

This note is one of a series placed in the Almanac for the guidance of livery masters, wardens, and their clerks, especially new ones, 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. Most are written by a past chairman of the Livery Committee, of whom you may read more at the foot of the Contact page.

Decorations – when to wear

Introduction

Elsewhere in the *Dinners & Protocol* folder of this website is a link to the Royal British Legion advice on the wearing of medals. *Debrett's Correct Form* also gives interesting guidance (p.303 of the 1999 edition). There is also a note about when to wear Livery Badges (of office) in this Almanac.

But this note simply addresses the different issue of: **When should the host (livery company) specify that the (usually) dinner is to be an occasion when guests are asked to wear “Decorations”**.

And now (at January 2023) an additional note re thoughts on miniatures, full size medals/decorations etc – see foot of this page.

As in all else, the Clerk will be guided by their company's precedent, and custom & practice.

Guidance

But a new clerk, of maybe a new company, may seek guidance, where no precedent is apparent.

He/she has the option of Always, Never, or Sometimes. The first two have obvious attractions, but the third is probably the correct one. Those with decorations (esp significant ones e.g. Orders of the British Empire) may understandably welcome the opportunity to wear their gong, and formal livery dinners are one of the relatively rare occasions when they can properly do so.

But NOT at every dinner. (Decorations are seldom specified at lunch, nor at a formal morning coat event).

So, when? White tie dinners would be an obvious event to specify Decorations. If the company never wears evening dress, then at the major Civic dinner (with LM) is another. If the company has an annual dinner to which they regularly invite their service affiliates etc, that too could be an occasion for decorations and medals (miniatures).

What do we mean by Decorations?

Usually the neck mounted ribbons of the more senior honours (CBE etc), and campaign medal etc miniatures for typically (ex) armed services personnel. Those entitled to wear the

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various orders of chivalry (*not this writer*) will know the rules. But many would say that only one neck ribbon looks sensible, so eg a master with his/her badge, but also the holder of, say, a CBE, would be best advised to wear the CBE medal ribbon on the left chest, rather than the neck version.

Invitation

The formal invitation card will state ‘Decorations’ as appropriate, beneath the specified Dress code. If none are expected, there is no need to say so. [Conversely, if a livery dinner is, unusually, one where badges of office are *not* expected to be worn, it would be helpful to say so.]

Garden of Remembrance Service

This annual service at St Paul’s in November is described in a note in the *Church, Sport, Trade* folder of this Almanac.

But it is a rare livery occasion when full sized medals are usually worn by all those in attendance.

Tiaras

A final quote from Debrett – *‘Decorations’ is also the cue for women to wear their most important jewellery, including tiaras*. But it may be worth remembering that this was written nearly 20 years ago, and even at State Banquets, few tiaras are nowadays in evidence.

Miniatures, full size medals/decorations??

These notes are the personal view of the writer, offered for guidance only.

First a distinction should be made between “medals” and “decorations”.

The former, medals, simply includes military campaign medals – ie the kind of award which does not usually merit letters after your name, although a few military decorations/medals such as MC, DSO etc do confer post nominal status.

Decorations include eg orders of the British Empire (KBE, CBE, OBE, MBE), and other similar awards (CH, OM, CMG etc etc)

See <https://honours.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about/orders-and-medals/>

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Taking simple medals (usually/often) military first. In civilian clothes, including DJ, white tie and indeed military mess kit, ONLY miniatures should be worn, never the full-sized medal.

But every rule needs an exception, and on eg Remembrance Sunday/parades, “old comrades” (what are now called *veterans*) often wear their full sized medals on their eg blazer.

Normally the full-sized military campaign medal is only worn in uniform.

Decorations, on the other hand have either a neck ribbon, and/or a kind of brooch arrangement.

Such “decorations” may be worn when the dress code (for eg white tie) stipulates “Decorations” – which seems sensible and fair enough.

And where other decorations (not medals) are held, then it seems logical they may be worn as above. Eg knights have a neck ribbon and “gong”.

But only one neck ribbon should be worn at a time, so this may present a conflict for eg livery company office holders, esp masters.

In summary, (military) medals should only be worn as miniatures, when Decorations are specified.

Whereas, those who have “real” decorations may wear the full insignia of their honour esp in white tie, and when decorations are specified (as they usually would be in evening dress).

There is more on this at

<https://www.gentlemansgazette.com/tuxedo-black-tie-guide/advanced/orders-decorations-medals-black/>

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