

Guidance on Etiquette at Guild Events

From time to time members have questions about etiquette at Guild dinners. It is hoped that the following guidelines will deal with the majority of such queries. Similarly, guests to our events may well need help and guidance, and their hosts have a responsibility to ensure that guests are comfortable and relaxed; we hope these notes will help in this respect.

Etiquette is not necessarily about right or wrong, but about how we choose to behave when we dine, in good fellowship and with mutual respect between all present. These notes, which are based on similar guidance from other Companies, are provided in this spirit.

Dress Code

Livery Hall Dinners — "Black Tie"

The dress code at most Livery Hall dinners is black tie for gentlemen; for ladies, a long or short dress, or an evening top with a long skirt or trousers is appropriate. Black tie means a plain, black bow tie accompanied by a white dress shirt and, if wished, either a black waistcoat or a cummerbund that will not 'frighten the horses'.

It is inappropriate for a gentleman to wear a white or coloured tie with a dinner jacket at a Livery Hall dinner but a white dinner jacket in the summer, national dress or uniform would be acceptable, although unusual. Serving officers of our armed services may wear uniform and may wear a cummerbund in their unit colours.

Guildhall Banquet — "White Tie Preferred, Black Tie Acceptable"

The preferred dress code at the Guildhall Banquet is white tie, national dress or uniform for gentlemen and a long dress or a long skirt and evening top for ladies. Cocktail dress length does not normally accompany white tie. Decorations may be worn, usually miniatures; this will often be specified in the invitation.

White tie means a plain white tie, dress shirt with a collar that does not turn down except for two small wings, a white waistcoat, a tailcoat and dress trousers. It is acceptable for attendees without white tie to attend in black tie with a white dress shirt and black dinner jacket plus sober waistcoat or cummerbund, and they will not feel out of place in doing so. If you are a host, it is wise to check with your guests (and vice versa) to avoid any sartorial embarrassment.

Other Dinners and Suppers — "Suit & Tie"

Gentlemen are expected to wear suits and ties, rather than jackets and ties; for ladies, the equivalent "day wear" is appropriate, or a cocktail dress but typically not a long dress.

Other Guild Events — "Smart Casual" or "Blazer & Tie"

This can be interpreted as "anything but jeans"; T-shirts and shorts are definitely "off limits". Footwear is however more of a challenge - certainly white sports trainers would not normally be acceptable, whereas leather or suede trainers could be. Ultimately, the context of the event will be your best guide. Some venues have their own dress code and this will be communicated with joining instructions.

Reception and Processions

The receiving line is not a time for long conversation. Guests should be encouraged to assist the toastmaster by announcing their names to him clearly and then proceed to shake hands (not too firmly!) and exchange a few words of greeting or welcome, without delaying those that follow.

Typically, the Master and principal guest(s) process into, and out of, the dining room, led by the Beadle, processing in and out clockwise. Everyone else, standing at their places at table clap in a slow rhythm (in time to the music if there is any), but should not turn to face the procession.

Sung Grace

Grace is sung at the end of the meal at the Guildhall Banquet. Members are encouraged to learn both tune and words, although the latter is printed on the Banquet menu. There is musical accompaniment for the sung grace.

Comfort Breaks

Whilst we do not expect anyone to be uncomfortable, strictly speaking no one should leave the table for any reason until after the loyal toast. The order of events after a meal is normally sung grace, loving cup, and loyal toasts after which coffee is served. Speeches and any musical entertainment usually follow but may be interleaved with the meal at some events.

Whilst there is no "official comfort break" the most convenient time to leave the table is when coffee is being served. However, when dining at Mansion House, the Lord Mayor (while being sympathetic where a guest finds it essential to do so) asks that guests be informed that it is not customary to leave the table before the conclusion of the event.

The Toasts

- The first Loyal Toast is proposed by the Master. At a dinner without music everyone stands, glasses are raised and all join in the toast saying: "The King". At the Guildhall Banquet, where there is music, the Master rises, says "The King" the company rises and stands to attention; the music strikes up immediately and everyone sings the first verse of the National Anthem. Glasses are not lifted or even touched until the singing is finished; then everyone toasts the King and sits down.
- The second Loyal Toast is also proposed by the Master. At a dinner without music everyone stands, glasses are raised and all join in the toast saying "the Royal family". At the Guildhall Banquet, where there is music, everyone rises and stands to attention whilst the first few bars of the National Anthem are played, but without singing. Glasses are not lifted until the music stops, then we raise them and join in the toast and sit down.
- The third formal toast is to The Lord Mayor and the City of London Corporation.
- The final formal toast at the Banquet is to the Guests, and may be proposed by the Master or sometimes, the Senior Warden. He/she will then invite members to rise; the guests remain seated.

Photography

Please do not take photographs once you are inside the dining Hall. The official photographer will take photos and they will be published on the Guild's website from where they may be downloaded for personal non-commercial use. Photos with the watermark Holland Photographic Services may be ordered from Peter directly: peterholland304@btinternet.com and a fee is payable – see our website Galleries section for further details.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones should be on silent and not evident at table.

The Loving Cup

The loving cup ceremony may take place at dinner and will be after the meal:

- 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, you do not stand until the person who has it turns to you with the cup in his/her hands. The circulation is to the left, apart from top table where the Master sends a cup in each direction.
- As the person holding the cup turns to you, you rise and bow; you raise the lid in your right hand with a flourish and wait while they drink and wipe the rim with the cloth. You then replace the lid and take the cup by its handles with a bow; you turn to the next person who rises, bows, raise 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 his 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.

If you do not wish to drink, the cup may be raised in salutation as an alternative.

Conclusion

Members will very quickly get used to these traditions; however, guests may find their first experience a little overwhelming and may worry in case they transgress some rule or look silly. It is a host's duty to put them at their ease and remind them that although we take our formalities seriously, we are at dinner to enjoy ourselves.

Hosts may therefore wish to direct their guests to the words of the sung grace on the menu, the fact that the second playing of the National Anthem is not sung and that they remain seated when the guests are being toasted. These seem to be the pressure points for a newcomer.