

This note is one of a series placed in the Clerks' Almanac by the Livery Committee. Most are written by its chairman, of whom you may read more at the foot of the [Contact page](#). They are intended to be of guidance to livery clerks, especially new ones, or those seeking advice on a particular topic. They are not prescriptive, and how individual companies choose to conduct their affairs is, of course, entirely up to them.

Dress codes

The livery companies are perhaps one of the last bastions of traditional formal attire, and many of their members like it that way. It has been wittily observed that two women turning up at the same event in the same dress are mortified. Whilst two men at the same dinner dressed differently are even more embarrassed at their social faux pas.

This note sets out a few guidelines, but as with all else, individual companies will have their own practices and customs, and it may also be usefully added that livery dress codes are now becoming a little more relaxed.

White Tie/Evening Dress – consists of a black tail coat, dress trousers, a stiff white shirt with winged collar, and a white bow tie, and white waistcoat.

Ladies equivalent – a long dress, and with shoulders covered. Gloves may be considered. Tiaras, if in possession.

Black Tie/Dinner Jacket – consists of a black DJ, dress trousers, a WHITE dress shirt, and a BLACK tie, with optional sober cummerbund or black waistcoat.

Variations from the laid down colours black/white are generally frowned upon in the City.

Ladies equivalent – long, or below the knee dresses or skirts, or evening trousers – however cocktail dresses are not usually worn. It is usual at dinner for ladies' shoulders to be covered.

Some formal livery dinners/banquets offer the choice of White or Black tie.

Mess Kit. Serving officers may choose to wear their appropriate uniform.

Business dress/Lounge suit – for livery lunches, early evening receptions/church services etc this will be the norm, but most will expect men to **wear a tie**. Some would expect men's shoes to be black leather.

Ladies equivalent will be obvious.

Morning Coat – consists (in the City of London) of a BLACK morning tail coat (of a different style and cut to the evening tails above), a BLACK waistcoat, and matching or striped trousers; and a plain white shirt. Traditional morning coat (silver) ties seem to have gone out of fashion, and nowadays a livery company (or regimental/club) tie is usually perfectly acceptable. Cravats/stocks etc are not.

Ladies equivalent – smart day dress, and if you wish, a hat.

More problematic is **when to wear morning coat?** Attitudes are very much more relaxed now on this matter, and there are very few formal occasions when morning coat is de rigeur for all guests. As with weddings, the custom now is often for the principal participants to wear morning coat (eg at Common Hall or other big Guildhall formal daytime occasions) whilst those simply in the audience/congregation are free to wear either morning coat or a suit. Buckingham Palace Garden Parties no longer stipulate morning coat, but most livery masters are likely to wish to dress up for HM. As too, male guests at the Sheriffs' Breakfast. Many ward club civic lunches still encourage male guests to wear morning coat.

Ladies hats. It would be unusual these days to dictate whether women should or should not wear a hat, and this writer is certainly not about to! Ladies who like wearing hats will wish to do so at daytime City church services (not after 6pm) and on other formal occasions in the City.

Badges. The rules are relatively simple. 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. The same rule applies to other badge holding liverymen (wardens, court assistants, PM's etc), but in their cases, it is far less likely that they are present/invited in their office holding role. Hence badge wearing is unlikely to be appropriate/correct in most cases. That said, it doesn't do any harm!

Livery sashes, medals, badges etc should only be worn when with the host company, not when a guest elsewhere. Ladies livery brooches, however, may be worn as wished.

Medals – guidance from the Royal British Legion on this subject is given elsewhere in this folder.

A thought for ambitious junior male liverymen. If you plan to spend many years as an active liveryman, possibly hoping to join the court and progress, then you would be well advised to grasp the nettle at an early stage and buy your own white tie and/or morning coat (perhaps aiming for a generous fit, allowing for some later spread!). Second hand is available from Moss Bros and elsewhere, and the cost will be quickly recouped against hire charges.

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Livery Committee

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Was this note helpful? Do you have comment? Email nrpullman@btinternet.com