

Livery Committee Website Content

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.

Dining arrangements

Grace is said before sitting down to eat. 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.

Processions into and recessions out of dinner

The Master, principal guest(s), Wardens, Hon Chaplain, 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.

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 banquet. Liverymen are encouraged to learn both tune and words, although the latter are always printed on the menu. There is not always musical accompaniment for the sung grace.

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, and you then dab behind your ears; this is believed to aid the digestion.

The Loving Cup

The loving cup ceremony is set out on the menu although this does not prevent a few liverymen and guests getting it wrong! The practice does vary between companies but 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 he or she turns to you, you rise; you (head) bow; you raise the lid in your right hand with a flourish and wait while he/she drinks and wipes 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 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.

[PDF download 'Livery Dinner Ceremonies']

[PDF download 'Loving Cup Plans']

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

Whilst there is no “official comfort break” the most convenient time to leave the table is when coffee is being served.

The Toasts

There are usually five formal toasts. In all cases the Beadle calls for silence;

- The Loyal Toast is proposed by the Master. At formal dinners the Master rises, says “The Queen” the company rises and stands to attention; the music strikes up immediately and the Company sings the first verse of the National Anthem. Glasses are not lifted or even touched until the singing is finished, then all sit down. Where there is no music provided, the Master rises, says “The Queen” then the Company rises, glasses are raised and all join in the toast saying “the Queen.
- The Royal Toast is proposed by the Master. The Master rises and says loudly “The Prince of Wales, The Duchess of Cornwall and the other members of the Royal Family”. The Company rises and stands to attention whilst the first few bars of the National Anthem are played, but we do not sing. Glasses on the table until the music stops, then we raise our glasses and join in the toast saying “The Royal Family”. We sit down. Again when no music is provided then the Company rises, 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 he has done so the Company rises and raises their glasses saying those same words. We sit down. If the Lord Mayor or a Locum Tenens is present he 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 guests. He will then invite the Company to rise, say “the Guests” and all members of the Company rise, raise glasses (often pledging nearby guests, who remain seated, as we do so), 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, who first makes a short speech. When he has finished he will 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 we all, members and guests alike, stand and say “The ‘Company’”, raise our glasses, 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.

Smoking

Smoking is no longer permitted **anywhere on Hall or other event venue property. This restriction also includes e-cigarette devices**

Mobile Phones and Photography

Mobile phones are to be switched off on entering the venue and should not be used during any function including the taking of photographs. **Whilst this is becoming near impossible to enforce, members are expected to observe the courtesy and inform their guests accordingly.**

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 generally frowned upon.

Dining Out

Invitations from other Livery Companies will be addressed either by a single

letter addressed to the Clerk inviting the Master and often the Clerk too or by separate letters to Master and Clerk.

In the first case, if the Master cannot accept, the Clerk should never do so, unless the invitation specifically states that the Clerk is welcome to attend unaccompanied.

In the second case, if the Clerk is entitled to attend without his or her Master, he or she would be unwise to make a frequent practice of so doing.

In the case of Companies having a Hall, it is customary for a Livery Company hiring that Hall to invite the Master and Clerk of the 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 his host, but he always addresses that letter to the Clerk of the host Company and requests him to thank his Master. It is customary for such letters to be hand-written. A Master always writes his thanks to the Master of the host Company.

The Master

Except for letters of thanks for hospitality, and private communications, the Master does not normally write letters. He instructs the Clerk to write on his behalf.

If any Master insists upon writing official or semi-official letters, it is most desirable that the Clerk should ensure that he is given a copy for purposes of information and record.

The Clerk

The Clerk is responsible for conduct of the function generally but should use the Beadle as his intermediary. He should not expect to leave his place. Some Clerks jump up and down — this is not the best practice.

The Clerk should not normally speak and, if invited, should consider very seriously whether to accept. It is the task of the Clerk to motivate the speakers to perform properly, not to usurp their position.

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. This should occur rarely; but the Master will frequently consult the Clerk as to the content of his speech.

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.

The Master will often write himself to invite speakers to address the Company at a function. The Clerk should then confirm the arrangement with the speaker, setting out the specific duty, and advising the speaker of the length of time normally regarded as the maximum length of speech, normally 7-10 minutes.

Clerk's Badge

Clerks supplied with badges normally wear these at all Company functions; some wear them at all Livery and other functions to which they are officially invited as Clerk. Such badges are not normally worn on any other occasion. Clerks to the Great Twelve and many of the older Companies do not have badges. This is because they are servants of the Company, not honorary officers. Also, they usually serve for long periods of time, and expect to be known in their environment without the need for a badge.

Master's Badge

Members of Companies sometimes invite as private guests to Company functions persons who happen to be Masters of other Companies. Such persons are not entitled to wear their badge at such a function. A Master (or Clerk) only wears his badge when asked by the Company as an official guest. However, in such cases, the host Master can agree to adopt the guest Master as an official guest in which case he can wear his badge.

United Guilds Service

The Clerk is expected to ensure that the assigned Company row of 9 places at St Paul's Cathedral is filled with Court members. The Master sits on the aisle alongside the Wardens, the Clerk and others. The Clerk is responsible (with the Beadle) for ensuring that the Master and Wardens are gowned before proceeding into St Paul's.

Lord Mayor's Show

The Clerk is not normally involved in this. 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.

Charitable Appeals

Some Masters and even Liverymen attempt to use their position to make appeals for charities that they support. This is regarded as quite unacceptable in that it attempts to usurp the freedom of the Companies to apply their funds as they wish. Therefore 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

Strictly, a Clerk who is a member of his Company is described as the Clerk of that Company, whilst one who is not a member is described as Clerk to that Company. Such correct practice may be regarded as somewhat pedantic and is more honoured in the breach than the observance.

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.