



The Van Mildert Guide to Formal Dining

Everything you need to know about how to formal



Introduction

Formal dining is an essential part of life at Van Mildert College. Above all, formal meals are a celebration of our shared life in College. Each formal meal is a special occasion that comes with some elements of ritual and protocol and some conventions of courtesy. We expect everyone to dress and behave rather differently to how we do on other occasions. This can all seem a little mysterious, but this guide is designed to make everything clear.

Every Mildertian plays a role in maintaining our traditions and sustaining our shared life. This guide will cover questions you may have, ranging from general etiquette through to the dress code, whilst simultaneously highlighting the role that the Mildert spirit plays, which is the most essential aspect to any of our events.

The idea of formal dining may be new to you, or you have had similar experiences before, but either way you will reap the benefits of collective friendship in our Mildert community.



Experiencing a Mildert formal will lead you to understand why formals are so much more than just the clothes we wear and the food we eat. I look forward to seeing you at a formal dinner soon.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas Mole". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Professor Tom Mole
Principal

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What is a Mildert Formal?

Formals at Van Mildert are primarily a celebration, and an opportunity to gather with friends to enjoy food, drink and entertainment put on by the College or the JCR. Typically shaping themselves around festivals or milestones in your Durham career, formals are an opportunity to celebrate the Mildert community.

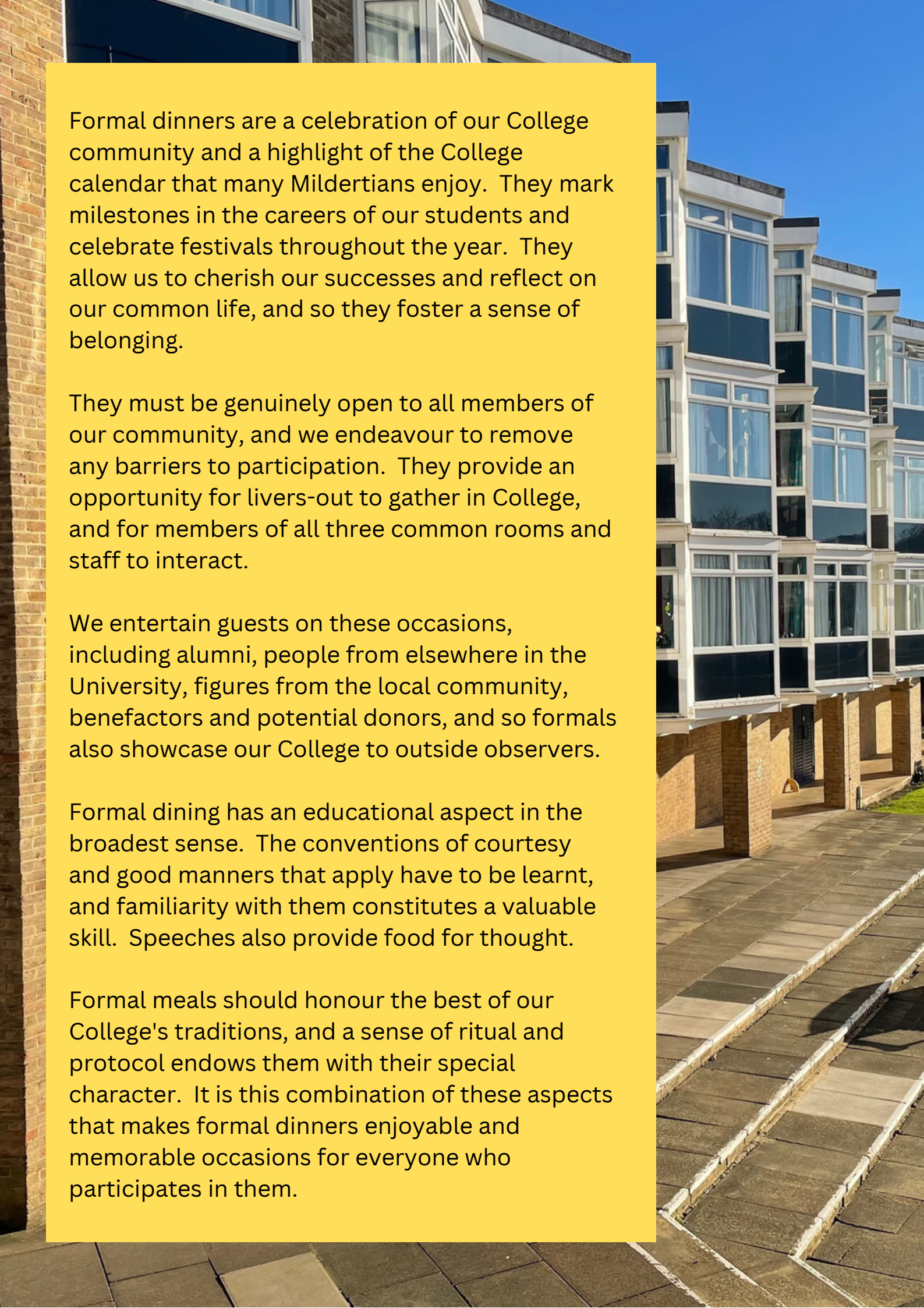
Whilst the word 'formal' may seem daunting or serious, Mildert fosters a culture of inclusivity and embraces diversity, and our formals are no exception. The uniformity that can be seen in other 'gowned' colleges is not a value we share at Mildert, as we favour a more relaxed approach. What kind of attire is considered appropriately formal will be discussed at greater length in the 'Dress Code' section.

The opportunity to have a 3-course meal in College with table service is a rare one and adds to the special nature of the occasion. Livers-in have a slightly reduced formal meal price as they pay for catering through their licence agreement.

We have traditions that we are proud to call our own at Mildert, but we prefer to keep the ethos of our formals as simple as possible. Our core values as a College are reflected through our formals, which centre upon respect, community, individuality, and responsibility.

If you respect everyone around you in the Mildert community, be yourself and encourage others to do the same, and most importantly always take responsibility for your actions, then Mildert Formals are occasions you will cherish whilst you are here.





Formal dinners are a celebration of our College community and a highlight of the College calendar that many Mildertians enjoy. They mark milestones in the careers of our students and celebrate festivals throughout the year. They allow us to cherish our successes and reflect on our common life, and so they foster a sense of belonging.

They must be genuinely open to all members of our community, and we endeavour to remove any barriers to participation. They provide an opportunity for livers-out to gather in College, and for members of all three common rooms and staff to interact.

We entertain guests on these occasions, including alumni, people from elsewhere in the University, figures from the local community, benefactors and potential donors, and so formals also showcase our College to outside observers.

Formal dining has an educational aspect in the broadest sense. The conventions of courtesy and good manners that apply have to be learnt, and familiarity with them constitutes a valuable skill. Speeches also provide food for thought.

Formal meals should honour the best of our College's traditions, and a sense of ritual and protocol endows them with their special character. It is this combination of these aspects that makes formal dinners enjoyable and memorable occasions for everyone who participates in them.

How to Take Part

Undergraduates

1

Announcement

Formals will be announced through a post on the Van Mildert College Students Facebook group by the JCR FEO, as well as via email. This will include the menu and the date when sign-ups will open.

2

Bookings

Once sign-ups open, go to the events sign up page within the members' dashboard of the JCR website (<https://mildert.co.uk/dashboard/events.php>). Sign-ups operate in groups, with one person signing up the whole group. This person needs to know the CIS user ID (4 letters, 2 numbers) of all those in the group, as well as any dietary requirements. To the person signing up the group – remember the group name you enter as this will be on the seating plan. The full cost of the formal for all group members must be paid by the person signing up the group. As formals often sell out, it is recommended that the others in the group do not reimburse the person who signed them up until the group has received confirmation that they have places on the formal.

3

The Evening

Formals usually start at 7pm. The seating plan is posted on the JCR Facebook page and outside the dining hall. Generally, attendees gather in the College Bar some 15–30 minutes before the start of the formal. The JCR President will ring a bell to inform to proceed into the Ann Dobson Hall. Please make sure to sit in your assigned seats, as our catering staff will be delivering meals that meet special dietary requirements to these seats.

The JCR President will give a short welcome before asking everyone to stand for the entrance of High Table. The Principal will invite you to take your seats after High Table have entered. After the meal, the Principal or a guest gives a closing speech, after which the formal is over. It is tradition to retire to the Bar for post-formal drinks.

How to Take Part

Postgraduates

1

Dining Options

Members of the Middle Common Room have the choice of dining either with the SCR on High Table, or dining at a MCR table with the JCR in the main part of the Ann Dobson Hall. If you'd like the opportunity to meet College Officers and guests, then you may prefer High Table. If you're looking for an evening with your own group of friends, low table is the most appropriate.

2

Bookings

A member wishing to dine with the JCR should book and pay through the JCR's website (see the section "How to Take Part – JCR" for more information), but those members who wish to dine with the SCR need to book using the link in their email invitation to the University's E-Commerce system. Note that payment is required at the time of booking and dietary requirements should be mentioned. Wine for the meal can be purchased immediately before dinner.

3

The Evening

Low Table:

For those MCR members opting to dine in the body of the Ann Dobson Hall with the JCR, pre-dinner drinks and wine for the meal may be purchased at the College Bar. Each group signed up will be assigned a table on the seating plan. Please read the section 'How to Take Part – Undergraduates' to understand the flow of the evening for those on Low Table.

High Table:

See the section 'How to Take Part – Senior Common Room'

How to Take Part

1

Booking

Invitations to Formals are sent by e-mail, and members wishing to attend may book using the link given to the E-Commerce system. Note that payment is required at the time of booking and dietary requirements should be mentioned. Wine for the meal can be purchased immediately before dinner.

2

Before Dinner

Prior to Formals, members meet in the Lakeside Room, where pre-dinner drinks are available and charged to battels. The displayed table-plan will identify your place at the table and the names of your neighbours. Pre-ordered wine will be delivered to your place on High Table, but if not pre-ordered, wine can be purchased at the College Bar.

The Principal or another College officer will welcome members and guests. In preparation for procession into the Ann Dobson Hall, members and guests are asked to line-up in order of their place at the table into two columns corresponding to the two sides of High Table. Exchange of places is not helpful to serving staff who will have already identified the places of those with special dietary requests.

Senior Common Room

3

During Dinner

Students will stand while High Table enter and take their places. Everyone remains standing until invited to sit by the presiding College Officer.

Mobile phones are switched off and not used during the meal. It is expected that diners will converse with the people sitting on both sides of them as well as across the table.

Everyone is expected to remain at the table throughout the meal, unless they need to leave for health, wellbeing or comfort reasons.

4

After Dinner

After closing words by the Presiding officer, everyone stands as those on High Table process out of the Ann Dobson Hall to socialise in the Lakeside Room, where tea and coffee are served and digestifs are available (signed for and charged to battels).

Etiquette

We expect a high standard of courtesy and behaviour from all attendees at a formal meal. Here are some things to bear in mind to make sure you do your bit to make the evening a special occasion.

Be Polite

No rudeness to staff or other diners is tolerated

Remove

outside coats before entering the hall and remain smartly dressed throughout

Wait

until the people to either side and opposite have been served before you start eating.

Talk Normally

no shouting, chanting or singing

No Phones

at the table, except for taking photos

Pass Plates

to the end of the table after each course to help staff clear them

Talk to People

around you, even if they're not part of your group

Remain Silent during words of welcome and speeches

Share

wine and food with others at your table

Help Staff

by not moving around the hall while they are serving or clearing dishes



The Mildert Formal Rules

- Remain in your seat during food service and clearing to help our staff do their job.
- Only leave your seat to go to the lavatory or in an emergency, and then only one or two at a time.
- Remain silent during speeches and maintain respectful noise levels throughout.
- Stand for the entry and exit of High Table as requested by the JCR President.

Members of the JCR Executive are responsible for maintaining discipline during formal meals. Unacceptable behaviour may result in you being removed from the formal meal and barred from future formals or other College or JCR events.

What to Expect

- Gather in the bar.
- JCR President rings the bell to indicate that it's time to take your seats.
- Enter the Ann Dobson Hall and sit at your assigned table.
- JCR President rings the bell and says 'All rise for High Table'. Please stand up and be silent.
- High Table enter in procession and stand behind their seats.
- The Principal says the Words of Welcome and invites diners to be seated. Please sit down.
- Dinner is served.
- JCR President rings the bell and says 'Pray silence for the Principal'.
- The Principal thanks the catering staff.
 - The Principal makes a short speech, or introduces the speaker.
 - The Principal toasts the College motto, 'sic vos non vobis'
 - The JCR President says 'All rise for High Table'; High Table leave the Ann Dobson Hall.
 - Diners are free to leave; the bar is open.





Dress Code

One of the ways we make formals special is by dressing in special clothes. This helps to create a sense of occasion, and is all part of the experience. The dress code helps all attendees conform to a similar level of formality, while still allowing plenty of room for personal choice.

Please note, we do not wear black tie (i.e. a black bow tie worn with a dinner jacket) to formals; this is reserved for events such as balls. Similarly, the kind of thing you'd wear to a night club is also not appropriate.

If exceptions are desired, for example due to a medical need, please contact the Vice Principal. The JCR's Formals and Experiences Officer will also be able to help with other queries.

Examples of **Appropriate** Attire

- Lounge suit, worn with collared shirt and tie (as above).
- Smart shoes
- Maxi dress, midi dress
- Trouser Suit or Jumpsuit
- Recognised national dress

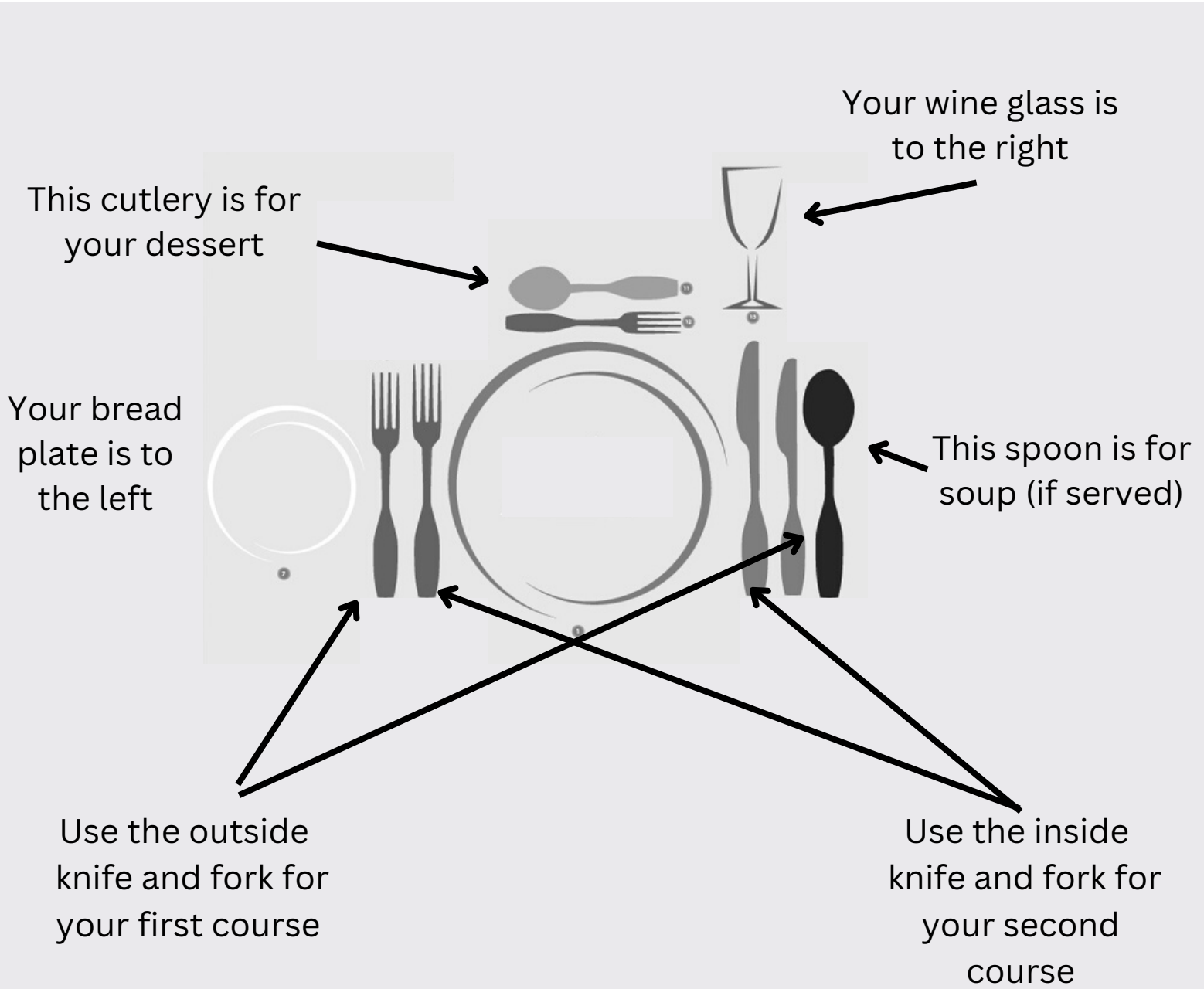
**Want to borrow something to wear?
We may be able to help!**

The 'Mildert Wardrobe' is a collection of formal wear available to loan. It's a great way to dress smartly and sustainably, while keeping costs down. You can borrow something for free, and you only pay the cost of cleaning!

Examples of **Inappropriate** Attire

- Trainers
- Jumpers
- Sports kit
- Sunglasses
- Headwear (except for religious reasons)
- Sliders, flip-flops etc.
- Ball gowns
- Denim
- T-shirts
- Shorts

Your Place Setting



Help our staff to help you

At Van Mildert, we respect and appreciate our staff. If staff are serving or clearing dishes, you should refrain from leaving your seats, as room between tables can be limited, so creating obstructions with people wandering about the Hall hampers the staff in their work. It is also considered good etiquette to avoid leaving the table if somebody from your table has already left the Dining Hall. Allowing only one or two people per table out of the Hall also ensures the formal experience of community remains throughout the entire evening.

Wine

Formal meals are primarily a chance for our community to come together for a civilised evening. We celebrate our successes and mark the milestones of the student journey. These are celebratory occasions, and like many celebrations they may involve consuming alcohol. But excessive drinking may prevent diners from upholding the traditions of courtesy and good manners that are essential to the occasion. Drunkenness during dinner is therefore unacceptable.

You may choose to drink wine with your meal, and to share wine with the people sitting with you. Wine can be pre-ordered for collection at the College Bar prior to the formal when you book your formal ticket.

Consumption of alcohol is of peripheral importance to a formal meal; whilst giving you the choice to drink wine, other alcoholic drinks are not permitted inside the Dining Hall. Half a bottle of wine per person is considered sufficient for consumption during dinner. Non-alcoholic wine is available to purchase, and soft drinks and water are provided on tables free of charge.

After the formal has finished, the College Bar opens, serving a full range of alcoholic and soft drinks. There are usually post-Formal events in the bar such as karaoke. Whilst drinking *before* a formal is not prohibited, anybody deemed too intoxicated to follow the rules of formals will not be allowed to take their seat in the Dining Hall and will not be allowed to collect their pre-purchased wine from the bar.



Frequently Asked Questions

What's on the menu?

It's different every time. We always serve three courses, and there are always vegetarian options. We can cater for a very wide range of dietary requirements if notified in advance.

Who sets the price?

Prices are set centrally by the University. There are currently three price bands, depending on the menu offered, so the price varies between formals. Van Mildert College does not make a profit on formal dining.

I can't afford the ticket price. What should I do?

We can help! If you're experiencing financial hardship, contact the Student Support team for information about the support available. We're also looking into a 'pay-it-forward' scheme to allow students to contribute to the cost of formals for those who find it difficult to pay. No one should be excluded from attending a formal meal for financial reasons.

I don't have a suit/dress/tie. What can I do?

We can help! The JCR run the 'Mildert Wardrobe', where you can borrow formal wear for free. You only pay for the cost of dry cleaning before you return the item. Ask a member of the JCR executive for information about how to use this service.

Can I bring my own wine?

No. That would be in violation of our license to serve alcohol.

Who gets to sit on High Table?

A mixture of people: College Officers, such as the Principal and Vice Principal; invited guests from outside College; Senior Common Room members, who may be University staff or friends of the College from the local community; Middle Common Room members who have chosen this option; undergraduate students invited by the Principal in recognition of their contribution to College life.

Are formals always the same?

Not at all. While the traditions and conventions that govern formals remain constant, we do vary things a bit. At some formal meals we give awards for various contributions to College life. At Hallowe'en we traditionally have a fancy dress formal. And on Mildert Day we have a formal brunch, which combines two of Mildert's favourite things.

Are formals mostly for posh kids in bow ties?

We don't think so. Formals are for everyone. We look forward to seeing you there.

We hope you enjoy formal dining at Van Mildert College

Acknowledgements

Prof. Tom Mole
Principal

With thanks to the Formal Dining Working Group, which was convened in Epiphany Term of 2022 to review formal dining at Van Mildert, and to students who later joined Task and Finish Groups.

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