

The Hitherto Unknown Source and Artist of Oxford Academic Dress Engravings Identified

A lawsuit in 1808 leads to evidence of the artist who created unpublished drawings intended for a lavish picture book, *Alex Kerr writes*

In the early 1990s I came across several prints from a previously unknown set of engravings illustrating Oxford academic dress. They depicted a DD, an MA, a determining BA in a hood with an extra lambskin binding ('wool fells'), a proctor, an esquire bedel and a yeoman bedel. I thought that they had probably been drawn and engraved about 1810 and were proofs before letters, that is trial 'pulls' before the titles and names of artist and engraver were added to the printing plates. I described them in an article in the *Burgon Society Annual* for 2004.¹ The publication for which they were intended and the artist's identity have now come to light.

Primary Source
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In March 2014 Philip Marston, Manager of Sanders, the Oxford print dealers, showed me an unidentified engraving discovered in their stock. It was of an Oxford BA in his ordinary hood and I recognized it as another costume plate from the set (Fig. 1). The hood is extremely slender, which was the fashion at the time. The wearer seems to have hitched up the left sleeve and side of his gown, so revealing a well-turned calf! Like the others, this image does not copy or echo earlier images and, not surprisingly, it does not seem to have been the model for later ones.

A month later, Philip Marston found a loose, untrimmed sheet bearing the images of the yeoman and esquire bedels engraved side by side on one plate.² The sheet had been kept with, and had the same dimensions as, copies of the only two parts actually issued of an ambitious large-format work intended for publication in twenty-five monthly parts. Its long title was *Oxford Delineated; or, A Graphic and Descriptive Tour of the University of Oxford, Comprehending General Picturesque Views, Correct Representations of All the Principal Public Buildings, with Their History and Present State, and the Academic Costume*. It was the work of John Claude Nattes (c. 1765–1839) in collaboration with Augustus Charles Pugin (1762–1832) and the first two parts were published in 1805 by James Cundee's Albion Press in London. No plates of academic dress were published in these two parts, but the last phrase of the title shows that it had been planned to include some later. Indeed, the prospectus, reprinted as preamble on the front cover of each, includes the statement: 'The costume, or academic dress, will be faithfully drawn ...'.³ The project was

1 'Unrecorded Engravings of Oxford Academic Dress from the Early Nineteenth Century', *Burgon Society Annual*, 2004, pp. 44–48. The article includes images of the plates except the determining BA, which was not available and cannot now be traced.

2 The prints already known must have been cut from sheets similarly bearing two images. The fact that no vertical edge of the plate-mark can be seen on either the left or the right is evidence of this.

3 *Proposals for Publishing by Subscription 'A Graphic and Descriptive Tour [&c]'* [1805], copy in Oxford, Bodleian Library, G.A. Oxon. b. 111 (113).

a commercial failure and no more parts were issued. However, James Cundee kept plates that had been prepared in expectation of the continued publication of the work and in the next few years he had impressions of the views taken from them to sell as loose prints. Some of these had titles, some the names of artist and engraver, some an imprint and date. He reissued them in about 1833 as a collection of fourteen plates, without letterpress but with a title page giving the short title *A Graphic and Descriptive Tour of the University of Oxford &c.*⁴ Until now, nobody appears to have been aware that plates of academic dress had also been engraved and some proofs before letters had been made from them.

Further evidence has been found more recently in an album owned by the antiquarian book dealer Peter Hill. It includes all but one of the topographical plates printed by Cundee after the collapse of Nattes's project. In addition there are three sheets each of which bears two of the academic dress images: one of the proctor and the DD (Fig. 2);⁵ a second of the BA in his ordinary hood and the MA; and a third of the yeoman and esquire bedels. Unlike the views, none of them has lettering. A nineteenth-century handwritten table of contents at the front lists the views and ends with 'Six Costumes, in 3 plates'; clearly the views and costumes were together when the album was made up. Other, unrelated items have been added to the album later, which do not appear in this table of contents. The engraving of the determining BA, which I saw back in the 1990s, is not present, but doubtless will have been similarly printed alongside one of the dress for another degree.

The views were drawn by Nattes and Pugin, but neither is known for portraits or figures like the ones in these costume engravings. It seemed that another artist had been brought in to make the drawings from which these plates were engraved. I have now discovered evidence of that artist's identity.

In 1808 Cundee sued Nattes and Pugin in the court of Chancery for breach of contract.⁶ In his answer to the complaint, Nattes counterclaims for work done and his expenses following the failure of the Oxford venture. The accompanying schedule lists amounts he is claiming for several of his drawings, in each case preceded by a separate cost for engraving. The original agreement of 1805, which Cundee had quoted in full in his bill of complaint, stipulated that the drawings were to be executed solely by Nattes and Pugin and that they were to have engravings prepared from them. It also set the payment they were to receive for each drawing and each engraving. The last item in Nattes's schedule, however, is: 'Paid Mr. Green for Costume—4 Drawings at £2:2s. each ...', with no mention of engraving. I cannot explain the reference to only four drawings when we know of seven that were engraved. Nattes must be referring here to James Green (1771–1834), a well-regarded watercolour portrait painter, who had been a witness to the parties' signatures in the original agreement. Green belonged with several other notable artists to the same informal sketching club as Nattes, meeting weekly in the winter months from about 1800 to

⁴ J. R. Abbey, *Scenery of Great Britain and Ireland in Aquatint and Lithography, 1770–1860, from the Library of J. R. Abbey: A Bibliographical Catalogue* (London: Curwen Press, 1952), nos 274, 275; Brian Kentish, *A Catalogue of Illustrated Books on Oxford and Oxfordshire Published between 1675 and 1900* (Longworth, Oxon.: the author, 2000), nos 59–61. Also listed in E. H. Cordeaux and D. H. Merry, *Bibliography of Printed Works Relating to the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), no. 305.

⁵ The example of the proctor that I published in 2004 shows two additional figures in cap and gown; it is now clear that these were drawn in later and were not part of the original plate.

⁶ Kew, National Archives, C 13/2087/35, *Cundee v. Pugin* (Bill and two answers).

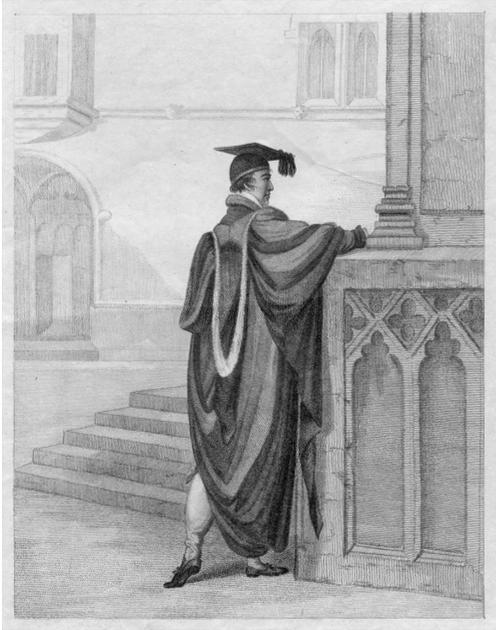


FIG. 1 BA in his ordinary hood.

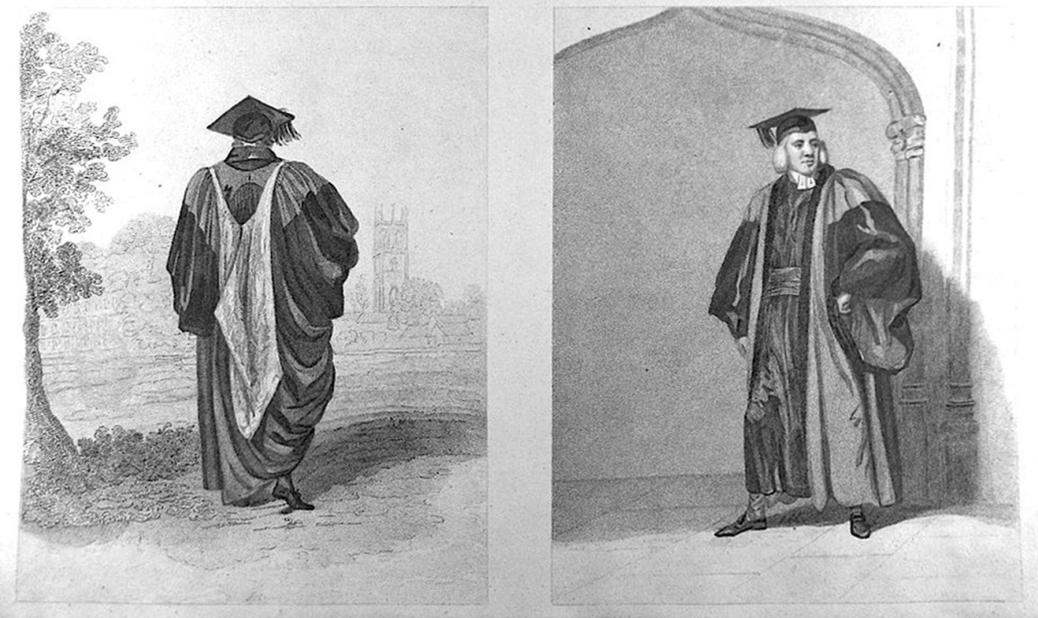


FIG. 2 Proctor and DD.

1804 to sketch and talk about art.⁷ There are distinct similarities between the drawing of the figures in the academic dress plates, their feet, stance and profile, and that in Green's signed watercolour subject pictures and full-length portraits.⁸

Presumably Cundee had the costumes engraved on plates each with two figures in the format of the abandoned *Graphic and Descriptive Tour* intending to issue impressions from them as loose prints like some of the views. I have not discovered who engraved the costume plates. The technique is quite different from those of James Merigot (1772–1816), Frederick Christian Lewis (1779–1856) and Christian Rosenberg (active 1796–1850), whose names appear as engraver on some of the views.

Copies of the two parts of the *Graphic and Descriptive Tour* and later prints of the topographical plates are exceedingly rare. The hitherto unidentified academic dress prints may well be rarer still. Now the task is to track down any other plates that may exist from this remarkable set engraved after drawings by James Green.⁹

7 L. H. Cust, 'Green, James (1771–1834)', rev. by John Sunderland, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004); *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. by Kenneth Garlick and others, 16 vols and Index (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978–98), Vol. VI (1979), p. 2271.

8 For example: *Five Orders of Architecture Personified; Portrait of a Standing Gentleman and Dog* <www.artnet.com/artists/james-green/past-auction-results>; *Eudora et Philemon—Vide Ovid* <www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Eudora-et-Philemon---Vide-Ovid/EDEF7453B2B89144>; and *Portrait of the Rev. Gilbert Wakefield* <www.artwarefineart.com/gallery/portrait-rev-gilbert-wakefield-1756-1801> [retrieved 13 Feb. 2017].

9 I am indebted to Philip Marston for informing me about the prints he had found and to Peter Hill for allowing me to examine the album in his possession and to reproduce the images of the proctor and the DD from it. I am also grateful to Colin Harrison, Senior Curator, and Caroline Palmer, Print Room Supervisor, in the Department of Western Art at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for their advice on several points.