

# The History of Undergraduate Academical Dress in Britain's Modern Universities since 1880, with a Discussion of its Recent and Current Use

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## Abstract

Undergraduates in cap and gown are a sight associated today with a select few universities. Despite this, over thirty British universities prescribe academic dress for undergraduates. For many of the universities founded in the twentieth century, the adoption of undergraduate cap and gown was a part of establishing an *esprit de corps*. Some 1960s universities attempted radical reforms to undergraduate dress, which in some cases were rejected by students. Over the twentieth century undergraduate gowns faded from view; however, their current use is slightly broader than has been generally considered, thanks to a number of traditional halls of residence at civic universities.

Shaw's *Academical Dress* shows us that, of the United Kingdom's roughly 170 universities and degree-awarding bodies, 33 currently prescribe academic dress for undergraduate students.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, undergraduates in cap and gown are a sight associated today with very few universities: matriculation and examinations at Oxford; the college formal dinners of Oxford, Cambridge and Durham; and the scarlet St Andrews undergraduate gown. These have been described as 'pockets of resistance' against the casualizing trends in university education; however, they represent only a small proportion of even those universities that prescribe undergraduate cap and gown.<sup>2</sup> Nearly thirty 'modern'<sup>3</sup> universities—that is to say, universities founded since the late nineteenth century—also either have undergraduate dress in their regulations or have done at some stage over the twentieth century. At the 'civic'<sup>4</sup> universities, un-

1 Nicholas Groves (ed.), *Shaw's Academical Dress of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3rd edn (London: Burgon Society, 2011–14), Vol. I (hereafter Shaw (2011)).

2 Oliver James Keenan, 'How Can Academical Dress Survive in the Third Millennium?', *TBS*, 10 (2010), pp. 99–125 (p. 105), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1086.

3 This article does not consider any universities founded before 1880. This is a practical decision taken based on the different approaches to university education taken by universities following Manchester in foundation, and is not intended to make the claim that no university founded before that point could be considered modern.

4 I have defined the civic universities (a term used largely interchangeably with redbrick within this article and in some, but not all, other literature) as having been founded between Manchester (Victoria) in 1880 and 1960. Manchester is certainly the first redbrick university, and though London has been categorized as a civic, its foundation does not feature the notable collaboration between the city institutions and the growing college that preceded the grant of a royal charter. 1960 has been chosen for convenience as the beginning of a decade of university

dergraduate cap and gown were often adopted—whether from the Senate or through student movements—in order to foster a sense of *esprit de corps* that was seen as lacking from the new universities compared to Oxford and Cambridge (a topic of Truscot’s *Red Brick University*).<sup>5</sup> The gowns adopted were of existing patterns and followed the conservative trends set largely at Cambridge or London. In many cases the wearing of academical dress on a day-to-day basis was not enforced, and even in some cases where enforcement nominally existed, the practice nevertheless seems to have generally fallen into disuse. The 1960s saw radical change in British higher education,<sup>6</sup> and it is surprising that as many as twelve universities established since 1960 either currently or formerly prescribed academic dress for undergraduates. The designs of gowns in this period sometimes differed radically from the norms established; however, in all cases they were short-lived experiments that do not seem to have seen any significant use since the end of the decade that introduced them. The ideals of *esprit de corps* and corporate life were drawn upon; however, cultural changes in the newer universities ensured that they were not as significant as they had been decades before. At many universities undergraduate cap and gown have become a historical obsolescence, remaining in regulations but largely unused, but at a few universities traditional or collegiate halls of residence have retained the use of undergraduate academical dress. Some universities have found other uses for undergraduate gowns. These are examples of strange traditions which appear anathema to the image of many modern universities but are traditions which ought to be noted.

#### **‘Esprit de corps’: undergraduate dress of the civic universities (1880–1960)**

Hargreaves-Mawdsley finished his history of academic dress with the end of the eighteenth century, dismissing the robemakers of the nineteenth as ‘borrowing freely and without true knowledge of the manner whereby the old universities had gradually acquired their costume.’<sup>7</sup> Despite any number of petitions, the nineteenth century saw the establishment of only four universities in Great Britain (not including Ireland), and it was not until the early twentieth century that the university extension movement had gained significant traction to see the establishment of redbrick or civic colleges as universities. The adoption of academical dress for undergraduates at these universities was a piecemeal affair, though largely a restrained one. At Oxbridge, cap and gown were as much a symbol of discipline as pride, being an identifying mark for the proctors.<sup>8</sup> Though discipline could be a problem at the civics,<sup>9</sup> it was not on the

expansion although no new university was founded in that year.

5 Bruce Truscot, *Red Brick University* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943). William Whyte, *Somewhere to Live: Why British Students Study Away from Home—And Why it Matters*, HEPI Report 121 (Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute, 2019), p. 19.

6 The plate-glass universities are considered those founded during the 1960s, particularly following the Robbins Report. I have not included a separate category for universities founded between 1969 and 1992 for the reason that none of them adopted undergraduate academic dress; and I have broadly included all 1960s universities under the plate-glass umbrella, again for simplicity.

7 W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. vii.

8 Paul R. Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 103.

9 See Edward Fiddes, *Chapters in the History of Owens College and of Manchester Uni-*



**Fig. 1.** Caroline Chadwick wearing the Owens College (Manchester) undergraduate gown.

whole a force behind the adoption of academical costume, which was instead often driven by a perceived need to boost *esprit de corps* amongst a student body that spent its days in a markedly different manner from those living in colleges at Oxford or Cambridge.

Owens College, a predecessor to the University of Manchester, was the first of the civics by a generation, and pioneered of a new sort of university education.<sup>10</sup> When academical dress was discussed during the nineteenth century it was ruled that there would be none for undergraduates.<sup>11</sup> The earliest student petition for academical dress came in 1854; however, ‘the authorities deemed it inadvisable to allow the wearing of a costume so incongruous with the squalid surroundings of the college.’<sup>12</sup> In 1880

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*versity, 1851–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1937), p. 116; J. C. Holt, *The University of Reading: The First Fifty Years* (Reading: Reading University Press, 1977), p. 6. Both show poor discipline as a reason for establishing halls of residence at their respective universities.

10 Alex Robertson and Colin Lees, ‘Owens College and the Victoria University, 1851–1903’, in Brian S. Pullan (ed.), *A Portrait of the University of Manchester* (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2007), pp. 10–16 (p. 11).

11 Philip Lowe, ‘The Origins and Development of Academical Dress at the Victoria University of Manchester’, *Burgon Society Annual 2001*, pp. 25–32 (p. 25), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1004.

12 Owens College, *Record of the Jubilee Celebrations at Owens College, Manchester* (Man-

the Victoria University was created as a federal institution for the north of England. Life at the new university did not feature the formalities of undergraduate life at Oxbridge or Durham, and so the academic costume committee again did not recommend undergraduate dress, which caused student protest. An anonymous student wrote to a newspaper 'to express some little astonishment at the absence of some academic costume for the Victoria undergraduates',<sup>13</sup> highlighting that London undergraduates were entitled to a gown. There was some encouragement of undergraduate academical dress at Owens during the 1870s and 1880s, and Lowe speculates that this was in part due to college principal Joseph Greenwood, in whose handwriting an amendment to the calendar inviting undergraduates of any university to wear the dress to which they were entitled appears.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that Greenwood was also a supporter of the residential aspect of the College,<sup>15</sup> and that he could have seen these aspects of tradition, which as Lowe mentions he would have known from his time at Cambridge, as two sides of the same coin. Despite this, the undergraduates of the Victoria University entered the twentieth century in plain clothes.

Outside changes to London regulations it seems the only new undergraduate dress adopted in the late nineteenth century was that used by the then University of Wales College, Aberystwyth (now the University of Aberystwyth), which used 'the Oxford scholar, but the sleeves gathered (like London BA) with green cords and buttons'.<sup>16</sup> A student wrote in the late nineteenth century that the cap and gown were required 'all the while and everywhere' though oddly 'except in chapel or our lodgings'<sup>17</sup>—these two places would later become the stalwarts of undergraduate gown-wearing at the civic universities, though here 'lodgings' likely refers to rented houses, or rooms within houses, rather than the more formal halls of residence.

The early years of the twentieth century saw newly chartered universities, and with them new regulations on undergraduate costume. In 1900 the new University of Birmingham adopted undergraduate cap and gown (the latter of the Birmingham pattern—an Oxford scholar's [u2] with the sleeve seam open—also used at Lampeter and Leicester).<sup>18</sup> At Manchester, authorities had been worn down and by the jubilee of 1902 'the days of probationary plain clothes [were] fulfilled, and the distinction of cap and gown conferred on undergraduates.'<sup>19</sup> The 'short-lived' Manchester gown was of an unknown design with open and deeply pleated sleeves (Figs 1, 2).<sup>20</sup>

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chester: Sherratt & Hughes, 1902), p. 5. (Hereafter, *Record of the Jubilee*.)

13 *Evening Mail*. 30 April 1881. Quoted in Lowe (2001). p. 30.

14 Lowe (2001), pp. 25–26.

15 Colin Lees and Alex Robertson, 'Early Students and the "University of the Busy": The Quay Street Years of Owens College, 1851–1870', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 79 (1997), pp. 116–94 (p. 171).

16 William Gibson and Nicholas Groves, 'The Origins of the University of Wales Robes', *TBS*, 8 (2008), pp. 91–97 (p. 96), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1064.

17 E. L. Ellis, *The University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1872–1972* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972), p. 48.

18 Thomas A. Goodman, 'The Academic Dress of the University of Birmingham' (2019) <[www.researchgate.net/publication/334459727\\_The\\_Academic\\_Dress\\_of\\_the\\_University\\_of\\_Birmingham](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/334459727_The_Academic_Dress_of_the_University_of_Birmingham)> [retrieved 6 February 2024].

19 *Record of the Jubilee*, p. 5.

20 Alex Kerr, 'The Turbulent History of Undergraduate Academical Dress, Summary of an



Fig. 2 (left). A student in the Owens College (Manchester) undergraduate gown, c. 1900.



Fig. 3 (right). A University of Manchester undergraduate gown, showing the cording on the yoke. It is no longer prescribed by the University but is worn in some halls.

The wearing of undergraduate dress at Manchester was a fervour of the jubilee year: by 1904 it was ridiculed in a student publication<sup>21</sup> and in 1919 it was removed from University regulations as ‘obsolete.’<sup>22</sup> The association of gown-wearing with the jubilee of the College is significant, and the use of the phrase ‘probationary plain clothes’ in a University publication makes it clear that the conferring of gowns upon undergraduates somehow demonstrated the College coming of age as a university.<sup>23</sup> The adoption of gowns for the jubilee also demonstrates that academic dress in this period aimed to work alongside other initiatives such as students’ unions, sports teams, and halls of residence, in promoting an image of university life and developing the *esprit de corps* that, it was considered in the nineteenth century, set the ancient universities apart from the new.<sup>24</sup> At Birmingham in the same year a student wrote that enforcing the wearing of gowns upon undergraduates would ‘stamp all members [of the University] with what one might call a “Varsity stamp”.’<sup>25</sup> A comparison was made to the University of Wales colleges, which all enforced gown-wearing.<sup>26</sup> Again the aim was to create a group identity for students. By 1940 this had moved from a mark of pride to a mark

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Illustrated Talk by Alex Kerr, Burgon Society Study Day, 7 May 2011, *Burgon Notes*, 17 (Summer 2011), pp. 2–3. Also found, with a different image, at <[www.scribd.com/document/65743270/Alex-Kerr-2011-Undergraduate-Academic-Dress#](http://www.scribd.com/document/65743270/Alex-Kerr-2011-Undergraduate-Academic-Dress#)>.

21 Philip Lowe, *Manchester Academical Dress: A Guide and History* (Manchester: privately printed, 2002), pp. 23–24.

22 Lowe (2002), p. 28.

23 *Record of the Jubilee*, p. 5.

24 Gary S. Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age: The Half-known City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 145.

25 Quoted in William Whyte, *Redbrick: A Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 147.

26 *Ibid.*

of difference, when the Students' Guild at Birmingham rejected a proposal to make gown-wearing at council meetings optional as 'it was a privilege which distinguished members of the University from students at the Technical College.'<sup>27</sup>

In 1909 the University of Bristol decided against the use of undergraduate gowns (as did Queen's University Belfast, around the same time),<sup>28</sup> but by 1911 had added gowns of the [u2] Oxford Scholars' pattern to its regulations.<sup>29</sup> A year later it was noted that these were worn 'on the very coldest of days, and then only to keep warm'.<sup>30</sup> Depending on the university, the impetus to wear academic dress might come from the Senate or from the student body, but it seemed at least a point of discussion at most of the civics. The University of Sheffield adopted an unspecified undergraduate gown in 1908,<sup>31</sup> which later became the [u2], along with Leeds. The lie of the land in 1909 was described by the University of Bristol Gown Committee, which reported that undergraduate dress was 'regularly worn [at] Cambridge, Oxford, Dublin, Durham and Newcastle, [Bangor, Cardiff, and] St Andrews'; worn by some students at Glasgow and Aberdeen; an option at Sheffield; and in use only for ceremony at London, Manchester, and Birmingham.<sup>32</sup> This report shows the range of undergraduate dress in British (and Irish) universities in this period. Whilst it suggests that Aberystwyth had ceased to use its gowns, satirical and photographic records of the 1920s show the College's students enrobed.<sup>33</sup> Reading added blue facings to a [u2] gown, marking the first case of chromatic departure in England (outside of Cambridge college variations), which would become common. Gowns seem to have been encouraged at Reading: in the 1920s and 30s one lecturer was known for reproving students who entered his classes without one,<sup>34</sup> and in 1921 regulations requested that 'women students going into the town should either wear cap and gown or ordinary costume.'<sup>35</sup> Pictorial evidence from the 1920s also suggests that gowns were in common usage among students for at least formal occasions.<sup>36</sup>

Another factor in the difference in use between Oxbridge and the civics was the presence of women. While the new universities remained predominantly male environments, they had begun admitting women students as full members earlier than Oxbridge.<sup>37</sup> Deslandes has portrayed cap and gown as a 'badge of manhood',<sup>38</sup> and the

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27 E. W. Ives, *The First Civic University: Birmingham 1880-1980: An Introductory History* (Birmingham, University of Birmingham Press, 2000), p. 386.

28 G. W. Shaw, *Academical Dress of British Universities* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1966), p. 45.

29 Paul Hayward, 'Bristol Blue: A Search for the Origins of Academic Dress at the University of Bristol', *TBS*, 21 (2021), pp. 185-207 (p. 188), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1201.

30 Quoted in Whyte (2015), p. 148.

31 Nicholas Gledhill, 'Academical Dress at the University of Sheffield: A Timeline', *TBS*, 4 (2004), pp. 49-52 (p. 49), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1030.

32 Hayward, p. 199.

33 Geraint H. Jenkins, *The University of Wales: An Illustrated History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), p. 122.

34 Holt, p. 92.

35 Holt, p. 355.

36 Sidney Smith and Michael Bott, *One Hundred Years of University Education in Reading: A Pictorial History 1892-1992* (Reading: University of Reading Press, 1992), p. 50.

37 Oxford and Cambridge had women students but they were not matriculated members of the universities.

38 Deslandes, p. 104.



Burgon Society archives WBS-063 (f)

**Fig. 4. University of Reading undergraduate gown.**



Burgon Society Archives WBS-429 (f)

**Fig. 5. University of Hull undergraduate gown.**



Burgon Society archives WBS-204 (f)

**Fig. 6. University of Leicester undergraduate gown. This pattern was also used at Birmingham and Lampeter.**

warden of the women's hall at Manchester was against their adoption; however, when it came down to a student vote at Manchester in 1907, a greater proportion of women than men voted in favour of enforced academic dress.<sup>39</sup>

Some universities, as Manchester had before, adopted undergraduate dress before being granted full university status. Gowns had been enforced at the University College of Southampton in 1923, when the college principal drew on the idea of *esprit de corps* in asking students 'to look upon the cap and gown as the symbol of our corporate life'.<sup>40</sup> The enforcement of academic dress was unpopular, as some lines from a poem printed in a student magazine show:

Now that the powers which sway our destinies  
Decree that we a sable robe must wear.  
In spite of all our cries and woeful pleas [...]   
Though some may 'swank' the undergraduate gown,  
Thank Heaven I need not wear it in the town.<sup>41</sup>

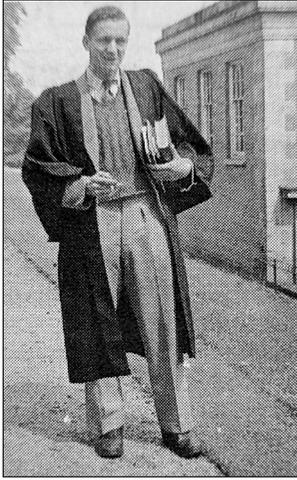
The University of Leicester adopted undergraduate dress while still a university college, choosing the Birmingham pattern: 'knee-length, with open forearm sleeves', and required students wear them in lectures.<sup>42</sup> At Nottingham a unique gown was designed for undergraduates before the grant of a royal charter in 1948, like Liverpool adopting a longer gown of bachelor's length and with what John Horton describes as

<sup>39</sup> Lowe (2002), pp. 52, 25.

<sup>40</sup> *Southampton University College Magazine*, 23 (59) (Easter 1923), p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 (57), p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Clifford Dunkley, 'Academic Dress of the University of Leicester', *TBS*, 11 (2011), pp. 59–75 (p. 60), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1092.



**Fig. 7. A student in a Nottingham University undergraduate gown, photographed in the 1930s or 40s.**



**Fig. 8. An early ceremony at the University of Nottingham in 1948, featuring undergraduates in academic dress. Note the wide sleeves and the length of the gowns.**

‘open, wide and relatively short’ sleeves of a bell shape. As at Manchester before, staff at the new University who had been at Oxbridge may have brought an idea of tradition and ceremony with them—Nottingham’s first vice-chancellor, Bertrand Hallward, had been a proctor at Cambridge.<sup>43</sup> As these colleges became universities over the next few decades, their academic dress—and the attitude of their students towards it—changed.

In 1957 at the then University of Southampton ‘the student newspaper called—once more—for the wearing of gowns to be made compulsory in order to create a corporate spirit.’<sup>44</sup> The London pattern [u3] gown was chosen. Upon becoming a university in 1957 Leicester reassessed its academical dress and with it adopted a new undergraduate gown. ‘Guardsman’ or ‘Cardinal’ red was considered—likely due to Scottish influence—however, the customary black was eventually chosen:<sup>45</sup> ‘Oxford scholars’ shape, with the forearm seam left open. The sleeves and back are ruched, but not pleated in the usual way.’<sup>46</sup>

As the later civics became universities they adopted undergraduate dress as a matter of course. At Hull, where the gowns were black with sky-blue facings and yoke, the specifications mandated ‘Gowns ... for both staff and undergraduates at lectures,

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<sup>43</sup> The author would like to thank John Horton for the information provided about the University of Nottingham’s undergraduate gown.

<sup>44</sup> Whyte (2015), p. 242.

<sup>45</sup> Dunkley, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> Shaw (1966), p. 70.



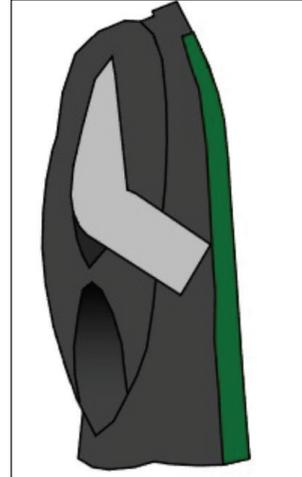
Burgon Society Archives (WBS-637 (f))

**Fig. 9. University of Keele undergraduate gown. The [u3] pattern was also used at Southampton and (with red cording) at Manchester.**



Burgon Society Archives (WBS-235 (f))

**Fig. 10. University of Leeds undergraduate gown. The [u2] pattern was used widely at the civic universities, including Wales, Sheffield, and Bristol; and was adopted at some of the plate-glass universities in the 1960s.**



**Fig. 11. The University of Exeter Scholars' gown, based on illustrations in Shaw (1966).**

written examinations, ceremonial occasions and official interviews'.<sup>47</sup> At Exeter undergraduates were required to be in academical dress for 'lectures, classes and tutorials, in chapel and when visiting members of the academic staff officially'.<sup>48</sup> The gown was a [u3], though with a separate scholars' gown featuring green facings and yoke: 'It is not known when [this] was introduced, nor if it is still current'.<sup>49</sup> The image of buying your gown as a part of the rite of passage associated with 'going up' was beginning to settle in to some of the new universities.

The most radical decisions in terms of undergraduate academic dress was at Liverpool, which prescribed a Cambridge MA gown for undergraduates, with cord and button on the yoke—considered a 'strange anomaly' by Shaw.<sup>50</sup> Liverpool was an outlier and the general trend was not one of great innovation; however, many of the redbrick universities—certainly the earlier foundations—clearly saw it as important that they adopt undergraduate dress as part of the trappings of becoming a university

47 See images WBS-429 (f) and WBS-429 (b), at <burgon.org.uk/archive/hull> [retrieved 28 April 2024]. Richard Baker, 'The Academic Dress of the University of Hull from 1954 to the Present Day, Including the Hull-York Medical School from 2003', *TBS*, 11 (2011), pp. 30–58 (p. 32), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1091.

48 David C. Quay, 'An Overview of the History of the Academic Dress of the University of Exeter', *TBS*, 19 (2019), pp. 38–54 (p. 39), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1163.

49 Shaw (2011), p. 178.

50 Shaw (1966), p. 5.

and developing traditions that would foster *esprit de corps*. For the most part in the modern universities it is evident that undergraduate academic dress has faded away, with change taking place at different speeds at different universities. At Bristol gowns are at least nominally enforced at lectures to this day, though are hardly to be seen (see section below), and by the 1920s were seen by students as an unnecessary emulation of Oxbridge;<sup>51</sup> whereas at Birmingham ‘[as] late as 1950 a survey ... reported that students were generally in favour of academic dress’, though rationing presented a problem. The pattern at Birmingham was a common one: ‘Gowns were never abolished. They symbolized the old order, and they faded away.’<sup>52</sup>

### **Undergraduate dress at the plate-glass universities and beyond (1960–)**

The Robbins Report saw the number of universities in the United Kingdom doubled, and the creation of new kinds of university. Some of the new ‘plate-glass’ universities had existed before as colleges and brought academic dress forward with them from their pre-university days (such as a 1902 student petition at what was then Loughborough University College, which succeeded in adopting undergraduate dress)<sup>53</sup> but others had been created anew and were imbued with a spirit of innovation. The rationale for adopting (and even enforcing in some cases) academical dress for undergraduates is not as evident as in the civic examples already discussed; however, in some cases the idea of promoting a unified corporate identity seems to have played a part.

Both the University of Sussex and the University of East Anglia were radical departures from the mock-gothic or redbrick norm in terms of their campuses, and complemented the gleaming white concrete of Bradbury’s satire<sup>54</sup> with a pair of new undergraduate gowns ([u6] and [u7] respectively). At Sussex, a sleeveless gown was designed by academic dress historian Norman Hargreaves-Mawdsley and was considered a ‘radical’ departure, though Shaw ‘said that some features of [the scheme] showed tendencies to return to the style of dress worn in the medieval universities of Europe.’<sup>55</sup> Within a week of going up to Sussex, the first cohort of undergraduates had ceased to wear the ‘archaic status symbols’ of their gowns.<sup>56</sup> Undergraduate gowns at Sussex may not have been a success, but in Norwich the gowns of the UEA caused a stir with its fashion. During its foundation, the UEA presented a vision of university life that was ‘attractive to conservative rural Norfolk and Suffolk’, and plans for halls of residence featured ‘rather idealistic drawings of young men (not women) in residence, wearing ties, jackets and gowns, with firm clean-shaven jaws, earnestly reading’.<sup>57</sup> The undergraduate gowns, like the rest of the academic dress scheme, were designed by Cecil Beaton and first appeared in 1966. They followed the trends of colour-changing begun at Reading and Exeter with a

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51 Whyte (2015), p. 182.

52 Ives, p. 387.

53 Whyte (2015), p. 153.

54 See Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975).

55 Alex Kerr, ‘Hargreaves-Mawdsley’s *History of Academical Dress* and the Pictorial Evidence for Great Britain and Ireland: Notes and Corrections’, *TBS*, 8 (2008), pp. 106–50 (p. 108), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1066.

56 Fred Gray, *Making the Future: A History of the University of Sussex* (Falmer: University of Sussex, 2011), p. 101.

57 Michael Sanderson, *The History of the University of East Anglia, Norwich* (London: Hambledon & London, 2002), p. 51.

‘smokey blue’<sup>58</sup> sleeveless gown with black facings.<sup>59</sup> A tricorner cap was initially included, but soon was replaced by the more usual square shape. *The Times* likened the UEA undergraduates in their gowns to the ‘Mods’, and a year later became a ‘sixties fashion statement’ when modelled by radio hostesses.<sup>60</sup> In the brave new world of the plate-glass universities, students no longer clamoured for a mark of status as they had at the civics at the turn of the century and as recently as 1957.

In a similar vein the undergraduates of the University of Hertfordshire (notable as the only post-1992<sup>61</sup> university that prescribes undergraduate dress) are entitled to wear a London BA gown without a hood.<sup>62</sup> This decision was a more pragmatic one than those taken at Sussex or the UEA, the designers of Hertfordshire’s academic costume deciding that: ‘gowns were more likely to be worn if they were of a pattern ready to hand.’<sup>63</sup> Other recent universities may have a history of undergraduate academic dress, though there is no present use, for instance the University of Cumbria was formed in 2007 from the merging of the Cumbria Institute of the Arts and St Martin’s College, Lancaster. The latter had ‘initially’ (during the 1960s) enrobed its students, to encourage high academic standards.<sup>64</sup>

Radical departures from the black stuff of the old universities would continue. The University of Lancaster required its early cohorts of students (until 1966) to wear a grey [u3] gown to lectures; and the University of Bradford (technically) enrobed its undergraduates in a maroon gown of the Oxford scholar’s cut with silver facings.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps the most dramatic variations took place at the University of Dundee. Despite



**Fig. 12. Recent undergraduate gowns that demonstrate departures from the norm in both pattern and colour, based on illustrations in Shaw (1966, 2011).**

58 Sanderson, p. 136.

59 University of East Anglia, ‘Official and Academic Dress’, Calendar <[www.uea.ac.uk/about/university-information/university-governance/academic-calendar/official-and-academic-dress](http://www.uea.ac.uk/about/university-information/university-governance/academic-calendar/official-and-academic-dress)> [retrieved 6 February 2024].

60 Sanderson, p. 136.

61 The Further and Higher Education Act (1992) changed the UK higher education scene significantly by converting all polytechnics into universities. While ‘post-1992’ now generally refers to universities founded due to this Act and in the years that followed (i.e., not into the twenty-first century), the most recently founded university discussed is Hertfordshire (1992), and therefore any discrepancy in the definition 1992–present is irrelevant.

62 Shaw (2011), p. 204.

63 Bruce Christianson and Philip Waters, ‘Reflections of Designing the Academic Dress of the University of Hertfordshire’, *TBS*, 20 (2020), pp. 150–61 (p. 156), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1183.

64 Peter S. Gedge and Lois M. R. Loudon, *S. Martin’s College, Lancaster, 1964–89* (Lancaster: Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster, 1989), p. 12.

65 Peter William Clarke, ‘McKinlay’s People: A Study of the Academic Dress of the University of Bradford’, *TBS*, 16 (2016), pp. 13–29 (p. 25), asserts that ‘it could be argued that [ceremonial usher’s] gowns form the basis of the undergraduate academic dress of the University’ doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1138.



Burton Society Archives WBS-070 (f)

**Fig. 13. University of Lancaster undergraduate gown.**



Burton Society Archives (WBS-951 (f)

**Fig. 14. University of Dundee undergraduate gown.**

being a nominally modern university, the University of Dundee is considered an ancient one by law. In Scotland it 'is alone among the modern universities in sharing the tradition of the red undergraduate gown'.<sup>66</sup> In 1899 the Student Representative Council adopted the St Andrews gown for undergraduates (in 'appreciation' of the college becoming a part of that university)<sup>67</sup> but differentiated the Dundee gown by the addition of a pentagonal badge bearing a representation of lilies, made of the same material as the collar, on to the left breast. In 1954 this gown was replaced with a gown of the St Andrews cut in dark blue, though this would last only until university status was granted in 1967, when the undergraduate gown was restored to red, only with 'a yoke, collar and facings of serge or flannel in "Stewart blue"'.<sup>68</sup> This gown remains a part of university regulations.<sup>69</sup>

Other universities were more restrained. The University of Newcastle had begun its life as two colleges of the University of Durham, and continued the [u4] of that university into its own regulations when it gained university status of its own in 1963. The universities of Keele, Loughborough, and Bath adopted black gowns of existing patterns ([u3] for the former and [u2] for the latter two). The University of Strathclyde prescribes one of only two black undergraduate gowns in Scotland (the other being for divinity students at St Andrews), though with a blue button and cord.<sup>70</sup> It is also the newest Scottish university to have adopted academic dress for undergraduates.

66 , Jonathan C. Cooper, 'The Scarlet Gown: History and Development of Scottish Undergraduate Dress', *TBS*, 10 (2010), pp. 8–42 (p. 31). doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1082

67 Donald Southgate, *University Education in Dundee: A Centenary History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982), p. 143.

68 Cooper, pp. 31, 21.

69 The University of Dundee, 'Academic Dress of the University', 7 July 2023, at <www.dundee.ac.uk/guides/academic-dress-university> [retrieved 8 February 2024].

70 Cooper, p. 32.

For many of the new universities of the 1960s, academic dress was a part of forming a new identity, just as it had aimed to create *esprit de corps* at the civics. At Keele in the 1960s students were forbidden from entering the library without their gowns, which were sold alongside the more popular scarves (in Keele colours of ‘tomato, egg and black pudding’),<sup>71</sup> whilst at the UEA bold departures from the norm of academical costume were chosen to mark the foundation of a new university for the sixties. Change was coming, however, and ‘... the notion that the university should separate itself off from the community, marking the distinction between students and non-students with special clothes’, was beginning to be perceived as a negative one.<sup>72</sup> Creating a corporate identity was important for these universities but equally it was criticized from within, and the expansion of the universities opened them up to a new generation of students with whom such regulations did not sit well. Many of these gowns appeared more in regulations than on students themselves. In this period Oxbridge removed the requirements for gown-wearing students. It has been considered that there was something of a drive from Oxbridge academics teaching at the new institutions toward the proliferation of academic dress amongst staff and students on a day-to-day basis. By the end of the decade—as lecturers moved on and the culture of the new universities changed with the ‘opportunity for expression captured in the zeitgeist of the 1960s’—had been eroded<sup>73</sup> and the later plate-glass universities did not adopt any undergraduate dress.

### ‘Gated, gowned, and single-sex’: gowns in halls of residence

Outside the well-known present-day pockets of gown-wearing amongst undergraduates (Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, and St Andrews), there is a number of halls of residence within the civic universities where the practice of wearing gowns at formal occasions has not entirely died out. Halls of residence were founded at these universities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century upon collegiate lines, with direct inspiration from life at Oxbridge colleges,<sup>74</sup> and have been considered the most significant development of the civic universities.<sup>75</sup> The first of these in England was a Church of England hall at Manchester founded in 1870, called Hulme Hall since 1887 and still open today,<sup>76</sup> which was followed by halls of residence across the country. It was the non-residential nature of the new universities that ensured that the undergraduate gowns never truly caught on, and could never really have been enforced in the first place. But in more rule-bound halls of residence gowns managed to cling on—as barely visible microcosms of Keenan’s ‘pockets of resistance, in which there is a gap between the university’s regulations and the students’ practice.’<sup>77</sup> At the University of Reading, Wantage Hall was built in the neo-Tudor style, complete with an impressive dining hall,

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71 Keele University, *Keele’s Colours and Badges*, at <[www.keele.ac.uk/thekeeleoralhistoryproject/keeleheraldrycoloursandscarves](http://www.keele.ac.uk/thekeeleoralhistoryproject/keeleheraldrycoloursandscarves)> [retrieved 6 February 2024].

72 Whyte (2015), p. 242.

73 Sandra Wearden, ‘How Academic Dress Is Mobilized in Degree Ceremonies and to What Effect’, *TBS*, 15 (2015), pp. 14–29 (pp. 19–22), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1131.

74 See for an example of such a foundation the original Hulme Hall Prospectus (1870), held at the University of Manchester Archive and Special Collections: GB 133 HHH/1/2.

75 Whyte (2015), p. 157.

76 J. N. Hartshorne, ‘The Halls of Manchester’, in University of Manchester, *Communication* (Manchester: University of Manchester Communications Office, 1975), p. 12.

77 Keenan, p. 106.

in 1908.<sup>78</sup> A 2006 discussion on *The Student Room* (an online forum) suggests that gowns had largely fallen out of use by the late 1990s, and were worn only at significant anniversary dinners or on the high table.<sup>79</sup> Gowns at Wantage may since have faded from existence. The general pattern of gown-wearing at the civic universities is that it continued past requirement in lectures in an increasingly dwindling number of halls of residence, worn at an increasingly dwindling number of formal events. Whyte notes that over the 1990s ‘the gated, gowned, and single-sex halls of the past were almost completely abandoned ... The new residences—and the reformed versions of the old halls—were self-catering, informal, and unisex.’<sup>80</sup> Alongside this an orthodoxy of student opinion has grown that ‘one only [lives] in hall ... for just one year.’<sup>81</sup> This model is an economically convenient one for expanding universities, but not a positive one for the use of academic dress. There remain a few halls of residence in Britain where undergraduates wear gowns to dinner or chapel. Those presented here may not represent the entirety of current practice, as this is an area where the actual use of academic dress differs quite significantly from university regulations and as such makes research difficult; however, they likely illustrate the breadth of current usage.

Under the University of Bristol calendar of 1962—and still by the letter of the present-day regulations—Bristol undergraduates are required to wear a gown in lectures (but not labs) and ‘In Halls of Residence, as required by the regulations of the Hall.’<sup>82</sup> In common with most universities, undergraduate gowns on the whole ‘are not to be seen in the University today.’<sup>83</sup> There remains a small niche of gown-wearing at Bristol, however. Wills Hall was established in 1929 along the collegiate ideals already well-established as the model for a hall of residence at a civic university: one approaches up a private leafy drive, past a chapel, to a mock-gothic extravagance of sandstone and enters a quad which would not look out of place in either of England’s ancient universities via a secluded porter’s lodge. The practice of nightly formal hall was established by the first warden and the ‘tradition of formal dining continues to this day ... taken together in academic gowns.’<sup>84</sup> As patterns of residence (and of student expectations) changed in the 1990s Whyte describes Wills as one of the halls that remained one of the ‘gated, gowned, and single-sex halls of the past,’<sup>85</sup> though the Hall is now mixed. In 2017 it was reported in *The Tab* that all catered halls at Bristol have formal dinners; however, that at Wills they took place more frequently (‘once every couple of weeks’), and that ‘yes we wear gowns (not helping our case I guess).’ The case in question was the hall’s ‘upsetting’ reputation: ‘known as “posh”, “fancy”, “for rich peo-

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78 The layout of the Hall, and its dining hall, can be seen in Smith and Bott, p. 34. See also Holt, p. 6.

79 Holt, p. 6; <[www.thestudentroom.co.uk/showthread.php?t=51614](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/showthread.php?t=51614)> [retrieved 7 February 2024].

80 Whyte (2015), pp. 315–16.

81 Arthur Mawby and Gerard McKenna, ‘Residences and Lodgings’, in Pullan, pp 142–49 (p. 148).

82 Hayward, p. 199.

83 Hayward, p. 185.

84 M. J. Crossley Evans, *A History of Wills Hall, University of Bristol*, 2nd edn (Bristol: Wills Hall Association, 2017), p. 24.

85 Whyte (2015), p. 315.

ple” amongst other, less pleasant things.’<sup>86</sup> It seems that the tradition of gown-wearing remains strong at Wills and enrobed undergraduates can be seen in pictures of Wills Hall as recently as 2022<sup>87</sup>—the ‘spectacle of nearly 200 loud students in black tie and gowns’ continues.<sup>88</sup>

Wills is rightly one of the more notable collegiate halls of residence—certainly architecturally it is perhaps the closest imitator of the ancient universities—however, it is by no means the oldest. It was at pioneering Manchester that the University’s decision not to provide accommodation was first met by the establishment of halls (not at Reading, as has been claimed)<sup>89</sup>, the first being the Anglican Hulme Hall in 1870. It was followed by Dalton Hall in 1876, a foundation of the Society of Friends; Ashburne Hall in 1901, the first women’s hall; and St Anselm Hall in 1907, another Church of England venture that went on to be described as ‘the closest attempt’ to emulate the Oxbridge lifestyle—though its ‘exclusive Anglicanism, relative poverty, and lack of influence within the university [prevented it] from doing any such thing.’<sup>90</sup>

The reaction to the University’s introduction of undergraduate gowns at these halls was mixed. W. H. Perkins, resident of Hulme Hall in 1902, provides an interesting description of their reception, recalling that ‘Hulme Hall wouldn’t normally have welcomed them, but they were helpful in covering irreverent deficiencies of dress on entering chapel.’ He does not say why the Hall might not have welcomed gowns.<sup>91</sup> The only other possible source on the reception of undergraduate cap and gown at Manchester is a debatable one, however the Lent 1902 edition of *Yggdrasill*, the magazine of Ashburne Hall, features two cherubs as its frontispiece, one wearing a cap and the other trying on a gown.<sup>92</sup> In any case the warden of Ashburne Hall was against the introduction of gowns in the first place, and Dalton Hall would never adopt them due to its Quaker foundation. Eventually they were brought in at Ashburne: a former resident recalled in conversation that the Junior Common Room voted to abolish them around 1990. At that point they were certainly required at Allen Hall, Hulme Hall, and St Anselm Hall most evenings, and possibly were in use at a few other halls.

At Hulme during the late 1990s gowns were unpopular owing to the expense. The JCR’s solution was to purchase a set of its own gowns from Ede & Ravenscroft<sup>93</sup>—not Wippell & Co., as previously—which are [u3] with red cording around the yoke (a design which likely comes from the 1930s).<sup>94</sup> This has been the method by which undergraduate gowns are used at Hulme Hall ever since. Lowe notes that in 2002 a ‘recent innovation’ was a separate gown for the President of the JCR (an Oxford advanced student’s

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86 Ben Bloch, ‘In Defence of Wills Hall’, *The Bristol Tab*, 2017, at <thetab.com/uk/bristol/2017/01/08/defence-wills-hall-27879> [retrieved 7 February 2024].

87 Charles Gunter, *Wills Hall Association Yearbook 2022* (Wills Hall Association). Available at <www.willshallassociation.org/post/2022-yearbook> [retrieved 7 February 2024].

88 Crossley Evans, p. 98.

89 Holt, p. 57.

90 Whyte (2015), p. 197.

91 W. H. Perkins, quoted in the *Hulme Hall Chronicle*, 1980–81 edition, held at the University of Manchester Library Archives and Special Collections. Reference: GB 133 HHH/2/9/1.

92 Ashburne House Students, *Yggdrasill*, Lent 1902, held at the John Rylands Institute in the Ashburne Hall Archive.

93 Recounted to the author by a former resident. Also mentioned in Lowe (2002), p. 51.

94 Lowe (2002), p. 50.

gown ‘with a 1” red border around the flap collar’). The whereabouts of this gown today is unknown. To offer a personal experience, when I came up to university in 2022 I had been reliably informed by recent material online that as a resident of Hulme Hall I would be issued with a gown. Gowns did not, however, appear until the second formal of the year when two former members of the JCR committee conjured up enough for the students on the high table.<sup>95</sup> In early 2023 we counted the JCR’s gown stock (about enough for half the Hall), which had been briefly misplaced. By the February formal they were in use again. Today gowns are optional—but largely popular—for formal dinners at the Hall. There are fewer formal dinners a year at Hulme Hall today than in the past, and the freshers’ handbook for the 2023–24 academic year at Hulme Hall has toned down its terms from ‘Wearing gowns to formal meals is a requirement for residency’<sup>96</sup> (in 2003) to: ‘... undergraduate gowns ... will be offered by the JCR free of charge ... Postgraduates are welcome to wear any other academic dress to which they are entitled.’<sup>97</sup>

St Anselm Hall likely adopted gowns around 1922 ‘following the pattern of Hulme’<sup>98</sup> and today they are required for frequent formal dinners and at weekly chapel—the Hall is considered something of an incongruity in Manchester for these traditions.<sup>99</sup> From 2021 to 2023 there were protests at St Anselm Hall against wearing gowns to three dinners a week, which led to dinner boycotts and eventually a table for students not wearing gowns was permitted. Despite this gowns remain fairly popular at the Hall and the more relaxed nature of regular formals (compared to less frequent dinners at Hulme or Wills, where most students wear formal attire under their gowns) has led to the adoption of something like the St Andrews’ approach to undergraduate gowns: thrown quickly over casual clothing.<sup>100</sup> Although the attitude can hardly be described as going beyond events where gowns are required, the Hall has worn gowns for such impromptu ceremonials as the ‘funeral of “Eric” the hedgehog’ in 2019.<sup>101</sup> Since the recent closure of the Hall bar, gangs of undergraduates in gowns walking across Victoria Park in search of refreshment are not an unknown sight.

Manchester and Bristol seem to be the main pockets of gown-wearing. The only other example I have been able to find of recent years is that of Devonshire Hall at the University of Leeds, which opened in 1928. It was structured in the ‘traditional “Oxbridge” style’<sup>102</sup> and there is some evidence that gowns are still in use for formal dinners. The Hall information page on the University’s website included a quote from a student that ‘Our formal dinners are great; everyone dresses up and wears University

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95 It should be noted that as Manchester halls do not have fellows or academic staff, the high table is used by the pastoral staff, the executive committee of the JCR, and any guests.

96 Hulme Hall, *Residents’ Handbook*, 2002–03, held at the University of Manchester Library Archive and Special Collections. Reference: GB 133 HHH/2/10/14.

97 Hulme Hall JCR, *Welcome Hulme, Information* (pamphlet in small circulation).

98 Lowe (2002), p. 52.

99 Ella Robinson, ‘Slems Is Known As the Weirdest University Halls in Manchester. That’s Exactly How the Students Like it’, *The Mill*, 25 November 2023, at <manchestermill.co.uk/p/slems-is-known-as-the-weirdest-university> [retrieved 28 April 2024].

100 Keenan, pp. 105–06.

101 St Anselm Hall Association, ‘Life in Hall’, *St Anselm Hall Archive*, at <stanselmhall.wixsite.com/stanselmhallarchive/blank>.

102 University of Leeds Conferences and Events, *Devonshire Hall*, at <conferencesandevents.leeds.ac.uk/devonshire-hall/> [retrieved 7 February 2024].



Wikimedia Commons

**Fig. 15.** A formal dinner at St. Anselm Hall in October 2020.



Edward Teather

**Fig. 16.** Students in Manchester undergraduate gowns in the Hulme Hall bar before a formal dinner, February 2023.

robes to have a sit-down meal together<sup>103</sup> though the current page does not mention academic dress.<sup>104</sup> Groves has suggested that a ‘mystery item’ shown to members of the Burgon Society—‘an aged undergraduate gown with bell sleeves and facings edged with pinkish/red ribbon and red corded yoke’ – could have come from a Leeds hall,<sup>105</sup> though this description seems to fit the Victoria University of Manchester students’ gown held in the Burgon Society Archives (Fig. 3).<sup>106</sup>

Were it not for the halls it is conceivable that Manchester undergraduate dress could never have progressed beyond a mention at the 1902 jubilee, and that with the removal of enforced requirements to wear gowns in lectures at Bristol they too would have vanished; however, these institutions must be credited almost entirely with keeping the tradition of undergraduate dress not only nominally present but a living part of day-to-day student life in small parts of a few civic universities. Though these universities as a whole are not necessarily those ‘at which “tradition” is embraced’ to an institutional degree, these halls should be considered a part of the ‘growing pockets of resistance’, noted by Keenan.<sup>107</sup> This gap is clear. Even as undergraduate dress slipped out of university calendars it remained a part of hall regulations at a number of traditional halls, and though it has fallen out of use steadily alongside the decline of formal dinners it remains a part of hall life in the twenty-first century.

### Other uses of undergraduate dress

In most universities the day-to-day wearing of academic dress has all-but vanished. Beyond halls of residence it should be noted that some universities have found re-

<sup>103</sup> University of Leeds. Devonshire Hall, at <[web.archive.org/web/20210419060328/https://accommodation.leeds.ac.uk/residence/4/devonshire-hall](http://web.archive.org/web/20210419060328/https://accommodation.leeds.ac.uk/residence/4/devonshire-hall)> [retrieved 7 February 2024].

<sup>104</sup> University of Leeds. *Devonshire Hall*, at <[accommodation.leeds.ac.uk/residence/4/devonshire-hall](http://accommodation.leeds.ac.uk/residence/4/devonshire-hall)> [retrieved 7 February 2024].

<sup>105</sup> Philip Lowe, ‘And a Good Time Was Had by All ... in Manchester’, *Burgon Notes*, 20 (June 2012), pp. 2–3 (p. 3), at <[burgon.org.uk/about-us/notes](http://burgon.org.uk/about-us/notes)>.

<sup>106</sup> See images WBS-284 (f) and WBS-284 (b) <[burgon.org.uk/archive/victoria-manchester](http://burgon.org.uk/archive/victoria-manchester)> [retrieved 28 April 2024].

<sup>107</sup> Keenan, p. 106.

formed use for their undergraduate gowns and that others have seen a surprising length of use: At St David's College Lampeter the undergraduate gowns—of which there were variations for scholars<sup>108</sup>—remained in use until 1971. Today student petitions to reinstate gown-wearing at modern universities would be surprising to say the least, certainly if they were followed by significant support. The unique undergraduate gown of the UEA was not mentioned in a 2015 suggestion from the international student ambassadors that formal dinners be brought in at the university.<sup>109</sup>

At several universities the undergraduate gown has morphed into an usher's gown to be worn at ceremonies—this could stem from practice employed at least at Manchester whereby undergraduates were paid to be ushers but were required to wear an undergraduate gown, long after the gowns' official status had vanished. It should be noted that Manchester since seems to have adopted a purple gown with a yellow stripe around the yoke for the use of ushers at ceremonies—bearing a similar design to the old undergraduate gowns, but also to previously used stewards' gowns.<sup>110</sup>

[A]nyone attending a graduation ceremony of the University [of Bradford] would see a great number of individuals wearing undergraduate gowns ... usually undergraduates assisting with the ceremony or other individuals who are not entitled to wear any other form of academic dress.<sup>111</sup>

Jackson reveals that Manchester undergraduate gowns have 'been pressed into service on a largely ad hoc basis as ushers' gowns at a number of other British universities' including Warwick,<sup>112</sup> which never specified any undergraduate dress.<sup>113</sup> It is of note that whilst this could be considered the adoption of robes for officers, other universities specify bachelors' gowns for non-graduates participating in ceremonies.<sup>114</sup> Even at universities where academic dress is rarely seen, the occasion of a graduation remains a spectacle of hoods and gowns where universities show themselves in their full quasi-medieval splendour. Similar occasions have resurrected the undergraduate gown at Manchester, with 'unexpected' use of the undergraduate gown at royal visits as late as 1959.<sup>115</sup>

Student officials have also been enrobed. At the University of Exeter between the years 1962 and 1997 the scholars' gown was 'worn exclusively by the president of the Students' Guild on very formal occasions, such as attendance at the University Court',<sup>116</sup> and at Bradford a set of unique gowns was designed for the officers of the Stu-

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108 Shaw (2011), p. 238.

109 Chau Nguye, 'Hall Dinner in UEA Why Not?', *UEA Notes from Norfolk* (2015) <[uea-notesfromnorfolk.blogspot.com/2015/08/hall-dinner-in-uea-why-not.html](http://uea-notesfromnorfolk.blogspot.com/2015/08/hall-dinner-in-uea-why-not.html)> [retrieved 22 June 2024].

110 Lowe (2002), p. 49.

111 Clarke, pp. 25–26.

112 Nicholas Jackson, 'The Development of Academic Dress in the University of Warwick', *TBS*, 8 (2008), pp. 19–58 (p. 34), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1061.

113 Shaw (2011), p. 416.

114 An example of this is the University of Stirling. See Colin Fleming, 'The Academic Dress of the University of Stirling, 1967–2006', *TBS*, 6 (2006), pp. 54–76 (p. 60), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1050.

115 Lowe (2002), p. 49.

116 Quy, p. 44.

dents' Union: 'not strictly undergraduate gowns in the traditional sense, they certainly constitute part of the academic dress for some undergraduates.'<sup>117</sup> On occasion the odd tradition has kept undergraduate dress in use, though not as generally as in the halls.

## Conclusions

The vast majority of the UK's universities have been established since 1880, and there has been an evident decline in the adoption of undergraduate academical dress as time has gone on and the level of formality associated with university life has decreased. Most of the universities established between 1880 and 1960 either have or have had some form of undergraduate academic dress; however, only one post-1992 university has done the same.

Academic dress, at both the civic and plate-glass universities, was conceived as a means to create a single body corporate amongst the staff and students of the university; however, the differing approaches to university life at the largely non-residential civics in comparison to Oxbridge did not permit the widespread use of undergraduate costume to continue for a great length of time, as it has at the ancient universities. Halls of residence at the civics aimed to bring something of college life into the new universities and succeeded in ensuring the survival of academic dress to the present-day in a few cases. A few plate-glass universities experimented with enforcing academical dress upon their undergraduate students; however, this was not successful in the face of changing university culture during the 1960s, and it seems that by 1970 none of the then-new universities even encouraged the wearing of gowns in lectures.

In 1909 the University of Bristol gowns committee discovered that gowns were regularly worn by undergraduates at Cambridge, Oxford, Durham, Newcastle, Bangor, Cardiff, and St Andrews (and further research should have added Lampeter and Aberystwyth to that list); worn occasionally at Glasgow and Aberdeen; and used for ceremony at London, Manchester, and Birmingham. Today it seems that academical dress is regularly worn by undergraduates at Cambridge, Oxford, Durham, and St Andrews; worn occasionally at Manchester, Bristol, and possibly at Leeds and Reading; and used by ushers at Bradford, Warwick, and possibly at other institutions.

## Acknowledgements

Chris Williams took the photos in the Burgon Society Archive. Figure 1 is reproduced with the kind permission of Nick Chadwick. Figure 2 is reproduced with the kind permission of Alex Kerr. Figures 7 and 8 are reproduced with the kind permission of John Horton.

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117 Clarke, p. 26.