

# ***Egregii Procuratores: The Master of Arts' Full-Dress Gown and its Use by the Proctors and Assessor of the University of Oxford***

By Edmund Eggleston

## **Introduction**

I have a vague memory of a conversation taking place some twenty-five years ago when I was an undergraduate reading Modern History at St Benet's Hall in Oxford. During lunch one day, across the refectory table, the conversation turned to a discussion of the dress of the proctors of the University and the demise of the full-dress gown of the Masters of Arts. At the time I knew little about the academical dress of the University and the proctors were people largely unknown to the inhabitants of St Benet's Hall. One perceptive fellow undergraduate addressed me saying, 'Oh, that's the sort of thing you'd be interested in!' The seed was then sown and after lying dormant for a quarter of a century has now germinated into this short paper.

When beginning to write this article, I set out to examine as much documentary evidence as possible—both printed works and illustrations of Oxford's academical dress—in order to address two questions. The two questions which I wanted to attempt to answer were these:

1. Is the full-dress gown as worn, today, by the proctors still the sartorial property of the Masters of Arts of the University? and
2. Is it permissible for Masters of Arts of the University to wear a gown made from silk as it is at other universities?

In trying to address these questions, this article has wandered down other avenues, and looked at other issues. These include, (a) how the full-dress gown of the Masters of Arts has developed into a ceremonial robe for the proctors and collectors, (b) consideration of recent adaptations to the design and use of this gown in the second half of the twentieth century and, (c) the dress of the pro-proctors has also been considered, in order to have a complete picture of the dress of the University's staff in the Proctors' Office.

Dr Alex Kerr and Dr Nicholas Groves have both kindly provided suggestions for lines of research and valuable assistance. These suggestions have further broadened the scope of this paper and I am indebted to them for their help and advice.

## **The ceremonial role of the proctors at Oxford**

Addressing the vice-chancellor and the proctors with these words, 'Insignissima Vice-Cancellaria,<sup>1</sup> vosque egregii Procuratores, præsento vobis ...' each dean of degrees from the various colleges and permanent private halls of the University of Oxford presents his or

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Louise Richardson became the first woman to hold the post of vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford in Jan. 2016, hence the change to the Latin address made by the college dean of degrees. Previously, the address had been made in the masculine form, 'Insignissime Vice-Cancellarie'. See <[ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field\\_document/Degree%20ceremony\\_201617\\_web.pdf](http://ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Degree%20ceremony_201617_web.pdf)> [retrieved 11 April 2017].

her students at the degree ceremony normally held in Sir Christopher Wren's Sheldonian Theatre.<sup>2</sup> During the course of this ceremony these words will be repeated several times and this repetition makes one aware of the importance of not only the vice-chancellor, but also the 'excellent proctors', in both the proceedings of the day and in the wider life of the University throughout the academic year.

Today, Oxford proctors are mainly associated with their role within these ceremonies for the awarding of degrees. Historically being the representatives of the Regent Masters of Arts, they have played an instrumental part in the governance of the University for many centuries, particularly the conduct of examinations and the granting of degrees. The proctors are first recorded almost eight centuries ago in a grant of privileges to the University of Oxford from King Henry III in 1248.<sup>3</sup>

Describing the role of the proctors, Joseph Wells<sup>4</sup> wrote:

The Proctors represent the Masters of Arts as opposed to the higher faculties (i.e. the Doctors), and it is in virtue of the time-honoured right of the Faculty of Arts to decide all matters concerning the granting of 'graces', that the Proctors take their prominent part in the degree ceremony. Although the Vice-Chancellor is presiding, it is the Proctor who submits the degrees to the House, and declares them 'granted'.<sup>5</sup>

The proctors were required to be chosen, by colleges in rotation, from among their Masters of Arts of more than four years' standing but less than sixteen years'.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, being Masters of Arts, it is only to be expected that, depending upon the solemnity of the occasion, the proctors would wear either the full-dress or the undress gown of that degree.

### The proctors' gown

The gowns which the proctors use to this day are the full-dress gowns of the Masters of Arts which, ordinarily, had fallen into disuse by the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Dr Alex Kerr suggests that the open-sleeved gown was normal for MAs at Oxford and Cambridge until at least late in the sixteenth century, the closed-sleeve gown taking over in the very early seventeenth century. Oxford had retained the use of the open-sleeved gown alongside the closed-sleeve gown.

A portrait painting of a young gentleman, possibly Richard Lovelace, who was admitted to the degree of Master of Arts at Oxford in August 1636, shows the sitter wearing a black open-sleeved gown with black velvet facings.<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 1) The sleeves are lined with the same black velvet and turned back to show the velvet. This portrait, painted circa 1636–40 by John de Critz the Elder, is possibly one of the earliest colour depictions in existence of the full-dress MA gown.

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2 The candidates for higher degrees are usually presented by a Regius professor.

3 L. H. Dudley Buxton and Strickland Gibson, *Oxford University Ceremonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 145.

4 Joseph Wells, vice-chancellor, 1923–26. Warden of Wadham College, Oxford.

5 J[oseph] Wells, *The Oxford Degree Ceremony* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 59.

6 Buxton and Gibson, p. 146.

7 Dr Alex Kerr, has described in detail the use of gowns by the MAs in seventeenth-century Oxford. See 'Gowns Worn by MAs in Early-Seventeenth-Century England and the Curious Case of Thomas Thornton's Sleeves', *TBS*, 12 (2012), pp. 72–85.

8 Richard Lovelace, 1617–75. Matriculated as a gentleman commoner, Gloucester Hall, Oxford, 27 June 1634. Admitted to MA, 31 Aug. 1636.

MAs at Oxford went on using the full-dress gown for ceremonial events and at royal visits through to 1687.<sup>9</sup> The proctors' gown carries a tippet attached by a button to the left shoulder of the yoke of the gown. Retired proctors are entitled to use a tippet on their ordinary MA gowns (See Figs 3, 4).<sup>10</sup>

The pattern of the proctors' gown is the same as the doctors' full-dress robe, made in black stuff, with facings and sleeves originally of black, but now of a dark-blue silk velvet.<sup>11</sup> Velvet came into fashion in England c. 1380–1400, though it is not mentioned in any sumptuary laws until 1404.<sup>12</sup> In Oxford in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the use of silk-velvet would have been a mark of high status; being an imported cloth<sup>13</sup> it was more expensive to produce than silk or stuffs and therefore used in the University only for the full-dress gowns of Masters of Arts and the robes of the doctors in the Faculty of Divinity. In an account of the 'Ornaments Purchased in 1557–58' for the use of St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle, the canon precentor, Dr William Chedsey<sup>14</sup> paid 8s. for two yards of black velvet, and in the same account six yards of waxen cloth cost him only 4s.<sup>15</sup> At this time velvet was imported from both France and Italy, and it would have been regarded as a luxury cloth. It is only during the years after 1685 and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes that velvet is produced at Spitalfields in London by *émigré* weavers,<sup>16</sup> and being produced more cheaply and in greater quantities, it begins to lose its status as a high-value commodity. It may be only a coincidence that the full-dress Masters' gown begins to fall into disuse around the same time that velvet cloth becomes more readily available.

Regarding the use of the full-dress Masters' gown on more solemn University occasions, Buxton and Gibson tell us:

The use of the Proctor's gown by ordinary M.A.s on these occasions of academic ceremonials, is a relic of its original use by all Masters on certain occasions of great ceremony, as e.g., at inception. It stood in relation to the ordinary M.A. gown as the Doctor of Divinity's 'dress' gown, used at Encaenia, etc., does to the 'un-dress' gown of black stuff which he wears on ordinary occasions.<sup>17</sup>

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9 Kerr, 'Gowns Worn by MAs', p. 74.

10 Buxton and Gibson, p. 26.

11 Until the mid-nineteenth century it was difficult to obtain a silk velvet material dyed to a black colour as all dye compounds were extracted from natural products. Many black dyes produced a blue-black or midnight-blue on velvet. William Henry Perkin discovered the first synthetic dye in 1856.

12 Maurice F. Bond, ed., *The Inventories of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, 1384–1667* (Windsor: Oxley, for the Dean and Canons of St George's Chapel, 1947), p. 39, n. 8.

13 Samuel William Beck, *Draper's Dictionary* (London: Warehousemen & Draper's Journal Office, 1882), pp. 360–61.

14 William Chedsey: Corpus Christi College Oxford, 1529, BA 1530, Fellow 1531, MA 1534, BD 1542, DD 1546. Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, 1557. President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 1558–59. Deprived of all livings and offices and committed to the Fleet Prison, 1559. Sidney Leslie Ollard, *Fasti Wyndesorienses* (Windsor: Oxley, for the Dean and Canons of St George's Chapel, 1950), p. 101.

15 Bond, p. 235.

16 Beck, pp. 360–61.

17 Buxton and Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 45, n. 1

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**Facing page Fig. 1. From 1636, a very early illustration of a Master of Arts wearing the full-dress gown with velvet lined bell shaped sleeves. The subject may be Richard Lovelace. The painting pre-dates Edward's and Loggan's illustrations by forty years.**



Reproduced with permission. The Provost and Fellows, Worcester College, Oxford.

Historically the Faculty of Divinity and the Faculty of Arts have been clerical faculties and they share certain similarities in their dress. The degrees of MA, BD,<sup>18</sup> and DD<sup>19</sup> in undress all use the same pattern black gown, the BD and the DD are made of silk and have a black cord and button on the yoke, to anchor the clerical scarf. In full dress both the MA and the DD had black velvet facings and sleeves to their gown or robe. In the early seventeenth century Oxford doctors were still wearing a hood with their full-dress robes, but by Loggan's time (1675) they had left them off (except the Doctors of Music, who went on wearing theirs until the early nineteenth century).<sup>20</sup> The modern practice is for doctors of the University not to wear their hoods with their full-dress robes, but following the ancient practice the proctors continue to wear their hoods with their ceremonial full-dress gown.<sup>21</sup>

## The collectors

The proctor's gown was also worn by the collectors until 1822, in which year their office ceased to exist, the two collectors being representatives of the 'determining' bachelors. Cox in his *Recollections of Oxford* gives us a simple description of the collectors' dress: 'their gowns and sleeves were exactly like those of the Proctors.'<sup>22</sup> Collectors are mentioned in the statutes as early as 1346 and were doubtless in existence long before that time. Their duties seem to have changed little during the centuries, their main occupation being the collection of fees for the proctors at the time of determining.<sup>23</sup> Determining ceased in 1822. The collectors did not wear the proctors' hood with this gown (Fig. 9), but they did carry a small tippet attached to the left shoulder, in the same manner as the proctors and pro-proctors.

In Loggan's illustration (Fig. 5) the sleeves of the collector's gown are slightly more pendulous than the proctor's. Kerr suggests that this may have been a full-dress BA gown, which became identical with the proctors' gown by 1770 when everyone had forgotten its origin.<sup>24</sup> The distinctive shape of the sleeve illustrated (by Loggan) in 1675 was gone by 1770.<sup>25</sup>

18 'With effect from 1 Oct. 2005 study for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity permissible only for students already registered for the degree. No new applications will be accepted.' *Oxford University Gazette*, 25 April 2005.

19 'Temporary Suspension of Higher Degrees: Education Committee has conducted a review of the University's provision of higher degrees and, following the recommendations of the review, has agreed that the Examination Regulations, and thereby applications, for the higher degrees listed below should be temporarily suspended with immediate effect while work to revise the regulatory and administrative framework is undertaken. The higher degrees affected are: Doctor of Divinity, Doctor of Civil Law, Doctor of Letters, Doctor of Science, Doctor of Music. N.B. This suspension does not affect the Doctor of Medicine.' *Oxford University Gazette*, 16 June 2016.

20 Kerr, pp. 74–75

21 The proctors' hood is the Master of Arts' 'winter' hood, thus their dress fossilizes both an otherwise-disused gown and hood. Correspondence from Nicholas Groves, 8 Nov. 2017.

22 Cox, George Valentine, *Recollections of Oxford* (London: Macmillan, 1870) pp. 241–42.

23 Buxton and Gibson, pp. 5–6. Groves, Nicholas, 'The Hood of the Determining BA at Oxford', *TBS*, 17 (2017), pp. 76–83.

24 Kerr, 'Hargreaves-Mawdsley's History of Academical Dress and the Pictorial Evidence for Great Britain and Ireland: Notes and Corrections', *TBS*, 8 (2008), pp. 106–50 (p. 114).

25 Correspondence from Alex Kerr, 24 Nov. 2017.

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**Facing page Fig. 2. 'The Vice Chancellor Conferring the Degree of Master of Arts, Oxford, April 1842', engraving by W. Walker after a drawing by R. W. Buss. Note that there is shown an edging in a lighter colour to the velvet facings and sleeves of the proctors' full-dress gowns.**



From the "Vigilant" 1842.

Day of Reges. Lib. to the Queen.

THE VICE CHANCELLOR CONFERRING THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS, OXFORD, APRIL 1842.

## Last seen in Winchester in 1873

The wearing of the full-dress gown by Masters of Arts had largely fallen out of use by the end of the eighteenth century. In a footnote, William Combe states, ‘This gown has, however, grown into such total disuse, as scarcely to be known in the University.’<sup>26</sup> Similarly, ninety years later, Wells writing in 1906 says, ‘The Proctors, as the representatives of the MAs, wear their old full-dress gown, which has otherwise disappeared from use.’<sup>27</sup> The last documented use of the full-dress MA gown was by the senior of the two fellows of New College who went down to Winchester to conduct the examination for scholarships. This use continued till 1873.<sup>28</sup> It may be the case that the ordinary Master of Arts in Oxford seldom had the opportunity to wear his full-dress gown, so during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was abandoned by the MAs, until eventually this pattern of gown became associated solely with the ceremonial duties of the proctors and, until 1822, the collectors.

## Stuff or silk?

The University of Oxford does not provide any definitive instruction about the type or quality of cloth to be used in the manufacture of the gowns worn by the Masters of Arts. At Oxford the choice of material for gowns would appear to be more a matter of custom, rather than any formal regulation by the University.<sup>29</sup> Apart from silk, the most common materials for gowns are Russell cord, poplin, and prince’s stuff. In more recent times synthetic fabrics such as rayon have been employed in the manufacture of gowns.<sup>30</sup> Russell cord is a cloth with a fine cord appearance, using a mixture of wool and cotton in the weave.<sup>31</sup> Poplin is a plain weave cloth, traditionally consisting of a silk warp with a weft of wool or worsted fibres.<sup>32</sup> Prince’s stuff is another black wool cloth, closely woven in a plain weave.

The Register, compiled in 1957 to be an authoritative modern work of reference on the patterns and the cloths to be used for Oxford’s academical dress, gives information only about the MAs’ hoods and does not give any specification for the gown of that degree, neither the pattern nor the quality of the cloth to be used.<sup>33</sup>

The historic evidence for the use of silk fabrics for the manufacture of MA gowns is scant. In his ‘general observations’ concerning the academical dress of the University of Oxford, William Combe says in 1815, ‘Silk gowns are only worn by Graduates in Law, Physic, and Music, Under-graduates in Law and Physic and by the Nobleman and Gentleman Commoner. When either of the last take a degree, the gown of Bachelor or Master is made

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26 Nicholas Jackson, ed., *Ackermann’s Costumes of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge*, Burgon Society Historical Reprints, 1 (London: The Burgon Society, 2016), p. 14, n. 22.

27 Wells, p. 77.

28 Andrew Clark, ed., *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary of Oxford, 1632–1695, Described by Himself*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891–1900), Vol. III, pp. 226–27.

29 Correspondence from Alex Kerr, 3 Nov. 2017.

30 The Wardrobe of the Burgon Society holds two Oxford MA gowns, both in Ottoman silk, made early twentieth century. They were the property of Professor Bruno Neveu, director, Maison Française, Oxford, 1981–84.

31 Beck, pp. 280–81.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 260.

33 Andrew James Peter North, ‘The Development of the Academic Dress of the University of Oxford 1920–2012’, *TBS*, 13 (2013), pp. 101–41 (p. 122).



Fig. 3. Proctor, by George Edwards, 1674.

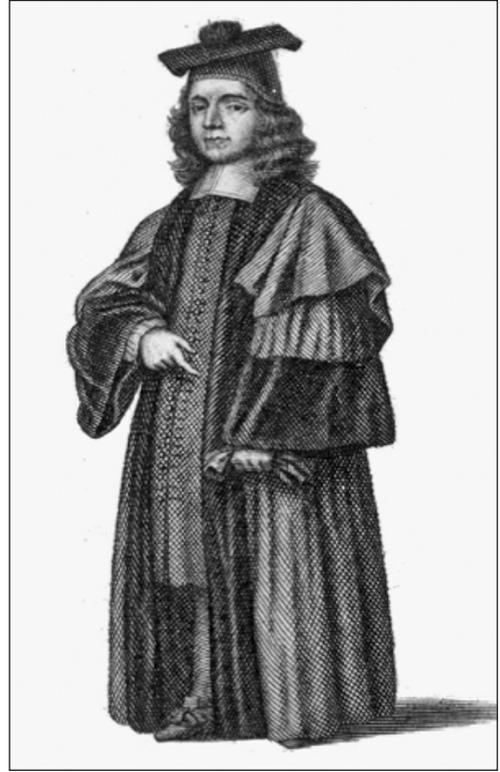


Fig. 4. Proctor, by David Loggan, *Oxonia illustrata*, 1675.



Fig. 5. Collector, by David Loggan, *Oxonia illustrata*, 1675.

in silk: but this is not the case with any other member of the University.<sup>34</sup> Combe also describes the proctor's gown as being made of black prince's stuff.<sup>35</sup>

If this is indeed true, it is quite curious. Today the cost to purchase a silk Masters' gown is prohibitive for most people. However, gowns made of silk are still prescribed for the use of MAs at the Universities of Cambridge and Bristol, and Wales, for example.<sup>36</sup> So why is the same material not prescribed for Masters' gowns at Oxford? At Oxford the MA degree has been described as being the most important of degrees as it confers full membership of the University.<sup>37</sup> Therefore one would expect the use of either silk or stuff to be allowed for the MAs at Oxford, as it is elsewhere.

It is interesting to note that Buxton and Gibson tell us the material used for the Master of Arts' gown is 'either silk or Russell cord, the latter being most generally used, but it is said that it is traditional for the Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, if not a doctor, to wear a silk gown on formal occasions' and 'Women's gowns are exactly the same as men's, but many of the Masters of Arts, *Magistræ Artium*, have reintroduced the old practice, seldom seen among the men, of wearing a gown of silk or poplin, instead of the usual Russell cord.'<sup>38</sup>

Here we have evidence that silk has, in past generations, been used for the gowns of ordinary Masters of Arts at Oxford, and the use of silk is not confined only to the people listed by William Combe. As the University has not provided, in the past, any clear indication of which materials can or cannot be used for the manufacture of Masters' gowns, much of the decision making in this field must have been left to the tailors in the town and the desires of their customers.

We can understand the frustration of the warden of Wadham College when writing about the University's academical dress in 1906, 'At the present time the scanty relics of mediaeval usage are at the mercy of the tailors; and though it must be said for their representatives in Oxford that they do their best to maintain old traditions, yet there is no doubt that innovations are slowly but steadily being introduced, e.g. the M.A. hood is losing in length, and is altering in colour'.<sup>39</sup>

#### Laud's Statutes of 1636

*No one ... through the lust of change should attempt a departure from the ancient fashions and introduce novel dresses. And the tailors also shall be forbidden to depart even a nail's breadth from the received form or fashion of the dress suitable to each degree, under a penalty to be inflicted at the discretion of the Vice Chancellor.*<sup>40</sup>

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34 Jackson, p. 15.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Statutes and Ordinances of the University of Cambridge, Chapter II, Section 14, Academical Dress, Black Gowns, amended 13 July 2016, at <[www.admin.cam.ac.uk](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk)> [retrieved 26 Nov. 2016]. Bristol: Nicholas Groves, *Shaw's Academical Dress of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols (London: Burgon Society, 2011–14), Vol. I, p. 103. Wales: *Ibid.*, p. 412.

37 Buxton and Gibson, p. 39.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 43.

39 Wells, p. 74.

40 *Statutes of the University of Oxford Codified in the Year 1636 under the Authority of Archbishop Laud, Chancellor of the University*, English translation by G. R. M. Ward, Oxford University Statutes, 2 vols. (London: Pickering, 1845), Vol. I, p. 154.

Fig. 6 (near right). Deputy proctor (pro-proctor), 1770, Grignion, version with hand colouring published by J. Taylor in 1807. Wearing undress MA gown, closed sleeves, showing velvet facings with yellow edgings.

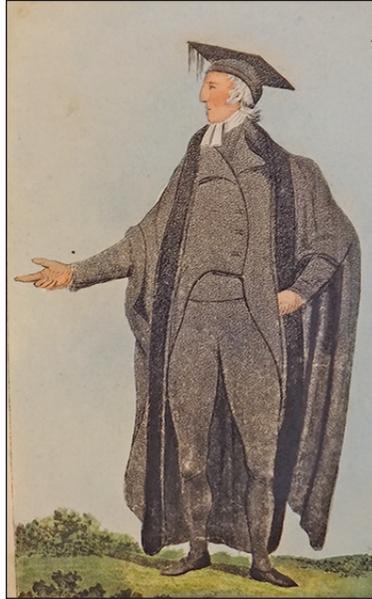


Fig. 7 (far right). Deputy proctor (pro-proctor), 1770, Grignion. Wearing undress MA gown, showing tippet attached to back of gown, on left shoulder.



Fig. 8 (right). Proctor, by Agar after Uwins, published by Ackermann, 1814.

## Alterations to the design of the proctors' gown

The proctor's gown has not been exempt from these 'innovations' to which the warden of Wadham alludes. Several authors note that the facings and sleeves of these gowns were edged with a wide yellow stripe and a narrow red or crimson stripe. These yellow stripes can be clearly seen in etchings published by Nathaniel Whittock and others.<sup>41</sup>

Buxton and Gibson wrote, 'In full dress the Doctor of Divinity wears a scarlet robe with sleeves and facings of black velvet, with an edging of three yellow stripes, with crimson in between the stripes (such an edging is limited to them and to the Proctors—it is really the selvage of the velvet to which tailors have attached magic.)<sup>42</sup> Since the late 1970s the tailors have somehow lost their magic, and the stripes have vanished!

The following descriptions of the ornamentation of the proctors' gowns are placed in chronological order: William Combe (1814)<sup>43</sup> and Wells (1906)<sup>44</sup> both give black as the colour for the velvet facings and sleeves. Buxton and Gibson writing in 1935 say, 'The Proctors['] ... gowns are of the same cut as the doctors' full-dress robes, but less full. They are made of Russell cord, with very dark blue, almost black, silk velvet sleeves and facings, with edgings of a broad yellow and a narrow red stripe'.<sup>45</sup> In 1957 Venables and Clifford wrote, 'The Proctors wear a black full gown, with velvet sleeves and facings and edgings of a broad yellow and narrow red stripe, together with a black hood lined with miniver fur. A square cap is worn'.<sup>46</sup> Here they do not specify the colour of the velvet for the facings and sleeves of the proctors' gowns. We may therefore assume that the facings and sleeves are the same colour as the gown, black.

During the years 1975 to 1979 the proctors' gowns had their distinctive yellow and red stripes removed,<sup>47</sup> and during the course of the last one hundred years, or so, the colour of the facings and sleeves of the gowns has changed from black or blue-black velvet to a shade of deep royal-blue velvet. 'The gowns, which have a tippet on the left shoulder, are always worn except when lecturing or in the Proctor's own college, when he [or now she] wears an MA gown with a tippet'.<sup>48</sup>

Mr Simon Bailey, Keeper of the Archives at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, has kindly provided the following information:

Questions of academic dress are generally decided by the Proctors, and sometimes the Vice-Chancellor, of the day personally and are not recorded in minutes of committees. It follows that much of the evidence is fragmentary. There are some references to the velvet facings in a Proctors' correspondence file relating to their gowns and hoods, 1949–93, but not a complete account of any decisions made about the colour.

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41 Alex Kerr has provided an analysis of this pictorial evidence, and it is reproduced here as an appendix.

42 Buxton and Gibson, p. 38.

43 Jackson, p. 15.

44 Wells, p. 77.

45 Buxton and Gibson, p. 44.

46 D. R. Venables and R. E. Clifford, *Academic Dress of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Shepherd & Woodward, 1957), p. 6.

47 This ornamentation is noted up to the fourth edition of the Venables and Clifford booklet (1975) but not in the fifth edition (1979).

48 Buxton and Gibson, p. 44.



Fig. 9. On right: Collector, by Agar after Uwins, published by Ackermann, 1814.



Fig. 10. This 1822 print by Nathaniel Whittock shows the yellow edging to the velvet on both the gowns of the proctor (which is enlarged at right, Fig. 11a) and the pro-proctor. The scarlet robe of the DD does not have this ornamentation.

When new gowns were ordered in January 1959, it was specified that they should be ‘faced with gold and yellow selvage on the inside’. A similar stipulation was made in February 1968. In response to an enquiry in May 1979, the Marshal wrote that ‘Proctors wear a full length black gown with velvet facings and edgings of a broad yellow and narrow red stripe’.<sup>49</sup>

It appears that when new gowns were ordered for the Proctors in August 1973, ‘blue/black’ velvet was specified. This was the preference of the then University Marshal, despite its extra cost, and must have been approved by the Proctors although there is no note to that effect. It seems that black had been used in previous new gowns since 1949. The Marshal<sup>50</sup> had seen the reference in *Oxford University Ceremonies*, p. 44, to ‘dark blue, almost black’ sleeves. I have found no other references to this issue in the archives here.<sup>51</sup>

Today the information given on the University’s own website is somewhat contradictory. The web page describing the academic dress of Senior University Officers describes the trim of the proctors’ gown as ‘Deep-royal blue velvet’ and the web page describing Full Academic Dress gives ‘Midnight blue’ for the colour of the velvet trim for the same gown.<sup>52</sup> We ought not to be surprised by this inconsistency from the University in regard to its description of academic dress. History has shown this to have happened many times before. One example is the shade of blue used for the trimming of the Doctor of Philosophy robe which, in modern production, is not the dark navy-blue originally specified in 1917.<sup>53</sup>

### The assessor’s gown and hood

In a further mutation, the full-dress gown of the Master of Arts continues to live on at Oxford. In recent years the University assessor too has been granted its use. The post of assessor was established by the University in 1960 specifically to deal with students’ health, welfare and finance issues. The assessor’s full ceremonial dress is of more recent origin having been introduced in 1999, following approval by Hebdomadal Council in December 1998.<sup>54</sup>

The assessor’s version of the Master of Arts’ full-dress gown is differenced from the proctors’ by the use of a deep-purple velvet on the facings and sleeves. It, too, has the tippet attached to the yoke, on the left shoulder. A hood of the Dean Burgon shape is worn with this gown, made from white corded silk, lined with white silk.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps the intention here was to copy the proctors’ hoods,<sup>56</sup> but to have the hood made in cloth rather than in miniver.

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49 Oxford University Archive, Ref. PR 1/12/2/1.

50 The University marshal is the head of the University Security Service. Historically the marshal was in charge of the proctors’ servants (*famuli*) who were the University police. The University marshal is responsible for marshalling processions of the University.

51 Correspondence dated 8 Nov. 2017.

52 See <[www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/The-University-Year/Encaenia/academic-dress](http://www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/The-University-Year/Encaenia/academic-dress)> [retrieved 4 Nov. 2017].

53 North, p. 125.

54 Information provided by Simon Bailey in correspondence on 8 Nov. 2017.

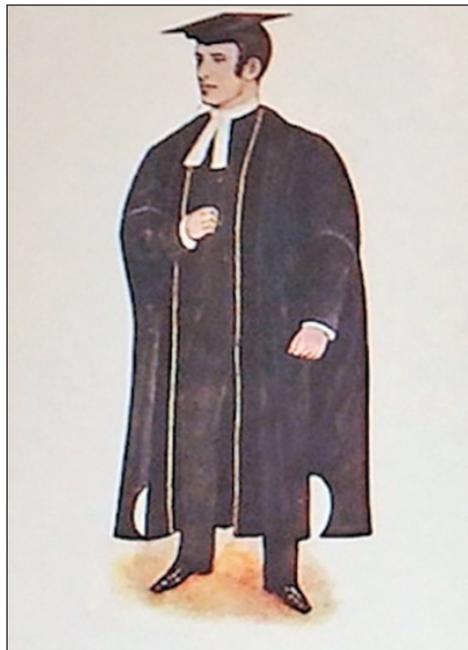
55 See Senior University Officers page at <[www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/The-University-Year/Encaenia/academic-dress](http://www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/The-University-Year/Encaenia/academic-dress)> [retrieved 4 Nov. 2017].

56 The proctors’ hoods are Oxford simple shape, fully lined with miniver. They are worn inside out, so that all of the miniver lining is displayed.

**FIG. 11** At left:  
Proctor, by Nathaniel  
Whittock, 1828.  
Black gown with  
black velvet facings  
and sleeves. The fac-  
ings and sleeves are  
edged with yellow.



**Fig. 12** Pro-proctor, by Nathaniel  
Whittock, 1840.



**Fig. 13** Pro-proctor, on postcard by  
George Davis, c. 1907.

## Pro-proctors

Every year, when the two new proctors are appointed, they are allowed to appoint two deputies, from their own colleges, to assist them with their duties throughout the year of their proctorship. The pro-proctors wear a gown which is not a variation on the full-dress gown of the MA, so, strictly speaking, it does not fall within the scope of this short article. However, as the pro-proctors (now called deputy proctors) are a part of the staff of the Proctors' Office, their gown is included here, to complete the historic picture.

The gown worn by them is the same pattern as the modern Master of Arts gown with closed sleeves, but with the addition of black velvet facings and a tippet attached to the yoke, on the left shoulder. Unlike the proctors, the pro-proctors do not wear tippets on their ordinary MA gowns.<sup>57</sup> The illustration of Oxford's academical dress in Loggan's *Oxonia* of 1675 does not have a representation of the dress of the pro-proctors. From this we might conclude that there was no specific form of dress assigned to the pro-proctors in 1675. However, Buxton and Gibson suggest that 'this is a dress which appears to date from the seventeenth century',<sup>58</sup>

Grignion's plates, issued in 1770 (Figs 6, 7) to accompany the new University Statutes issued that year, show the pro-proctors' gown to have yellow stripes edging the black velvet facings. Some seventy years later the gown is again depicted with the same ornamentation in Nathaniel Whittock's etching of 1840 (Fig. 12). The same pattern of gown is worn today by the deputy proctors, but without the addition of yellow stripes to the velvet facings.

Black velvet, rather than blue, has been retained for the gown facings. We must assume that the loss of the striped ornamentation also happened in the 1970s, at the same time as the ornamentation was lost from the proctors' gowns. When deputizing for the proctors the pro-proctors wear the proctors' miniver hood; at other times they wear the hood of their own degree with the pro-proctors' gown.

## Conclusion

Having given consideration to how the full-dress gown of the Masters of Arts has continued to exist and develop at Oxford through its use on ceremonial occasions by the proctors and collectors, and how adaptations to its design and use have been implemented by the University in the twentieth century, I must now return to the two questions posed at the beginning of this paper. The questions were,

Is the full-dress gown as worn, today, by the proctors still the sartorial property of the Masters of Arts of the University? and

Is it permissible for Masters of Arts of the University to wear a gown made from silk, as it is at other universities?

With regard to the first question, all of the evidence suggests that the MA full-dress gown has generally fallen out of use and is now considered to be a ceremonial robe for University officials at Oxford. On the subject of the full-dress gown of the MAs as used by the proctors, Nicholas Groves has said, 'Their dress fossilizes both an otherwise-disused gown and hood'.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the full-dress gown of the Master of Arts is a form of dress which has never been abolished or abrogated by Statute or other formal act of the University.

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<sup>57</sup> Buxton and Gibson, p. 45.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>59</sup> Correspondence, 8 Nov. 2017.

Charles Franklyn has, most helpfully, provided us with his opinion on this very question. He tells us,

Formerly the M.A. had a full dress robe of the same shape as the D.D., D.C.L. and D.M., but now this is never worn except by the Proctors at Oxford, at Degree ceremonies. It was a handsome black silk gown, with bell-shaped sleeves of black velvet, and fronts of the same. We can imagine that B.D.s must have worn it too as it is really the analogue (as regards a gown) of the B.D. hood, black lined with black. As this full dress M.A. robe has never been abrogated, any M.A. would appear to be fully entitled to wear it when full dress is worn. In style and shape it is very similar to the so-called pulpit or preacher's gown, and similar to the black silk gown worn by chaplains to H.M. the King or Queen.<sup>60</sup>

At a ceremonial event in the future, there is no reason the University should not allow her Masters of Arts to use again their full-dress gown.

With regard to the second question, some of the historical evidence shows that it is permissible to use silk for an Oxford MA gown, alongside other traditional fabrics. The University's own Register gives us no indication of what the quality of the material used for MA gowns should be. We must therefore assume that much is left to the robemakers and tailors and decisions in this field will also be influenced by cost. Today the cost of a silk gown would be prohibitive for most graduates.<sup>61</sup>

## Acknowledgments

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<sup>60</sup> Charles A. H. Franklyn, *Academical Dress from the Middle Ages to the Present Day, Including Lambeth Degrees* (Lewes: privately printed by W. E. Baxter, 1970), p. 153.

<sup>61</sup> The price of an Oxford MA gown in corded cotton and silk Ottoman fabric is £850. Correspondence with J. Wippell & Co. (Exeter) Ltd., 4 May 2018.

## Appendix A

### Colours attributed to velvet facings and sleeves of proctors' gowns:

Source	Date	Colour attributed to velvet facings and sleeves
Ackermann, <i>Costume</i>	1815	Black
Wells	1906	Black
Buxton and Gibson	1935	Dark Blue, almost black
Venables and Clifford (1st edition)	1957	Colour not specified
ox.ac.uk	2016	Deep-royal blue
ox.ac.uk	2016	Midnight blue

## Appendix B

### Analysis of pictorial evidence by Dr Alex Kerr<sup>62</sup>

- There is no sign of a stripe or stripes in Edwards (1674) or Loggan (1675).
- The plates engraved in 1770 to accompany the new statues have no stripes on the proctor or pro-proctor shown from behind; but the pro-proctor from the front (which is clearly not by Huddesford or Taylor, who drew the other twenty-four images) does have a stripe down the facings. That odd plate was part of the original set—the University's accounts show that there were twenty-five plates.
  - In James Roberts' watercolour drawings of 1792 in the Bodleian Library (MS Top. Oxon. d. 58) no stripe can be seen on the proctor, shown from behind, but the pro-proctor, facing us, does have a yellow stripe on his gown facings.
  - J. Taylor re-issued the 1770 plates in 1807 with colour added. No yellow has been added, but you can see where the stripe should be down the facings of the pro-proctor's gown.
  - Agar's plates after Uwins' drawings in Ackermann's book of 1814 present a bit of a puzzle. Is there a stripe on the gowns of the proctor and pro-proctor or not? The colourist has not added a bright yellow where we might expect it and Ackermann was meticulous in getting these details right in his publications.
  - In prints by Whittock of 1822, 1828, and 1840, and by Shrimpton of 1870 and 1885, the yellow stripes are definitely present.
  - In Davis's postcards 1902–07 the yellow stripe is clearly shown on the pro-proctor's gown, but the proctor is three-quarters turned away and no stripe appears.

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<sup>62</sup> Information provided by Dr Alex Kerr, 3 Nov. 2017.