

# The Development of the Academic Dress of the University of Oxford 1920–2012

By Andrew James Peter North

## Introduction

One might expect that the well-trodden ground of Oxford academic dress would yield nothing new or surprising, but this is far from the truth. With an institution as old as Oxford, many onlookers assume that because they know Oxford's traditions that they know Oxford's rules and so do not need to consult statute. An excellent example is the number of undergraduates these days who profess that one may not wear the square cap until graduation, whereas the most cursory glance at University regulations would show their belief false. Also, I would argue that the academic dress of Oxford is of particular importance as its gowns and hoods are used as templates for many other universities in the United Kingdom and further afield. Thus an understanding of the nature and origin of the current state of academic dress is essential.

In the nineteenth century, Oxford and Cambridge lost their monopoly on university education in England with the establishment of the University of Durham and the University of London. This, along with the growth of new areas of research such as science, led Oxford to increase the number of the degrees it offered.<sup>1</sup>

In 1895 the BLitt and BSc were created, and in 1900 the DSc and DLitt. Next, with competition from the Continent and the US, and with academics increasingly moving abroad to further their careers, Oxford led the way in introducing the new research degree, the DPhil, to the UK in 1917.

Despite the growth in degrees and of universities, there has been declining use of academic dress within the University (though admittedly its use is much higher than at other institutions). Whereas in the creation of the DSc and DLitt, academic dress was debated by the academics of the time, as the century developed opinions on academic dress became the preserve of interested persons (like Charles Franklyn and George Shaw) and the robemakers.

This article tracks how an ancient university manages to maintain and keep its traditions whilst evolving with modern trends. I also believe it tells the story of how a fairly logical and traditional system of academic dress is thrown into chaos by the explosion of new degrees and the attempted imposition of alien concepts such as 'faculty colours'.

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<sup>1</sup> This seems to signal the start of the modern trend towards proliferation, culminating in each course of study being awarded a different degree (MChem, MPhys etc.). Traditionally, at least at undergraduate level, even very different courses of study resulted in the same degree (e.g. BA in Classics or BA in Mathematics).

The article begins by looking at two attempts to reform Oxford Academic Dress, the first by Charles Franklyn and the second by the University itself. Both attempts failed, but for different reasons. The article goes on to examine in detail the *Register of Colours and Materials of Gowns and Hoods for Degrees of the University of Oxford*, one of Oxford's many attempts over the centuries to specify and standardize her academic dress. Finally, it raises the question, 'Where to from here? Continual chaos or large scale reform?'

## Reforms

In the course of the twentieth century there have been several attempts to implement a large-scale reform of the academic dress of the University. The reasons are many.

### *Charles Franklyn's subcommittee*

From the spring of 1941<sup>2</sup> to 18 October 1954<sup>3</sup> there was the prospect of a major overhaul in the academic dress of Oxford University. Charles Franklyn seemed to have taken advantage of his working in Oxford<sup>4</sup> by making contact with the Vice-Chancellor, George Stuart Gordon, and asking for Oxford to undertake similar reforms to those that Cambridge made in the previous decade.<sup>5</sup>

In the minutes of the Oxford and Cambridge Standing Joint Committee of 20 June 1941, the Vice-Chancellor informed the committee that he had been contacted by a Dr Franklyn regarding the academic dress of the University. Gordon stated he had been urged to initiate reforms in academic dress to 'make it more historically correct'. Gordon raised the issue with the committee to ask whether the 1932–34 reforms at Cambridge had been worth the trouble. He was told by a Mr Harrison (presumably of Cambridge University) that because no very great changes had been made, no objections had been raised from within the University or by the tradesmen.<sup>6</sup>

Franklyn's idea was that a special subcommittee be formed by the Vice-Chancellor to bring forward proposals for the reform. He, naturally, would serve on the committee with Strickland Gibson and one or two other experts.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that the suggestion was taken seriously by Gordon and his successor, Sir William David Ross, in the same year. No action was taken immediately owing to pressures of the war;<sup>8</sup> the University was already having trouble with the supply of undergraduate gowns.<sup>9</sup> When the war finished, another Vice-Chancellor was in charge, Sir Richard Winn

2 Franklyn, letter to the University of 28 Nov. 1944. Oxford University Archives, UR/PCD/1 Precedents and Procedures, Files 1–4. Letters hereafter noted are located in the same files.

3 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 219 (1954), p. xl.

4 Minutes of the Oxford and Cambridge Standing Joint Committee 20 June 1941.

5 For information regarding the reforms of the academic dress of the University of Cambridge during 1932–34, consult: Franklyn (1970), pp. 176–98. See also Nicholas Groves et al., 'The Academic Robes of Graduates of the University of Cambridge from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day,' *TBS*, 13 (2013), pp. 74–100.

6 Franklyn (1970), pp. 176–98. For details of the reforms, see Groves et al., (2013), pp. 88–82.

7 Franklyn, letter of 3 April 1945. Franklyn wrote several letters to various people within the University insisting that he would have to be made an MA in order to serve on the subcommittee. Gibson: Keeper of the Archives 1927–45. One or two others: Franklyn, Letter of 13 Feb. 1946.

8 Franklyn, letter of 28 Nov. 1944.

9 W. D. Ross, letter of 19 May 1943.

Livingstone, who, in Franklyn's words, "[wasn't] one scrap interested" in the proposed subcommittee.<sup>10</sup>

This did not deter Franklyn, who continued to write letters to the University enquiring when the subcommittee would be established.<sup>11</sup> He had even drawn up his own proposals for Oxford academic dress:<sup>12</sup>

**BA** Black silk lined white fur.

**MA** Black corded ottoman silk lined with crimson silk.

**BD** Black cloth or black corded ottoman silk lined with fine ribbed black silk, of the same shape as the D.D.

**DD** Scarlet cloth lined with fine ribbed black silk.

**BCL** Dark blue corded silk lined with white fur.

**DCL** Scarlet cloth lined dark blue silk.

**BMus** Dark purple corded silk lined with white fur. (This used to be dark blue like BCL.) It ought to be of pink satin lined white fur.

**DMus** Cream watered damask silk lined with pink satin, of the D.D. shape.

**BSc** Grey corded silk lined white fur.

**DSc** Scarlet cloth lined with grey silk.

**BLitt** Light blue corded silk lined white fur.

**DLitt** Scarlet cloth lined light blue silk.

The Medical Hoods, next senior after Law, should be reorganized as under:—

**BM** Crimson corded silk lined white fur.

**DM** Scarlet cloth lined crimson silk.

**MCh** Black cloth lined with crimson silk, same shape as B.D.

**BPhil** Dark blue corded watered [*sic*] silk, lined with white fur.

**DPhil** Scarlet cloth lined with dark blue watered silk.

N.B. All doctors' hoods, BD, and MCh, should have full-sized hood capes, hood liripipe of the DD shape. All doctors except DD should wear round velvet lay cap. (This scheme is discussed in the next section.)

However, because the war was just over the pressure on the University was still high. The Registrar, Douglas Veale, describes, in a letter of 1947, how Oxford had been living 'hand to mouth' since World War II owing to depleted staff and an increase in student numbers.<sup>13</sup> Veale did suggest in various correspondence (not just to Franklyn) that the issue of academic dress would be tackled as soon as possible.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this, in 1948, the Hebdomadal Council decided to fob off Franklyn<sup>15</sup> by relegating the issue of a subcommittee on academic dress to business pending.<sup>16</sup> Again he was not deterred, and tried to keep the issue of the subcommittee on the agenda by writing to

<sup>10</sup> Franklyn, letter of 8 Feb. 1946.

<sup>11</sup> Franklyn, letters of 13 Feb. 1946, 7 March 1947, 22 March 1947 and 22 June 1947.

<sup>12</sup> There is no date on this scheme, however given its place in the file and in the chronology of events, it is likely to have been produced in 1947–48.

<sup>13</sup> Veale, letter of 9 July 1947.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. and Veale, letter of 26 April 1947.

<sup>15</sup> Note of 21 July 1952.

<sup>16</sup> Hebdomadal Council Acts (1948), Vol. 199, p. xxxii.

the University.<sup>17</sup> However, as time went on the appetite for reform of the University's academic dress dried up, almost certainly due to successive Vice-Chancellors, who, like Sir Richard Livingstone, did not care about the matter. It was finally put to bed on 18 October 1954 when the Hebdomadal Council voted 11 to 5 'not to revive the question of the reform of academic dress.'<sup>18</sup>

It is unclear whether this decision was communicated to Franklyn, but he did not raise the issue of the subcommittee again until two years later as a side note in a letter in which he explains how he has secured the 'correct blue corded silk cloth for B.Litt. (Oxon.) [*sic*].'<sup>19</sup>

Franklyn was lucky to have originally contacted two Vice-Chancellors who were receptive to the reforms in academic dress. One cannot help thinking, if it were not for World War II, there may have been the distinct possibility of the subcommittee's being created. However, the War delayed the issue until there were people in charge who were not interested. As the time since the Cambridge reforms increased, there also seemed to be less of a motive to initiate similar ones at Oxford; the people who had been involved in the 1930s would have departed and the effect of the changes forgotten.

### *The existing scheme*

The question that one must ask is: was reform of academic dress necessary at that time? When Franklyn drew up his scheme, Oxford academic dress, as usual, constituted two forms: what the statute dictated, and what was actually being practised. The system being practised was a fairly simple one:<sup>20</sup>

**DD** [f5] Scarlet cloth lined black silk.

**DCL and DM** [f5] Scarlet cloth lined crimson silk.

**DSc and DLitt** [f5] Scarlet cloth lined grey silk.

**DMus** [f5] Cream damask lined cherry silk.<sup>21</sup>

**DPhil** [f5] Scarlet cloth lined dark blue silk.

**MCh** [s1] or [s2] Black silk lined and bound blue silk.<sup>22</sup>

**MA** [s1] or [s2] Black silk lined and bound crimson silk.

**BD** [f5] Black silk lined black silk.

**BCL and BM** [s1] or [s2] Light blue silk half lined and bound fur.

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17 Veale, letter of 2 March 1949.

18 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 219 (1954), p. xl.

19 Franklyn, letter 14 March 1956.

20 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 199 (1948), p. xxxii, and Haycraft (1948), pp. 15–16. They are annotated by the Groves classification system for academic dress: [f5] = Oxford full (doctor's) shape, [s1] = Oxford simple shape and [s2] = Burgon.

21 This is likely to be the case in 1947 as no notes were added to Franklyn's scheme in Hebdomadal Council report. The colour of the silk is often still described as cherry, but in reality today it is a lighter red/pink/cerise colour.

22 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 79, n. 2. The shade of blue in use at the time cannot be precisely determined but it is likely to be a dark hue. This could be suggested by looking how the hood was described in the surrounding decades: Buxton and Gibson (1935) says it should be 'light blue (not navy)', the 'not navy' probably an indication of supposed incorrect practice. The Registry of Colours (1957) has the blue down as a mid-blue. The Hebdomadal Council report stated it was light blue (this may have been in reference to Buxton and Gibson). Haycraft has the hood down as blue and has a drawing of it in dark blue on p. ix.

**BSc and BLitt** [s1] or [s2] Blue-grey silk half lined and bound fur.

**BMus** [s1] or [s2] Violet silk half lined and bound fur.<sup>23</sup>

**BPhil** [s1] or [s2] Blue silk lined and bound white silk.<sup>24</sup>

**BA** [s1] or [s2] Black silk half lined and bound white fur.

The hood was intended to represent the wearer's status within the University. However, the practice outlined above was different from what was prescribed; according to statute, all bachelors other than BA and BD should have worn the same hood as the BM and BCL.<sup>25</sup> The system is not totally logical, but was not the chaos that Franklyn described.<sup>26</sup> There was probably an argument for writing into statute the practice of the time. However, one can empathize with those who did not want a complete overhaul of the system, as it would have been quite a bit of effort for an unneeded change.

Franklyn's criterion for initiating a change was making the academic dress 'more historically correct'.<sup>27</sup> Did his scheme fulfil this? Franklyn's assertion implies that, at some point in time, the 'correct' academic dress was dropped or mutated into what was then being worn in the 1940s.<sup>28</sup> There were two 'types' of degrees in Oxford at that point: those introduced after 1895, and those 'historic' degrees which were being awarded before that date.

Franklyn's scheme is one based around faculty colours: black for divinity, dark blue for civil law, purple/pink for music, grey for science, light blue for letters, crimson for medicine, and dark blue watered silk for philosophy. Bachelors' hoods were to be of either the Oxford simple or Burgon shape<sup>29</sup> made of the faculty silk and half lined fur. Doctors were to have a hood in the Oxford full shape, in scarlet lined with the faculty silk. Although not stated, it is assumed the doctors' robes would have been brought into line with the new colours. The exceptions in his system are Arts, DMus and BD which he left alone, and the MCh which was to be of the Oxford full shape, in black cloth lined with crimson silk.

The first thing to note is that Oxford never had a faculty colour system. The gown and hood represented the wearer's status within the University.<sup>30</sup> In fact London was the first university in the UK to have a faculty colour system, in 1844.<sup>31</sup> So the premise of the system is most certainly not historically correct. The colours Franklyn chose for the faculties

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23 Described by Haycraft as violet.

24 Likely to be some shade of blue silk half lined and bound fur, or dark blue silk lined and bound white silk: contradictory evidence makes it unclear what practice was; Haycraft says dark blue lined white.

25 Statutes (from 1895), Title xiv §3: *De Habitu Acedmico singulis Gradibus et Facultatibus compente*. Full statute with translation can be found in A. J. Ross (2010), pp. 66–67.

26 Franklyn, letter of 21 June 1947.

27 Minutes of the Oxford and Cambridge Standing Joint Committee, 20 June 1941.

28 This possibly raises a deeper question: what is 'correct' academic dress or even historically correct? How far back in time does one go? Are the statutes themselves correct? Even when codifying existing practices, statutes can get them wrong! And mutations happen in dress before statutes can be changed to reflect these.

29 Implied by Franklyn (though not explicitly stated).

30 Christianson (2003) p. 25, Groves (ed.) (2011) p. 3 and Buxton and Gibson (1935) p. 38. It is noted in A. J. Ross (2010), p. 51, n. 17, that Statute xiv (which governed academic dress until 1970) specified that graduates should wear gowns 'suitable to their degree and faculty'. However, this is likely to refer to the type of the faculty (lay or clerical) instead of to a faculty colour (which was never the practice).

31 Christianson (2005), p. 80.

should also be examined. Black for divinity is obvious, as this was the existing colour for the DD and BD lining.

Franklyn kept the full shape for the BD hood whereas it would seem to have been one of those anomalies that he disliked so much about the existing state of Oxford dress.<sup>32</sup> So why maintain the full shape? There were, of course, no historical grounds upon which the BD should be given a simple shape hood, as it has always taken the full.<sup>33</sup> However, this argument did not stop him making other changes in the system which were not historically correct.<sup>34</sup> Another reason for keeping the full shape is the method of supplication for the BD.

The BD is awarded on the basis of a thesis or a portfolio of published work.<sup>35</sup> There is some logic in giving the BD the full shape hood, which is given to doctors, if it can be argued that it is conferred on the same grounds.

Dark blue is an interesting choice for civil law.<sup>36</sup> Both civil law and medicine have the blue fur-lined hood for bachelors and crimson on their doctors' full-dress robe and hood.

Furthermore, the MCh has a black Oxford simple or Burgon hood lined blue silk.

However, the shade in use at the time was of a light blue, by no means as dark as the dark blue used for the BPhil and DPhil.<sup>37</sup> So why did Franklyn choose dark blue (instead of crimson or light blue) for the BCL, and was the choice historically correct? There cannot be a definite answer to this question. The only historic association between law and blue at Oxford is in the BCL hood.<sup>38</sup> However, influence may have come from Bologna, where law and blue were linked.<sup>39</sup> So there is some historical precedent to suggest why blue was chosen over crimson.

Dark blue was almost certainly suggested in preference to light blue because dark blue was the shade used in the BCL hood c. 1815<sup>40</sup> and Franklyn, in his quest for historical correctness, would have wanted to bring the BCL back to its 'original' shade.<sup>41</sup>

With dark blue used for Law, it seems logical to link crimson with Medicine. This would be a sensible choice, as it had been used for the DM doctoral robes and hoods since the Laudian Statutes. However there was a slight divergence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from the crimson, as it had a pink silk.<sup>42</sup> But by the end of the nineteenth century the colours had coalesced into the crimson.<sup>43</sup> Indeed there was even unsanctioned

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32 Franklyn, letter of 22 March 1947.

33 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 83 and Plate 11B. See section where the BD is discussed below.

34 cf. Introduction of a faculty colour system, DCL, BSc, DLitt and MCh.

35 University of Oxford Examination Regulations (2011), p. 973. The BD originally took the same length of time (seven years) as a doctorate in a lay faculty. The doctorate in Divinity took twice this long.

36 Unfortunately for the readers of *The Medical World* on 31 July 1942, Franklyn asserts in his article 'Academical Dress: A Brief Sketch from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century, with Especial Reference to Doctors,' that Oxford DCLs can wear a scarlet cloth hood lined blue silk.

37 Ibid. and Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 39.

38 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 85.

39 An extensive discussion of the origin of the colour blue in the BCL and BM can be found in Christianson (2003), pp. 24–29.

40 Christianson (2003), p. 25.

41 Franklyn, letters of 7 March 1947, 22 March 1947, 21 June 1947 and 14 March 1956.

42 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 76.

43 Ross, A. J., (2012), p. 51, n. 22.

use of scarlet silk in the MCh hood in the early twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> Thus it seems there is a historical precedent for the selected colour.

Why did Franklyn choose to give MCh a full shape? There is no historical basis on which to make this change.<sup>45</sup> There may be two reasons for his decision. First of all, if the hood were to be of either simple shape it may get confused with the MA hood (as they would only differ in the material of which the hood is made; silk for MA, cloth for MCh). However, this seems unlikely to be the prevailing factor, as Franklyn was quite willing to make the DPhil and DCL almost identical. So concern for academic dress that looks similar was not of great importance for him. A more likely reason is the same as that for the BD, the MCh being a degree for which any member with sufficient standing may supplicate by thesis or a portfolio of published work.<sup>46</sup> Hence, following on from the doctors and BD it does seem logical in Franklyn's new system to afford the MCh a full hood.

The wording in Franklyn's choice for the BMus gives a potted history of the hood colour. Indeed the BMus did take blue, and in 1792 it was of a 'powdered blue' shade.<sup>47</sup> However, by the time Franklyn drew up his scheme, it had mutated into a violet colour.<sup>48</sup> Franklyn has rejected the historic link to blue and maintained the status quo. This is almost certainly because he was trying to impose a faculty colour system by reserving blue to law. It seems that he wanted the colour for music (pink) to derive from the facings and sleeve linings of the DMus gown.<sup>49</sup> It is unclear, therefore, why he rejected a faculty colour for music. Perhaps he thought that 'dark purple' and 'pink' were close enough, or that music could take two colours. Or maybe he thought a pink hood lined fur would not be as aesthetically pleasing as a dark purple one. However it was decided, music (along with arts and divinity) emerged from his system unaltered from their existing state.

Franklyn's choice for science and letters seems completely arbitrary. These degrees were introduced after 1895, and thus there is no historical precedent which can be referred to.

The choice of grey for the DSc/DLitt was perhaps an inoffensive compromise,<sup>50</sup> and BSc/BLitt were given the BCL/BM hood, an obvious choice as they shared similar rank, thus continuing the idea that academic dress refers to one's position within the University. However, by 1935 the bachelors' hood had moved to a blue-grey.<sup>51</sup> Thus the bachelors of science and of letters shared one colour, and the doctors shared another. In choosing faculty colours for science and for letters (as Franklyn did), which one gets grey and which gets blue-grey (presumably the 'light blue' to which Franklyn was referring in his scheme) is based on the whim of the person who decides. So there is no historical paradigm upon which Franklyn based these colours.

Franklyn was not too impressed by the choice of dark blue for the DPhil gown.<sup>52</sup> He even suggested at one point that philosophy should take light green!<sup>53</sup> However, by the

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44 Groves, N. (ed.) (2011), p. 114.

45 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 79, n. 2.

46 University of Oxford Examination Regulations (2011), p. 953.

47 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 87.

48 Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 40.

49 See list on p. 103: 'BMus: ... It ought to be of pink satin lined white fur ... DMus: lined with pink satin.'

50 A. J. Ross (2010), p. 58.

51 Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 40. See the discussion of BLitt and BSc below.

52 Franklyn, letters of 7 March 1947 and 21 June 1947.

53 Ibid. letter of 21 June 1947.

time he came to draw up his scheme he kept the dark blue. This was historically correct, insofar as this is the only colour philosophy has ever taken at Oxford.<sup>54</sup> Franklyn does attempt to differentiate between philosophy and law by indicating that philosophy should have watered silk. Quite a subtle difference between the then lowest and the second-highest doctorate.<sup>55</sup> Franklyn probably kept the dark blue not just for historical correctness but also to make his scheme more likely to be accepted by the University, as it would be unlikely to drastically alter a gown it had brought into existence only thirty years previously.<sup>56</sup>

The BA and MA remained unchanged by Franklyn. These being among the oldest and most commonly awarded degrees, there was no historical reason for them to be changed.<sup>57</sup> Indeed Franklyn, being a scholar of academic dress, would not want to impose a faculty colour onto arts. Not only because there was no precedent, but also there would be no appetite in the University or among the robemakers to change iconic Oxford hoods.

At the time of the proposed scheme there was a strange situation with the caps worn with full dress. Only holders of a DCL, DM or DMus were afforded the bonnet. The rest (DD, DSc, DLitt and DPhil) used the square cap (or the ladies' soft cap) in full dress.<sup>58</sup> Before the introduction of the post-1895 doctorates (DSc, DLitt and DPhil) the situation was logical. The doctors from the lay faculties (medicine, civil law and music) were influenced by the lay fashion during the sixteenth century and began to wear the bonnet in full dress.<sup>59</sup> The DDs, unaffected by this secular trend, maintained their cap which would evolve into the square cap.<sup>60</sup> Thus a distinction was made on the grounds as to whether the degree was in a lay or clerical faculty.

So why were DSc, DLitt and DPhil given a square cap? And was Franklyn right to give all doctors apart from DDs the bonnet? DPhils supplicated for their degrees through the faculty of arts.<sup>61</sup> Arts was considered as a clerical faculty (this is demonstrated in that arts and divinity are the only faculties not to wear the lay lace gown).<sup>62</sup> Thus, as one would expect, the DPhil took the square cap. However there are some anomalies. BPhils and DPhils in undress wear the lace gown,<sup>63</sup> which would imply philosophy should be treated as a lay faculty. There are arguments both ways for which headdress DPhils should wear. However, since a DPhil thesis can be offered in almost any subject, it would seem strange to require the lay gown and limit the cap to one of a clerical nature.

Much the same is true for DScs and DLitts. There seems to be no reason these degrees should wear a square cap as there is no clerical influence in these degrees.<sup>64</sup> Thus, providing them with a bonnet and a lay gown is probably more logical.

<sup>54</sup> For the background as to why dark blue was chosen for philosophy consult: A. J. Ross (2010), pp. 58-64.

<sup>55</sup> See <[http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml#\\_Toc28140155](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml#_Toc28140155)> (accessed 17 Dec. 2011).

<sup>56</sup> A. J. Ross (2010), p. 58.

<sup>57</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), pp. 79-82, 88-91.

<sup>58</sup> Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 27; Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 69; DD in full dress 'black square tasselled cap', p. 73. DCL, DM and DMus wear the round velvet bonnet.

<sup>59</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 68 and 69.

<sup>61</sup> A. J. Ross (2010), p. 62.

<sup>62</sup> Venables and Clifford (1957), pp. 14, 22 and 26.

<sup>63</sup> *Gazette*, Vol. 77, p. 114, *Gazette*, Vol. 47, p. 564.

<sup>64</sup> A. J. Ross (2010).

There is one notable item of apparel absent from Franklyn's list: the gown. From this it can be inferred that he had no qualms about the gowns which the University was using. Much like hoods, gowns reflected the wearer's status. BAs and MAs have their own gowns, all postgraduate degrees (except BD which now gets the DD gown) have the lace gown. Doctors in undress wear the lace gown with an extra panel of gimp (except DD, who wears a silk MA gown with a cord and button on the yoke). They also (apart from the DMus) get a convocation habit (if a member of convocation) and the scarlet robe of the Oxford doctor's pattern faced and the sleeves covered in the relevant silk (or velvet in the case of the DD).<sup>65</sup>

In trying to impose faculty colours onto Oxford, Franklyn's aim of restoring the academic dress to a historically sound footing was flawed.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, in the process he raised interesting questions about the nature of the academic dress of the University at that point and how it would adapt for the future. The BPhil was the first sign of what was to become an array of hoods introduced in the next half century. Introduced in 1946, the degree was originally assigned the lay bachelor's hood,<sup>67</sup> it soon managed to obtain its own hood.<sup>68</sup> This would herald an era where almost every new degree would be given its own hood regardless of standing within the University. One cannot help thinking that Franklyn would have had some interesting ideas about how the academic dress could be reformed today. He also touched on some important questions about the origins of the colour of certain hoods, for example the blue in the lay bachelor's hood and its relation to law, and the reasoning behind the different shapes (i.e. if BD gets the full shape why not MCh?). Caps worn by doctors in full dress was another interesting point; it may seem strange to modern eyes (and possibly viewers in the 1940s) that not all doctors wore the bonnet. Franklyn's proposals have allowed for a critical examination of Oxford academic dress of the mid-twentieth century and with the thoughts from these in mind, a rationalization of modern practices may have some recent context.

### *The 1992 resolution*

The issue of reforming Oxford academic dress was raised again in 1992. In this instance, it was led by the robemakers.<sup>69</sup> It was the introduction of the MEd, BTh, MTh and reintroduction of the BEd that precipitated this proposal. The rising price of materials, especially the lace, and the introduction of more and more new degrees led to a situation where the robemakers wanted to initiate a critical review of the state of academic dress.<sup>70</sup>

After John Venables, of the Shepherd & Woodward group, highlighted this issue to the University, academic dress was debated at the Hebdomadal Council. The motivation for this move is clearly stated in the agenda:

The introduction of new degrees and redesignation [*sic*] of others in recent years has led to an increasingly illogical situation regarding the styles of academic dress as now worn.<sup>71</sup>

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65 Venables and Clifford (1957), pp. 14, 16 and 18.

66 Did it even need to be changed past the extent of codifying existing practice?

67 [s1] or [s2] blue half lined and bound fur.

68 [s1] or [s2] dark blue lined and bound white silk.

69 Venables, letter of 26 May 1992.

70 Ibid.

71 Hebdomadal Council Agenda 26 Oct. 1992.

It proposed that degrees be split into three groups: first degrees, graduate degrees, and doctorates. Holders of first degrees would wear the BA gown. Holders of graduate degrees would wear one of the two gowns currently in use—the MA gown or the lay bachelor's gown—and doctors would continue to wear the gowns they had.<sup>72</sup> It was further suggested that the lace on the lay bachelors' gown should be replaced with braid, given that the lace was very expensive and difficult to obtain.<sup>73</sup>

It was agreed that graduate degrees should take the lay bachelors' gown with the substitution of braid for the lace, but that the doctors should continue to wear the original lace; it was also decided that all first degrees should use the BA gown, and the hood for all new first degrees (BTh, BEd) should be of the Burgon shape in black with a narrow band of colour appropriate to the degree, and the equivalent graduate degree (MTh, MEd) hood should be the same, but fully lined in the colour.<sup>74</sup> The exception was the MEng, which was a first degree: these would go dressed as the BA until admitted to Convocation, when they would go dressed as the MA.

When this was communicated to Venables he informed the University that a supplier of lace at a good price had been found so no substitution with braid was necessary.<sup>75</sup> This was noted at the next meeting of the Hebdomadal Council.<sup>76</sup>

How have these reforms worked in practice? It is certainly clear that this was a major change in the direction which future developments would take—prescribing the nature of the gown and hood. Despite the explosion in the number of masters'-level first degrees, the principle of taking the dress of a BA was maintained by them all.<sup>77</sup> There have been no new bachelors'-level first degrees added since this resolution, so no examination of its impact on this area can take place.

For graduate degrees it has not succeeded. The scheme was not maintained for the MFA.<sup>78</sup> The hood is [s2] yellow silk, lined and bound white silk. If the memorandum had been followed, it would have taken [s2] black silk lined and bound yellow silk.

Indeed, there is no mention of this decree in the choosing of the hood. As it was introduced seven years after the 1992 decree, it is possible that people had forgotten about its existence. Discussions about this hood refer to other graduate hoods (MLitt, MSc, MPhil, and MSt) but make no mention of the 1992 ruling.<sup>79</sup>

Another example of this ruling's being ignored is the MBA, which was introduced in 1996. The simple explanation is that there was no bachelor's equivalent from which to get a colour. So, instead of following the rules laid out in 1992 (which would have given a black hood lined with a colour), they simply copied the existing MLitt/MSc hood and changed the colour of the shell.<sup>80</sup>

Another thing the 1992 ruling did not allow for was the creation of new categories of degree, such as the professional doctorate, for which new principles had to be drawn up.

Even had this decree been adhered to, would it have been an historically sensitive advancement? For the doctorates, being unchanged, the obvious answer is yes.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> It is unknown what type of braid they had in mind.

<sup>74</sup> Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 333 (1992), p. xxxvi.

<sup>75</sup> Venables, letter of 9 Nov. 1992.

<sup>76</sup> Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 333 (1992), p. lviii.

<sup>77</sup> Until the most recent change: see Addendum.

<sup>78</sup> Hall, internal memorandum, 24 Sept. 1999.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Hebdomadal Council Agenda, 9 Dec. 1996.

However, for the bachelors' degrees, historical context has been completely ignored. Apart from BDs (which are unique) all bachelors' hoods up to the BPhil in 1946 contained fur (and it was the original intention for the BPhil to have had fur). Indeed, fur is the material associated with bachelors. The BFA and BEd hoods did not maintain this historical link when they omitted fur. Historically accurate hoods for these degrees would have been furred hoods.

Secondly, the proposed idea was to introduce a faculty colour system, something which has historically no place in Oxford, for all that it was brought in with the right intentions. With the introduction of more and more degrees the system of academic dress was heading for chaos (as we know it today), having some logical guidance on how new dress should be created would easily quell this.

However, the result of the change was not a returning to historical standing, but the implementation of a faculty system with the introduction of the narrow band of silk on bachelors' hood. One cannot help thinking these steps were to keep costs down, rather than to maintain the academic dress tradition.<sup>81</sup>

## The Register

### *Genesis of the Register*

Anyone wishing to discover the academic dress of the University of Oxford is directed by the University's Regulations to the *Register of Colours and Materials of Gowns and Hoods for Degrees of the University of Oxford*.<sup>82</sup> The Regulations explain: 'Graduates of the University shall wear robes, gowns, and hoods of the colours, materials, and shapes as shall be from time to time prescribed in the Register ...'<sup>83</sup> The promise to be such a comprehensive document means that the Register is one of the most important items about Oxford academic dress in recent history.

Such a significant development in the academic dress of Oxford had quite humble beginnings. It started with a reasonably innocuous letter from a Revd Kenneth Saunders to Veale, the Registrar. Saunders complained that, upon trying to renew the silk of his BLitt hood, he was supplied with two identical silks of an 'incorrect' colour. Upon objection, the robemakers told him the correct colour was unobtainable. After further research and starting a correspondence in *The Times* he discovered that the correct silk was easy to source.<sup>84</sup> He lay the blame for the situation at the robemakers and the University for not caring about which silks were being used.<sup>85</sup>

Veale assured Saunders that something practical would be done to rectify the situation.

Thus, in the first meeting of the Hebdomadal Council in the following term, the issue of academic dress was discussed. The Registrar had been around several tailors in the city, who had shown him contradictory descriptions of colours and materials in 'authoritative' works.<sup>86</sup>

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81 Perhaps cost-cutting is a tradition in academic dress.

82 See <<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/48-012.shtml>> (accessed 21 March 2012).

83 Ibid.

84 This correspondence was with Franklyn, who also took this issue to the University in the broader context of his own proposed scheme. He was told politely by the University that the Hebdomadal Council voted not to reform the academic dress. Franklyn, letter of 14 March 1956, and Veale, letter of 29 March 1956.

85 Saunders, letter of 11 April 1956.

86 It is unclear what these authoritative works are. Possibilities include published works like

The tailors were prepared to present a plate to the Council depicting the correct colours and materials. The Proctors approved of this and asked for a plate to be submitted.<sup>87</sup>

The tailor they approached was Dennis Venables.<sup>88</sup> He drew up a draft copy of the Register in consultation with other robemakers who were members of the Federation of Merchant Tailors.<sup>89</sup> It was also based on an old pattern book which Shepherd & Woodward had used for many years.<sup>90</sup> Venables made one note when he submitted the draft: silk and art silk should be used, and nylon avoided as it is inconsistent and creasing often happens.<sup>91</sup>

When the draft was received by the Hebdomadal Council, it set up a subcommittee to consider the proposals. The subcommittee consisted of the Vice-Chancellor (Alic Smith), the Principal of Lady Margaret Hall (Lucy Sutherland) and the Senior Proctor (P. D. Watson).<sup>92</sup> The subcommittee, although examining the whole of the draft, were mainly concerned with the BA and MA hoods.<sup>93</sup> The Hebdomadal Council adopted the report of the subcommittee.<sup>94</sup>

Two copies of the Register of Colours and Materials of Gowns and Hoods for Degrees of the University of Oxford were made. One was deposited in the University Archives, and the other was kept by Shepherd & Woodward on behalf of the tailors of Oxford.<sup>95</sup>

A leather bound, hand-written copy of the Register was prepared, with sample swatches of materials on each page. When the Register was finished the University prepared to change its statutes regarding academic dress. This involved rescinding previous decrees concerning academic dress and making the single decree 'graduates of the University wear robes as detailed in the Register.' This was passed unanimously.<sup>96</sup>

### *Register of colours and materials of gowns and hoods*

The University Regulations are quite clear in that 'Graduates ... shall wear robes, gowns, and hoods of the colours, materials, and shapes ... prescribed in the Register ...', but does the Register live up to this purpose?<sup>97</sup>

Each page of the Register is devoted to an individual degree, except that where degrees use the same dress (e.g. DSc and DLitt) they share a page. On each page are the subheadings Hood, Trimming, and Shape. Doctors (except EngD and DClinPsy) have the subheadings Robe, 'Gown, undress', Hood, and Shape. MCh alone is described by Hood,

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Buxton and Gibson, catalogues such as Wood or Haycraft, University records, or material scrapbooks held by the individual tailors.

87 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 224 (1956), p. xix.

88 Veale, letter of 24 April 1956.

89 Venables, letter of 3 May 1956.

90 *Oxford Mail*, 12 Feb. 1957.

91 Venables, letter of 3 May 1956.

92 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 224 (1956), p. xl.

93 Committee on academic dress, Report to the Hebdomadal Council, 1 June 1956.

94 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 224 (1956), p. xl.

95 Veale, letter of 11 June 1956.

96 Rescinded: Decree 1 of 13 Nov. 1900, Regulations concerning the dress of DSc and DLitt; Decree 3 of 19 June 1917, Regulations concerning dress of DPhil, Decrees 2 and 3 of 26 June 1923, Regulations concerning dress of BD. Details in Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 226 (1957), p. xlv. Passage recorded in *Gazette*, 14 Feb. 1957.

97 See <<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/48-012.shtml>>, (accessed 21 March 2012).

Gown, and Shape. Beneath the descriptions are swatches of the materials mentioned. Two examples of its descriptions are:

Doctor of Science, Doctor of Letters  
Robe: Scarlet cloth with neutral grey facings and sleeves  
Gown, undress: Black, trimmed with black lace  
Hood: Scarlet cloth lined with neutral grey silk  
Shape: Full

Master of Studies  
Hood: Deep green art silk or silk  
Trimming: Lined and edged white silk  
Shape: Dean Burgon

Hoods are described comprehensively by the Register.<sup>98</sup> The word ‘hood’ denotes the basic material and colour out of which the hood is made—the shell, if you will—while ‘trimming’ details how the hood is otherwise modified. Terms used include fully lined, lined, half-lined and edged, single trimming and double trimming.<sup>99</sup> No measurements are given on how far the hoods should be edged.

The terms it uses to describe the shape of the hood are: Oxford, Dean Burgon and Full. In the context of Oxford academic dress the meanings of these terms are clear. On its own ‘Oxford’ could refer to the Oxford simple [s1] or the Oxford full [f5] shape. However it is reasonable to conclude ‘Oxford’ refers to the Oxford simple shape, ‘Full’ refers to the Oxford full shape and Dean Burgon refers to the Burgon shape [s2]. Thus with the directions supplied in the Register any robemaker should be able to reproduce an Oxford hood.

Gowns, on the other hand, are a different matter. The Regulations direct graduates to wear gowns as prescribed in the Register. However, unless one is a doctor or MCh, no gown is specified. It seems strange that only the gowns of the higher degrees are detailed. The implication of this is that the University does not regulate part of the dress of most graduates.

This presents an interesting situation, as for most academic dress created after 1920, provision was made in the Hebdomadal Council Acts for gowns as well as hoods. Therefore, unless they are prescribed in the Register, most graduates will have to seek out individual decrees to discover which gown they may wear.<sup>100</sup>

With respect to the gowns which it does describe, it is obvious to what the robe directions are referring. However, there are no directions as to how much of the sleeve is covered with silk in the doctors’ dress robes.<sup>101</sup> The description of the undress gown is even less revealing: ‘Black, trimmed with black lace’, could be interpreted in a plethora of ways. No attempt has been made to describe the gown beyond its colour. One might have expected the gown described as a ‘lay’ or ‘flap collared’. Although swatches are given of the

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<sup>98</sup> This is not a surprise as it was born out of concern for the correct colour of a hood.

<sup>99</sup> Fully lined and lined being used interchangeably. Edging refers to part of the lining being brought over onto the outside of the shell. The meanings of single trimming and double trimming are discussed in the section relating to the BA.

<sup>100</sup> As can be seen in the section discussing the dress of the degrees, the gowns prescribed are not necessarily what one might expect, cf. MSc.

<sup>101</sup> The directions could be misinterpreted as something like a UEA higher doctor’s gown.

hood materials, no example of the lace is given.<sup>102</sup> Again, this implies the lace is dictated by historical precedent. The pattern of the ‘trimming’ is also unspecified, leaving the interpretation of that down to the robemakers. One conclusion that could be drawn is that, given that most doctors and MCh<sup>103</sup> share the same description for a gown, the intent was for them all to wear the same gown.<sup>104</sup>

As a document born out of the need for clarification on the colour of a hood, it is no surprise that the focus of the Register is detailing colour, materials and shapes of hoods. In this it has performed its duty well. However another *raison d’être* of the Register was to prescribe gowns for graduates. In this it has fallen short, with only a few degrees having their gowns detailed in their entry. Where there are descriptions, those for the robes are sufficient, but those for the gowns are inadequate, as no robemaker could reproduce the gown from the entry.<sup>105</sup> With respect to the entries themselves, they are not kept up-to-date.<sup>106</sup> Several degrees awarded by the University are not entered in the Register, and degrees whose dress has changed have not been updated.<sup>107</sup> Although caps and non-graduate dress are not part of the Register, their inclusion would have made it more comprehensive.<sup>108</sup>

Oxford still lacks a complete official specification of academic dress of its members. This is partly due to the historic nature of the University: nobody sat down and designed the system. When people have got around to noting the dress an *exemplar* system has been used (as partially in this case).<sup>109</sup>

Compared with similar institutions Oxford is sadly behind the times in this regard.<sup>110</sup> There is also an issue with the accessibility to the Register, as anyone wishing to view it has to request a viewing in the Bodleian Library.<sup>111</sup> On a side note, Oxford does list the specifications of the hoods in its graduation brochure, although it only gives the colour and materials.<sup>112</sup> Thus Oxford still has a long way to go in producing a detailed and comprehensive list of its academic dress. Perhaps this could be achieved by updating and adding gowns to the Register and publishing a complete list within the Regulations on the Internet. With more and more degrees being awarded, the need for a readily available, comprehensive list of the academic dress (including gown, hood and cap) is increasingly necessary.

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102 Lace is often referred to as gimp. See Tsua (2012), pp. 103–127.

103 For EngD and DClInPsy no gown is specified, although in practice the lay bachelors’ gown is worn, and the DD’s undress gown is described as ‘Master of Arts in silk’.

104 As indeed they do.

105 Perhaps the University is concerned only with tailors in Oxford.

106 Observations as of Michaelmas term 2011.

107 Of the former: MJur, EngD and undergraduate masters (BCh is also not mentioned but it is likely that this never had its own academic dress). Of the latter, the BFA.

108 i.e. commoner, scholar and advanced student.

109 Venables (2009), p. 2.

110 The University of Cambridge has a detailed description of its academic dress in its Ordinances (available online at <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/2011/chapter02-section12.html>).

111 This process is not too arduous, but it does require one to be in Oxford and have access to the Duke Humfrey’s Library (compared with being able to look it up on the Internet at one’s leisure).

112 At <[http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/global/www.ox.ac.uk/local/sites/studentgateway/documents/Degree\\_Ceremony\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/global/www.ox.ac.uk/local/sites/studentgateway/documents/Degree_Ceremony_Brochure.pdf)>, (accessed 28 March 2012). The entries are very similar: where the Register says ‘Trimming: White’ the brochure says ‘edged and lined with white silk’.

## Regulation

This section examines the choice of academic dress for each new degree, new status (e.g. Advanced Student) and changes in existing practice. The date of first award of a degree is given in parentheses; degrees offered by the University since medieval times have no date of first award, and are designated 'historic'. The subsections are arranged in the order of individual articles of dress, then non-graduates, then graduates in chronological order.

## Hoods

Oxford is unique in that some of its graduates have a choice of hood shape.<sup>113</sup> The shape of hoods the University prescribes are: Oxford Simple [s1], Burgon [s2] and Oxford Full [f5].<sup>114</sup> The shapes which the Register allots to the various degrees are:

[s1] or [s2]: BA, MA, BCL, BM, BLitt, BSc, BMus, MPhil.

Just [s1]: BD, BPhil, MCh.

Just [s2]: BEd, MSc, MLitt, BFA, MSt, BTh, MTh, MEd, MBA, MFA, DClInPsy

[f5]: DCL, DM, DD, DSc, DLitt, DPhil, DMus

The DPhils and higher doctorates have the full shape, in line with centuries of custom. There seems to be no real logic behind which hoods have which simple shape. Of those who get the choice, all but the MPhil are degrees which were introduced before 1920. Thus when codification came, stating existing practice, where both shapes had been used since the (re)invention of the Burgon shape, was the obvious thing to do. The hoods which may take only [s1] are discussed in their respective sections, as the possible reasons may be individual to each degree. All the hoods that take only [s2] are for degrees which have been introduced since the 1960s.<sup>115</sup> It is possible that the robemakers may have wanted to restrict the shape so they do not have to make hoods in the unpopular<sup>116</sup> Oxford Simple shape. Or ignorance of there being two hood shapes available (due to the rarity of the Oxford Simple shape) could have lead to those degrees getting only the Burgon shape. The Register does not have an entry for EngD. In practice this takes only [s2] shape, following from the DClInPsy, which is also a professional doctorate.

## Lace Gowns

The general design of the lace gowns in terms of the shape of the gown<sup>117</sup> has not changed since the 1920s; flap-collar with hanging panel sleeves with an inverted-T armhole, sewn across at the elbow. It is also clear that the arrangement of the lace on the gowns has been the same since 1885.<sup>118</sup>

One significant change that has occurred is the design of the lace used on the gowns. Three different variations on the same design have been used over the past ninety years, going from a large ornate gimp to the version currently in use.<sup>119</sup>

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113 Groves (ed.) (2011).

114 The Groves Classification designation as in Groves (ed.) (2012).

115 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 262 (1969), p. lxxxi.

116 Chest Minutes p. 362, 23 June 1949.

117 Covering both the lay bachelors' gown and the doctoral undress gown.

118 Tsua (2012), p. 106, and Shrimpton (1885).

119 For a complete history of Oxford Gimp see Tsua (2012).

The use of lace was in jeopardy in the early 90s owing to its growing expense, but an inexpensive alternative having been found, it was saved.<sup>120</sup>

## Caps

Three types of cap have been in use at Oxford over the period concerned: the Square Cap, Bonnet and the Soft Cap.<sup>121</sup> One striking aspect of academic dress at Oxford is that neither the Register nor any other statute or regulation makes any provision for headwear pertaining to specific degrees.<sup>122</sup>

The Square Cap is worn by all non-graduates of the University, and by holders of every degree in all states of dress (i.e. undress, convocation and full) except the full dress of DMus, DM and DCL (which wear the Bonnet).<sup>123</sup> There are, however, some issues that must be cleared up. It is a common and well-espoused maxim by undergraduates and post-graduates that the Square Cap may only be worn after graduation.<sup>124</sup> There is no doubt that this is false. Scholars gained the right to wear the Square Cap in 1565<sup>125</sup> and commoners followed suit in 1770.<sup>126</sup> The *Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum* always precedes the mentioning of the cap with the verb worn. For example:

'At the Matriculation ceremony, University examinations, and at presentation for a degree, "subfusc" clothing must be worn with cap and gown'.<sup>127</sup> It is clear that the intention is for the cap (in this case the Square Cap) to be worn, not carried.

The *Memorandum* does make specific mention of carrying the cap: 'Women members of the University are allowed to carry a square cap, or else wear a soft cap, when attending University ceremonies'.<sup>128</sup> In fact, the inference from this is that if the University intended the square to be only carried they would have made it explicit.

This raises the question as to when this ridiculous notion of not being allowed to wear the cap started. Video evidence shows that in 1941 it was still common for non-graduates to wear the square cap.<sup>129</sup>

One point of interest regarding the square cap is the fact that DPhils, DLitts, DScs all wear the square cap in full dress. This seems strange as doctors in full dress elsewhere

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120 See p. 109.

121 Shaw (1966), (1995), Groves (ed.) (2011), Venables and Clifford (1957), (1966), (1972), (1975), (1979), (1985), (1993), (1998), Venables, (2009).

122 The author is yet to see any regulation creating new academic dress which specifies head wear.

123 Shaw (1966), (1995) Groves (ed.) (2011), Venables and Clifford (1957), (1966), (1972), (1975), (1979), (1985), (1993), (1998), Venables (2009).

124 At <[http://www.pembrokejcr.org/?page\\_id=459](http://www.pembrokejcr.org/?page_id=459)> (accessed 9 Dec. 2012), <<http://www.sjc-jcr.com/applying/dictionary/>> (accessed 9 Dec. 2012), <[http://hildasjcr.org.uk/?page\\_id=198](http://hildasjcr.org.uk/?page_id=198)> (accessed 9 Dec. 2012), and <<http://mertonmcr.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Alternative-Prospectus-2011-2012-final.pdf>> (accessed 9 Dec. 2012). The author recalls that during his matriculation in 2011 he was told by fellow students who had been at Oxford for no more than two weeks (and officers from the Proctors' Office (!)) that the wearing of the square cap was restricted to graduates. Upon being challenged they failed to produce any evidence this was the case.

125 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 96.

126 Kerr (2008), p. 130.

127 *The Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford* (2011) p. 44.

128 Ibid.

129 At <<http://vimeo.com/38997188>> (accessed 9 Dec. 2012).

usually wear a bonnet like a DM, DCL or DMus.<sup>130</sup> There seems to be no statute or Act which prescribes head wear for DPhils, DLitts and DScs. The question then arises as to why they wear the square cap instead of a bonnet. This could be due to their original supplication through the Faculty of Arts. However another possibility is that newly graduated DPhils, DLitts and DScs did not pay for a new hat given that no statute forced them to wear one.

### *Commoners*

Since it is not the gown of a graduate of the University, the Commoners' gown is not regulated by the Register.<sup>131</sup> However there is no evidence to suggest that during the period concerned the gown has changed in any significant way.<sup>132</sup> The major problem with the Commoners' gown is that it is extremely difficult to find any University regulation regarding it in modern times, and there has been no statute concerning its shape or design in the period covered by this article. However some colleges do attempt to describe the gown in their various handbooks.

For example, New College describes the Commoners' gown as a 'short gown'.<sup>133</sup> This is obviously flawed, as many gowns (including the Scholars' gown) could be described as 'short'. The current length of the Commoners' Gown is between waist length to covering the bottom of a jacket.<sup>134</sup> There is also great diversity in the width of the streamers on the gown, not just between robemakers but also between different 'runs' of gowns.<sup>135</sup> This is probably due to large numbers which are produced and the natural variation that occurs when materials are cut.

Given the vast differences between Commoners' and Scholars' gowns, and the fact that the Commoners' gown is one of meanest in the country when it comes to length, shape and design, it is no surprise that over the years there have been those who have wished to abolish it or bring it more into line with the Scholars' gown.

An N. S. Walter in *The Oxford Magazine* in 1966 tried to put forward a case that the distinction between commoners and scholars should end, and especially the way it is embodied in the Commoners' gown.<sup>136</sup> However it was another twenty years until such a proposal was taken seriously. In 1985 the Conference of Colleges voted 19–6 that 'It would be desirable if the Commoners' gown were changed in such a way as to make it more like the Scholars' gown'.<sup>137</sup> However no more is mentioned of it after this. One can only assume that the issue was dropped either through lack of support, or those in authority having better things to do with their time than changing undergraduate academic dress.

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130 Groves (ed.) (2011).

131 Vice-Chancellor's Resolutions, <<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/48-012.shtml>> (accessed 16 Sept. 2012).

132 Buxton and Gibson (1935) p. 41, Venables and Clifford (1957), (1966), (1972), (1975), (1979), (1985), (1993), (1998), Venables (2009).

133 <<http://www.new.ox.ac.uk/system/files/Undergraduate%20Newcomers%20Guide%202012.pdf>> (accessed 9 Dec. 2012).

134 Observation made in 2012 of gown from both Shepherd & Woodward and Ede & Ravenscroft.

135 Observation made of the Commoners' gowns owned by members of New College 2012.

136 *The Oxford Magazine*, 28 Oct. 1966.

137 Nicholas, letter of 4 April 1985.

## Scholars

As with the Commoners' gown, the Scholars' gown is not listed in the Register. Thus there is no contemporary University legislation regarding the style of the gown. In this case as well, New College describes the Scholars' gown as a 'long gown':<sup>138</sup> an inadequate description.

The most interesting thing to note about the Scholars' gown is the shape of the sleeves. All descriptions of the sleeve shape from Buxton and Gibson, Shaw (all three editions), Venables and Clifford and in *Transactions of the Burgon Society* say the Scholars' gown has bell-shaped sleeves.<sup>139</sup> This is all well and good, but Scholars' gowns are also available with a pointed, open sleeve like the BA gown. The Shepherd & Woodward Group sell gowns with a bell-shaped sleeve like that of the doctors' full dress robe. Ede & Ravenscroft, on the other hand, sell the Scholars' gown with the pointed open sleeve.<sup>140</sup> Since the University produces no guidance, these are natural variations that have arisen among different robemakers.<sup>141</sup>

Caps for scholars are discussed in the 'Caps' section.

## Graduate students (*Advanced Student*)

The Advanced Student status was introduced to the University in 1917 in the wake of the creation of the DPhil.<sup>142</sup> In the first instance, it was given the gown of a gentleman commoner,<sup>143</sup> but it would seem that this was never observed.<sup>144</sup> So two years later the University amended its statutes and introduced the gown currently in use.<sup>145</sup>

However, half a century later it seems there may have been some discontent with the Advanced Students' gown. In 1968 the Hebdomadal Council suggested that the distinction between the Advanced Student and BA gown be abolished (one assumes they meant in favour of the BA gown).<sup>146</sup> This does not seem to have been pursued any further as nothing else is mentioned of the idea.

A memorandum from the Proctors in 1971 described the Advanced Students' gown as: 'A long gown of black stuff, whose shape and ornaments shall be in accordance with the pattern approved by the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors in the Registry'.<sup>147</sup>

Following on from this, an undated memorandum from around 1978–79 stated that Advanced Students should wear a square cap and a gown of the same style as a Commoners' gown but reaching the knees and with streamers the length of the gown.<sup>148</sup> What is important here is that the memorandum makes specific note of the fact Advanced Students

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138 At <<http://www.new.ox.ac.uk/system/files/Undergraduate%20Newcomers%20Guide%202012.pdf>> (accessed 9 Dec. 2012).

139 Gibson (2004).

140 This could be the University of London undergraduate gown, which makes sense given that Ede & Ravenscroft is based in London.

141 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963) describes the gown of 1770 as 'a full bell-sleeved gown, the sleeves tapering behind to points'; p. 98.

142 A. J. Ross (2010), p. 59.

143 *Gazette*, Vol. 47, p. 145. For detail on the Gentleman Commoners' gown see Gibson (2004).

144 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1957).

145 A. J. Ross (2010), p. 60. For a detailed description of the Advanced Student's gown before 1920 see Ross §6.

146 Hebdomadal Council Acts (1968), vol. 260, p. clxiii.

147 Memorandum from the Senior and Junior Proctors, 5 Jan. 1971.

148 Undated memorandum (c. 1978–79) from the Proctors.

are fully entitled to wear the Square Cap. This is contrary to the urban myth espoused by most members of the University that it may only be worn after one graduates.<sup>149</sup>

The Examination Regulations state that an *exemplar* Advanced Students' gown is deposited at the University Offices in Wellington Square.<sup>150</sup>

### *BA (historic)*

Due to the historic nature of the BA no great alterations have been made to the hood or gown during the time period concerned. However the main development with respect to the hood is the material out of which the trimming was made.

Before World War II, rabbit fur was used for the lining of the hood.<sup>151</sup> But during<sup>152</sup> the War the high rate of purchase tax, at 112½%, pushed up the price of the hood.<sup>153</sup> Taking a lead from Cambridge, the Registrar inquired whether a new BA hood lined with white pile should be introduced.<sup>154</sup> No further action was taken as it was believed that the tax would be reduced in the near future and the tailors advised that people would want to pay for a quality hood.<sup>155</sup>

However, over the following five years, the situation had not improved and the Hebdomadal Council was asked to allow the use of artificial fur as well as real fur. After a specimen was produced and inspected, the use of artificial fur was approved in 1953.<sup>156</sup>

When the Register came to be drawn up, the subcommittee disliked nylon fur. Realizing that real fur may be hard to come by (because of myxomatosis) they wondered if there were an alternative.<sup>157</sup> After being told that there were ample supplies of fur from France, and that the purchase tax had been reduced to 5%,<sup>158</sup> the committee was happy to disallow the use artificial fur in the University's hoods.<sup>159</sup> The Hebdomadal Council accepted the committee's recommendations.<sup>160</sup> This became 'law' within the University when the Register was approved in 1957.<sup>161</sup> The entry in the Register for Bachelor of Arts reads:<sup>162</sup>

Hood: Black poplin, art silk or silk  
Trimming: White rabbit fur  
Shape: Oxford with single fur trimming  
Dean Burgon with double fur trimming

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149 See section on caps.

150 Oxford University Press (2011), p. 823. The author is yet to validate this.

151 Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 41.

152 *Oxford Mail*, 12 Feb. 1957.

153 The price for a bachelor's hood in late 1948 was £10 10/- (i.e. ten and a half pounds). This corresponds to about £300 in today's money in terms of the RPI, but is more like £850 in terms of average earnings in 1948. See <[www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppoweruk](http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppoweruk)>.

154 Memorandum from the Registrar, 11 Nov. 1948.

155 Minutes of the Hebdomadal Council, 15 Nov. 1948.

156 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 216 (1953), p. xc.

157 Veale, letter of 21 May 1956.

158 Venables, letter of 24 May 1956.

159 Report of the committee on academic dress, 1 June 1956.

160 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 224 (1956), p. xc.

161 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 226 (1957), p. xliv.

162 Register of Colours and Materials of Gowns and Hoods for Degrees of the University of Oxford 1957 (hereinafter Register of Colours and Materials), unaltered as of Michaelmas Term 2011.

It took another 22 years before the issue of fur came to be examined again. In 1979 John Venables of Shepherd & Woodward asked the Vice-Chancellor, Sir Rex Richards, to examine the issue.<sup>163</sup> Venables suggested that because the price of fur had risen,<sup>164</sup> the change in public reaction to the use of real fur and uncertainty in the supply of good furs, the University should reconsider its position on fur. Venables said he would be pleased to show the University an example of the hood with faux fur.<sup>165</sup>

The Vice-Chancellor and the Hebdomadal Council moved swiftly upon Venables' suggestion. Having inspected the specimen hood and considering the arguments, they approved the use of artificial fur. It was also communicated to Venables that the Register would be amended accordingly; however, this is yet to happen.<sup>166</sup> The Register still reads as above.

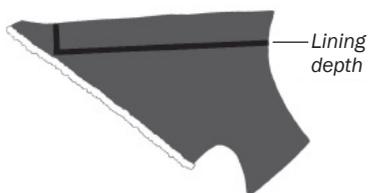


FIG. 1 Net of BA hood [s2] as made by Shepherd & Woodward.

With respect to the directions in the Register, how does one interpret the lining directions of single and double fur trimming? Trimming is not a word often associated with a detailed hood description in academic texts such as Shaw; lined, bordered, edged and bound being more rigorously defined terms. However single and double trimming are standard terms used by robemakers. Shepherd & Woodward interpret 'Dean Burgon with double fur trimming' as a black Burgon shape hood bordered 4" inside but not bound on the outer edge, and bound fur on the edge of the hood that rests against the back. The neck band is unlined and bound only on the lower edge. This can be seen in Figure 1.<sup>167</sup>

The BA gown has not undergone a major change since 1920. Descriptions of the BA gown throughout the period concerned are consistent with the BA gown in use today.<sup>168</sup>

The wristband that is sometimes added to the gown sleeve for ease of manoeuvrability is mentioned in 1935.<sup>169</sup>

### *BM/BCh, BCL (historic)*

The main area of concern with these degrees is the shade of blue used in the hood. Despite Franklyn's protestations<sup>170</sup> the colour of the BM/BCL hood was certainly of a mid to light blue in 1920.<sup>171</sup> The Register entry reads:

Hood: Blue poplin, art silk or silk  
 Trimming: White rabbit fur, half lined and edged  
 Shape: Oxford with single fur trimming  
 Dean Burgon with double fur trimming

<sup>163</sup> Venables, letter of 13 July 1979.

<sup>164</sup> In 1979, a Burgon BA in real fur would have cost £28 and in faux fur would have cost £17.

<sup>165</sup> Venables, letter of 13 July 1979.

<sup>166</sup> Brain, letter of 24 July 1979.

<sup>167</sup> Observations made from a Shepherd & Woodward hood in Michaelmas term 2011.

<sup>168</sup> The description of the BA gown in Buxton and Gibson (1935), Shaw (1966), (1995), Venables and Clifford (1957), (1966) (1972), (1975), (1979), (1985), (1993), (1998), Venables (2009) are consistent with the BA gown of 2012.

<sup>169</sup> Buxton and Gibson (1935) p. 41; but the practice is likely much older.

<sup>170</sup> Franklyn, letter of 7 March 1947.

<sup>171</sup> Shrimpton (1885), Davis (1902), Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 40.

It has stayed this way up to the present day.<sup>172</sup> One aspect of particular note is the fact that the BCh does not possess any academic dress of its own.<sup>173</sup> Indeed, the degree is not mentioned in any entry in the Register, even under the BCL, BM pages. In contrast with Cambridge, the BCh is not awarded separately from the BM, and so does not need its own robes.

### *BD (historic)*

The BD has had a rather turbulent time since 1920. In 1923 the Hebdomadal Council passed an Act which give the BD the lace gown instead of the silk MA, which it had been wearing previously. The Hebdomadal Council had no historic or logical reasoning for this decision, and it is almost certain that the Council did not appreciate the fact that the BD, by its nature, is a clerical degree, whereas the lace gown is a garment firmly rooted in lay origins.<sup>174</sup>

Fortunately, when the Register was introduced in 1957, previous decrees relating to academic dress were repealed.<sup>175</sup> These included the decree which made the BD wear the lace gown.<sup>176</sup> This meant the BD could once again legitimately wear the silk MA gown. The BD entry in the Register reads:<sup>177</sup>

Hood: Black silk

Trimming: Fully lined with a light weight black silk

Shape: Oxford

Here is found the next issue which the BD has faced in the twentieth century: the Register describes the hood shape as Oxford. This term is clearly ambiguous as both the Oxford Full shape [f5] and the Oxford Simple shape [s1] could both realistically be described as an Oxford shape. To resolve this, it can be noted how the Register describes hoods for other degrees. The word 'Oxford' is used to describe the shape of hoods for: BA, MA, BCL, BM, BLitt, BSc, BMus, BPhil, MCh, and MPhil, whereas 'Full' is used for: DCL, DM DD, DSc, DLitt, DPhil, and DMus. Therefore it is clear that the author, Dennis Venables, intended the BD to take the Oxford Simple shape [s1]. However there is no evidence that the BD ever took the simple shape hood, either before or after the creation of the Register.

This situation seems rather strange as [s1] black silk, lined black silk is almost identical to the literates' hood.<sup>178</sup> Current practice still rightly contradicts the Register by wearing an Oxford Full shape hood.

### *MA (historic)*

For the MA the gown has not changed since 1920. However the hood is less straightforward. When the Register was being drawn up, the subcommittee that came to examine what should be in it enquired of Dennis Venables whether there were an alternative lining to that of the MA hood with which they had been supplied.<sup>179</sup> The new silk (lining (a)),

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<sup>172</sup> Shaw (1966), (1995), Groves (ed.) (2011), Venables and Clifford (1957), (1966), (1972), (1975), (1979), (1985), (1993), (1998), Venables (2009).

<sup>173</sup> Unlike Cambridge where the BChir has its own gown and hood.

<sup>174</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 83.

<sup>175</sup> Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 226 (1957), p. xliv.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Register of Colours and Materials.

<sup>178</sup> Groves (2002), pp. 15–16.

<sup>179</sup> Veale, letter of 21 May 1956.

which is of a dark red/cherry colour, met with the committee's approval.<sup>180</sup> The linings which the committee considered were (a) which was pure silk (costing £8/16/6) and (b) which was red art silk (costing £6/16/6). Both linings for the MA hood were approved by the subcommittee and the Hebdomadal Council.<sup>181</sup> Thus MA is the only hood for which there is a choice of linings in the Register:

Hood: Black poplin, art silk or silk  
Trimming: Oxford red silk (a)  
                  Oxford shot art silk (b)<sup>182</sup>  
Shape: Oxford or Dean Burgon

### *MCh (historic)*

Two issues have faced the MCh over the past ninety-two years: the gown and the shape of the hood. Buxton and Gibson describe the MCh gown as: '[T]he black laced gown'.<sup>183</sup>

Unfortunately, this is rather vague, but it is probable that it refers to the doctoral undress gown, as it was the only laced gown previously mentioned in that chapter. The Register reads:

Hood: Black silk, lined and bound with blue silk  
Gown: Black, trimmed with black lace  
Shape: Oxford

The only other time the 'black, trimmed with black lace' gown is mentioned in the Register is in the description of the doctoral undress gown. Therefore, the MCh was given the doctoral undress gown. It has maintained this in practice to the present day.<sup>184</sup>

For the hood, Buxton and Gibson describe the hood of the MCh as 'ordinary'.<sup>185</sup> There is no hood in use in Oxford that is known as 'ordinary'. Given, later on, that they describe the BA hood as 'Burgon shape',<sup>186</sup> it is not beyond reason to suggest that the 'ordinary hood' could be the Oxford Simple shape. This position was affirmed by the Register. However over the past sixty years it seems to have acquired the Burgon shape as standard.<sup>187</sup>

### *DCL, DM (historic)*

The main issue with these degrees is the colour of silk used on the robe and the lining of the hood. To the present day its colour can be anything from crimson, similar to that of the MA lining, to a salmon pink. On this matter the Register reads:

Robe: Scarlet cloth with red silk or art silk facings and sleeves  
Gown, undress: Black, trimmed with black lace

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180 Memorandum from the Senior Proctor, 22 May 1956.

181 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 224 (1956), p. xc.

182 (b) is of a slightly lighter shade of red than (a) but they are both of a crimson colour.

183 At p. 39.

184 Venables and Clifford (1966), (1972), (1975), (1979), (1985), (1993), (1998), Venables (2009).

185 At p. 39.

186 At p. 41.

187 Venables and Clifford (1966), (1972), (1975): these do not describe the shape of the hood however it is Burgon shape in the illustration; (1979), (1985)—the description says Oxford but the illustration is Burgon, Venables, J. (2009), describes and illustrates a Burgon shape.

Hood: Scarlet cloth lined with scarlet silk  
Shape: Full

The colour of the swatch is the same shade of red as the scarlet of the cloth of the robe. In this way the University intends the robe to be the same colour. However the variation still persists perhaps due to different runs of silk having a slightly different shade or some robemakers not realizing this rule and continuing to make it in their traditional shade.

### *DD (historic)*

The DD wears the square cap in full dress.<sup>188</sup> One can see the logic in this, as the DD is a clerical degree and the square cap is a clerical garment.<sup>189</sup> However, Douglas Veale, a former Registrar of the University, stated in a letter that the DDs were entitled to wear another cap: 'An Oxford Doctor of Divinity (other than Honorary D.D.) is entitled in full dress to wear a biretta in the English fashion, i.e. a soft square cap similar to that worn by bishops.'<sup>190</sup>

However he later admits in the same letter he has never see it being worn. It seems that Veale is probably describing a Bishop Andrewes Cap. Hargreaves-Mawdsley notes that DDs in the seventeenth Century wore something similar to what we know as the Bishop Andrewes today.<sup>191</sup> Given that there is no statute pertaining to the headdress of DDs, it would be reasonable for a DD to wear a Bishop Andrewes Cap in lieu of the square cap should they want to wear something different. The rest of the dress remains unchanged as shown in the Register:

Robe: Scarlet cloth with black velvet facings and sleeves  
Gown, undress: Master of Arts in silk  
Hood: Scarlet cloth lined with black silk  
Shape: Full

### *BMus (1502)*

The dress of the BMus<sup>192</sup> has not changed over the period concerned. The Register describes the hood as:

Hood: Lilac silk or art silk  
Trimming: Half lined and edged with white fur  
Shape: Oxford with single fur trimming  
Dean Burgon with double fur trimming

The BMus wears the lay bachelors' gown.<sup>193</sup>

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188 Venables and Clifford.

189 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963) charts the development of the DD head dress to the square cap, p. 68

190 Veale, letter of 26 April 1947, also in Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 38

191 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 68.

192 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 87.

193 Groves (ed.) (2011), p. 320.

### *DMus (16th century)*

The academic dress of the DMus<sup>194</sup> has not changed since 1920. The Register allows the DMus to wear:

Robe: Cream satin brocade in silk or art silk with facings and sleeves of cherry coloured silk.

Gown, undress: Black, trimmed with black lace

Hood: Cream satin brocade of silk or art silk lined with cherry coloured silk

Shape: Full

Although it is left open by the Register, the pattern of the brocade is traditionally an apple blossom design.<sup>195</sup>

### *BLitt, BSc (1895)*

When the BLitt and BSc were first introduced in 1895 it was decided that they should go dressed the same as the BCL and BM.<sup>196</sup> This, as discussed previously, was the lay bachelors' gown and a simple or Burgon shaped hood of mid-blue half-lined fur.<sup>197</sup> However by 1935, at the latest, the colour of the BSc/BLitt hood had mutated into a grey-blue colour.<sup>198</sup> It is unclear when this happened. Buxton and Gibson lament the divergence in the dark blue silk of DPhil,<sup>199</sup> which was instituted in 1917.<sup>200</sup> It is likely that the colour of the BSc/BLitt silk may have changed around this time. The wording in Buxton and Gibson would seem to suggest that the grey-blue silk had been around for a while—or at least long enough for the authors to believe it was the correct silk: 'B.M.s and B.C.L.s wear a hood of light blue ottoman, with double rabbit fur. The Bachelors of Letters and Science have a similar hood, but the colour is, or should be, not light blue, but grey-blue. [*sic*]'

This may have happened because around the time of World War I, silks in the correct colour may have been hard to obtain. However if this were the case then the BCL/BM would have also have been affected in the same manner, but they have maintained their mid-blue colour. It may be a coincidence that the BSc/BLitt changed into grey-blue, given that the colour of the silk in the DSc/DLitt (introduced in 1900) is grey, but it is a possibility that this may have influenced the change in colour. One thing that does seem clear is that this change was led by the robemakers and this new hood colour made its way into the Register:

Hood: A grey blue art silk or silk [*sic*]

Trimming: Half lined and edged with white rabbit fur

Shape: Oxford, with single fur trimming

Dean Burgon with double fur trimming

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194 Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963), p. 77.

195 Shaw (1995) p. 43, Venables and Clifford (1966), (1972), (1975), (1979) (1985), (1993), (1998), Venables (2009).

196 Statute Title xiv §3 cl. 2, 'Baccalaurei in Litteris vel in Scientia eodem vestitu quo Baccalaurei in Jure Civili vel Medicina induantur', i.e. 'Bachelors in Letters or in Science go dressed in the same dress as the Bachelors in Civil Law or Medicine.'

197 See BM/BCh, BCL section.

198 Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 40.

199 Ibid., p. 39.

200 Ibid.

The BSc was renamed MSc in 1971,<sup>201</sup> and the BLitt became the MLitt in 1978.<sup>202</sup>

### *DLitt, DSc (1900)*

The dress for these degrees has not changed since their creation. The Register reads:

Robe: Scarlet cloth with neutral grey facings and sleeves

Gown, undress: Black, trimmed with black lace

Hood: Scarlet cloth lined with neutral grey silk

Shape: Full

### *DPhil (1917)*

First designed in 1917,<sup>203</sup> the academic dress of the DPhil has remained unchanged to the present day, although a small variation seems to have occurred in the colour of the blue silk used. The original ruling states dark blue be used;<sup>204</sup> however by the time of the Register navy is the received colour. The Register describes it as:

Robe: Scarlet cloth with navy blue facings and sleeves

Gown, undress: Black, trimming with black lace

Hood: Scarlet cloth lined with navy blue silk

Shape: Full

Buxton and Gibson detail this change happening sometime before 1935.<sup>205</sup> To this day there are natural variations in the colour of the blue silk—from navy to mid-blue and even some blue with a hint of purple.<sup>206</sup>

### *BPhil (1946)*

The BPhil has had a rather complicated history since its inception in 1946.<sup>207</sup> It was introduced around the time that Franklyn was interested in establishing a subcommittee to review the academic dress of Oxford,<sup>208</sup> and he put forward his own suggestions for the BPhil hood. He suggested that, given the DPhil took dark blue silk, the BPhil hood should be dark blue half lined fur.<sup>209</sup> However, he felt that this would be wrong, as this hood would be the ‘correct’ BCL, BM hood.<sup>210</sup> In further correspondence Franklyn said that the BPhil should be light green<sup>211</sup> or an ‘unspecified blue’.<sup>212</sup> But Statute XIV, which governed academic dress when the BPhil was introduced, was amended to read:

Baccalaurei in Litteris, vel in Scientia vel in Philosophia eodem vestitu quo  
Baccalaurei in Jure Civili vel Medicina induantur.<sup>213</sup>

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201 Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 269 (24 May 1971).

202 Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 291 (1978), p. xcii.

203 A. J. Ross (2010), pp. 58, 62, n. 84.

204 *Ibid.* p. 61.

205 *At* p. 39.

206 The blue dye has a tendency to oxidize over time, from navy blue to purple (similar to the Bristol PhD) and eventually to a delicate lilac.

207 Ross, A. J., (2012), p. 53.

208 See section about Franklyn’s subcommittee

209 Franklyn, letter of 22 March 1947.

210 *Ibid.*

211 Franklyn, letter of 21 June 1947.

212 Franklyn, letter of 14 March 1956.

213 *Gazette*, vol. 77, p. 114. Bachelors of Letters or Science or Philosophy shall go dressed as

However the situation was to be obfuscated. Soon after the degree was created, it took a dark blue hood lined and bound white silk. When asked for clarification of the issue, Veale, the Registrar, stated that the BPhils should wear the same academic dress as BLitts.<sup>214</sup> However there is no evidence to suggest that BPhils ever wore the BSc/BLitt hood. Indeed when the Register was made, it described the BPhil's academic dress as:

Hood: Dark blue silk or art silk  
Trimming: Lined with white silk<sup>215</sup>  
Shape: Oxford

The question is, why did the unauthorized hood come into existence? One suggestion could be that the robemakers did indeed intend to have a hood of dark blue half lined fur, taking dark blue from the DPhil, and fur to represent the bachelors' level. However, given the high price of fur during the post-war period, white silk may have been substituted for fur—thus producing the hood we have today.<sup>216</sup>

Another problem was created by the Register itself. The shape of the hood is there restricted to the Oxford Simple shape. When the degree was originally instituted, there was no restriction on whether the hood should be Oxford Simple or Dean Burgon.<sup>217</sup> It is also very likely that those graduating with a BPhil before the Register, would have worn a hood of the Burgon shape owing to the unpopularity of the Oxford Simple shape.<sup>218</sup> So why was the shape restricted? Unfortunately there is no clear answer to this. Arguments based on the fact that 'Oxford' could mean Burgon shape are false, as the Register specifically uses the term 'Dean Burgon' to refer to this shape. Arguments based on trying to differentiate the BPhil from the MPhil would be wrong, as the BPhil was introduced and the Register was written before the MPhil was created.

Under the statute mentioned above, the BPhil has always worn the lay bachelors' gown. This would be correct as it is consistent with all other postgraduate bachelors (excepting the unique case of the BD).

### *BEd (1969)*

The degree of BEd was a result of the Robbins Report. Before Oxford determined its academic dress, the Vice-Chancellor, Dr K. C. Wheare, received a letter from Shaw asking him to consider his proposals. Shaw's idea behind his scheme was to give holders of the degree a distinctive gown and hood without infringing on the BA, and to fit in with the existing dress. His scheme was:

Gown: A black stuff gown with sleeves of the Geneva style, except that the back seam shall be rounded off.

Hood: A black stuff hood of the Oxford Burgon shape, the cowl to be bound 1" inside and outside with crimson shot red silk (i.e. the M.A. (Oxon.) silk).

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Bachelors of Civil Law or Medicine.

214 Veale, letter of 2 March 1949.

215 Just lined, not lined and edged.

216 As at Cambridge, where cloth was permitted for the BA hood. See Groves et al. (2013), p. 96. —Ed.

217 *Gazette*, Vol. 77, p. 114.

218 Chest Minutes, p. 362, 23 June 1949.

Shaw's dress fulfils his criteria, as no new colours are added to the dress of the University and the gown is similar in style to the Oxford BA, but unique.<sup>219</sup>

Charles Franklyn also expressed an interest in designing academic dress for the BEd, but did not submit a scheme.<sup>220</sup>

It was another three years before the Hebdomadal Council got around to debating the issue. The idea they originally considered was that BEd holders should wear the BA gown and a hood of pale blue silk without fur: 'like the BLitt &c. but without fur'.<sup>221</sup> Had this passed it would have seen the return of a long-retired garment, the hood of the Student of Civil Law,<sup>222</sup> although it is probable that they did not realize that their suggestion had already been a hood of the University. The inspiration behind this suggestion was perhaps that all the bachelor-level hoods at the time, except BA, BD and BMus (which is rare), contained the colour blue, and all those except BPhil were some shade of blue half-lined and bound fur.<sup>223</sup> It seemed that those on the committee wanted to continue the theme—but without the fur.

Was this the correct choice? The important distinction that was not made was that all the hoods for which blue was the main colour were for postgraduate bachelors,<sup>224</sup> whereas the BEd was designed to be a first degree. Thus the correct decision would have been to keep the fur lining (representing bachelors), and change the colour of the hood in some other way so as to distinguish it from the BA and the postgraduate bachelors.

The Hebdomadal Council decided that the BEd should wear the BA gown, the first time for any degree other than the BA to be given it. The BA gown was a consistent choice as the gown represents the rank of the degree achieved (i.e. first degree, postgraduate and doctors).

The Council could not reach agreement on a hood, and decided that the hood would be chosen at the next meeting, after the Junior Proctor had produced some sample silks.<sup>225</sup> At the following meeting a black hood lined green silk, of the Dean Burgon shape, was approved.<sup>226</sup> This decision was communicated to Shaw and in the letter the hood was described as: 'Burgon, black silk or art silk, lined with beetle green (BCC 24) silk or art silk.'

During the 1992 rationalization of Oxford academic dress, in line with the other bachelors' degrees which rank below the BA, the full lining of green silk was reduced to a narrow band of 1½".<sup>227</sup> The Register has been updated and reads:

Hood: Black silk or art silk

Trimming: Silk or art silk taffeta edged beetle green (B.C.C. 24)

Shape: Dean Burgon

### *MSc (1971)*

When the postgraduate bachelor degrees were changed to their master equivalents, academic dress had to be created for the new degrees. This happened to science in 1971. The

<sup>219</sup> Shaw, letter of 18 May 1966.

<sup>220</sup> Franklyn, letter of 18 May 1966.

<sup>221</sup> Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 262 (1969), p. lxiv.

<sup>222</sup> Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 25.

<sup>223</sup> Hebdomadal Council, Vol. 199 (22 Jan. 1948), with reference to Haycraft (1948), pp. 15–16.

<sup>224</sup> Christianson (2003), p. 25.

<sup>225</sup> Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 262 (1969), p. lxx.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. lxxxi.

<sup>227</sup> Venables, letter of 9 Nov. 1992.

Hebdomadal Council had a clear idea about what it wanted this dress to be. It decided that the gown should be the same as the BSc because 'it was the gown worn by MCh which is comparable to MSc'. The hood should be grey lined light blue or *vice versa*.<sup>228</sup>

The reasoning behind the choice of gown for this degree is interesting. The initial assertion that the BSc gown is the same as the MCh gown was false. When the BSc was instituted in 1895 it was decreed that it should take the same dress as the BCL,<sup>229</sup> which was the lay bachelors' gown. It is possible to conceive that the Council, at the time, did not realize that MCh took the doctors' undress gown (as it is very similar to the lay bachelors' gown). However this is not the case, as in the *Gazette*, which issued the finalized decree about the MSc's dress said: 'Dress of the MSc shall be ... the same pattern as ... [the] Masters of Surgery (which is also the undress gown worn by doctors)'.<sup>230</sup> Another possibility is that the Council incorrectly believed that the doctors' undress was the same as the lay bachelors' gown (again perhaps because of their similarity).

Whatever the case, this marks a key juncture in the development of Oxford's academic dress: what sort of gown should a postgraduate master's degree (like the MSc) have? This seems a strange question to ask at such a late date as 1971, but at this time Oxford only awarded two masters' degrees: MA and MCh. The Hebdomadal Council thought that the gown for this new degree should be that of the MCh because the degrees were 'comparable'.<sup>231</sup> MSc may rank directly below MCh,<sup>232</sup> but is it comparable? The MCh is regarded as a higher degree (much like a higher doctorate) because it is awarded on submission of a thesis or a portfolio of published work, whereas the MSc is a postgraduate taught or research degree. Thus they do not seem to be awarded on a comparable basis. So the MCh gown (as the doctoral undress gown) may not be consistent with their argument. Therefore, unless a new gown were to be created, the lay bachelors' gown (as in the BSc) would be the 'comparable' option as the MSc was more a rebrand of the BSc.

With respect to the hood, the Council set out their thinking in detail. They took their lead from the pre-existing hoods awarded for science. Pale blue was taken from the BSc hood with the added note that 'fur should be confined to bachelors' hoods'.<sup>233</sup> The other colour, grey, was lifted from the lining of the DSc hood. The Hebdomadal Council examined several variations of these colours. Black lined light blue was rejected due to its similarity to the MCh hood.<sup>234</sup> Again, black lined grey was rejected as it was regarded as 'dull'.<sup>235</sup> Thus specimens of light blue lined grey and grey lined light blue were ordered from Shepherd & Woodward to be examined at the next meeting.<sup>236</sup>

With a lack of faculty colours, the Council were trying to link the two colours associated with science in the MSc hood. The Hebdomadal Council were correct in staying away from fur, regarding it as a bachelors' material, but blue was also very much linked to a

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228 Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 269 (24 May 1971).

229 A. J. Ross (2010), p. 52.

230 *Gazette*, 1 July 1971.

231 Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 269 (24 May 1971).

232 At <[http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml#\\_Toc28140155](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml#_Toc28140155)> (accessed 19 March 2012).

233 Memorandum from the Senior and Junior Proctors, 5 Jan. 1971.

234 [s2] Black lined and bound mid-blue.

235 Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 269 (24 May 1971).

236 Hebdomadal Council Acts, vol. 269 (1971), p. lxxviii.

bachelors' degree (other than arts or divinity).<sup>237</sup> So was it right to put it in a masters' hood? By this time BSc (and BLitt) had acquired their own shade of blue; a grey-blue.<sup>238</sup> Thus it is plausible to consider this colour a science/letters colour. There is no reason grey should be associated just with doctors.

After the specimens were inspected a light blue hood lined light grey of Dean Burgon shape was approved.<sup>239</sup> This was announced in the *Gazette*: 'Dress of the MSc shall be a black gown with black lace embroidery of the same pattern as that worn at present by Masters of Surgery (which is also the undress gown worn by Doctors). A hood of light blue silk edged and lined light grey (the blue being the colour of the present BSc hood and the grey the colour of the lining of the DSc hood).'<sup>240</sup> The Master of Science entry in the Register reads:

Hood: A grey blue art silk or silk  
Trimming: Lined and edged neutral grey silk  
Shape: Dean Burgon

During the rationalization of academic dress in 1992 Venables made a list of all the academic dress used by the University. In this list the MSc and MLitt were listed as having the lay bachelors' gown.<sup>241</sup> However it was noted, in the same list, that the brochure, *Academic Dress of the University of Oxford*, said they should wear the doctoral undress gown. Venables sought clarification on this point from the University.<sup>242</sup> The University informed him (incorrectly, according to the regulations then in force) that they should wear the lay bachelors' gown.<sup>243</sup>

Therefore sometime between 1971 and 1992 practice had changed so that the MSc and MLitt were given the lay bachelors' gown instead of the doctoral undress gown. This was probably the result of two factors: the similarity between the two gowns, and the new masters' degrees which did take the lay bachelors' gown.<sup>244</sup> The legislative upshot of the reforms in 1992 stated: '[T]hat the gown for graduate degrees with the title of Bachelor and Master should be the same as the present gown for the M.Phil., etc., ...'<sup>245</sup> This was the lay bachelors' gown. Therefore one of the unintended consequences of the Act was finally to give the MSc and MLitt the logical gown associated with their rank.

### *BFA (1978)*

After the degree was instituted, the committee of the Ruskin School recommended to the Hebdomadal Council that the academic dress of the BFA<sup>246</sup> should consist of a hood with gold-coloured lining and the BA gown. The BA gown was chosen, taking the lead from

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<sup>237</sup> Christianson (2003), p. 25.

<sup>238</sup> Register of Colours and Materials.

<sup>239</sup> Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 269 (1971), p. cliv.

<sup>240</sup> *Gazette*, 1 July 1971. It is interesting that the hood is described as 'light blue' in the *Gazette*, but as 'grey-blue' in the Register. Cf. Buxton and Gibson, p. 40. Similarly the lining is described as 'light grey' in the *Gazette*, and as 'neutral grey' in the Register.

<sup>241</sup> Venables, letter of 9 Nov. 1992.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> Dorey, letter of 4 Jan. 1993.

<sup>244</sup> These being MSt and MPhil. The MTh and MEd, which were being created at the same time were being given the lay bachelors' gown.

<sup>245</sup> Hebdomadal Council Acts (1992), Vol. 333, p. xxxvi.

<sup>246</sup> Hebdomadal Council Agenda, vol. 290, p. xc.

the BED which also took the BA gown as it was considered to be of similar standing to the BA.<sup>247</sup> The Hebdomadal Council approved the recommendations of the committee.<sup>248</sup> The entry in the Register reads:<sup>249</sup>

Hood: Black poplin, art silk or silk  
Trimming: Lined and edged gold silk  
Shape: Dean Burgon

The academic dress of the BFA remained this way until John Venables came to examine the academic dress of the University in 1992.<sup>250</sup> Venables wanted to add fur to the BFA to bring it into line with the other bachelors' degrees.<sup>251</sup> It is unclear why, when the Hebdomadal Council came to vote on Venables' proposals, it had been changed so that the BFA, BED, BTh and all new first degrees should have a black hood in the Burgon shape with a narrow band of 1½" in the appropriate colour.<sup>252</sup>

The Hebdomadal Council approved the change with the proviso that anyone admitted to the BFA before the change maintained the right to wear the 'old' style hood.<sup>253</sup> The Register has not been updated to reflect this change.<sup>254</sup>

### *MPhil (1979)*

The MPhil was intended to supersede the BPhil in the same way the MSc and MLitt had replaced the BSc and BLitt.<sup>255</sup> but the BPhil was retained in the field of philosophy.<sup>256</sup>

The original proposal in front of the Hebdomadal Council was that the MPhil should wear the BPhil hood because of the similarity between the two degrees. The gown should be what was then worn by the MSc, the doctoral undress gown.<sup>257</sup> The Hebdomadal Council decided that the dress of the MPhil should be the same as the BPhil.<sup>258</sup> Thus they take the lay bachelors' gown instead of the doctoral undress gown as originally proposed.

It was not until 1986 that the Register was updated. The intention was that its entry should be exactly the same as the BPhil.<sup>259</sup> In spite of this instruction the Register actually reads:

Hood: Dark blue silk or art silk  
Trimming: Lined<sup>260</sup> with white silk  
Shape: Oxford or Dean Burgon

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247 Ibid. Indeed the BFA ranks just below the BA.

248 Hebdomadal Council Acts (1978), Vol. 290, p. xciv.

249 Register of Colours and Materials, unaltered as of Michaelmas Term 2011.

250 See section: The 1992 Resolution.

251 Venables, letter of 26 May 1992.

252 Venables, letter of 9 Nov. 1992.

253 Hall, letter of 3 Nov. 1992.

254 Register of Colours and Materials, unaltered as of Michaelmas Term 2011.

255 Brain, letter of 8 Dec. 1978.

256 At <[http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/bphil\\_in\\_philosophy](http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/bphil_in_philosophy)> (accessed 19 March 2013).

257 Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 291 (1978), p. xcii.

258 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 291 (1978), p. xcvi.

259 Venables, letter of 21 Jan. 1986. See section relating to BPhil.

260 As for the BPhil, the entry reads 'lined', not 'lined and edged'.

The difference being that, in the BPhil entry, the shape is restricted to Oxford, whereas the MPhil may take the Oxford or the Burgon shape. It is unclear why this change was made. A possibility may be a desire to legalize the more popular Burgon shape.<sup>261</sup> It would be incorrect to suggest this was done to differentiate between the BPhil and MPhil, as it was clear when the academic dress was drawn up that the Hebdomadal Council did not wish there to be a difference. Furthermore, they would be indistinguishable should someone wear the hood in the Oxford Simple shape.

### *MLitt (1979)*

In making academic dress for the MLitt the Hebdomadal Council had an easy task. As there was no distinction between letters and science at the bachelors and doctoral level, the Council decided that the dress for the MLitt should be the same as the MSc.<sup>262</sup>

This is consistent with the Oxford tradition of academic dress representing the rank of the wearer<sup>263</sup> and again they share a similar rank at the masters' level.<sup>264</sup> Its entry in the Register is identical to the MSc (in fact, they share the same entry):

Hood: A grey blue art silk or silk  
Trimming: Lined and edged neutral grey silk  
Shape: Dean Burgon

The fate of the MLitt gown is tied to that of the MSc. Please see that section for details.

### *MSt (1984)*

There is little information regarding the creation of the MSt. However from the hood assigned to it, it seems clear that the lead was taken from the MPhil hood, replacing the dark blue by a deep green. The Register reads:

Hood: Deep green art silk or silk  
Trimming: Lined and edged white silk  
Shape: Dean Burgon

The gown is the lay bachelors' gown, again taking the lead from the MPhil.<sup>265</sup>

### *BTh (1992)*

The BTh was introduced at the time when John Venables came to examine the University's academic dress. Indeed, it was one of the new degrees which prompted the rethink. The original idea was that it would take fur.<sup>266</sup> However, as with the BFA and BEd, the Hebdomadal Council decided that these bachelors' degrees should take a black hood in the Burgon shape, with a narrow band of the appropriate colour.<sup>267</sup> Since Venables suggested that the

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<sup>261</sup> The implication being that the BPhil was illegally wearing a Burgon shape hood. This seems to be the inference from Shaw (1966).

<sup>262</sup> Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 291 (1978), p. xcii.

<sup>263</sup> Christianson (2003), p. 25, Groves, N. (ed.) (2011), p. 3, and Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 38.

<sup>264</sup> At <[http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml#\\_Toc28140155](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml#_Toc28140155)> (accessed 19 March 2012).

<sup>265</sup> *Gazette*, 29 June 1984.

<sup>266</sup> Venables, letter of 26 May 1992.

<sup>267</sup> Hebdomadal Council Act, Vol. 333 (1992), p. xxxvi.

MTh should take a purple colour, and they wanted to impose a faculty colour system on the new degrees, the narrow band is of a purple colour. The Register was updated to read:

Hood: Black silk or art silk

Trimming: Silk or art silk edged bishops [*sic*] purple

Shape: Dean Burgon

As was consistent was with all first degrees offered by Oxford, the BTh took the BA gown.<sup>268</sup>

### *First-Degree Masters (1993)*

Like most other universities in the United Kingdom, Oxford has had to adapt to the new concept of first-degree masters (or ‘undergraduate’ masters—something of a contradiction in terms). The first degree of this nature to be awarded was the MEng in 1993.<sup>269</sup> Now there are eleven undergraduate masters’ degrees awarded by the University.<sup>270</sup>

As the MEng was on the horizon at the review of academic dress in 1992, the dress of this degree was considered.<sup>271</sup> The Hebdomadal Council decided holders of this new degree should go dressed as a BA in the first instance and, when they became members of Convocation,<sup>272</sup> should go dressed as an MA.<sup>273</sup> This was explained in a letter to Venables: ‘Council has agreed (*a*) that the holder of the degree of M.Eng. should initially wear the same academic dress as the holder of the degree of BA; and (*b*) that, when the name of the holder of the degree of M.Eng. is added to the Register of Convocation, he or she should from that point wear the same academic dress as the holder of the degree of MA.’<sup>274</sup>

The reasoning behind this decision was explained by the Vice-Chancellor, Sir Richard Southwood: ‘We hope that ... this would demonstrate the historic links between all first degrees of this University and the unity of the membership of Convocation ...’<sup>275</sup>

This was an historically sound conclusion as academic dress reflected the wearer’s rank within the University. Since holders of the MEng were to have equal precedence as BAs until they qualified for Convocation, when they would rank as MAs, wearing the academic dress of these degrees would accurately show their rank. This was reaffirmed in 1999 for new undergraduate masters’ degrees.<sup>276</sup>

However this position was rather compromised when, in 2002, membership of Convocation was opened to all graduates of the University.<sup>277</sup> Therefore, by the wording of the rulings above, those being admitted to these degrees should immediately go dressed as MAs as they are members of Convocation. There is no evidence that this change in membership rule led to any change in dress in practice.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Southwood, letter of 10 Nov. 1992.

<sup>270</sup> At <<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml>> (accessed 16 March 2013).

<sup>271</sup> Venables, letter of 26 May 1992.

<sup>272</sup> i.e. twenty-one terms from matriculation.

<sup>273</sup> Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 333 (1992), p. xxxvi.

<sup>274</sup> Hall, letter of 3 Nov. 1992.

<sup>275</sup> Southwood, letter of 10 Nov. 1992

<sup>276</sup> *Gazette*, 15 July 1999

<sup>277</sup> At <<http://www.oua.ox.ac.uk/enquiries/congandconvseven.html>> (accessed 17 March 2013).

<sup>278</sup> Groves (ed.) (2011), p. 321. For changes made effective 1 January 2014, see Addendum.

### *MEd (1993)*

The MEd was another degree which was created at the time of the 1992 review. Venables' original intention was that the then-current BEd hood, black lined green, would be given fur, and the black lined green hood would be given to the MEd.<sup>279</sup> As it turned out, the BEd ended up with a different hood, but the MEd did inherit the old BEd hood.<sup>280</sup> The hood is described in the Register as:

Hood: Black silk or art silk

Trimming: Silk or art silk taffeta lined beetle green (BCC 24)

Shape: Dean Burgon

The MEd was given the lay bachelors' gown.<sup>281</sup>

### *MTh (1993)*

The MTh's story is much the same as the MEd, the intention being to have a black hood lined with a given colour,<sup>282</sup> which was to be purple. Perhaps this is not an arbitrary choice, as the Register describes the shade of purple as 'bishops' purple', thus maybe trying to reflect the theological nature of the degree:

Hood: Black silk or art silk

Trimming: Silk or art silk lined bishops [*sic*] purple

Shape: Dean Burgon

However it seems that the original shade of purple was rejected, because it was the same shade as that used by Warwick in their LLB hood: Burgon shape lined and bound purple.<sup>283</sup> This marks a change in the landscape of academic dress. For the first time Oxford, the oldest University in the English-speaking world, had amended its proposed academic dress in the light of another University already using a similar hood. It also shows that there was a concerted effort that, in creating new academic dress, not only should the hood be unique within Oxford, but also within the United Kingdom. The colour was subsequently changed to a more magenta shade of purple.<sup>284</sup>

### *MBA (1997)*

The academic dress of the MBA<sup>285</sup> was designed by John Venables of Shepherd & Woodward. The lay bachelors' gown would be worn and a hood in the Burgon shape in 'Bristol Maroon' lined grey.<sup>286</sup> The gown was chosen as this was worn by postgraduate masters, and the hood was chosen to be a unique hood that complemented the current hoods.<sup>287</sup> This was approved by the Hebdomadal Council<sup>288</sup> and the Register was amended:

279 Venables, letter of 26 May 1992.

280 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 333 (1992), p. xxxvi.

281 Shaw (1996), p. 42.

282 Venables, letter of 26 May 1992.

283 Jackson (2008), pp. 28, 31, 52. The Warwick LLB hood had been introduced in 1969.

284 Hebdomadal Council Acts (1992), vol. 333, p. lxxxix.

285 Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 345 (9 Dec. 1996).

286 Moss, letter of 27 Nov. 1996. Although Bristol Maroon was the same colour used by Bristol hoods, both the hood shape and lining colour are distinct. However the design for the MBA hood conflicts with the 1992 decision.

287 Hebdomadal Council Agenda, Vol. 345 (9 Dec. 1996).

288 Hebdomadal Council Acts, Vol. 345 (1996), p. lxxxvi.

Hood: Deep maroon art silk  
Trimming: Dark elephant grey  
Shape: Dean Burgon

### *MFA (2001)*

The original proposal for the MFA<sup>289</sup> was that it should take the lay bachelors' gown because it was the gown worn by the MLitt, MSc, MPhil, and MSt. The hood proposed was gold silk or art silk lined and edged with white silk or art silk.<sup>290</sup> The reason for this choice was that this was the same design for the MLitt, MSc, MPhil, and MSt. The gold was taken from the BFA hood.<sup>291</sup> This was subsequently approved by the Vice-Chancellor. The approved design was: 'Gown: black silk or art silk with a form of black lace sewn on the collar, the lower part of the back, and down the sleeves (which are closed and cut straight, having an opening just above the elbow). Hood: Dean Burgon shape, of gold silk or art silk edged and lined with white silk or art silk.'<sup>292</sup> However the Register is rather less descriptive:

Hood: Gold art silk  
Trimming: White  
Shape: Dean Burgon

It seems strange that, given the declaration from the Vice-Chancellor which states that silk or art silk may be used, the Register is so restrictive on the material on the shell of the hood and so general in the lining of the hood. This could be laziness or ignorance on the part of the person who updated the Register.

The choice of gown seems to be correct as it was consistent with the other postgraduate masters' degrees offered. The hood choice is an interesting one. One possibility could have been for the MFA to take the old BFA hood, black silk lined and bound gold silk, like the hoods given to the MTh and MEd. This would have been consistent with the 1992 decision. However, the University decided to copy the pattern of the MSt and MPhil, having a coloured shell lined white silk. One last thing to note is the contribution to the faculty colour system that had been developing—a concept historically alien to Oxford.

### *DClinPsy (2003)*

The colours of the hood were modelled on that of the DPhil, scarlet lined dark blue, and the MCh, black lined blue,<sup>293</sup> maybe trying to reflect both the research and medicinal aspects of the degree. However there has been a major departure from tradition; this is the first time that a doctorate had not been given the full-shape hood. Perhaps the reason for this is the same as why the DClinPsy does not have full or Convocation dress—the University did not regard it as a 'proper' doctorate.<sup>294</sup>

The Vice-Chancellor approved the academic dress of the DClinPsy as follows: 'Gown: black silk or art silk with a form of black lace sewn on the collar, on the lower part of the

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289 Hall, letter of 10 May 2001.

290 Hall, internal memorandum, 7 Sept. 1999.

291 Ibid.

292 Hall, internal memorandum, 24 Sept. 1999.

293 Hall, internal memorandum, 7 Sept. 1999.

294 In the sense that Cambridge did not regard the PhD as a proper doctorate and thus did not give it a fully scarlet robe in the [d1] shape.

back, underneath the arms, and down the sleeves (which are closed and cut straight, having an opening just above the elbow).

'Hood: Dean Burgon shape of blue silk or art silk edged and lined with scarlet silk or art silk'.<sup>295</sup> The gown described is the doctoral undress gown.<sup>296</sup> The reasoning behind this choice was that it was the same gown worn by the MCh and the DM in undress.<sup>297</sup> Therefore it may be that it was not chosen so as to reflect the fact the degree is a doctorate, but because it was awarded in the field of medicine. As with the EngD, there is a question as to whether it takes the doctoral undress gown or the lay bachelors' gown in practice.<sup>298</sup> The DClinPsy entry in the Register reads:

Hood: Royal blue art silk  
Trimming: Red  
Shape: Dean Burgon

### EngD

No statutes or rulings for the EngD, were found, nor does it have an entry in the Register.<sup>299</sup> In practice it takes a Burgon shape hood, [s2], in scarlet cloth<sup>300</sup> lined and edged with petrol blue silk, and the cowl is bordered on the inside 2" grey silk.

The Burgon shape was probably chosen as this was the shape worn by the only other professional doctorate offered by the University, the DClinPsy, and scarlet was chosen as this is found in all the doctoral hoods (except DMus, which is unique). Perhaps the grey band is a nod to the grey found in the MSc and DSc hood—echoing the scientific nature of the degree. This is the first Oxford hood to contain three colours.

Which gown it wears is less certain. It may have been given the same gown as the DClinPsy, the doctoral undress gown. Despite this, the brochure *Academic Dress of the University of Oxford Venables* (2009) states that the EngD (as well as the DClinPsy) wear the lay bachelors' gown. Perhaps this signals a divergence between statute and practice.

### MJur

There seem to be no statutes pertaining to the MJur. Holders of this degree go dressed as the BCL.<sup>301</sup> This seems fair as it ranks just below the BCL in the order of precedence.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Hall, internal memorandum, 24 Sept. 1999.

<sup>296</sup> This description is the same as that of the doctoral undress gown in Venables (2009).

<sup>297</sup> Hall, internal memorandum, 7 Sept. 1999.

<sup>298</sup> Venables (2009), p. 20.

<sup>299</sup> A precise date cannot be ascertained, however it was some point between 2004 and 2009. What also should be noted is that this is first ever degree to break the Oxford abbreviation system of putting the level of degree first (i.e. B, M or D) then the subject (in this case Eng). It did this under pressure from the EPSRC. However the degree is described as the DEng in the graduation brochure (p. 13). See <[http://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field\\_document/Degree%20Ceremony%20brochure%202013-14.pdf](http://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Degree%20Ceremony%20brochure%202013-14.pdf)>.

<sup>300</sup> Although both Groves (ed.) (2011) and Venables (2009) say scarlet silk, the hood hired by the author was cloth.

<sup>301</sup> Venables (2009), p. 24, Shaw (1995), p. 42, Groves (ed.) (2011), p. 321.

<sup>302</sup> At <[http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml#\\_Toc28140155](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml#_Toc28140155)> (accessed 21 March 2013).

## Conclusions

Since 1920 Oxford has gone from offering sixteen to forty-four degrees. In addition, new types of degrees have been invented which have had to be accommodated, including post-graduate masters, first-degree masters and professional doctorates. Unlike most other universities in the United Kingdom, Oxford has never had a system of academic dress designed for it. Therefore all these developments have had to be assimilated piecemeal into the naturally evolved system.

Ultimately for conclusions to be drawn, there must be criteria by which the development of the academic dress must be judged. Usage, I believe, is the most important, as the purpose of academic dress is to be worn. Sympathy to the historical context of the academic dress is also important. This is not Franklyn's perhaps flawed notion of 'historically correct', but a recognition of the tradition from which the academic dress comes. Finally, this needs to be underpinned by satisfactory statute and regulation.

As it stands today, the use of academic dress amongst the dons is broadly restricted to the MA gown and hood, even if they possess Oxford doctorates. This can be compared with Cambridge, where, on the whole, members of the University wear academic dress appropriate to their degree. This may be because Cambridge has some advantages over Oxford with respect to keeping costs down. The undress gown of PhDs (and some other doctorates) differs from the MA's by the addition of a small piece of lace, meaning that the MA gown may be easily converted into the PhD undress gown and that the price difference between the two gowns is small.<sup>303</sup>

At Oxford, on the other hand, there is a substantial difference in price between the MA and DPhil undress gown: £155 due to the difference in material, the design of the gown and the substantial amount of lace used in the DPhil gown.<sup>304</sup> It is not surprising that academics who possess higher degrees choose to go dressed as the MA.<sup>305</sup> However, with respect to hoods the DPhil's is only £28 more expensive. As shown at Cambridge, this is not an insurmountable barrier for buying the correct academic dress. Thus the historical legacy of the academic dress of the University has left it poorly equipped to deal with the financial realities of modern life, leading to the narrowing of everyday usage to only one degree. It seems that the situation cannot be rectified unless there is a large-scale rethink of academic dress. Further developments over the period concerned have only happened to the hood, the cheapest item, so this has not had an effect on gown usage.

What about the historical context of Oxford's academic dress? In the period leading up to the creation of the Register, it did broadly follow on from the past. Despite there being some confusion over the BD's gown, which was inadvertently corrected, the traditions were maintained. The key juncture was the creation of the BPhil. This degree is an interesting case in point, where the University intended it to go dressed as the BCL/BM but where it managed to acquire its own hood—much as the BSc/BLitt had. Whereas the BSc and BLitt both took a blue hood half-lined fur like most other postgraduate bachelors, the BPhil hood was a dark blue lined white.

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<sup>303</sup> The difference being £30 at Ryder & Amies between the cheapest MA and PhD gowns.

<sup>304</sup> The difference between the cheapest MA and DPhil undress gown from Shepherd & Woodward.

<sup>305</sup> They could make an argument that DPhil with MA outranks DPhil on its own. However, in reality, I doubt an academic would know or care about this reasoning.

This event marked a great rift in the academic dress prior to that point, and the subsequent creation of academic dress. For this was the first time, with the sole exception of the BD, that a bachelor's hood had not had fur. Indeed, no other new bachelor's hood after this point would have fur. The BEd hood of 1992 would set the standard of the narrow band of silk for the bachelor's hood, which the BTh and BFA copied. Meanwhile the BPhil, along with the MSc in 1971, set the standard model for the majority of new postgraduate degrees. The two pre-existing masters' hoods were black lined with a coloured silk (blue for Surgery and red for Arts). However, the BPhil and MSc started the practice of having a coloured shell lined either grey or white. There was an attempted renaissance of black lined with a coloured silk for masters' hoods in 1992, but this was short-lived and only the MTh now survives.

The BPhil and MSc also gave rise to the quasi-faculty colour system which now exists. Faculty colours (which were invented for the University of London in 1844) should have no place in an historically sensitive scheme. As a further anhistorical innovation, the DClinPsy hood was the first doctoral hood not to be in the full shape, and the EngD soon followed suit.

With respect to gowns, there has been more consistent reasoning. Although there was initially some confusion around which gown postgraduate masters should receive, it was ultimately resolved, correctly, that they should wear the lay bachelor's gown. On the other hand, although the DClinPsy was given the doctoral undress gown to wear, it now wears, along with the EngD, the lay bachelor's gown. This means that they wear nothing which indicates that it is a doctoral level qualification.

Although the creation of new academic dress has not been entirely bereft of logic, it certainly, with regard to the hoods and latterly the gowns, does not stem from the academic dress which was worn before World War II. One of the problems is that there seem to be parallel systems running at once. This is symptomatic of a poorly regulated system with no clear path for further development.

So what about regulation? This is the true weakness of the whole scheme. Oxford has always favoured an *exemplar* system of regulation, that is, having a physical reference of gowns and hoods in preference to a written one. This can trace its roots to Laud's lost chest of academic dress through to the Register. But it is simply not fit for purpose. This can be seen in the way the academic dress of the BSc/BLitt and BPhil quickly changed from what it was originally prescribed. In recent times, post-Register, the gown of the MSc/MLitt and DClinPsy has mutated from what the Hebdomadal Council intended. Indeed, the Register does not even list every degree; there is no mention of caps; and there is only the most cursory reference to gowns for the most senior degrees. Thus when University regulation states: 'Graduates of the University shall wear robes, gowns, and hoods of the colours, materials, and shapes as shall be from time to time prescribed in the Register of Colours and Materials of Gowns and Hoods for Degrees of the University of Oxford', the statement is effectively meaningless. Moreover, there is no single, simple and convenient place where academic dress is detailed. The Register is deposited in the archives and the original rulings are buried away amongst volumes of Hebdomadal Council Acts.

So, the development of the academic dress has not been smooth. It has faced a dramatic increase in the number of degrees for which it has to cater. Add to this the great expense of the lay bachelors' and doctoral undress gown, the most commonly prescribed gowns, and insufficient regulation, it is no surprise that we have ended up with the hotch-potch system we see today.

Franklyn complained about the chaos of the academic dress in the 1950s,<sup>306</sup> one can only imagine what he would have to say about it now. However, all is not lost. There are several steps that the University could take to rectify the situation:

1) The first thing that must be done is that all extant Statutes, Regulations and Acts relating to academic dress be repealed. These should be replaced by one single Regulation detailing the full academic dress (gown, hood and cap) of each degree.<sup>307</sup> This would ensure that all the academic dress may be found in one easily accessible place and resolve any doubt about what the correct dress may be.

2) In addition, the University may wish to consider the position and use of the MA gown—given the superior status that possessing an MA confers. This may include allowing it to be worn in place of the doctoral undress gown, with a doctoral hood, for those who have a doctorate and an MA.

3) Finally, a more radical option may be for the University to have a mass consolidation of the hoods, returning to a situation where degrees of a similar rank wear the same dress. This would make the creation of future academic dress easier, as new degrees would take pre-existing dress.

Overall, the development of the academic dress of Oxford University has not been a smooth ride, as it has had to adapt to new degrees and the fast changing face of academia. Due to the haphazard mode of regulation, the successive persons responsible for updating the scheme have not been fully equipped with historical context when creating new academic dress. All this has led to the strange system of parallel schemes of academic dress.

The future direction of the academic dress is unclear. It seems inevitable that Oxford will have to adapt as it offers more and more degrees. If the recent history is anything to go by, this will mean more hoods, one for each degree. But there may come a crunch time when the number of hoods becomes too large and the lay bachelor's and doctoral undress gown become too expensive. Perhaps then the development will take a new course.

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306 When it was in fact nicely logical except for the then new BPhil.

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## Addendum: Undergraduate Masters, with commentary

On 31 October 2013 the following notice was issued in the *Gazette*:

The Vice-Chancellor and Proctors have agreed to the introduction of a new form of academic dress to be worn by undergraduate Masters (i.e. holders of the degrees of MBiochem, MChem, MCompSci, MEarthSci, MMath, MPhys and current and future equivalent joint-subject degrees) instead of the same academic dress as BAs. These graduates should wear:

- a laced gown of the same pattern as holders of the MSt degree
- a hood which is the same shape as the MA hood, in black silk lined with sand fabric.

These arrangements will come into effect on **1 January 2014** (from which time existing holders of the degrees concerned will be entitled to wear the new form of academic dress and graduands will be required to wear this academic dress on being admitted to their degrees).<sup>1</sup>

At Oxford, academic dress represents the rank of the wearer within the University.<sup>2</sup> Thus a reasonable basis on which the academic dress for first-degree masters and BAs should be differentiated is if they rank differently. The Statutes of the University state that first-degree masters rank as BAs until their twenty-first term from matriculation when they rank as MAs.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the original decision in 1992 for first-degree masters to go dressed as BAs, until their twenty-first term from matriculation, when they shall go dressed as MAs was maybe more appropriate.<sup>4</sup>

Does the new academic dress fulfil its purpose of recognizing a first-degree master? The hood being in the Burgon or Oxford Simple shape was a correct decision as only doctors (and the BD) take the Oxford Full shape. All other degrees wear a hood in the Burgon and/or the Oxford Simple shape. The colours and materials also reflect hoods awarded for all types of masters' degrees.<sup>5</sup> That is a black silk shell lined a coloured silk.<sup>6</sup>

'A laced gown of the same pattern as holders of the MSt degree' is the lay gown, which is worn by all postgraduate bachelors and masters. Previously it represented a postgraduate degree not a first degree. Perhaps a clue as to why the University chose this gown is found in the decree: '... the same pattern as ... the MSt degree'. This would mean that the University chose the gown because the nature of study for the fourth (and final) year of the first-degree masters is similar to the MSt.

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1 *Gazette*, 31 Oct. 2013.

2 Christianson (2003) p. 25, Groves, ed., (2011) p. 3, Buxton and Gibson (1935), p. 38.

3 At <<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/307-072.shtml>> (accessed 12 Jan. 2014).

4 Hall, Letter of 3 Nov. 1992.

5 Postgraduate masters, higher masters and the MA .

6 The decree mentions that the hood is lined with a 'sand fabric'. In reality the hood is lined with sand coloured art silk.