Formal Hall – what you need to know

Introduction
Formal Hall is held on Tuesdays, and on Fridays in Full Term. By definition, Formal Halls are formal dinners often used for the entertainment of College guests. As such they are governed by certain guidelines, customs and rules set out to ensure all College members enjoy the occasion. Failure to observe these guidelines, customs and rules may result in the individual(s) being asked to leave the dinner. Alcohol may not be brought into Formal Hall.

Booking and Special Diets
Members must book by 12 noon the day before, online at www.formalhall.wolfson.cam.ac.uk. Special diets must be notified online at the time of booking and care taken to ensure the details are correct. All diners who have booked a special dietary requirement must make themselves available to the Butler prior to dining (before 7.20pm) to obtain their ‘Special Dietary Requirement’ dining slip. The possession of their ‘Special Dietary Requirement’ dining slip will entitle them to the meal that has been pre-ordered. Failure to obtain this slip may result in the diner not being served with their requested meal. When the diner has taken their place for dinner, they should show the ‘Special Dietary Requirement’ dining slip to the member of staff who is serving their dinner and retain the slip for the duration of the dinner. The Special Dietary Requirement dining slip should be left on the dining table at the end of the dinner.

Dress Code
The dress code for formal dinners at the College is a jacket with a tie for gentlemen and appropriate equivalent for ladies. College Members should wear their gown, and guests who are members of the University are also encouraged to wear a gown. Gentlemen without a jacket and tie, and anyone appearing in jeans, training shoes, beach footwear, and/or hats or caps, will be refused entry. Jackets/gowns must be kept on during the Formal Hall. Members should ensure their guests are aware of and comply with the dress code.

Guests
College Members may bring no more than three non-Wolfson guests to Formal Hall and are personally responsible for the correct behaviour of their guest(s). All guests attending any Formal Hall must be accompanied by their Wolfson host. Each Member should be aware of any special dietary requirements among their guests and enter these into the system at the time of booking. Members should also ensure their guests collect the requisite card/s during the drinks reception before dinner. Members are responsible for hosting their guests, ensuring that they are aware of the dress code, informing them of the customs and procedures (see below), guiding them through the evening, and introducing them to the President or Presiding Fellow should the occasion present itself. Members are therefore not permitted to ask others to book guests into Formal Hall on their behalf.
The minimum age to attend a formal dinner is 18. Younger children may use the cafeteria service when accompanied by a College member.

Sitting together as a group
The definition of a group is 10 or more wishing to sit together. No single group can exceed 25. The organiser of any group of 10 or more must seek the permission of the Domestic Bursar (Mr. Alan Fuller, domestic-bursar@wolfson.cam.ac.uk) at least one week beforehand; and they must also seek permission if they wish to increase the number in the group, before the close of booking for the Formal Hall.
The group organiser should consult the College Calendar to ensure that their requested date does not coincide with a Formal Hall of special interest to other groups.
Members use the online booking system. A name can be assigned for the group booking and each Member can book up to three guests (thus keeping to the ratio of one Member to three guests).
Please refer to the previous section for details of how to book in your guests.
The table nearest the Gallery is designated as the ‘Groups Table’. If the proposed group is larger than 25 or if the Groups Table has already been fully allocated to group bookings, then permission for a group will not be given. Once permission has been granted the group organiser should arrange to see the Butler (well in advance of the Formal Hall) and he will show them the seating arrangements.

Formal Hall Prices in 2017-18
Students and their guests £19.30/ Non-students and their guests £28.80
Guest meals are charged to the account of their host.
NB These prices now apply to Music & Madeira as well. For Burns Night in the Lent Term there is an additional charge of £2.50 per head.
Students have one free Formal Hall, which can be taken between 3 October 2017 and the end of the Easter Full Term (15 June 2018), excluding Hallowe’en, Burns’ Night and Guest Nights. This free Formal Hall is credited back to your College Account at the end of the relevant term. In addition, all Students are invited to a Subject Formal Hall on a set date within the course of the year as a College guest.
Wine

Wine is served as follows: a glass of reception wine at the pre-dinner Drinks Reception; two glasses of wine with the Starter and Main Course, which is chosen to complement the menu (with an alternative available on request); a glass of sweet white wine with the Sweet; a glass or two of port at Dessert.

‘No Wine’

The prices above are reduced by £6.90 if a ‘No Wine’ card is completed. By completing this card, a diner agrees not to drink wine at any stage of the evening, i.e. not at the Drinks Reception, nor during Dinner, nor at Dessert.

The diner should place their completed ‘No Wine’ card under their wine glass at the start of the meal. ‘No Wine’ cards are available from the Porters’ Lodge or from staff at the pre-dinner Drinks Reception.

It is essential that the card is completed fully, including the Wolfson member’s WCID number or CRS ID, which must be legible, to ensure you are not charged for wine.

Payment and Cancellation Charges

Formal Hall and other special meals are charged to a member’s College account. Bills are sent out quarterly. In the event of cancellations, the Bursar reserves the right to charge a cancellation fee. Cancellations received later than 12 noon the day before Formal Hall will be charged at full cost.

Running Order

19:15-19:30 Pre-dinner Drinks Reception

Diners should arrive from 19:15 for the pre-dinner drinks reception held in the Combination Room. Please do not arrive before 19:15 – drinks will only be served from 19:15.

The dinner starts promptly at 19:30 and is announced by the Butler. The President or Presiding Fellow enters first, followed by the rest of the diners. Latecomers will not be admitted.

19:30-21:00 Grace, starter, main course, sweet, closing Grace

Diners go through to Dinner in an unhurried way, with a minimum of strategic choosing of places, and move up to ensure that there are no empty places. Diners remain standing behind their chosen chair and wait for whoever is presiding to say Grace. The gong is sounded and, when all are silent, the President or Presiding Fellow says Grace.

After Sweet, the gong sounds again and all diners stand for the closing Grace.

21:00 Friday - Coffee in the Combination Room

The President or Presiding Fellow leads diners to the Combination Room for coffee and chocolates.

21:15-21:45 Dessert (fruit and port)

There is no further Grace so diners may sit down immediately, again moving up to ensure no empty places. The port is passed continuously around the table in a clockwise direction. Diners leave the Hall at approximately 21:45 to allow staff to clear.

Mobile and Electronic Devices

The use of cameras, mobile phones, or any other electronic device is not allowed during Formal Hall meals at any time. Members should ensure that their and their guests’ mobile phones are switched off before coming in to dine. Voices should be kept at a reasonable level, so avoiding the need for anyone to shout.

Etiquette

As these dinners are formal occasions, it is expected that members and their guests will remain seated throughout the meal. Moving around the tables, particularly during service, creates a problem for both staff and other diners. It is also not usual to leave the table during the meal unless a diner feels unwell. If members do leave at any point they should exit and return as discretely as possible. Please note that this dispensation is not intended for taking cigarette breaks. If diners are delayed and arrive late they should report to the Butler before sitting down.

Diners should ensure that they talk to all nearby diners, not just those to one side or in front.

Making the most of Formal Hall

Formal Dining provides an opportunity for members of the College community to engage in wide-ranging, interdisciplinary conversation in a leisurely atmosphere. One of the most interesting aspects of Formal Hall is finding oneself sitting next to someone from an entirely different background, field or profession.

In order to maintain the ethos of the Formal Hall, diners try to adhere to the following protocols:

- We sit adjacent to other diners rather than leaving gaps between diners.
- We introduce ourselves to as many people as possible during the pre-dinner drinks reception.
- We introduce ourselves to the other diners nearest to us.
- We try to engage in conversation with those opposite and those next to us.

These protocols promote maximum civility and rich conversation, which can be educative at the time and can also lead to further networking beyond the confines of the occasion. Each successful Formal Hall helps to build a sense of community and to make it more intellectually vibrant and socially agreeable.

29 August 2017