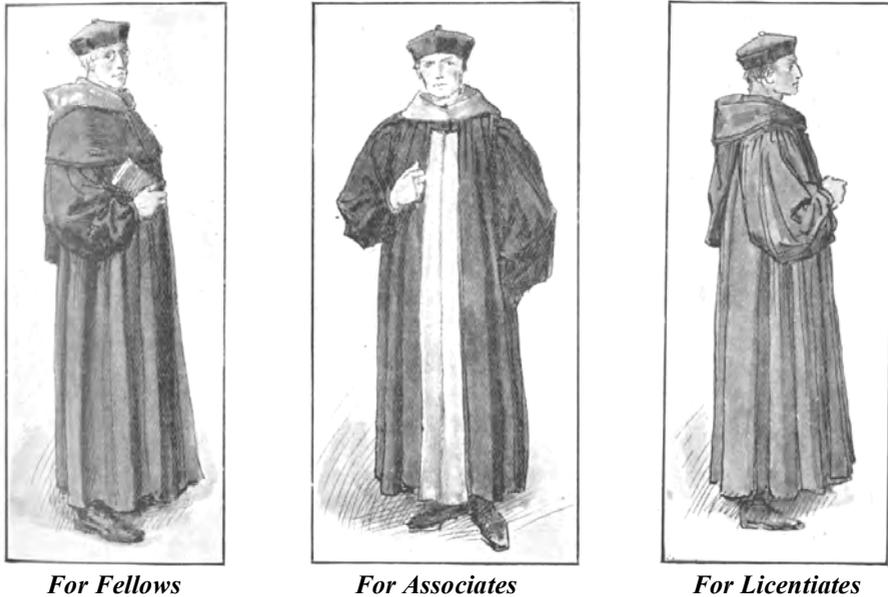


## **A Dress without a Home: The Unadopted Academic Dress of the Royal Institute of British Architects, 1923–24**

*by Philip Goff*

Following the death of Bill Keen, the Managing Director of Ede & Ravenscroft, in 1996, one of my tasks, as Academic Consultant, was to sift through hundreds of files and letters at the Chancery Lane premises.<sup>1</sup> On one occasion, a yellowing, quarto-size page fell out of a book. It was headed *Supplement to the Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, and the bold title of the piece caught my eye: ‘Proposals for the Adoption of an Academic Dress for Members and Licentiates of the Royal Institute of British Architects’. This was followed by some illustrations of the costume for Members (that is Fellows and Associates) and Licentiates, and these are reproduced below, by permission.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> William Robert Keen (1932–96), Manager of robemaker Wm Northam & Co., Managing Director, Ede & Ravenscroft Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> I am very grateful to the Librarian, Archivist and library staff of the RIBA for their kind and generous help and for permission to reproduce material from the *Journal*.

The illustrations were accompanied by a brief explanatory note, together with descriptions of the costumes envisaged as follows:

It has been suggested to the Council that an Academic dress should be officially adopted for the use of Members and Licentiates of the R.I.B.A. The Council referred the suggestions to a small Sub-Committee, which presented the following report:—

The Committee appointed by the Council to consider the question of an Academic dress for Members of the Institute have met, and beg to report as follows:—

1. *For Licentiates*—Black gown with black hood, the hood being part of the gown. Two narrow dark orange piping lines down the front, the same lines to be carried round the edge of the hood. The gown to have full black sleeves with narrow black band round the wrists. Black four-cornered biretta. (Approximate cost £5 5s.)

2. *For Associates*—Same gown as above, but with two broad stripes of dark orange down the front. The hood to be part of the gown, but the whole of the inside lining to be dark orange. Biretta the same. (Approximate cost £6 6s.)

3. *For Fellows*—Same gown as above, the hood to fit round the shoulders with close black buttons in front, and to form a short cape over the chest. The lining of the hood to be of dark orange silk and the hood itself to be silk. The only colour to be on the hood. Same biretta as above, but to have black silk revers at the back. (Approximate cost £6 6s.)

The Committee, with the assistance of expert advice, recommend these gowns as being of a dignified and traditional type. In all cases the hoods will not have to be put on over the head. They further recommend that actual samples upon the lines indicated above may be submitted without delay so that gowns may be ready for the Wren celebrations.<sup>3</sup> This dress will hide all ordinary clothes.

W. E. RILEY.

W. GILLBEE SCOTT.

W.W. SCOTT-MONCRIEFF.<sup>4</sup>

January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1923.

---

<sup>3</sup> The celebrations to mark the bicentenary of the death of Sir Christopher Wren, which took place in London on Sunday 25 February 1923, seemed to have excited some members of the RIBA. In particular the service at St Paul's Cathedral, at which representatives of many prestigious bodies wore some kind of official or academic dress, had clearly left some of them feeling the absence of such dress for RIBA members.

<sup>4</sup> William Edward Riley (1852–1937), Chief Architect, LCC Architects Department, member of the Art Workers' Guild and a leading light in the Arts and Crafts movement; William Gillbee Scott (1857–1930) Most of his buildings are schools or other public buildings; William Walter Scott-Moncrieff 1886– ? I have not been able to ascertain the date of his death; neither the RIBA nor *ODNB* seems to have this information although I was able to inspect his application form for Fellowship. His floreat dates at the RIBA are 1920–58.

The note goes on to explain that these proposals were to be submitted, by the Council of the RIBA, to the General Body for consideration, and again outlines the scheme of dress proposed by the subcommittee. However, the descriptions of the costumes, in the following note are rather different. Both gown and cap are described differently and the orange colour silk has been changed to old gold.

The Council decided that the suggestion, together with the report of the Subcommittee, should be submitted to the General Body for consideration. The drawings herewith reproduced show the type of dress recommended by the Subcommittee for the three classes of membership. The colours suggested are black and old gold, and the description in each case is as follows:—

*For Fellows:—*

The silk-lined hood is attached to a cape of black silk with a narrow edging of colour, under which is worn the ordinary college gown of dull black cloth with full sleeves. The cap is the ordinary square-shaped college cap—the early form before the use of the mortar-board came in.

*For Associates:—*

The hood is attached to the gown, without a cape, and its colour is carried down the front of the gown with wide bands. The gown is as before, with full sleeves.

*For Licentiates:—*

Similar to the last, except that the hood is not lined throughout, but has an edging of colour, the same being carried down the front of the gown in a narrow strip.

This rather confusing proposed scheme was published as a supplement to the *RIBA Journal*.<sup>5</sup> It was obvious that neither set of proposals had ever been adopted and no further information in the records of Ede & Ravenscroft about the proposed scheme of dress could be found.

Four years later, on Sunday 18 September 2000, a few months after the foundation of the Burgon Society, I accompanied the Bishop of Edmonton, as his chaplain, to a confirmation at St Silas' Church, Kentish Town. Afterwards, I was introduced to Dr Neil Bingham, who was the Assistant Curator of the RIBA Library and had recently overseen the moving of the RIBA Drawings Collection to the Victoria & Albert Museum. Following subsequent correspondence with Dr Bingham, and through his kind help, a reasonable copy of the proposal was made and permission given for it to be used at some later date.

### ***The authors of this pleasant little extravaganza***

The proposed dress regulations, which formed the supplement to an edition of the *RIBA Journal*, remained unexplored until Spring 2006, when, during several visits to the RIBA Library, more began to emerge about this proposed scheme of dress.

One of the first things about the scheme, that strikes the student of academic dress, is the slightly faux-medieval look of the proposed costumes. The rather fine

---

<sup>5</sup> Vol. 30, No. 11 (14 April 1923), unpaginated loose insert.

square cap, and the close-fitting sleeves of the closed gowns are reminiscent of illustrations in some of the editions of Percy Dearmer's *Parson's Handbook* and *The Ornaments of the Ministers*.<sup>6</sup> They also bring to mind the work of the Warham Guild in its imaginative renderings of medieval hoods.<sup>7</sup> A conversation with Professor Bruce Christianson, FBS, reinforced this line of enquiry.<sup>8</sup> A Warham Guild catalogue from the 1920s showed a priest dressed in gown and square cap, which bore a striking resemblance to the style of drawings shown in the proposed costumes for the RIBA (see Fig. 2). A similar costume showing what used sometimes to be referred to as 'a priest's walking dress' can be seen in Fig. 3.

Given his medieval leanings and his connection to the RIBA it seems likely that Dearmer would have taken an interest in such a project particularly as it afforded the opportunity for the dress to reflect his own particular tastes. Moreover, there is a reference in the Warham catalogue to an illustration, 'by Mr. Gray', who, it would seem, was a member of the influential advisory committee of the Warham Guild and responsible for many of its illustrations.<sup>9</sup>

Another interesting feature of the designs is that, in the original proposals, the gowns were intended to be worn closed, a development being seen in academical

---

<sup>6</sup> *The Parson's Handbook* by Percy Dearmer, MA, DD (Oxon) and (interestingly for our purposes) HonARIBA, was first published in 1899 and went through various subsequent editions, published by Oxford University Press until a 12th edition in 1932, four years before his death. Dearmer (1867–1936) was a High Church clergyman inclined towards the revival of a medieval style in church decoration and ornaments. He was Vicar of St Mary, Primrose Hill in North London, 1901–15 and there was able to experiment and indulge his interest in catholic liturgy and art of the non-Roman flavour which was known as the 'English or Sarum Use'. From 1919 until his death he was Professor of Christian Art at King's College London and in 1931 he became a canon of Westminster Abbey.

<sup>7</sup> The Warham Guild was founded in London in November 1912 to augment the studies of the Alcuin Club and the directives of *The Parson's Handbook*, and to carry out 'the making of all the Ornaments of the Church and of the Ministers thereof according to the standard of the Ornaments Rubric, and under fair conditions of labour'.

<sup>8</sup> I am very grateful to Professor Christianson, Dean of Studies of the Burgon Society, for suggesting the headings used in this paper and also, along with other colleagues, for the very helpful observations and remarks made while it was being written.

<sup>9</sup> George Edward Kruger Gray (25 December 1880–2 May 1943) was an English artist best remembered for his designs of coinage and stained glass windows. Gray was originally named George Kruger but took his wife's name, possibly to avoid anti-German feeling, although he was, in fact, born in Jersey. He was involved in the liturgical movement but also interested in heraldry. Obit: *The Times*, 4 May 1943; *ODNB*. A graduate of the Royal College of Art, he was thus entitled to wear the ARCA hood.



**Fig. 2**



**Fig. 3**

dress in the USA at the time.<sup>10</sup> This might also have been another nod in the direction of early academic dress and the *cappa clausa*.<sup>11</sup>

Following the publication of the Supplement to the *RIBA Journal*, a letter to the Editor, of 23 April 1923, was published in the *Journal*.<sup>12</sup>

Sir,—We duly received our April *Journal* and the picturesque illustration of academic dress; but we think perhaps the title, ‘Comic Supplement’ had been omitted in our copy, which was also lacking in several other details. No information was given as to when this costume was to be donned, nor of the necessity for its creation.

Perhaps information might be provided by the authors of this pleasant little extravaganza as to whether it is for use at our general meetings, so that we can admire each other in the disguise of potent, grave and reverend seigniors, and add fashion details to the agenda, or whether it is to be worn in our offices to impress

<sup>10</sup> See *Concerning Caps, Gowns and Hoods* (Albany NY: Cotrell & Leonard, n.d. [c. 1902]) in various editions. In this robemaker’s catalogue gowns are illustrated both open and closed.

<sup>11</sup> A long closed cloak with one or sometimes two slits for hands. This garment was ordered for all the secular clergy by Archbishop Stephen Langton in 1222 to bring English clergy into line with those in Europe. It was therefore the regular dress of the early scholars and graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, who were all at least in minor orders. This cloak still exists in some forms today, such as the cope worn by the vice-chancellor of Cambridge University (or deputy) when conferring degrees.

<sup>12</sup> Vol. 30, No. 12 (28 April 1923), p. 398.

clients and overawe travellers, or on the occasion of visits to jobs to protect our clothes from the general dust of work in progress, and perhaps identify us to the foreman. By the way, there is another serious omission. No design appears for costumes for clients. To quit fooling: we can imagine no more futile, undignified and useless proceedings than to spend our time dressing ourselves up in this manner (or proposing to do so).

Where a ceremonial costume is the outward and visible sign of ancient and honourable traditions, hallowed by the custom of centuries, we yield to no one, in reverence, for the spirit it signifies, or in our opposition to any innovations which would tend to destroy its use. Architects have too frequently laid themselves open to charges of ill-considered restoration. Surely to revive the type of dress which has long yielded to the changed style of life is but a gross instance of the same spirit.

The days of ordered formality, flowing robes and ceremonious affectations are gone beyond recall, and in an age which is suffering from the rude shocks that a great war has given to civilisation, unostentatious endeavour and recognition of our duties to the community seem the only ways in which architects need strive for recognition. Fine feathers do not make fine birds, and conversely, 'Good wine needs no bush.' Let us be content to be judged by our works, and refrain from advertisement by personal adornment. Costumes of this type, if at all necessary, should be confined to office bearers in virtue of and for the term of their office.—  
Yours faithfully,

A. J. HEALEY [*F.*].<sup>13</sup>

W. S. GRICE [*A.*].

W. B. STEDMAN [*A.*].

Contained in that same volume, as part of the Annual Report, is the following:

Proposals for the adoption of an academic costume for Members and Licentiates of the R.I.B.A. have been discussed by Council. A sub-committee of the Council has prepared a definite scheme for the purpose, and the Council have submitted the matter to the General Body for consideration.

### ***No whiffing, husky cachinnation***

Two days later, at the end of a meeting at the RIBA on 30 April, to discuss the revision of the Charter and By-laws, a fascinating debate on the subject of academic dress took place. It reveals both the varied attitudes to academic dress for non-graduates, at the time, and something about the perceived status of architects. In fact the debate opened with consideration of the proposed adoption of academic dress by the RIBA but quickly broadened into a wider debate about the place of architects in society as compared to other professionals. The debate was reported in the *Journal*, as follows:<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> It was the practice of the Institution to indicate Fellowship of the Royal Institute of British Architects (FRIBA) or Associateship of the Royal Institute of British Architects (ARIBA) by adding [*F.*] or [*A.*] to members' names.

<sup>14</sup> Vol. 30, No. 13 (12 May 1923), pp. 426–28.

## ACADEMIC DRESS FOR MEMBERS AND LICENTIATES

At the conclusion of the discussion of the proposals for the revision of the Charter and By-laws, the proposals for the adoption of an academic dress were considered. These proposals were published in an illustrated supplement issued with the *Journal* for 14 April.

The CHAIRMAN: We now come to the next item in the agenda: To consider the proposals for the adoption of an academic dress for Members and Licentiates of the R.I.B.A. First, the Secretary will read some letters.

The SECRETARY read the following letters:—

Dear Sir,—I am obliged for the particulars contained in the last number of the *Journal*.

The proposed dress would certainly be very picturesque, but I fail to see the slightest necessity for it. The occasions on which it would be worn would probably not exceed one in ten years, and, personally, I strongly object to being obliged to pay £6 6s. for a dress which would probably be moth-eaten when I wanted to use it. I also think that under existing circumstances Associates and Licentiates would not have £5 5s. to spare for the same purpose.

For these reasons, I regret to have to record my distinct objection to the proposals that an academic dress should be adopted.—Yours faithfully,

R. LANGTON COLE [F.].

Dear Sir,—In case we are unable to attend the meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> instant, will you allow us to express our opinion regarding the academic dress proposed for Fellows, Associates and Licentiates of the Institute?

We think that the designs are excellent in themselves, but for the proposed purpose we do not think they are suitable.

If a dress is deemed necessary, we suggest that very simple and plain gowns with distinctive colours, ‘deep red’ for Fellows, ‘deep blue’ for Associates, and ‘black’ for Licentiates.

In place of the biretta, a plain square velvet top, smaller than the usual ‘mortar-board’, and plain-shaped velvet headpiece.

We hope that the above suggestions may be of use, and remain, yours faithfully,

WILLIAM AND EDWARD HUNT [FF.].

Dear Sir,—With regard to this matter, as to which I am entirely in accord with the report of the Sub-Committee, will you kindly let me know on which occasions it is proposed that members of the Royal Institute should wear this cap and gown? For instance, I am an Alderman of this city [Exeter]. I take it that at official receptions I should wear this? Yours faithfully,

J. ARCHIBALD LUCAS [F.].

Mr. W. E. RILEY [F.]: Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen, the first thing that struck me about the reading of the letters was that there was no whiffling, husky cachinnation at the back of them, but a good roar of laughter. But I do treat this matter with something like seriousness. We have seen that there has been this evening a strong tendency to make this Institute a thoroughly democratic and representative institution. And when you established a code of examination by which you excluded from membership everyone who had not a sound general education and a good professional education as well, you entailed the necessity, in

my opinion of showing that they had attained their position by some such method as is employed in other academical institutions. The Institute has a Royal Charter. It would be almost useless to tell you of some of the societies that have an academic dress, but you might like to know of a few, as possibly you may not be acquainted with them. The Royal College of Art has one,<sup>15</sup> so has the Royal College of Science and Technology,<sup>16</sup> the Royal College of Surgeons,<sup>17</sup> the Royal College of Organists,<sup>18</sup> and several others I could name.<sup>19</sup>

The necessity of an academic dress for our members has been in my mind for a good many years, and I thought this necessity was particularly pronounced during the Wren celebrations. There was a very spontaneous opinion expressed about this in an influential and very dignified paper, the *Church Times*, and I would like to read it. It referred to the service in St. Paul's Cathedral: 'No two congregations in St Paul's Cathedral on these national occasions are alike. On the contrary, there were distinguished men in plenty, but their distinction was not advertised by ceremonial dress.' I submit that this is a very spontaneous and surprising note from the *Church Times* in vindication of what I am now asking you to consider. If you want to see

---

<sup>15</sup> The Royal College of Art was founded in 1837, and was known as the Government School of Design. It became the National Art Training School in 1853, with the Female School of Art in separate buildings, and in 1896 received the name Royal College of Art. It was often informally referred to as the South Kensington Schools during the nineteenth century. After 130 years in operation, the Royal College of Art was granted its Royal Charter in 1967, which gave it the status of an independent university with the power to grant its own degrees.

<sup>16</sup> This reference is confusing. The Royal College of Science and Technology, formed in 1887, was originally the Glasgow and West of Scotland Technical College and the predecessor of the University of Strathclyde. I think Riley intended a reference to what is now Imperial College, London.

Having left the University of London federation, Imperial College received a new charter from HM the Queen in 2007 and the author was privileged to be able to design a new system of academic dress for the College, on behalf of Ede & Ravenscroft. The new scheme incorporates several of the features of the former diploma hoods, chiefly the use of purple velvet and white watered silk.

<sup>17</sup> Although its origins can be traced back to 1540 and the union of the Fellowship of Surgeons and the Company of Barbers by Henry VIII to form the Company of Barber-Surgeons, the College received its Charter in 1800 as the Royal College of Surgeons in London (later of England).

<sup>18</sup> The College was established in 1864, the result of an idea by Richard Limpus, organist of St Michael's, Cornhill in the City of London. It was always Limpus's intention to obtain a Royal Charter, an ambition achieved in 1893 by his successor, Edmund Turpin. It was Turpin also who secured a permanent home for the new Royal College, in premises in Kensington Gore. Turpin's Lambeth DMus robes are held in the Burgon Society's archive of academic dress.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout this paper, when describing academic gowns and hoods, I have used the splendid system devised by Dr Nicholas Groves, FBS, which has been adopted as standard by the Burgon Society. See N. Groves, *Key to the Identification of Academic Hoods of the British Isles* (London: Burgon Society, 2002; 4th revised and greatly enlarged edition, 2010).

another cause for some such thing, I advise you to go into the adjoining room and look at some of the garbs the Presidents have been painted in.

The proposed academical costume which the Council have been good enough to authorise me to circulate has, at any rate, a dignified appearance. Some of you may not like it, but it has been designed by a celebrated exponent of that class of costume, Mr. Gray, and I think it is a very fine and dignified costume. Outside there has been an effort to treat this proposal with levity, but I submit it is not a subject for levity at all; it is of real import to you, so that if at any time you are going to such an academical function, and certainly if you are going to such a function as we were interested in recently, you will have some sort of appropriate and distinctive dress which you can put on. I have been asked to say when you may put it on. You will put it on when you feel that the dignity of your profession demands it. I formally ask you to consider the adoption of an academical dress. I move this resolution: 'That we adopt an academical dress for use on academical and functional occasions of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and take as the basis the three designs submitted in the supplement to the *Journal*.'

Mr. W. SCOTT-MONCRIEFF [*F.*]: I beg to second that. When it was first suggested the idea appealed to me very strongly, and I have given such support as would enable it to be carried through. Mr. Riley has mentioned most of the points I thought of referring to, but there is one which he did not make quite clear. It is, that if this proposal for wearing an academic dress is passed, there is no member of the Institute, either Fellow or Associate, who is under any compulsion whatever to have it. It is simply felt that there are occasions when Members should wear such a dress and could do so with very great advantage.

Mr. WOODCOCK: Supposing this principle is adopted—I do not say whether it is going to be, or not—will it be open to us to consider the details?

The CHAIRMAN: Certainly: it is only *an* academic dress which is proposed.

Mr. J. B. CHUBB [*F.*]: I am very glad that this proposal has been brought forward at last. It has been in my mind for many years, and it was brought home to me more particularly some years ago at a public reception by the University of London, when nearly everybody attending there was distinguished by some sort of costume. I, for one, felt that I was nobody at all, although at that time too I had the pride of belonging to this Institute. Members of the College of Surgeons were there in the black gown with red facings,<sup>20</sup> Members of the College of Physicians with the black gown and purple facings,<sup>21</sup> and, as I say, everybody had a costume of sorts. This Institute, I need hardly tell you, is an Institute of such eminence that something of the kind which is now proposed is absolutely essential. The public are beginning to learn what an architect is, and are beginning to find out, for the first time, what the Royal Institute is, and I think it is high time we came forward and showed

---

<sup>20</sup> Black stuff of Cambridge MB shape [b3] with 2" facings of crimson satin which continue around the bottom edge of the yoke and with a crimson cord and button on each sleeve.

<sup>21</sup> Chubb was mistaken. Members (and also Fellows and Licentiates) of the Royal College of Physicians did not wear (and still do not wear) a distinctive robe. The President wore (and still wears) a black damask robe trimmed with gold ornaments such as that worn by many university chancellors.

ourselves as Members of this great Institute. There is far too much self-effacement in this country, and we have suffered very much from it for many years. They have managed things better abroad; in France they have known how to represent their public bodies. I hope this matter will not be turned down without receiving a good deal of further consideration. I have not pledged myself to adoption of these designs: I think they are interesting, but a little too monastic and medieval. If we could adopt a costume of simpler design, more like that of the College of Surgeons, or of the College of Physicians,<sup>22</sup> we should attain all that we need, and we should show ourselves before the public as members of a great and noble institution.

Mr. DALE: Will members be given an opportunity of seeing models of the garments themselves?

The CHAIRMAN: The remarks Mr. Riley made are about an academic dress, not necessarily this design.

Mr. SCOTT-MONCRIEFF: I was a member of the Committee which went into this. The basis of it is the University gown of the old type. The present type of gown, which is worn by undergraduates of Oxford, Cambridge, etc.,<sup>23</sup> is a disfigurement of the original type, which had long sleeves, and we have taken that as the basis. It is made of the same stuff as the ordinary graduate's gown, the old type, with long sleeves which buttoned round the wrist,<sup>24</sup> and the cape was Mr. Gray's suggestion. The whole idea was to keep it as plain and as simple as possible. With regard to the biretta, it was felt by the three of us, on the recommendation of Mr. Gray, who is a great authority on these costumes, that it was the best one to suit that particular gown. And one of the things we had in mind all the time was that it should be of such a nature that you could put it on without having to take off anything. When it was on it would hide all your ordinary clothes, and there would be no exposure at the neck.

Major CORLETTE: There is too much hilarity; we should be more serious if this is to be adopted by the Institute. I am in favour of doing anything which will increase the importance of the profession in the eyes of the public, and we hope that the names of the designers of our buildings will be noticed more. If we are keen about that for ourselves, we should recognise the importance of the sister art, and I suggest that, if this meeting to-night adopts this proposal, the costumier or milliner who designed it shall be named in the *Journal*, with her portrait.<sup>25</sup>

Mr. EWEN: There is no one in this room who has not, again and again, read descriptions of the opening of most important buildings, mentioning the name of the Lord Mayor, or other dignitary, but no mention of the architect, because the architect, as a rule, is the least distinguished person in the whole proceedings at the opening of the building. Yet it is on account of his work that the function takes place

---

<sup>22</sup> Chubb means here that the RIBA should adopt a simple black gown with a coloured silk facing.

<sup>23</sup> Scott-Moncrieff may have intended to say 'graduates' which would have made more sense.

<sup>24</sup> It is not clear what 'old type' means here. Some of the Warham Guild-inspired garments are rather more imaginative than historical.

<sup>25</sup> And interesting to note that it is here taken for granted that a costumier would have to be a woman.

at all. I am not in favour of wearing a pelisse,<sup>26</sup> though a biretta might do very well. This idea gives the architect an opportunity to come into the picture, whereas at present he too often is not in the picture.

Mr. DALE: I think a specimen of the costume should be submitted before adoption.

Mr. MAURICE WEBB: I do not want to make a laughing-stock of the subject, but it is very important to decide this. At present everybody is laughing at it, and Mr. Scott-Moncrieff reminded me of the Scotch minister who was discussing a similar question in connection with his church, and he said: 'I will wear no clothes to distinguish myself from my fellow-Christians,' and that is the attitude this Institute should adopt. We do not want an academic dress; but if we are going to have one, why discard the old-fashioned mortar-board? Why go back to the fifteenth or sixteenth century for the biretta?<sup>27</sup> When I come to these meetings I want to meet Mr. Perks with a flaming sword in either hand,<sup>28</sup> not clothed in a biretta and a cope. I hope we shall give it further consideration before we pass it.

Mr. SCOTT-MONCRIEFF: The last speaker already has an academic dress; he is M.A., and therefore entitled to wear one. And much of the laughter and opposition to-night has come from those who already have one.

Mr. CART DE LAFONTAINE [A.]: A speaker mentioned that they have an academic dress in France; but the French architects have no such dress; they stand on their own merits, and do not require an academic dress.

Mr. L. A. CULIFORD [A.]: I think this meeting should not decide the question for the whole country; I think we ought to get a postal vote from the members of the Institute.

A MEMBER: I think those who have shown an interest in the matter by coming here to-night, knowing this subject was to be discussed, are the right people to decide it.

Mr. WELCH: We have many members in the North of England and in Scotland who would find it costly and inconvenient to come here and spend the night in town to discuss these matters; therefore, in fairness, we should give them the opportunity of voicing their wishes. There are many who would like academic dress; there are others who would dislike wearing it. We are not sufficient in numbers here, and we

---

<sup>26</sup> From the Latin *pellicus*, meaning 'made of skin', the pelisse was a loose cape made of fur, or made of velvet or satin and lined or trimmed with fur. See Alex Kerr, 'Layer upon Layer: The Evolution of Cassock, Gown, Habit and Hood as Academic Dress', *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 5 (2005), pp. 42–58.

<sup>27</sup> In the discussions the word 'biretta', which is used in the proposed designs is being used to refer to the square cap in one of its pre-Reformation and Tudor forms, particularly as understood from portraiture and the imagination of the Warham Guild, rather than the stiff-bladed form which evolved on the Continent and is still prescribed for Roman Catholic cardinals and bishops. The 'biretta' proposed here is a cap rather like the present Canterbury Cap although with rather more construction and body. The mortar-board is another form of these caps which all have a common origin in Europe.

<sup>28</sup> Sydney Perks was Chairman of the Charter and By-laws Committee which had just seen through major revisions to the RIBA Charter, in a very long meeting, hence the reference to the 'flaming sword' and to what Webb regarded as a more important matter.

do not here command the whole intelligence of the Institute, and we should give the opportunity to others to express their opinions.

Mr. E. FIANDER ETHELLES [*Hon.A.*]: Is it necessary to consult members in the North Country? Many of them are here to-night. The wearing of academic dress is optional, and we should give members the opportunity of doing so. I think a vote might well be taken to-night.

A MEMBER: I think this matter has been well discussed outside; and if there are individuals who object, they could have written to express their opinions, just as did the three members whose letters the Secretary read out to us. I think this meeting is sufficiently representative to decide.

The CHAIRMAN: I will put the amendment of Mr. Welch that a postal vote on the question be taken.

The amendment was put to the vote and lost.

The CHAIRMAN: I now put the original proposal.

Mr. MAURICE WEBB: Does this require a confirmatory meeting?

The CHAIRMAN: We shall have to go on to the details but the principle will be settled to-night.

The resolution was put to the vote and carried.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to take the details to-night?

Mr. RILEY: I do not think I am in a position to do that. The general meeting having expressed the opinion that an academic dress should be adopted, I am prepared to accept amendments on the question of the fitness of the designs. My opinion is that it is a very artistic dress. But whether it should take that absolute form I do not know. I shall be glad to receive the amendments. But, in order to test the feeling, I propose 'That the academical dress which has been circulated be the dress adopted by the Institute.'

Mr. WOODCOCK: I appreciate the Council's ideas for keeping to tradition, and I admit that the sketches published do show a great regard for tradition. I think that at the present day it would be an advantage if we regarded the present conventionalities a little more. In detail I would suggest some other alterations. I commence with the Licentiate's robes, as they are the first given. I suggest that the hood, in all cases, should not be as traditional as shown, but should be further down the back, not so close up to the neck, and that it should be detachable in the usual way. I am against any suggestion as to the 'split-herring' shape which the Oxford hood so often assumes,<sup>29</sup> but it should not be so traditional as shown in the sketches. I suggest that the Licentiate's hood should be lined with black silk, edged with dark orange, not with the old gold suggested by the Committee. Also that the thin edge should extend down the gown. With regard to that for the Associates, it should be similar, except that the hood is lined with dark orange. With regard to the Fellow's costume, it should be the same as the Associate's *plus* the cape. And the circular makes no reference to what the hood is made of; is it alpaca, or stuff or silk?

Mr. ANSELL: These details are rather a matter for a skilled and able Committee than for a general meeting of the kind. If members who have suggestions would

---

<sup>29</sup> A version of the [s1] shape which allows what remains of the cowl to fall open so as to reveal the lining. This can still be seen in the University of Wales simple-shape hoods.

send them to the Committee, they would be considered, and probably a better result would be obtained. I suggest this, though I voted against the dress.

The CHAIRMAN: I support the idea of long sleeves, because for fifty years I have worn a cassock, sometimes without sleeves, sometimes with sleeves. It is a comfort to have a cassock with sleeves, because then it does not matter what is the colour of the coat you have on; if you have a cassock with short sleeves, you will scarcely wear a light coat underneath it.

Mr. DALE: I think samples should be submitted before we proceed further.

Mr. WELCH: I think we shall be wise to adopt the suggestion of Mr. Ansell, to refer it to a Committee, and that members who have views should send them to that Committee. It would be much more satisfactory.

Mr. Ansell's proposal was carried.

### ***What do they stand for? Do they carry a hood?***

Following the meeting at the RIBA on 30 April 1923, two letters were published in the *Journal*, as follows.<sup>30</sup>

Sir,—I have read with interest and approval a letter in the *Journal* of the 28 April upon the subject of the proposed academic dress. I did not join in the discussion at the Institute on 30 April, as the voice of a Licentiate is as that of one bleating in the wilderness. But had I voiced my sentiments I could have pointed out that the origin of badges and distinctive dresses, as in the case of heraldry, had an admirable, indeed necessary significance. The significance, however, of centuries long past is no more existent, except for public services, such as the Navy and Army.

That the resolution for adopting an academic dress should be moved by Mr. Riley is worth noting, for he was connected for a long period with a Council which has shown a sensible disregard for aping fashions now out of date.

One would be sorry for the old Corporation of the City of London—or for any other old institution—to discontinue ancient customs and habits. But it is always a mistake to put new wine into old bottles. Moreover, a profession, one of whose professions is a dislike to copy old fashions, should act consistently.—Faithfully yours.

PERCY L. MARKS (*Licentiate R.I.B.A.*).

Sir,—Your correspondents, Messrs. Healy, Grice and Steadman [*sic*], ask when the proposed costume would, if adopted, be donned.

May I endeavour to give them my personal answer to their question in this way. As an exceedingly lowly Licentiate, working in a provincial town, I do not suppose that, assuming the academic dress is adopted, I should ever personally have occasion to wear it or even to possess it. Yet I welcome the idea most heartily!

My reasons for this apparent paradox may best be explained by an incident of which I was witness the other day. I was travelling by train from our great shopping town, and found myself in the company of a small group of friends and acquaintances, members of the Diocesan Corps of Lay Readers. After stopping at several wayside stations, only a few, and they, with one exception I believe, officials

---

<sup>30</sup> Vol. 30, No. 14 (2 June 1923), pp. 465–66.

of the Corps, remained. Naturally they discussed the business of their organisation, the subject of the moment being whether a local member of the R.I.B.A should be admitted to the higher, or Diocesan, or lower, or Parochial grade. The point was: The higher grade is, in practice, confined to professional men. Was a provincial architect to be classed with professional or trades people? Someone said, 'He has some letters after his name, I know.' 'Yes,' said the Warden, 'but what do they stand for? Do they carry a hood?'

Now, here is the whole case in a nutshell. It is a generally recognised thing that all professional and scholastic qualifications confer academic dress; and by this the outsider, knowing nothing of the particular profession under review, judges and will continue to judge of the status of the professional society or examining body. In other words, he will recognise the Institute as an academic body and not as a trade union when it falls into line with other academic bodies in this, as in other ways. That we may consider his attitude illogical or even silly does not affect the case.

A MERE LICENTIATE

The next mention of the subject appeared in the *Journal*, which announced that at the forthcoming General Meeting (Business) to be held on Monday 7 January 1924<sup>31</sup> amongst the items would be the consideration of the following report:—

At a Special General Meeting held on 30 April 1923, the proposals for the adoption of an Academic Dress were discussed and approved in principle, and the Council were requested to appoint a Committee to consider the details of the costumes and to invite suggestions from Members and Licentiates.

On 7 May 1923 the Council appointed Mr. W. E. Riley, Mr. W. Gilbee Scott and Mr. W. W. Scott-Moncrieff to serve on the Committee above-mentioned.

On 17 December 1923 the Committee submitted the following report to the Council: -

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO CONSIDER SUGGESTIONS  
ON ACADEMICAL DRESS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DECISION OF  
THE GENERAL MEETING DATED 30 APRIL 1923.

We have been deterred from meeting earlier than the date given through the regrettable illness of Mr. Gillbee Scott.

Several written suggestions have been submitted on this question, and a still greater number of verbal suggestions has been made. The criticisms written and the verbal criticisms on the suggested type of Academical Dress are generally in the direction of simplifying it so that it can be readily assumed without removal of the ordinary everyday costume. The 'biretta' is generally thought to be too ecclesiastical, and every verbal suggestion on this part of the dress is in the direction of adopting the ordinary headgear of an Academical Dress.

We therefore recommend that the Dress be so far modified as to admit of rather loose sleeves being adopted, and the modifications necessary for Licentiate, Associate and Fellow being made in the use of the orange colour and the 'stuff' of the general costume, viz., an alpaca dress for Licentiate and Associate with a 'piped'

---

<sup>31</sup> Vol. 31, No. 4 (22 December 1923), p. 123.

edging of orange for the Licentiate and an orange band for the Associate. A silk dress for Fellows, with hood as given in the original suggestion with orange lining and other details as originally submitted. That the 'biretta' be replaced by a soft cap and mortar-board with tassel of orange colour.<sup>32</sup> [ . . . ]

We hesitate to alter the original design, on which we had the valuable assistance of Mr. Kruger Gray, whose experience in kindred questions is well known.

W. E. RILEY

W. W. SCOTT MONCRIEFF

W. GILBEE SCOTT.

The Council submit this report for the consideration of the General Body, but recommend that the proposal should be dropped forthwith.

In 1996, when the rather damaged page was first found, there was attached the text of the third paragraph of the above report, namely the suggested modifications to the scheme of dress. It seems likely that, following the various criticisms of the scheme as being too medieval-looking and ecclesiastical, one or more of the members of the committee (perhaps Mr Riley) approached Ede & Ravenscroft with the drawings prepared by Mr Kruger Gray and the various received comments from members of the RIBA. It seems likely that Ede & Ravenscroft would have reinforced the suggestions in favour of more conventional gown sleeves and the more customary style of square cap. It would not have been quite so easy to manufacture the Warham-style designs and the orange colour of the scheme would have been welcomed since there would have been a good stock of orange silk at the Chancery Lane premises used for lining the hoods of the popular University of London degrees in Commerce.<sup>33</sup> Old gold was less used at the time, and perhaps Ede & Ravenscroft helped to steer the RIBA back towards the use of orange silk.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> By this stage the proposed designs have moved in the direction of more conventional academic dress but, interestingly, the colour orange has been restored.

<sup>33</sup> The regulations for these degrees, the BCom and MCom were introduced in 1920, at the same time as regulations for the PhD (Senate Minutes 3267 of 11 May 1920). The University of London Bachelor of Commerce hood (BCom) was of black stuff or silk [f3] shape. The cowl was faced with deep orange silk 3" inside, carried over to form a 3/8" edging on the outside. For members of Convocation, the rest of the hood was lined with white silk. The Master of Commerce hood (MCom) was of black corded silk [f3] shape fully lined and edged around the cape, cowl and neckband with 3/8" deep orange silk. Members of Convocation were allowed a 1½" facing of white silk inside the cowl. BCom and MCom sometimes appear as BComm and MComm. It may well have been the case that orange was a popular colour at the time. It was certainly around in the academic dress of other institutions such as at Liverpool and Manchester and has reappeared recently as one of the Schools colours in the newly introduced academic dress of King's College London.

<sup>34</sup> Old gold was principally used for hoods in the Faculty of Pharmacy in the University of London but the BPharm degree was not introduced until 1927. Old gold was also used for the neckband of the hood for the ARSM (Associate of the Royal School of Mines, part of Imperial College) and for some theological college hoods.

The Minutes of the General Meeting of 7 January were duly reported in the *Journal*, as follows.<sup>35</sup>

The report of the Academic Dress Committee was considered and on the motion of Mr. W. E. Riley [*F.*], seconded by Mr. W. W. Scott-Moncrieff [*F.*], it was resolved by 31 votes to 28 that the report be approved.

### ***To awaken the Living Dead***

By this time Members of the RIBA were becoming rather exercised about whether to sanction some distinctive dress or not, and the debate at the meeting on 7 January had obviously been quite heated as the following letter, published in the same issue of the *Journal*, from the President of the Devon and Exeter Architectural Society reveals.<sup>36</sup>

Sir,—Force of circumstances has for several years debarred my attendance at meetings of the Institute. On Monday last I had looked forward to renewing happy recollections of my student days, but two things leave an unpleasant impression on my mind. The first is the acrimonious, and at times undignified, tone of debate—quite alien to the spirit of former years. The second, the fact that important matters of principle affecting the prestige of the Institute can be settled by a majority of two on a vote of 60 members out of an electorate of more than 3,000.

Whilst I have no desire to widen the breach which appears in our ranks, may not some change of system in recording votes be worthy of consideration by the Council?—Yours faithfully,

PERCY MORRIS [*F.*].

This letter was followed, in the next issue of the *Journal*, by a rather exotic and somewhat opaque letter from one of the proposers of the scheme.<sup>37</sup>

Dear Sir,—I quite agree with Mr. Percy Morris. It was a dreadful night. My behaviour was especially outrageous. But what we are trying to do is to awaken the Living Dead! Professor Lethaby and many others have all tried decent methods, and they have all failed. There remains just a chance that indecent methods may do what decency has failed to do.

In the meantime other Societies are taking up work that the R.I.B.A. should have taken up years ago—such as the Royal Society of Arts' scheme circulars of which are now being sent round. When will these good old-fashioned people who hate disturbances realise that the R.I.B.A. was founded for architecture, not for architects, nor was it intended that it should play second fiddle to the R.A.

Once again I repeat the warning that unless the R.I.B.A. gives up these Victorian notions of presidential professionalism, and moves with the spirit of the times and in anticipation of the most obvious tendencies towards unification of arts—even

---

<sup>35</sup> Vol. 31, No. 5 (12 January 1924), p. 161.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>37</sup> Vol. 31, No. 6 (26 January 1924), p. 182.

unification of arts with workmanship—it will simply become a second-rate body of professional touts, with no influence whatsoever.

The R.I.B.A is already being laughed at. People say, ‘Well, if Regent Street is the sort of thing you people can do at your best, we shan’t believe any of your after-dinner presidents’ speeches about your noble art.’ And they are quite right.

Materialism is on the decline. The letters are fading and the spirit is returning. With this change will come a return to ceremonial. The younger generation see through all the materialistic ideas of their Victorian parents. We hope to be in the advance guard of those who will herald a new growth—when the flower of art shall blossom forth in pure and radiant beauty. We must prepare a clean site for this new structure. The old and crazy building must be pulled down before the new one can be built.

Please overlook, Mr. Editor, the crime of my ‘House of cards’,<sup>38</sup> and print this letter as a reward for paying my subscription every year so promptly. By the way, it is rather amusing to notice how ideas sown a year ago and frowned upon by the mighty in their seats are given out *ex cathedra* now.—Faithfully yours,

W. W. SCOTT-MONCRIEFF [F.].

This rather eccentric letter, with its oblique references to the debate on academic dress, demonstrates how the subject can be used as a kind of lens through which to look at other ideas. These events took place just six years after the Great War and the language about the pulling down of the old and preparation for the new, together with the colourful rhetoric about the blossoming of art, reflects an age of hope for the future. They also reflect the debate within society, and within the Royal Institute about how institutions other than universities were regarded. Were architects to be regarded as tradesmen, artists, craftsmen, academics or a combination of some or all of these? Some who read Mr Scott-Moncrieff’s outpouring would have been left bemused and others amused.

The letters continued and in the *Journal*, the following long letter was published.<sup>39</sup>

Sir,—In his letter published in your issue of January 12<sup>th</sup> Mr. Morris deplores the fact that ‘important matters of principle affecting the prestige of the Institute can be settled by a majority of two on a vote of 60 members out of an electorate of more than 3,000.’

If a series of General Elections came to be contested in this country concerning the respective merits of pyjamas and nightshirts as the correct sleeping attire for true patriots, it is really doubtful whether the enfranchised public could be expected to rush forwards and backwards to and from the polling booths for an indefinite period in order to record their views. In like manner, it may be questioned; whether the

---

<sup>38</sup> A long and rather tedious letter which Scott-Moncrieff had submitted to the *Journal*. Interestingly, for one so vocal within the Institute, little seems to be known about him apart from his authorship of a book on John Francis Bentley, the architect of Westminster Cathedral, in 1924.

<sup>39</sup> Vol. 31, No. 7 (9 February 1924), pp. 219–20.

majority of the younger Associates of the Institute will ever be induced to attend business meetings of the R.I.B.A. whilst such matters as tailoring threaten to form a recurring basis of discussion. If existing conditions are to be perpetuated in the future, the whole time of the Institute may easily be occupied in debating resolutions prohibiting the wearing of horn-rimmed spectacles by Licentiates or deploring the profanity of spats among Probationers.

At the particular business meeting where Mr. Morris noticed 'an acrimonious, and at times undignified, tone of debate—quite alien to the spirit of former years', 26 Associates were present and 2,326 Associates stayed away.

At a previous general business meeting held at 8p.m. on December 3<sup>rd</sup> last, two Associates were present, and 2,350 Associates stayed away. On this occasion the total attendance of members was 10 (including five members of the Council), and the proceedings terminated at 8.15p.m.

Mr. Morris suggests that some change of system in recording votes is worthy of consideration. The present position is that 958 Fellows are represented on the Council by not less than 18 Fellows; 2,352 Associates are represented by not more than six Associates; whilst 1,402 Licentiates are not represented at all. And the composition of the Standing Committee is on a very similar scale.

If it is agreed that a Utopian ideal will be attained when 2,350 Associates attend a general business meeting and only two stay away, the question of uniforms for architects may be safely relegated to that date, for according to the best modern authorities no clothes at all will be necessary in Utopia.

In the meantime several important problems await solution, but adequate expression of the ideals of the younger members of the profession on any of these problems cannot possibly be achieved under the existing Constitution of the Institute, which is a sheer anachronism.

If the younger Associates of the Institute were represented in proportion to their numbers and vocations on the Committees of the Institute, there would be no time for interminable discussions on matters of costume. General business meetings might last more than 15 minutes and be attended by more than 10 members. The Grissell Medal and Prize might attract more than one candidate out of the whole British Empire. And, even then, Mr. Morris might still notice a tone of debate quite alien to the spirit of former years. The tone of debate under such conditions might, for example, be a little more virile, which does not mean that it need be any less dignified.—Yours faithfully,

F. R. JELLEY [A.].

This correspondence might have been thought to be sufficient to put an end to the matter completely but meanwhile Mr Riley obviously had been busy behind the scenes and five days later a letter from him was published in the *Journal*.<sup>40</sup>

Dear Sir,—I have been approached by several members of the Institute on the question of ordering Academical Dress. As this matter has been approved both in principle (30<sup>th</sup> April 1923) and, latterly, in detail (7<sup>th</sup> January 1924), I have been

---

<sup>40</sup> Vol. 31, No. 8 (23 Feb 1924), p. 256.

expecting to see an indication of some definite action on the part of the Council to give effect to the decisions of the general body. Members of the Institute are obviously interested to know what action is intended, and whether, as I think should be the case, the Council is taking steps to have a model form of dress prepared and approved for each grade of membership, so that such of our members as may wish to do so may know how to proceed to obtain Academic costume in accord with the Institute's decision.

I am informed that orders have already been placed with Messrs. Ede and Ravenscroft, of 93 Chancery Lane, W.C.2, and if this is so it makes an early authoritative decision in the matter more desirable. Yours faithfully,

W. E. RILEY [F.].

### ***In the bravery of such academic dress***

This seems to have been the last attempt by the small group to see the proposals for special costume for RIBA members become a reality. Just over a week later, the matter was resolved as can be seen from the following extract from *Journal*,<sup>41</sup> which contained a report from the Special and Business General Meeting held at the RIBA on Monday 3 March 1924, the President, Mr J. Alfred Gotch, in the Chair.

The PRESIDENT said that the following notice of motion had been received from Mr. C. Ernest Elcock, Fellow:

‘That the resolution on the subject of Academic Dress passed at the General Meetings on 30 April 1923 and on 7 January 1924 be rescinded, and that no further action be taken in the matter of the proposed Academic Dress.’

In connection with this, the Council had desired him to say that they had had no part at all in this suggestion; all they had done was to give the necessary consent for the introduction of the motion, and they felt justified in giving that consent, inasmuch as at a somewhat small meeting the last resolution was passed by a very narrow majority. He then called upon Mr. Elcock to move his resolution.

Mr. C. E. Elcock [F.] said that he moved the resolution with considerable diffidence, as he felt very deeply the responsibility of moving a resolution rescinding any definite proposal which had been passed at a meeting of the Institute. At the same time, he felt that things should be done in a constitutional way, and that if any private member had anything which he wanted to bring forward it should be done in a constitutional manner. Unfortunately, however, the proposal they had to consider had been treated far from constitutionally, but had been considered rather too much as a great joke. But it had now got beyond a joke, and he suggested that, as far as possible, the matter should be treated seriously. He was glad that the Council, through the President, had prefaced the discussion by stating that the Council had nothing to do with the suggestion that such a motion should be brought forward. He could say that he had not consulted any of the Council with regard to it, and the resolution was brought forward entirely as a private member's motion. He had not,

---

<sup>41</sup> Vol. 31, No. 10 (22 March 1924), pp. 315–17.

indeed, arranged with anyone present to second the resolution. He thought the meeting would agree with him that everything had been done in a perfectly straight and open manner. He moved, therefore: 'That the Resolution on the subject of Academic Dress passed at the general meeting on 30 April 1923 and on the 7 January 1924 be rescinded, and that no further action be taken in the matter of the proposed Academic Dress.' In doing this he referred to the *Journal*, in which the meeting of the 30 April was reported, (vol. 30, pp. 426–428) and recapitulated the powerful arguments which were then brought forward, and spoke of the occasionally hilarious treatment of the subject by the various speakers and by the meeting generally. Mr. Riley had referred to a report in the *Church Times* in connection with the Service at St. Paul's and the Wren Bicentenary: 'No two congregations in St. Paul's Cathedral on these national occasions are alike. On the contrary, there were distinguished men in plenty, but their distinction was not advertised by ceremonial dress.' It was therefore interesting to note that a paper like the *Church Times* should consider that without ceremonial or academic dress these men, in some way, appeared distinguished. Mr. Riley had submitted that this was not a subject for levity. But he said if at any time you were going to an academical function you would have some sort of appropriate and distinctive dress. He (the speaker) had been looking round the room and, as far as he could see, in spite of the very ordinary attire which they generally assumed as architects, they still had a certain appropriateness in their dress, and it seemed to him very suitable indeed. Mr. Chubb had referred to a public reception at the University of London at which he was present, and he said, 'I, for one, felt that I was nobody at all, although I had the pride of belonging to this Institute.' That was all because he had not got an Academic dress. He also said 'The public were beginning to learn what an architect was and were beginning to find out, for the first time, what the Royal Institute was.' How were they finding it out if there were no Academic dress to distinguish the members of this Institute? The public must be finding it out because of the fine work and the good service which was being rendered to the community by distinguished and undistinguished members of the Institute. It was, he thought, work that counted and not their garments. Mr. Cart de Lafontaine told them that in France architects did not wear an Academic dress. Mr. Elcock then referred in detail to the arguments used at the meeting by Mr. Scott-Moncrieff, Mr. Ewen, Mr. Maurice Webb, and Mr. Woodcock. The result of that meeting was, he said, that a Committee was appointed to go into the matter of details, and the general principle was carried. The Council referred it to a further meeting of the members, and proposed that the matter should be forthwith dropped. In spite of this ruling of the Council who, after all, were their appointed and representative body, the matter was, so far, not dropped, but it was carried further and approved, by a very narrow majority indeed. What were the reasons one could state against a proposal for an Academic dress? He believed that those who proposed an Academic dress were as sincere and honest in their convictions as he and some others who opposed it were. His sheet-anchor in moving the resolution was that there was not sufficient unanimity in the profession to allow such drastic change to go forward. It was carried by a very small majority, and before and since they had heard a great many men up and down the country who were opposing it in every possible way. Even at annual dinners of allied bodies this had been so, and in one case, at Newcastle-on-Tyne, the *piece de resistance* of the

evening's entertainment was a farce got up, showing members, from the President down, attired in symbolical robes which it was thought would be suitable for the occasion. The Institute was becoming known to the public; it was appreciated, both by those in authority, in the House of Commons and elsewhere as a body which represented the ideas and wishes of architects as a body in the country. It was doing that partly through the dignified manner in which their various Presidents had carried out their duties. It was doing it also because of the varied labours of the Institute, their Council and its Committees, and he thought it was also gaining in public esteem through the excellent way in which the Institute was managed by their Secretary and his colleagues. The profession was also becoming known and respected by the labours, sometimes unknown, on the part of well-known members of the Institute, who possibly do not wear any distinguishing apparel separating them from the man in the street, but by their work show, in a very practical way, that they indeed are architects. If they wanted to be understood by the public as architects, if they wanted to dignify themselves, they should be associated with fine buildings, which spoke for themselves, not with some peculiar medieval costume. They had been too long fettered in the bonds of medieval and antique architectural detail: he thought it would be detrimental to the interests of the Institute if they allowed themselves to be shackled still further by medievalism by association with some medieval form of costume. Mr. Elcock then moved the Resolution.

Mr. SEPTIMUS WARWICK [*F.*] seconded the Resolution.

Mr. W. E. RILEY [*F.*] said that he had hoped that the last time he had spoken on the question would be the last time he should have anything to say in public on the subject of Academical dress. He congratulated Mr. Elcock on the temperate way in which he had revived what he conceived to be a very disagreeable subject, but he was shocked at his not having been present before, as it would have saved much trouble. He would have heard all the special arguments, and his own would have had due weight at either meeting when the matter was dealt with. It was more than a year since he had raised the question in the Council. It was, he thought, raised in the Council in December 1922 and on that occasion the council approved the resolution. Subsequently it was taken when he was not at the Council, very much to his annoyance. He felt personally hurt that the matter should be taken when he was not present. He naturally concluded that the proper course to take would be to ask the President to allow him to revive the question. The President said he was opposed to it, but he would allow him to take it to a general meeting. He had never intended to do anything else, or to treat the subject with levity or carelessness, or with lack of consideration for the Institute. Mr. Elcock, when he was reading these extracts with regard to the Wren Celebration, missed an essential sentence: he said the *Church Times* did in no way recommend the Institute to have an Academical dress. The essential sentence was this: 'If only they could have made their procession in the walk of the City Clergy in the bravery of such Academic dress as the medical men wear in the Cathedral on St Luke's Day, the scene would have been the richer.' He submitted that there was a spontaneous recommendation to the Institute to adopt Academical dress; he had nothing to do with its inspiration. He did not want to weary them by reiteration of what had taken place; those of them who read the *Journal* would remember the matter had been several times before the Institute, and on each occasion it had been carried. Between the first and the second time, the

Board of Education gave another spontaneous and, he thought, unanswerable, argument that something of the kind should be adopted. He wanted to say to members of the Institute that those who would wear Academical dress would not carry it on their arm and wear it all day; they would wear it when other people wore Academical dress. He contended that the moment they established an examination they made Academical dress an essential. He would give the reason why the Government regard it in a somewhat similar way. He was reading from a paragraph in *The Builder*, of 30 November 1923: ‘The Board of Architectural Education desire to draw attention to the following decision of His Majesty’s Board of Education with reference to technical teachers’ qualifications: “Architecture. —His Majesty’s Board of Education recognises the Associateship of the Royal Institute of British Architects (if awarded after passing the Examination of the Institute) as the equivalent to Degrees of Universities in Great Britain and Ireland.”’ He went to the Board of Education to ascertain what it meant. He said ‘Does it carry the right to wear the Academical dress which the equivalent rank carries in schools?’ They said ‘No, it carries a great many privileges in regard to pay, attendance, and so on.’ At Liverpool they had a degree in Architecture, and any Associate of this Institute having a Degree in Architecture wears Academical dress at once in Liverpool,<sup>42</sup> and he supposed he would wear it in London if he came to an Academical function there. That was an important point for them to consider. Many of the Associates teach in technical schools; they teach building design and other subjects in architecture, and they would naturally attend Academical functions. Why should they be ashamed of carrying the indication of what their rank was in this Institute? He had gone to a very hard-headed solicitor in regard to the rights of this motion, and he was satisfied by the Secretary that the Council had given Mr. Elcock the right to do this. It seemed to him almost unprecedented: he did not think it should have been discussed again until a session had elapsed. He introduced a detail only, that was the style of the dress. The opposition to the question was entirely centred on the principle and ought not, in fairness to those who came here to discuss the question, to have been raised for another six months. But he was glad it had, because in the interim many people had appealed to him and he knew some members of the Institute had an Academical dress made, and he thought it was time to warn them, and he had consulted a solicitor. He did not want men to be mulcted into unnecessary expense and then not be able to wear the dress. He was told by a solicitor of great importance in London that no one could prevent those who had got the Academical dress between the time it was proposed in principle and the time the details were settled from wearing it, so

---

<sup>42</sup> First established in 1881 as University College, Liverpool, the University admitted its first students in 1882. In 1884 it became part of Victoria University. Following a Royal Charter and Act of Parliament in 1903 it became the University of Liverpool. The University has the oldest university school of architecture in the UK. Founded originally in 1895, it was the first to create formally recognised courses for RIBA purposes. The BArch (Part 1) was created in 1902, and the MArch (Part II) in 1920. The MArch degree was available to those holders of the BArch degree of not less than ten years’ standing. The MArch hood is of black cloth [s4] shape lined with white silk with two narrow bands of black velvet laid on the lining. The BArch hood is similar but with the addition of a white fur binding around the cowl.

there would be some members of the Institute who had absolute right to wear academical dress. He would not like to say that the Council would not carry out the decisions of general meetings, but they had had two general meetings on this, and after there was a clean decision he hoped the Council would advance no more difficulties. The only objection he had heard raised was that it was going to be ridiculous. That came mostly from those who already had the right to wear Academical dress. They had a high standard of examination which was as high as the B.A. examination in any University in Great Britain. The natural corollary to the Board of Education action was that those who are teaching in technical schools at any rate, should have some dress to show that they belonged to this Institute. It was a simple way of showing what examination a man had passed and how he stood among the rank and file of his Institute. He himself was entitled to wear a dress through his educational attainments in the Admiralty, personally it was nothing to him, but he felt for those who were not able to do that. There was a list of the very important people who could wear Academical dress, and if they went to an Academical function they would be wearing Academical dress and the representatives of the Institute would not. They were the Royal College of Art, the Royal College of Science and Technology, the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal College of Organists, the Tonic Sol-fa College.<sup>43</sup> (Laughter.) That was supposed to be a little persiflage, representing the absurdity of the thing, but a man who could teach in the Tonic Sol-fa College was a man with Academical attainments, like anybody else and if a member of it were present he would be much surprised at the risibility which this reference had given rise to. Then there was the College of Preceptors,<sup>44</sup> and many of the Theological Colleges. He did not think the matter should have been brought up again. He thought Mr. Elcock should have been here in the first instance and made then the very excellent speech he had now made against it. Then if he had carried his point there would have been no further trouble. He trusted they would not allow the matter to be turned down on the very slight pretext which had been advanced that evening. The arguments which had been brought against it were those which were brought forward in the first instance. He

---

<sup>43</sup> The Tonic Sol-Fa College was opened in 1879 and was the brainchild of John Curwen (1816–80). He gave up his Non-conformist ministry to devote himself to a new system of musical notation.

The Fellowship hood in the 1920s was of light blue silk [f1] shape lined with pink silk. The Institution is now known as Curwen College of Music. See Nicholas Groves and John Kersey, *Academical Dress of Music Colleges and Societies of Musicians in the United Kingdom, with Notes on Degrees and Diplomas in Music of Certain Other Institutions* (London: Burgon Society, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> The College was originally founded as the Society of Teachers in 1846 and incorporated by Royal Charter as the College of Preceptors in 1849. It changed its name to the College of Teachers in 1998. The College initially awarded qualifications for secondary teachers and pupils. The robe designs have changed many times but at the time of the above debate the Fellowship hood (FCP) was of black silk [f1] shape bound all round with ½" violet silk. There were two 1" bands of violet silk around the inside of the cowl placed 1" apart.

hoped they would consider carefully the pros and cons of the matter before they dismissed it.

Mr. W. WOODWARD [*F.*] gave one or two instances of why he thought Academic dress important. In the case of a judge, for example. Because of the wig and gown one must pay a great deal more respect to the gentleman on the Bench than perhaps one would the following morning meeting him in Chambers, without his wig and gown. When he was a member of Westminster City Council they wore robes, not only the Mayor and Aldermen, but also the common councillors like himself. It was a deep blue dress, very simple, very inexpensive; but it had its effect. He remembered attending a function at Westminster Abbey, when they walked from west to east of the nave wearing this dress, and the effect was very different from that produced by the representatives of the Royal Institute when they walked up St. Paul's Cathedral on the occasion of the Bicentenary of Sir Christopher Wren. It was never proposed they should wear the dress, except on special occasions. It was only when the dress had an effect on the general public that it was to be worn. Mr. Riley had spoken of the Tonic-Solfa College. Could they say that for a solemn function at St. Paul's the organist going to his organ-loft was not more impressive in a dress than he would be in ordinary attire? He trusted that they would adopt the proposal for the Institute to have power to authorise Academic dress.

Mr. W. W. SCOTT-MONCRIEFF [*F.*] said that Mr. Elcock had dealt with his support of the Academic dress question so tenderly that he was a little unfortunate in selecting from the first General Meeting, when this proposal was accepted by a large majority, an abstract of an answer he had given to a question which, he thought, was by Mr. Hall. Mr. Hall asked him about certain technical details of the dress, and he replied that the idea was that they could choose a dress that was easy to slip on and easy to button. Mr. Elcock had left out something else he had said. He said that if Academic dress were granted to a Master of Arts at University for Degrees obtained in what was mostly book knowledge, those who were really Masters of Arts, or at least strove to be, should possess the same privilege. He thought that was rather a sound argument. The weight of opposition to the proposal had come from the kind of mentality that thought architecture could be raised by giving medals for street elevations. Those were the people who were saying that Academic dress was not a fit thing for architects to wear. The proposal was passed, first of all, by a large majority at the Annual Meeting. It was brought up again at another meeting, and was passed by a narrow majority of two or three. It had now been brought up again, to a third General Meeting, and really what one felt most was on the question of principle, whether the Bye-laws of the Institute were sane, or whether they were insane. There was another general misconception, and that was that we were going to foist an Academic dress on somebody who did not want it. All they were trying to do was to get the Institute to admit the principle that in return for their examination they, as much as any University in the world, were entitled to give an Academic dress for that examination. From the first, when Mr. Riley proposed this resolution he had looked at it from a different point of view, and he had supported it all along from that point of view. The point of view was this: It was patent to every child who went into the street in London that the world was changing, and changing very rapidly. A reaction from the age of materialism was already in progress. He sincerely believed that the present materialistic state of affairs could not go on; and

he supported Academic dress, because it was in the nature of ceremonial, and with the decay of materialism there was bound to be a return to ceremonialism.

Mr. EDWARD P. WARREN [*F.*] said that he thought they might congratulate themselves on the atmosphere of good temper which had characterised the discussion. He asked why those who favoured Academic dress for a non-Academic Society like theirs, professing the first, the most comprehensive of the fine arts, wanted it to be Academic? Why should it be akin to the various Colleges and new Universities in this country, and founded on the dress of ancient Universities which, through various mutations from the old medieval dress, was worn for the convenience of people who had to live in unwarmed and unventilated class-rooms and lecture-rooms? He saw no appropriateness in the Royal Institute having an Academic dress. Mr. Woodward told them that the members of the Westminster Council wore Academic dress. He should have thought it would have been a civic costume, which was a different thing. There were beautiful costumes in the ancient Corporations of London—the City Companies—which derived their costumes from the old Craft Guilds which had merged into them and become the City Companies they knew to-day. They were not academic costumes. To wear any Academic dress merely because they entered the Institute by examination did not seem to him to constitute the appropriateness of wearing such a dress, since they were a non-Academic body. If they were to wear a dress at all, it should be one for artists. He did not think that artists needed to have a corporate costume of any sort. The artists in France did not wear one; the lawyers did, and lawyers do in this country. Doctors wore a distinctive costume. But a distinctive costume closely imitating that of the Universities or other teaching bodies seemed inappropriate for artists, and on the mere grounds of custom he was opposed to it for the Institute.

Mr. PERCY E. THOMAS [*F.*] said, while he agreed that those who wished to wear Academic dress might be honest in their opinions, they were doing something which had got to be carried out by the whole Institute. If they took a postcard vote of the whole Institute, he agreed that they could accept a bare majority, but a meeting which was held in that room was in no way representative of the Institute. So far as he was concerned, neither a resolution of that meeting nor of the Council would induce him to wear an Academic dress. He did not think that a majority of two in a London meeting should be binding upon a body like the Institute.

Mr. A. J. C. EWEN [*F.*] said some reference had been made to his remarks at that first meeting when the question of Academic dress came up, and if he was correctly reported in the 'Journal' there was some lack of clearness in his expression. When he said he did not wish to wear a dress, it meant he had no particular ambition, because up to the present his work had not been of a nature which called for distinction. But there were men whose position was very different from his own. They did not want to discuss questions of mentality, or the ridiculous side at all; they wanted to see a bond of union in a large Society where men who were united by the nature of their work could easily recognise each other. It provided, as it were, a uniform which served as a bond of union. Those who had worn the khaki uniform know that the uniform was a bond of union. When a public building was opened by some distinguished person, and the opening ceremony was attended by the Mayor and Corporation and various other persons of standing, they were all suitably gowned. The architect was the least distinguished person in the

company. But the profession which that man represented was entitled to have his status made clear among the other professions present.

THE PRESIDENT then put the motion.

45 voted in favour of Mr. Elcock's resolution.

22 against.

The final mention of the proposed scheme of dress, and its defeat, appears in the *Journal* as part of the *Report of Council for the official year 1923–1924*.<sup>45</sup>

At the Business General Meeting held on 7 January 1924 the report of the Committee appointed to deal with the details of the proposed Academic dress for Members and Licentiates of the Royal Institute was approved. At the Business General Meeting held on 17 March 1924 a resolution was passed rescinding the previous decision on the subject and deciding that no further action should be taken in the matter.

### ***Two very different worlds***

Reading the contributions made to this fascinating debate on academic dress from the 1920s affords a remarkable insight into various areas of British society and particularly how members of the architectural profession perceived themselves and the world around them. Whilst some of the contributors took official costume very seriously there were obviously some very amusing exchanges at the meetings and the men (they were all men) were doing what educated clubbable men enjoy doing, namely arguing and debating in a spirit of goodwill and companionship and sometimes getting overheated.

Through the prism of this discussion about academic dress something about the nature and state of the Church, universities and social standing can be glimpsed. The tension in the architectural profession between artists and craftsmen seeking a greater academic rigour was also present in many other institutions seeking academic recognition at the time.

An obvious question to ask is: why did the subject of distinctive costume for members of the RIBA come to be raised at that particular time? Were there any special factors or events which occasioned this?

In reading through the *RIBA Journal* of the period, and other interesting papers in the RIBA Library, it seems clear that in January 1923 the forthcoming Wren celebrations were a major catalyst. The service at St Paul's was a lavish affair of State and well attended by society. The question of what members of RIBA would wear to the service must have been raised. From the discussion it is clear that they felt rather invisible on the day. The 1920s post-war period was a time when officialdom and its dress was taken seriously and perhaps there was hope and celebration in the air, but there are other factors to consider.

---

<sup>45</sup> Vol. 31, No. 12 (26 April 1924), p. 372.

Two days after the service at St Paul's, on Tuesday 27 February 1923, and as part of the continuing celebrations, the RIBA visited Cambridge to see Wren's handiworks. There was a good turn-out for this visit and the various officials, Fellows, Members and Licentiates spent a pleasant day touring the library at Trinity, the chapels of Pembroke and Emmanuel Colleges. Later they were entertained to tea at Pembroke by the Master and Fellows and then by an organ recital in the chapel. Perhaps the sight of Cambridge in term-time, with cap and gown much in evidence, to say nothing of chapel dress and the dress of the various officers and Fellows of the Colleges they visited that day, would also have had an effect on the visitors.

Added to the feelings aroused by the Wren celebrations in St Paul's, the visit to Cambridge and the influence of the Warham Guild, as brought to bear on the Royal Institute through Dearmer and Kruger Gray, the first edition of Haycraft's work had been published in 1923.<sup>46</sup> The second edition of Haycraft indicated in the foreword: 'In view of the great demand for the first Edition, which quickly sold out, no time has been lost in preparing the second Edition.'<sup>47</sup> It would seem reasonable to suppose that Mr Riley was well acquainted with Haycraft. Haycraft's list of the various non-university institutions, especially those formed under royal charters or patronage, may have helped to form the case in his mind in favour of such distinctive dress for the RIBA along with his prominent place as a member of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Several factors seem likely to have come together to make this the appropriate time for the matter of the adoption of special dress for RIBA members to be considered. It is interesting to note that throughout the correspondence and the discussions, as reported in the minutes, of the various meetings, it is 'academical' dress that is referred to and this would seem to reflect something of the debate going on within the Institute as to the professional standing of architects and how their learning and skills were regarded. There is a sense of wistfulness in the discussions and the desire to belong to an academic institution that is valued. There is also the desire for their achievements to be recognized more, and the description given by one of those taking part in the debate, of the architect, at the opening of a building, feeling that he was the least regarded personage present (they were often present in 'civvies' along with the Lord Mayor and others in their finery) is poignant. Some members of the RIBA seem more robust and did not feel that they required any special dress (let alone academic dress) in order for them to feel more respected.

---

<sup>46</sup> F. W. Haycraft, *The Degrees and Hoods of the World's Universities and Colleges*, 1st edn (Ware, Herts.: Jennings & Bewley, 1923).

<sup>47</sup> F. W. Haycraft, *The Degrees and Hoods of the World's Universities and Colleges*, 2nd edn (London and Cheshunt: privately printed by Cheshunt Press, 1924).

Our largely casual attitude to ornaments and ceremonies in this early twenty-first century, in which academic dress has largely survived by having become fancy dress—part of the well-earned celebration of the pursuit of a course of learning and/or research, not to mention the proud pay off for the parents and loved-ones, might hinder an understanding how seriously such costume was regarded in former times. Nevertheless such costumes used to be regarded with greater seriousness as can be readily understood from the discussions within the RIBA over its dress. However, in that rather heady time between the wars, in the minutes of the discussions, can be seen the ideas of two very different worlds.

Had the original version of the proposed dress, which was so nearly adopted by the RIBA in 1923/24, been authorized and worn by architects at ceremonies, church services, and perhaps the opening of churches, schools, bridges and public monuments, alongside the clergy and municipal and civic officers it would have been a most interesting sight and who knows quite what influence it might have had on other institutions considering such costume.<sup>48</sup> The rather quaint old-fashioned (some would say faux-medieval) and ecclesiastical look of the proposed costumes would have stood out at any ceremony and certainly would have brought architects into public consciousness in a striking and memorable way. Even the revised form of the proposals, with the more conventional gown sleeves and use of the square cap with tassel would have retained the Warham style hood and, for some of the robes a hood attached to the gown. This would have made the robes of the RIBA unique and distinctive in the British Isles until, of course, Vivienne Westwood introduced her innovative designs for the academic dress of King's College London,<sup>49</sup> which display a sartorial nod both to the *cappas* of the clerks of the medieval universities and the scholastic habit of Harry Potter!

---

<sup>48</sup> I am grateful to Dr Nicholas Groves, FBS, for reminding me that the former academic dress of the Architectural Association was remarkably similar, in some respects, to that proposed for the RIBA. The Master's gown was black [m5] with 1" orange silk facings and the gown was similar with broader orange silk facings. The hood for all awards was [s4] black lined black with two 1" orange bands of silk ribbon 1" apart. Founded in 1847 and formally established in 1890, the AA shared premises during some of its early history with the RIBA. It moved to its central London location in 1917. All AA awards are now validated by the Open University.

<sup>49</sup> In July 2006 the Privy Council granted King's College London degree awarding powers in its own right. Subsequently, King's successfully applied to the University of London to award its own degrees, while remaining as a constituent college of the University of London. The Charter and Statutes govern the College and they were revised and approved by the Privy Council in May 2009, the Ordinances approved by the College Council on 30 June 2009.

Vivienne Westwood's designs for KCL academic dress were introduced in a memorable 'catwalk' show in the Great Hall of King's College in July 2008 during which Dame Vivienne commented: 'Through my reworking of the traditional robe I tried to link the past, the present and the future. We are what we know.'