

Editor's Note

What have we learned in the last year? Masks work, isolation makes one glum, and gowns aren't going away anytime soon.

The first two are no surprise. Science works despite the sceptics, and time with friends nourishes the soul.

I would have been hesitant, on the other hand, to predict that academic gowns would remain popular, despite the social science research published in the *Transactions* showing their popularity. Perhaps I was a bit of a sceptic too.

The ceremonial use of academic dress is thriving even though the pandemic is whip-sawing many other social patterns. We've learned to change how we shop, how we travel, and of course how we dress.

University uniforms, however, haven't changed, and as a symbol of success in a centuries-old rite of passage their very uniformity is a point in their favour. Even though robes appear (to some) anachronistic and awkward in the twenty-first century, as elements of a tradition they give us comfort in uncertain times. Students may not be able to study in the library, but when they pose for photos in their gowns they carry forward the outward representation of their accomplishment.

Losing the library as a place to study for exams certainly frustrated students, but students weren't the only ones left without a critical resource. Researchers also found themselves unable to browse the stacks or delve into archives, which slowed their scholarly work or put it on hold entirely. Many of our authors look into historical university records, and while a vast cache of old books is available online, archival material is rarely uploaded. You can't open a cardboard box over the internet or pick up ephemera and turn it over, seeking a hidden clue.

Yet even with the limitations of lockdowns, we are pleased to present another abundant collection of research and ideas. A handful of the articles in Volume 20 did not fit into Volume 19, and I thank those authors for their patience in bringing their discoveries to light. The result is the set of eleven articles that follow and our special issue on the formation of the Burgon Society, a history inspired in part by the Society's twentieth anniversary last year.

The editors and reviewers, who joined me in reading and re-reading more than 100,000 published words, hope this year's *Transactions* helps make up for closed libraries and all these months apart.

—*Stephen Wolgast*