



## **The Butchers' Company Etiquette Guide for City of London and Livery Company Lunches, Dinners and Banquets**

*The Livery Companies are known for their formal dining in grand style at halls throughout the City of London. To the uninitiated, who may be attending a Livery Company lunch, dinner or banquet for the first time, these events can appear a daunting prospect, yet it need not be so - in fact it should be an entirely enjoyable experience. At its very best, it will be both fun and formal.*

*The following guidelines (which may vary in minute detail from one Company Lunch, banquet, dinner to the next) will help you enjoy the experience and remember it for all the right reasons.*

### **The invitation**

When invited to attend any event it is simple courtesy to respond in a timely manner indicating to your host whether you will be able to attend or not.

### **The dress code**

#### White Tie or Evening Dress

This consists of a black tailcoat which does not button up, dress trousers with a satin stripe, a stiff white shirt, with a winged collar, a white bow tie, and white waistcoat. Patent black shoes are normally worn. The Lady's equivalent is a long dress, with shoulders covered, and gloves may be added.

#### Black Tie or Dinner Jacket

This consists of a black dinner jacket which may be single or double breasted with or without satin or grosgrain lapels. Dress trousers with satin stripe, a white (only) dress shirt, and a black (only) bowtie. A conservative cummerbund or black waistcoat may also be worn. Any other colours in shirts or bowties are generally frowned upon in the City. The Ladies equivalent will be long, or below the knee dresses or skirts, or evening trousers. It is usual at dinner for ladies' shoulders to be covered. Some formal livery dinners and banquets offer the choice of White or Black tie. Guests who are serving or retired military officers may choose to wear their appropriate mess kit uniform. Also, guests from foreign and other nations may wear their formal national dress attire.

### Morning Coat

This consists of a black tailcoat that differs from the formal dress jacket by a single button up. The matching waistcoat must be black for City function Morning coat trousers are usually a striped design, worn with a plain white shirt. A livery company, club or regimental tie is ideal. Cravats should not be worn. Ladies equivalent would be a smart day dress, and frequently a hat. It is a custom for principal participants to wear a morning coat at Common Hall gatherings and the United Guilds Service. Those other attendees in the audience or congregation are free to wear either morning coat or a business suit. Buckingham Palace Garden Parties no longer stipulate morning coat, but most livery Masters will wear one. Also, male guests at the Sheriffs' Breakfast are expected to wear morning coat and Ward Club civic lunches still encourage male guests to wear morning coat.

### Business Attire

Commonly found at Livery Lunches this consists of dark (lounge) suit, collared shirt, and tie for male guests. The Lady's equivalent is long, or below the knee dresses or skirts, or formal trousers, which can be any colour.

### Badges

Livery Masters are generally encouraged to wear their badge of office if they have been invited to a formal event in their capacity as the Master. If they are present in a private capacity, they should not, unless the permission of the host Master has been obtained. The same rule applies to Wardens, Court Assistants, and Past Masters. Livery sashes, medals, badges etc should only be worn when attending the members' own company and not when a guest elsewhere. Ladies livery brooches, however, may be worn as wished.

### Medals

At white tie events, miniature military medals should be worn. At black tie formal events, some companies may allow either miniature or full-size medals to be worn. Always check with the Clerk on the policy

### **When to arrive**

Arriving at or slightly before the time specified on the invitation is always the best approach. For example: if an invitation reads '7pm for 7:30' then please arrive no later than 7pm.

The thirty minutes is not there to accommodate late arrivals but rather for guests to check their coat and bags in to the cloakroom, pick up and study the table plan, proceed through the receiving line (if in place), enjoy a drinks reception, share small talk with friends and acquaintances and participate in pre-dinner photographs (which for the Court and guests of the Master will be obligatory).

Considering that a Livery Company banquet will often have 200-300 diners, and larger City events may have up to 700 in the Guildhall - those 30 minutes will go very quickly indeed. It also provides the opportunity to ensure that you are comfortable before sitting down to eat, as getting up during the meal is probably going to be impractical and certainly isn't good manners.

Unless seated at the top table you will also likely be called in to the dining hall slightly before the dining time to ensure that everyone is stood behind their seat before the top table is clapped in.

### **The receiving line (specifically at the WCB Ladies Banquet)**

Many formal dinners, banquets and lunches will be preceded by a receiving line and drinks reception. If there is a receiving line you will be called forward by the Company Beadle (who will carry a staff of office and usually has a loud voice) who will announce you to the Master and the senior members of the Court (of which there may be as many as five with their partners). A polite

handshake and very brief “Good-evening” is all that is necessary as you move through the receiving line.

### **Addressing dignitaries**

Unless you happen to be the wife or husband of the Lord Mayor, or the Master, they are invariably addressed as either 'My Lord Mayor' and 'Master' (or Prime Warden / Upper Bailiff as befits the senior officer of the Company concerned). Familiarity breeds contempt and Livery Company events are not the place to address the Lord Mayor, Sheriffs, Aldermen or Masters of Livery Companies by their first names.

### **Find your seat**

Every dining event will have a seating plan and some companies go to the expense of producing individual plans for each diner with a clear pointer to where they are seated. It is helpful to everyone if you identify where you will be seated prior to being called in to the dining room. It is also useful to learn the names of those persons seated either side and opposite you although name cards will be present at each place setting.

### **Welcoming the top table**

When called in to the dining room, it is usually the custom to stand behind one's seat if the top table have yet to take their places. Often the host and principal guests will be welcomed into the dining hall by the guests clapping in unison. Diners may be invited to take their seats when the top table have all arrived at their seats. Although everyone will be expected to stand soon after the top table is settled when the Chaplain or perhaps the Clerk reads the grace.

### **The format of the evening**

A lunch, dinner, banquet will usually involve a number of toasts, speeches or other elements of ceremony. Each of these will be clearly signalled and explained to the audience by the Beadle or Master of Ceremonies.

Details of any toasts and perhaps a description of any ceremonial or entertainment element for the evening will be found in the dining card placed at each table setting. It is always helpful to familiarise oneself with the overall flow of the evening although they usually follow a simple pattern of drinks reception, meal, toasts, speeches, entertainment, post-dinner or lunch drinks, carriages.

### **Remaining seated**

A typical dinner, banquet or lunch will last between two and a half to three hours in length from the point of sitting down to the point of dispersal from the dining room. During that period, other than for toasts and ceremonial elements, the audience should remain seated throughout and certainly not move around the room.

Some events may announce a short comfort break after the toasts and before the speeches but in all cases be prepared and make use of that time between arrival and sitting down. Do not rely on there being a comfort break or the evening finishing early, leaving the room before the toasts and speeches is not acceptable other than in a medical emergency.

### **Topics of conversation**

It is good practice to introduce yourself to your fellow diners when you arrive at your place setting but before sitting down. Try to speak to each diner throughout the meal.

## **Speeches and prize giving**

Most Livery Company lunches, banquets and dinners will include several speeches. Unless you are invited to speak (and you will know well before the event), nobody else is invited to or expected to make a speech. This includes recipients of prizes or awards who may be called up to the top table to receive their prize, certificate or another memento from the Lord Mayor or the Master. A firm handshake, a thank-you and a smile for the camera is all that's required.

Those who are invited to speak should receive clear instructions on timings from the Company's Clerk or the Lord Mayor's private secretary. Generally, City speeches should last around 7 minutes (+/- a minute is fine), be topical and ideally include a measure of appropriate light-hearted humour and wit.

## **Passing the port (if provided as bottles on the table)**

Unless you wish to become better acquainted with the Bishop of Norwich, it is good manners to pass the port and always to the left (clockwise), when the decanter arrives at your place. Many of the events now rely on staff to fill your glass, dispensing with the need to pass the port.

## **The Loyal Toast**

Every City of London lunch, banquet or dinner will feature a Loyal Toast before the speeches. Everyone stands for the Loyal Toast. The format is therefore:

- The Beadle gavels
- Everyone stands up
- The Master says 'The King'
- Everyone raises their glass and responds 'The King'

Please note it is not necessary to drink, although it is good form to do so.

Leaving the table prior to the Loyal Toast (other than for genuine emergencies) is discourteous to the host, and poor form.

## **The Royal Toast**

Following the Loyal Toast there will be a toast to other members of the Royal Family. The format is similar to the Loyal Toast:

- The Beadle gavels
- Everyone stands
- The Master says 'The Queen Consort, The Prince of Wales, The Princess of Wales and the other members of the Royal Family'
- Everyone raises their glass and responds 'The Royal Family'

## **The Civic Toast**

Following the Royal Toast there will be a toast to The Lord Mayor and the City of London Corporation. The format is as follows:

- The Beadle gavels
- Everyone stands
- The Master says 'The Lord Mayor and City of London Corporation'
- Everyone raises their glass and responds 'The Lord Mayor'

## **Other Toasts**

There are also other toasts, i.e., to all guests of the Livery and special guest speakers. These are announced by an elected Liveryman or by the Master if a general toast of all guests who are not Liveryman of the WCB. Please follow your host's lead.

## **The loving cup**

At the end of a banquet, the Beadle will gavel and invite you to join the Master in a loving cup ceremony. The tradition dates back to King Edward the Martyr in 978 who was stabbed in the back by his step-mother as he drank, from then on no-one would drink from a cup without being protected! The Beadle will talk you through the ceremony which can seem quite complicated, as it requires three people to stand for one person to drink but it is easy once you know how! Cups will be placed at the top and bottom of each dining table and passed from right to left as it travels along until all diners have taken part. It's a fun and quirky City tradition that adds to a uniquely memorable part of a City banquet.

## **Exit**

When leaving the dining hall, it is custom to stand behind one's seat and clap out (In unison) the top table. Once the top table have left the room, all other guests may leave.

## **The stirrup cup**

Usually held in the reception room post a court lunch ending.

Fortunately, you are not expected to be mounted on a horse to participate in this post-prandial drink which is usually announced after the final speech and any parish notices. Diners are not obliged to stay for a final drink, but it is a good opportunity to thank your host if you are attending as a guest.

## **So, what is a dinner and what is a banquet?**

A simple definition is a dinner is of three courses whereas a banquet will be of four or greater courses, although a more precise definition is that a banquet will include toasts and speeches, therefore all City dinners and lunches are in fact... banquets. A full explanation of the etiquette, dress code and dining customs and ceremonies of the City of London Livery Companies may be found in [The City of London Freeman's Guide](#).

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