

A Light-hearted Look at Apothecaries' Livery Function Etiquette

Adapted for local use from guidance produced by Debretts and the Woolmen, with thanks. For the small print, please scroll to the end.

One of the joys of membership of a City Livery Company is the pleasure of being able to invite friends, family and colleagues to an event that they might otherwise never be able to attend.

Your guest will be thrilled by the invitation, but probably nervous about the potential minefield of social etiquette to be navigated. Nobody wants to be the “odd one out” and guests will enjoy themselves the more knowing that they have dodged the most obvious faux pas.

As ever, exceptions to the “rules” occur at even the best-regulated events. But if your guest follows this guide, they can expect to concentrate on the conversation and the occasion, rather than the length of their hem, or the colour of their bow tie.

What to wear

Your invitation should tell you what to wear for the event. Apologies ladies, but it will usually say what the gentlemen will be wearing, and expect you to follow suit. No pun intended.

The main exception will be a ladies-only event that might state “day wear”, which is the equivalent of “lounge suit” for gentlemen – and not that old pair of jeans you pop down to the supermarket in.

If the invitation is unclear, or you need guidance, just ask your host or, if they are a man, perhaps ask the Clerk's Office.

White Tie: Gentlemen

Whether it's Grandfather's hand-me-down, a bargain off Ebay, tailored perfection from Saville Row, or the old rag you wore as a student waiter or musician, white tie is perhaps the most elegant outfit that a gentleman will ever wear. We all have a touch of the David Niven or Fred Astaire about us in top hat and tails. Top hat optional.

- A black single-breasted tailcoat in black wool (barathea) or ultrafine herringbone with silk peaked lapels, often grosgrain (worn unbuttoned). The coat is shorter at the front than a morning coat.
- Black trousers with a natural taper and two lines of braid down the outside leg.
- Traditionalists will reach for a “boiled” white shirt with a heavily starched front and single cuffs, either Marcella (cotton piqué) or plain cotton. However, in these more relaxed times a soft (but still well-starched) white Marcella shirt with double cuffs is acceptable and is worn by many.
- With either version a wing collar should be worn; with boiled shirts this is usually starched and detachable, with soft shirts attached.
- Cufflinks and studs. The shirt will usually be closed with studs rather than buttons from the second closure down from the neck. These may be gold, plain white or decorative, but go for the Beau Brummell approach – less is more. Unless you are a rap artiste, in which case some licence will be allowed.

- A low-cut, white Marcella evening waistcoat (double or single breasted). Traditionally this should not be exposed below the line of the coat.
- A white hand-tied Marcella bow tie. A quick tip – whilst every other white item of evening dress except your scarf should be thoroughly starched, never let your laundry starch your white bow tie. You have been warned.
- Highly polished or patent black lace-up shoes, worn with black laces (traditionally ribbon), or court shoes, both with black socks.
- In winter, a black overcoat and white silk scarf may be worn. A top hat will keep the weather off, if you must. Sword sticks have gone out of fashion, and may result in a police caution. Likewise Derringers and Ladies' Colts.

White Tie: Ladies

- Full-length, formal evening dresses. It is traditional, but not essential, to show décolletage. Shorter dresses or trousers, no matter how smart, are not acceptable.
- Shoulders should be covered – a shawl may be the easiest way to do this, if you don't have the time or the budget to replace your prom dress.
- Jewellery can be striking - this is the time for the finest jewels and gems. Ladies may wish to wear their tiara, and it would be lovely to see one in Apothecaries Hall after an absence of many years.
- Evening bags should be small and elegant.
- Long evening gloves are rarely seen these days, but if worn should be removed once seated for dinner.
- As the gentleman may wish to arrive in a black overcoat, the lady may wish to arrive in a smart evening coat. Freezing cold and wet is rarely a good look.

White Tie: Military guests and National Costume

- Military guests are encouraged to wear mess kit if they don't have white tie. For the annual Yeomanry Dinner, mess kit is very much encouraged.
- National costume that is the equivalent of White Tie is welcome at Apothecaries functions. Peruvian Admirals may combine this with mess kit to good advantage.

White tie: Decorations

- Miniature decorations should be worn except when there is no miniature equivalent (e.g. stars, neck decorations and brooches) when the full-sized decoration may be worn.
- Decorations and medals are normally restricted to those awarded by the Queen for military or civil service.
- Other decorations awarded by foreign heads-of-state and chivalric and religious orders of equivalent status may also be worn.
- "Badges" should never be worn. Your long service in the Tufty Club may be a matter of great pride, and certainly a talking point at table, but the badge should remain discreetly hidden behind the lapel.
- Advice should be taken from the Clerk if at all in doubt, or from sources of official advice, such as the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, or the Royal British Legion.

Black tie/Dinner Jacket

At Apothecary White Tie events, we sometimes say “Dinner Jacket Permissible”. By this, we mean that if your White Tie has been eaten by your pet lion, destroyed by the dry cleaner, borrowed by an errant offspring, or beamed up by Scottie, we’d prefer that you turned up in Black Tie rather than be deprived of your conversation.

If you’re going to be a Member for many years, better to make the purchase now and get your moneys-worth. As a young respondent to a recent survey into White Tie put it “When I get changed at the office to go out for the evening, and appear back in front of my colleagues wearing white tie, I’m the uber top dog in the room”. No, I have no idea what he meant either, but the inference is that our younger members are happy for the excuse to dress up in a way that their colleagues cannot.

For the black tie dress code at Apothecaries Hall, read on.

Black Tie: Gentlemen

- A black wool (barathea) or ultrafine herringbone dinner jacket, single- or double-breasted, silk peaked lapels (or a shawl collar) and covered buttons. White dinner jackets were traditionally worn in hot climates but not usually in Britain, even in the summer. However, if the caterers need someone to serve ice cream, we’ll give you a call.
- Trousers are black with a natural taper, and a single row of braid down each outside leg.
- A white evening shirt, with a Marcella collar, bib and double cuffs, with a turn-down collar (not a wing-collar), worn with cufflinks and studs. A plain silk shirt with buttons may be worn but any kind of ruffles or frills should be avoided. Alternatively, a fly-fronted shirt, where the buttons are concealed, is acceptable. Adults should avoid novelty shirts and ties.
- Studs may be black or decorative. Earlier advice re: rap artistes applies.
- A black hand-tied bow tie (avoid ones which are pre-tied). The size of the bow tie should be proportionate to the size of the wearer. Whatever you may have seen at the Oscars or in the hairdresser’s comics, Western bootlaces and woggles are out.
- Black highly polished or patent lace-up shoes and black silk socks.
- Cummerbunds are not considered essential but may be worn. A matching tie and cummerbund in a non-conventional shade (pastels rather than burgundy and black) should be treated with caution. A natty cummerbund may be bought from the Apothecaries shop.
- Dark coloured waistcoats may be worn although they are not seen very often. They would always be considered a smart option, particularly with a watch chain. A waistcoat and cummerbund are never worn together.
- A white handkerchief in the left breast pocket is a classic detail.
- What works in rural Gloucestershire may appear unconventional in the City. Velvet smoking jackets, Turkish slippers and tasselled hats may seem a tad louche.

Black Tie: Ladies

- Ladies should wear an evening dress or skirt; long, or at least not very short, is usually best. Avoid wearing voluminous dresses for a dinner because they’re not practical. However very

tight 'red-carpet' dresses or those with a dramatic split, while stunning when making an entrance, can be uncomfortable or inappropriate at a formal event that involves both a reception and a long sit-down dinner.

- If not wearing a long dress, then a cocktail dress – a fitted dress to very slightly below the knee and with a little décolletage – is an option. The fabric should be suited to evening such as silk, crepe or chiffon.
- Evening trousers are an option, but it is better to go for a palazzo cut, rather than tight-fitting. Flowing, ethnic-inspired tunic tops with trousers may be worn if the event is at the less formal end of the spectrum. If in doubt, consult the Clerk's office. But not the Clerk himself, as he's clueless on these matters.
- Although the dress code is 'black tie', dresses need not be black. Equally, wearing black does not ensure the right level of formality.
- Tights or stockings should be worn, black or sheer.
- Fine or costume jewellery is appropriate, but not tiaras.
- An elegant evening bag should be used.
- Ideally, an evening coat should be worn, as for white tie.

Black Tie: Decorations

- Decorations should only be worn if the invitation states this. A single Neck Decoration and/or Star may be worn, but not Collars or Sashes. Miniatures only should be displayed.
- As ever, approach the Clerk's Office for advice.

You've worked out what to wear - so what happens at the Hall?

Reception

When to arrive

- Your invitation will give you two times, for example "6.30 for 7.00". The Hall Staff will not thank you for arriving earlier than the first. Better to arrive slightly later, to avoid everyone trying to leave their coats in the Cloakroom at the same time. But not too late.
- You should be in the Hall and ready to go in to dinner by the second time given. In the above example, if you arrive at 6.58, you are late, and the Beadle will be annoyed.
- In the event of your being unavoidably detained, perhaps at the mercy of Transport for London, don't panic. Try and ring us, but we will keep your place laid at table until the end of the first course, probably around 30 minutes after dinner is due to start, and you can slip in at any point up until then. Regrettably if you haven't arrived at that point, we will remove your place setting and shuffle your neighbours up a bit to close the gap.

On arrival

- On arrival at the Hall you will normally enter by the Cloakroom door, where you can leave your coat and bags. If you are waiting for members of your party, wait in the Cloakroom lobby or, if there isn't room, the Reception Hall.
- As soon as you can, move towards the Reception Hall. There is usually a table here where you can collect your copy of the seating plan. This will have your name on the front, and a rhinoceros symbol against your name on the seating plan itself.

- Once you have your seating plan, ascend the stairs towards the Receiving Line.

The Receiving Line

- Towards the top of the stairs, the Beadle will take your name and announce you. Guests will need to announce their name clearly to the Beadle, or show him their name on the front of the seating plan. The beadle will use the form of address you give him, so if you prefer to be known as “Mr” or “Major”, announce yourself to him as such. “Major and Mrs Smythe-Dorrington” will do nicely.
- The receiving line consists of the Master and the Senior and Junior Wardens. All will be delighted to meet you, but would prefer that you kept your life story for later, as they have over a hundred guests to greet. Move along there, more to see inside.
- From the Receiving Line, move into the Parlour and Court Room, where you will enjoy a drinks reception until called to dinner (at the second time shown on your invitation).

Dinner is announced

- At the end of the Reception, and at the second time shown on your invitation, the Beadle will announce that dinner is served. He will do this by banging his gavel and shouting. He likes this sort of thing.
- All Liverymen and their guests are asked to move into the Great Hall promptly, so that dinner can be served without delay.
- At most Apothecary functions, those seated at the top table remain behind in the Courtroom, and will process in once all the other guests are in their places. The Clerk will ensure that you are lined up in the correct order. He also likes that sort of thing.

Entrance of the Top Table

- When all are standing at their places, the Beadle will announce the entrance of the Master, Wardens, the Principal Guest(s), the Clerk and the Master’s Chaplain, if attending. They will then process into the Great Hall, often to a musical accompaniment.
- It is customary for the diners to clap slowly and rhythmically until they reach their seats. If clapping is not required the Beadle will tell you.
- Once the procession has arrived, the Beadle will announce Grace by the Chaplain if present, or the Clerk if not. The Apothecary Grace is in Latin, and unlike some Companies we frown on amusing or rhyming Graces. Although God is an Englishman, he is not known for his sense of humour.
- After saying “amen” please take your seat. Gentlemen should first help the Lady to their right to her seat. This is less a misogynistic hangover from a past era, than a practical measure to ensure that we don’t all try and sit down at the same time in a limited space.

During Dinner: Part 1

- The menu, wines, and order of proceedings are printed in the menu card. This is your handy guide to what happens next.
- Dinner will proceed with seamless efficiency from our catering providers, Party Ingredients. If you have informed us of a dietary requirement, they will have this information. If despite this you have a problem, please make this known to the waiting staff.
- It is traditional to delay eating each course until the Master has started eating. The Clerk will usually start to eat just as soon as the Master does, so you may take your cue from him.

- We want you to have a relaxed and enjoyable time, but please don't dawdle over your food too long, as the caterers are working to a strict schedule, and we have a lot to get through.
- Standard good manners apply during dinner. Please don't use a telephone or take photographs, stand up and wander around, talk during speeches, forget to pass on the Port, and so on. If you can't hold your drink, don't drink.

During Dinner: Part 2

So far so good, a fairly normal dinner party format. But now, for the uninitiated, it gets a little odd.

Sung Grace

- Once the pudding has been eaten, the Beadle will ask you to stand to join the Master in the singing of Grace. The words are provided in the menu, the tune is a catchy little dirge, volume preferred to accuracy. Just go with it.

The Rose Water Ceremony

The rose water ceremony is designed to refresh, and to aid digestion. It is not an aid to hygiene. The "Armada Dishes" containing iced rose water will be brought around by the waiting staff. You should:

- Dip the corner of your table-napkin into the rose water
- Pat or gently rub the damp corner behind your ears
- By stimulating the vagus nerves, this action soothes the digestive organs, and is most refreshing. "Ooh" and "aah" are the traditional refrains.
- Dipping your fingers in the rose water will reveal you as a know-nothing parvenu. Please don't.

The Loving Cup Ceremony

The ceremony of the Loving Cup is traditional at Livery dinners. It dates back to Anglo-Saxon times. At the Command of Queen Elfrida, his step-mother, King Edward the Martyr was stabbed in the back while drinking a toast from a two-handed goblet that she offered him. To prevent this happening again the back of the drinker is guarded by their next-door neighbour, the "pledge".

- Your neighbour with the Cup in his hand will rise and turn around to face you
- Rise from your chair and bow to the cup-holder, who will also bow
- Take the lid of the Cup in your right hand and raise it high with a flourish
- Your neighbour will drink, and then wipe the rim of the Cup with the attached table-napkin
- Replace the lid and take the Cup from your neighbour
- Bow to one another again
- Now turn to your neighbour on your other side, whilst your previous neighbour turns around to guard your back
- Your new neighbour will rise and you will bow to one another
- He will now raise the lid, and you will drink
- Wipe the rim, and he will then replace the lid and take the Cup from you
- Bow to one another once again
- He will then turn to his other neighbour, whilst you turn to face your original neighbour, thus protecting the back of your second neighbour while he is drinking
- You tap your original neighbour on the back and say "all done" or somesuch, and he will sit down
- When your second neighbour passes on the Cup, you may sit down
- Don't take it too seriously – it's all a bit of fun!

No more than three people should be standing at any time. Guests not wishing to drink may raise the cup in greeting to their neighbour. The contents of our Loving Cup are made to an old Apothecaries recipe and are a closely guarded secret.

Toasts

- Before the toasts, you will be offered a choice of Port or Madeira. You should refrain from drinking this until the first toast is given (see below).
- Once everyone has had a glass poured, the decanters will be placed at the ends of the tables. These should be passed only to the left. Wait until your neighbour's glass is partially empty before passing.
- The Apothecaries remain standing for the first three toasts. The procedure is as follows:
- The Beadle will ask everyone to stand, and remain standing, for three toasts. The Master says "The Queen", members and guests repeat "the Queen" and take a sip from their glass. You may notice some members muttering "Our Captain General¹" or some such aphorism after saying "The Queen" – this will be a regimental custom from their time in the Services. "Gawd bless 'er" should not be heard.
- The second toast is to The Royal Family. The procedure is the same, but the Master reads out the following: "The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh; The Prince of Wales, The Duchess of Cornwall and the other Members of the Royal Family". Members and guests repeat "the Royal Family" and sip from their glass.
- The third toast is to The Lord Mayor and City of London Corporation. Members and guests repeat "The City", take a sip, and then sit down.

Speeches

- The first speech is the Welcome to the Guests by a member of Court, followed by the Toast to the Guests. Guests should remain seated whilst the members of the Livery toast them.
- The second speech is the Response by the Principal Guest. There should not be a toast to the Society from the Principal Guest, but sometimes one slips in. Go with it.
- The third "speech" is from the Master, who mainly at this point will be introducing the entertainment.

Entertainment

Entertainment is normally, but not always, provided by opera scholars from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Two singers, accompanied by a pianist, will usually provide a solo piece each, and then sing a duet. If time permits an encore may be allowed. It's polite to look at the singers and not speak during this time, unless it is to compliment the quality of singing to your neighbour. Please do not get up and wander around during the entertainment. If desperate, leave before they start, and do not re-enter.

The final toast

After the entertainment the Beadle will announce the Master, who will give the Master's toast to the Society, to which, once he has finished, the response is "'Till time ceases".

Leaving the Dining Room

The Beadle will then announce that the Master invites us all to join him in a stirrup cup, and please to make way for the Master, Wardens and their Principal Guest(s). This is the cue for all to stand

¹ Royal Regiment of Artillery

and clap in time as the Master, Wardens and Principal Guest(s) leave the Great Hall. When they have left, you are encouraged to leave promptly so that the staff can clear the room. You may then either go home, or remain for a quick drink with the Master in the Courtroom.

Should guests appear to be lingering past their sell-by date, the Clerk will go and get his dog. This is your cue to leave, if you have not already done so. Monty by this stage will need a walk, poor boy.

Miscellaneous (extracted from various books of Etiquette)

- Senior Military officers entitled to wear ceremonial swords in military parade dress should not wear them for formal dinners.
- Spurs may be worn by those serving in regiments entitled to wear them, provided they do not damage furniture, frighten dogs or injure people.
- Mobile phones should under no circumstance be used at table. 'Selfies' and photography are similarly frowned upon.
- Grown-ups do not leave the table during dinner. A visit to the lavatory before going in to dinner may be advisable. A couple of pre-dinner pints of Old Nobby's Ferret Ale may not.
- Wines at Apothecaries' dinners are discussed in awe amongst our fellow Companies. Enjoy, but be careful – your glass will be topped up whenever it is below half full, and it is very easy to drink much more than you intended.
- Diners should make every attempt to find more imaginative topics of conversation to discuss than their everyday work – unless they professionally do something incredibly interesting.
- Religion and politics are not suitable subjects for the dinner table as they may cause the below to occur.
- Diners will not swear or use abusive language, whatever the provocation.
- When on-board ship, the Navy drink the loyal toast sitting down; the Army and RAF drink the loyal toast standing to attention, joined by the Navy when not aboard. The Apothecaries give a semblance of standing up straight, but as many of them served in the Royal Army Medical Corps and so missed the proper bit of Sandhurst, they struggle to stand to attention. This is not their fault.

And now some small print for our Members and guests – it's really rather important

Data protection requirements

Under the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) we are required to tell you that any personal data we collect about you will be used solely for the purpose of ensuring your safety and your enjoyment at the function you are attending. If we don't know a guest's name, and whether they have any dietary requirements, it's going to be hard to find them a seat and make sure that they get the right food. By passing us this information you are consenting to our using it to ensure your enjoyment. We will not keep that information any longer than we need to, although we keep indefinitely guest names and table plans for archival purposes. Those jolly chaps at the EU insist that we tell you this.

Photography at events

We all know that guests will sneak the odd photo (some very odd). Please just keep it discrete. However, you should also know that some of our events will have official photographers present, and that the site has CCTV operating for crime prevention and security purposes. As such your image

may be taken, stored, and used for internal and external communications, social media, publications, publicity material, and in other ways. Photographs go to our archive, and CCTV images are kept for a limited period of less than 12 months. We cannot guarantee that your image will not be taken. If this is a problem for you, then try and make sure that you are not looking at the camera. If this is still a problem for you, drop us a note and we can let you know if there is an official photographer on duty. If this is still a problem, then Apothecaries' Hall probably isn't the place for you. Clearly, we have no control over photographs taken by members and guests, and cannot be held liable for the use made of them.