

Dining at Tretower

Background

At Tretower we are going to be on display to the public whilst we eat and we thought it would be a lovely idea to give you all some guidance so we can dine in a style that is suitable to the hall.

The ideas are quite simple to follow and if you think about them they are quite practical.

Before the meal

You will need; a knife, a spoon, a plate or trencher, a bowl, a napkin, it should be white linen and long enough to drape over your shoulder.

The plate or trench, the bowl and the spoon should be set on the table and you can either put your knife on your belt or it can be on the table if you prefer. If you have a jug to put what you want to drink in that will also look much nicer on the table than bottles, whether they are in bags or not.

As you enter the hall

You should wash your hands in the bowl provided and use the towel to dry them. Take your place behind your seat at table.¹

Water will be provided near the kitchen end of the hall

Before you sit down

We are blessed with his Grace the King's presence for dinner we should wait for the King to enter and be given permission to sit down.

Before you eat

Take your napkin and put over your shoulder.²

Then take your knife and slice yourself a piece of bread or if you are fortunate take your manchet loaf.

During the meal

Use morsels of bread keep your knife and plate clean. When you have cleaned your knife or bowl, you can either put the morsel into a void dish or you can eat it.

The dishes will be passed round starting with the king and down the hall.³

Remember you should defer to the more senior before serving yourself and that those who are served after you will need food as well. It is the duty of all to ensure that their seniors as well as their juniors all get what they need in society.

The first dishes you should be served with will be the potages, either meat or lentil or both. To eat it you simply spoon some out onto your plate or into a bowl.⁴ When finished eating this you should clean your spoon using a lump of your bread.

When the meat or other solid dishes are served you should grasp the piece that want with the thumb and two fingers of your left hand and if necessary cut it off with your knife. You should then put it on your plate.

To eat what is on your plate you should pick it up with the thumb and first two fingers or your right hand. In this way the hand that goes in the communal dish has not been in your mouth. Sauces can be spooned on your plate.⁵

You should not, need to be reminded about behaving respectfully, by not talking with our mouth full, spiting or scratching at the table⁶. Finally, you should take care at all times to ensure your face and hands are kept clean with your napkin.

And that is all there is to it.

¹ You should be asking the chief steward but we will bypass that as we all know where we are going to sit.

² Peter Brears discusses this in Cooking and Dining in Medieval England says shoulder or lap but for consistency lets us use our shoulders as I find it works really well protecting your expensive clothes.

³ Feasts, of course, should be served in messes, Peter Brears says of four but I have heard of other numbers being used. Unfortunately it is most likely that we will not have enough period dishes to serve the dishes in messes so we will have to take this liberty. Within the mess the same thing would work of course, the most senior eats first and the more junior last.

⁴ Peter Brears suggests that people simply spooned the pottage into their mouths or put lumps of bread into the pottage and fished those out and eat them. However, given modern sensibilities I suggest we spoon it out into your bowl and eat it from there.

⁵ At Hampton court the interpreters there suggested that sticky sauces such as mustard or so could be served with the little finger of your right hand but as yet I have not verified this and it's probably not the nicest for everybody. I would suggest that you use your spoon, making sure that you have cleaned it with a good morsel of bread beforehand.

⁶ You wouldn't think that reading Scully's chapter on table manners in The Art of Cookery as it is almost entirely filled with examples of interdiction on such things