.

Invitations are usually sent at least 6 weeks in advance. It is useful for invitations to include a date by which responses are expected. This allows time for guest companies to consider, and manage, any potential diary clashes before giving a firm response. It is impolite for officers of a Livery Company, having formally accepted an invitation, to change their mind a week or two later.

(Hosts will, of course, understand if a Master or Clerk has to offer their apologies for not being able to attend at short notice because of illness or an emergency).

Invitations from other Livery Companies and City officers will usually be addressed by means of a single letter addressed to the Clerk. It is the host's decision as to whether they invite the Master alone, the Master with the Clerk, or the Master with their Consort.

A guest Company has no right to substitute individuals at will (eg by nominating a Warden to attend instead of the Master, or a Consort instead of a Clerk). In the case of need, alternative arrangements for representing the Company should always be discussed and agreed between Clerks.

In the case of an invitation sent jointly to the Master and Clerk, if the Master cannot accept, the Clerk should not do so, unless the invitation specifically states that the Clerk is welcome to attend unaccompanied. Where separate invitations are issued and the Clerk is entitled to attend without the Master, he or she would be unwise to make a frequent practice of so doing.

It is customary for a Livery Company hiring a Livery Hall to invite the Master and Clerk of that Livery Company to attend the function in the Hall. It is not best practice for that Livery Company's Master and Clerk to accept such an invitation unless they intend to return the invitation.

Invitations to events run by charitable organisations for the purpose of raising funds are not normally accepted unless the Master (and Clerk) of the Company accepting intend that their Company should contribute towards the charity's funds.

Having dined out, a Clerk should always write a letter of thanks to the Clerk of the host Company. The letter should request the host Clerk to pass on thanks to the Master. It is customary for such letters to be hand-written but email communications are acceptable in some cases – again, a PDF with brief covering message is preferable to a 2-line email. A Master should always write to the Master of the host Company personally to express their thanks. The letter should be sent to the Company's official address.

Post-nominals

Companies observe different practices regarding titles and post-nominals, some using all of them on seating plans etc; others using only Crown awards or appointments. The order of post-nominals after the holder's name is as follows:

First: Crown awards or appointments eg DBE, CBE, OBE, JP, DL, TD

Second: Qualifications eg FRCS, MA etc

Third: Elected office eg MP, CC

Note: CC denotes Common Councillors within the City of London; however, those appointed as Deputy within a Ward are addressed as "Deputy" and their name is shown with that title instead of the CC post-nominals, eg A B, Deputy.

The Master

The Master should personally invite speakers to address the Company at any formal function and should write a personal letter of thanks after the event. Except for those letters, letters of thanks for hospitality, and private communications, the Master does not normally write letters. Instead, the Master should request the Clerk to write on their behalf. If any Master insists upon writing official or semi-official letters, it is important that the Clerk is given a copy, for the purposes of information and record.

Masters usually write their own speeches. In case of need, which should be rare, the Clerk should be prepared to write a speech for the Master, sometimes at very short notice but this should not be standard practice. The Master should, however, consult the Clerk as to the order and content of their speech, in terms of maintaining City protocols. Most companies will ask for a copy of the Master's speech to be deposited in the records for archive purposes.

The Clerk

The Clerk is responsible for ensuring high standards at Company events, and for ensuring that the Master is suitably dressed and briefed for all engagements.

The Clerk is responsible for the conduct of functions generally but should generally act through the Beadle rather than themselves jumping up and down. The Clerk should expect not to leave their place, once seated.

Unless there are special circumstances, or an event is very small and private, it is not considered good practice for the Clerk to act as toastmaster or master of ceremonies, that task being within the province of the Beadle or an appropriate specialist.

The Clerk should not normally speak. If invited to do so, they should consider very seriously whether to accept. Clerks should never usurp the position of the Master or a guest speaker at a Company event.

The Beadle

The Beadle helps to ensure that the ceremonial aspects and the progress of each event is in accordance both with Livery practice and the anticipated time schedule. The Beadle will call and/or gavel to attract the attention of the Company and guests whenever required and will make announcements as to whether those present should stand, sit, be silent etc.

During a formal event, the Clerk will use the Beadle to communicate with the Master, the kitchen, speakers and entertainers, as needed.

Lord Mayor Locum Tenens and Representative Lord Mayor

Where the Lord Mayor has agreed to attend an event but must subsequently withdraw at short notice, a substitute will be offered, though the host Company is under no obligation to accept. A Lord Mayor Locum Tenens (LMLT) may be appointed if the Lord Mayor is out of the country, a Representative Lord Mayor (RLM) in other circumstances.

Both should be accorded the same courtesies and protocol as the Lord Mayor. If neither LMLT or RLM are appropriate, then the Company may invite an Alderman or Alderwoman, The Recorder or other civic functionary to represent the Corporation and to make a speech, but then the Civic Toast should be drunk in silence.

Guests

The Clerk should always advise the Master as to the guests to be invited to a function; and should feel free to advise as to any guest proposed by the Master whom the Clerk feels would be unsuitable.

Once the Master has issued an invitation to a principal guest or guest speaker, the Clerk should then confirm arrangements, briefing the speaker as necessary, setting out the specific duty, and advising the speaker of the length of time normally regarded as the maximum (ie 7-10 minutes); and the words of any particular Company toast.

The Clerk should ensure that each guest speaker is welcomed on arrival, given the opportunity to test the microphone etc and briefed about seating and procession arrangements as required.

Badges

Liverymen wear their badges at their own Company's events. Badges should otherwise only be worn if a Liveryman or office holder has been invited as an official guest of the host Company and is attending as a Company representative.

When invited by a member of another Livery Company to attend a function as their private guest, a Master, Clerk or Liveryman should not wear their badge, unless specifically invited to do so by the Master of the host Company.

Clerks supplied with badges normally wear these at all Company functions and at all inter-Livery and ceremonial functions to which they are officially invited as Clerk. Such badges are not normally worn on any other occasion, nor in the City of Westminster. (Note: Clerks to the Great Twelve and some of the older Companies do not wear badges.)

United Guilds Service

The Clerk is expected to ensure that the assigned Company row at St Paul's Cathedral is filled with Court members. The Master should sit on the aisle with the Clerk next, then the Wardens, then others. The Master's Consort has a separate reserved seat under the Dome, with other Consorts.

The Clerk is responsible (with the Beadle) for ensuring that the Master and Wardens are gowned before proceeding into St Paul's. In some Companies, all Court members attending the service will be gowned.

Lord Mayor's Show

Participation in the Lord Mayor's Show, and the extent to which the Clerk is involved, is a matter for individual Companies. There may be opportunities for Companies to take part under "Senior Liveries" and "Modern Liveries" banners, as well as individual entries.

The basic cost of participating in the Show relates to the space on the road taken up by each entry: how that space is filled will determine the final cost of the entry itself. Designs and costs will vary considerably.

If the Company has a member as Sheriff or Lord Mayor, the Clerk will be well-advised to consult another Clerk who has had such an experience at least a year before the member takes office.

The Election of Sheriffs and Election of the Lord Mayor

Liverymen clothed prior to 31 May in the previous year have a right to attend and vote at the Election of Sheriffs, held on the closest working day to Midsummers' Day each year, and the Election of the Lord Mayor, at the end of September (Michaelmas). Clerks are asked by the Town Clerk's Office in March/April each year to update the voting register. These attendance cards provide faster access into Guildhall; otherwise Liverymen must check their names against a (very long) complete register before being admitted. Voting is by outcry unless a close result is expected, in which case differently-coloured voting cards may be provided and tellers appointed to count votes.

The Master is expected to be part of the procession and attend both Elections, fully gowned. If the Master cannot do so, the Immediate Past Master should represent the Company.

Facilities are provided for Clerks who are not Liverymen in their own right to be able to watch the ceremony from other rooms within Guildhall. As space is limited, it is not good practice for Clerks to encourage staff or Consorts, who are not Liverymen, to accompany them.

Charitable Appeals

Some Masters and even Liverymen attempt to use their position to make appeals for charities that they support. This is regarded as unacceptable in that it attempts to usurp the freedom of the Companies to apply their funds as they wish and results in a group of people being regularly targeted for charitable support. Any such attempt should always be resisted. Companies should not appeal to one another. This dictum does not, of course, apply to assistance sought by a Company itself if it is in difficulties. An exception is also the annual Lord Mayor's Appeal.

Nomenclature

Traditionally, a Clerk who is a member of their Company is described as the Clerk **of** that Company, whilst one who is not a member is described as Clerk **to** that Company. This is correct practice but more honoured in the breach than the observance. Clerks are officers of their Companies; the implication should not be made that they are personal servants or assistants to Masters.

Consorts

Masters may, but are not required to, appoint a spouse, partner, companion or friend as their Consort for the year. The Consort should usually be the same person for the duration of the year. Consorts have different titles and responsibilities but their main role is to accompany and support the Master as the Master requires.

Consorts are not Officers of the Company and the Clerk should not be expected to act as Diary Secretary for a Master's Consort.

There is a fully developed programme of social events for Consorts, the majority of which are on a "pay to attend" basis. It is courteous for Consorts to write to thank their host following an event, particularly if a Consort has invited others on a non-reciprocal basis.

Conclusion

This advice is not about right and wrong, but about how City of London Livery Companies choose to behave when they dine, in good fellowship and with mutual respect between all present. Please observe these practices and accept them in the spirit intended.

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The Livery Committee