



COLLEGE DINING

Rebecca Martin speaks to the catering team at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge, about future food trends and catering for prestigious events

Murray Edwards was founded over 60 years ago as the third women-only Cambridge College. It opened with just 16 students, and has inhabited various sites over the years. The College now caters to 536 students and 56 staff at the current Huntington Road site, which opened in 1965.

The College has been home to actress Tilda Swinton, TV presenter and journalist Claudia Winkleman, TV presenter and comedian, Sue Perkins, and BBC News anchor, Mishal Husain.

THE F&B LOWDOWN

Murray Edwards' food and beverage areas include The Dome, Formal Hall, the bar and vending machines. There's also event catering in the conference centres, as well as the dining rooms and gardens.

During term, students are offered breakfast, lunch and dinner in the spectacular Dome dining hall. Students, staff and fellows choose from a hot main course of either meat, vegetarian or fish accompanied by a choice of vegetables, alongside a full salad bar, soup with rolls and hot and cold puddings.

There is also a chilled

cabinet containing packaged sandwiches, seasonal items, a variety of soft drinks, yoghurt and fresh fruit salad. Crisps, popcorn and chocolate are available near the till.

Brunch is served on Saturdays in term time and the Murray Edwards brunch has received excellent feedback in The Cambridge Student weekly newspaper as the top brunch of all the colleges with 82% of votes. The Student Room, the UK's largest student online community, has also reviewed the brunch as "amazing and very popular". Pancakes and waffles are the top brunch items, other than the usual hot English breakfasts.

Formal Hall is a high quality dinner with full waiter service. It takes place on Tuesday evenings in term time and on some Fridays. It is a popular occasion for entertaining guests. Graduates are invited to one Formal Hall per week free of charge (until

they have completed the required number of terms for their degree), and the fellows invite all graduate students and their guests before dinner to sherry in the Fellows' Drawing Room.

We catch up with Chris Pope, general manager of conferences, catering and residences, and head chef, Joe Dean, formerly head chef at Hotel du Vin, as well as Freya Vaughan, marketing and events officer, to talk about the catering at Murray Edwards and what the future holds for the College.

As the pressure is felt to compete with high street offers, Chris says they are keen to keep a very close eye on food and beverage feedback from students and guests. This means they're often ahead of the curve in responding to demand. He says: "It is an enjoyable challenge to have the opportunity to develop new products and extremely satisfying that we have already received feedback that shows we have exceeded expectations."



KEEPING WITH THE TRENDS

Joe notes that there has been a marked increase in demand for vegetarian and vegan dishes among students and conference and meeting delegates and the team have had to respond accordingly by regularly creating new menus to reflect the trends and dining preferences.

"We have responded with more choice and the introduction of new ingredients and dishes," he says. "Also, clean eating has become more popular as a lifestyle choice, and we are dealing with more and more requests for dishes that are safe for those with allergies and eating intolerances."

The kitchen always uses fresh, seasonal ingredients in dishes, which Joe describes as English and French, both classic and contemporary.

"We have also broadened what we offer for coffee and tea breaks for our meetings," he adds. "Just recently, we trialled iced coffee which we will introduce for the summer months and have invested in a special machine to make this.

"The College has always offered a range of refreshment options rather than just pre-packaged biscuits, and we introduced homemade cookies last year after trends analysis showed delegates enjoy homemade options. This year we have been developing high-energy raw fruit and nut bars, which have been developed in response to client demand for more raw and vegan food choices. The raw bars will go with our new homemade iced coffee, as a new refreshment break option for spring/summer conferences and meetings."

Freya adds that the team have definitely noticed the national shift towards coffee shops. She says: "Hot beverage machines are available in College serving a variety of drinks, including in the bar itself. We have partnered with KeepCup to introduce College-branded reusable cups so that students and visitors can choose to be considerate towards the environment if they are on the go."

Eating and drinking on the go is, like at any other university, as popular as ever. "We have seen a rise in the number of students who



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take lunch and dinner away from the main eating areas,” says Chris. “As with any campus environment we are aware of the need to provide hot and cold nutritious, allergen-controlled, sustainable food options to our student body alongside the usual takeaway staples.

“The desire to be able to take hot food away also has an impact on how we package this option and the wider subject of sustainable and manageable waste both in packaging and food.”

Coffee in its various forms, as well as natural fruit juices and fruit waters, are the best-selling takeaway options, while snacks are on the rise.

“We are starting to see a rise in the sales of ‘healthy’ options such as raw/paleo bars, dried fruit and Graze boxes, but the lure of chocolate is still strong with it remaining one of our best-sellers!” says Chris.

INTERIOR REFRESH

Beyond the menu updates, one of the dining rooms has been refreshed too. The Fellows’ Dining Room, which is popular for private dinners, lunches, more intimate weddings and drinks receptions, has been the most recent project.

The new look is centred around the College’s resident Art Collection – the second largest collection of female art in the world – and colourful rugs.

“It now provides an intimate setting for dinners and is completely self-contained so guests don’t have to move from one area of the College to another,” says Chris. “The Fellows’ Garden, accessed through glass doors, has a lawn surrounded by leafy trees and borders of beautiful flowers and in the summer months, it is perfect to enjoy drinks before coming indoors to eat.”

HOSPITALITY

Murray Edwards has two self-contained conference centres – Buckingham House and the Kaetsu Centre.

Buckingham House is a modern and flexible space, with a lecture theatre seating 140 and additional adjacent syndicate rooms. Catering is served in the foyer, which has sliding doors opening onto an attractive outdoor deck.

It has 35 single and twin en-suite bedrooms. These and further bedrooms in other areas of the College are available during university holidays.

The Kaetsu Centre is a contemporary venue that features seven flexible, flat-floored meeting rooms over four floors. A 150-seater lecture theatre is next to the foyer.

The centre provides 12 bedrooms available during term-time, which are ideal for speakers, organisers or special guests.

Dinners can be arranged for up to 200 seated on round tables in the Dome of the Kaetsu Centre, making

for a stunning setting for private dining and Christmas parties.

In addition, there is the Fellows’ Dining Room, which can accommodate 70 diners banquet-style on long tables, 40 cabaret-style and up to 150 for standing buffets and drinks receptions.

There are also meeting rooms which can cater for between 30-180 delegates during term time.

“Clients are definitely looking for added value for their events or ideas to enhance the guest experience and at Murray Edwards we are in a fortunate position to be able to offer a private tour of our Art Collection to enhance events,” says Freya.

Recent events include playing host to a book launch and a bespoke dinner.

Recipes for Relationships was a one-off performance meal and artwork by artist Emma Smith, curated by Leah Astbury at the University of Cambridge and funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council Cultural Engagement Grant. Murray Edwards College was chosen following an invitation



by Eliza Gluckman, curator of the New Hall Art Collection, and it was an appropriate setting for the event.

The meal brought together members of the local community across Cambridgeshire who had contributed to the development of a recipe book and menu that incorporated contemporary and historical ingredients used to encourage healthy relationships. The dinner was for 30 people, all local residents.

The artist Emma Smith says: "It was essential to find a venue where the chef would be happy to work with me to develop a bespoke menu specific to the requirements of the project. The menu and ingredients used were of central importance and I was really pleased to work with head chef Joe Dean. He completely understood what I was looking to do and was great fun to work with.

"The venue itself – the Fellows' Dining and Drawing Rooms – were perfect both in scale, practicality and aesthetic, especially hung with works from the New Hall Art Collection. It made a fantastic setting for the evening."

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Looking at the rest of term and beyond, Joe predicts that there will be more requirements for vegetarian and vegan menus, as well as sustainable options both in terms of meals and snacks.

"Meeting and surpassing the expectations of all our customers both internally in College and external conference delegates is always a challenge but one we enjoy!" he says.

"We have to be mindful about food intolerances and allergies when creating menus. We also need to consider carefully how many covers we will be doing, the ease of plating and how we can move the food quickly from the kitchen to the dining hall.

"This year we aim to continue to provide all our customers – students, fellows and staff in College and our conference and meeting delegates – with imaginative dishes that meet their requirements."

From formal dining to casual takeaway options, Murray Edwards continues to provide high quality catering for the next generation of women, helping them to achieve great things.



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