

The Hood of the Determining BA at Oxford

By Nicholas Groves

From time to time reference is made to the term ‘determining BA’. Some may be aware that such a person was in the final stages of becoming a BA, and still others may be aware that (at Oxford at least) he had a special hood. Along with those of the student of Civil Law and the scholars in Arts, the hood of the determining BA has long since gone.

What was a determining BA? The status existed at both Oxford and Cambridge.¹ The medieval Arts course was in two parts: the *trivium* for the BA (four years) and the *quadrivium* for the MA (a further three). The object was

to develop the student’s capacity for reasoned argument, for the oral disputation, so long the focal point of university education, represented far less the accumulation of knowledge than its active employment in debate.²

The progress to the degree was marked by a series of exercises. After two years, the student became a ‘general sophister’ and acted as respondent or opposer in a formal discussion on a set theme. In the fourth year, he became a ‘questionist’, engaging with an MA in disputations in grammar and logic: this exercise was known as Responsions.³ In due

I am grateful to Dr Alex Kerr for information on the various plates, especially the 1805 set, which he saw in the 1990s, and which he thinks are by James Green (1771–1834) (see ‘The Hitherto Unknown Source of Oxford Academic Dress Engravings Identified’, in *TBS*, 16 (2016), pp. 9–12). I am also grateful to him for providing high-resolution scans of the Loggan and Grignon plates, and for his comments. Also to Prof. William Gibson and Prof. Bruce Christianson for their comments on the early draft.

1 I do not presume to speak for what happened north of the Tweed, nor west of the Irish Sea. *The Oxford English Dictionary* has an entry for ‘determining’: 2. Performing the academic exercise of determination n.: *determining bachelor*, a bachelor of arts who had to determine in the Lenten disputations of the year. Obs. exc. in *University Hist.*

1649 *Order 26* Jan. in A. Wood *Life & Times* (1891) I. 149 That all determining Bachelours do meet at St. Marie’s at 12 of the clock ... and be conducted to the Schooles by the bedells.

1709 R. Steele & Swift *Tatler* No. 71 Not a Senior-Fellow [will] make a Pun, not a determining Batchelor drink a Bumper.

1721 N. Amhurst *Terræ-filius* (1726) xlii. 232 The collectors ... are chosen out of the determining batchelors by the two proctors.

1887 A. Clark *Reg. Univ. Oxf.* II. i. 52 To arrange the determining bachelors into groups, so that each determining bachelor might dispute twice at least.

1887 A. Clark *Reg. Univ. Oxf.* II. i. 63 All traces of determination have now disappeared from the procedure of the University. The last relic of it was abolished in 1855 ... To such a base end had ‘determining’ come.

I am grateful to Prof Gibson for this reference.

2 V. H. H. Green, *A History of Oxford University* (London: Batsford, 1974), p. 14.

3 Responsions remained, as a written examination, at Oxford until 1960, but was taken either before or shortly after matriculation. At Cambridge, where it was called the Previous, it was taken in the second year: it was ‘previous’ to the final examination. At both, it was sometimes called the Little-Go, or Smalls—the final degree examination thus being Greats. The process is described

course, the candidate came in front of a board of masters and had to convince them that he had attained proficiency in the necessary texts and exercises, while they assured themselves of his good character. If the verdict was favourable, he was then permitted to ‘determine’, that is, to uphold (or determine) a thesis (a proposition, rather than the present-day written dissertation) against an opponent.⁴ This, then, was the ‘determining bachelor’.

But determination *followed* the granting of the degree: it was a final stage of the investiture, a public demonstration of competence. Indeed, the admission to the BA was actually dated from the candidate’s admission as a questionist.⁵ At medieval Paris, determination was a gala affair, with a banquet to which senior clergy were invited, so they could head-hunt promising talent. In England it lost this carnival aspect, and it became a case of *stare in Quadragesima*—to stand in the University Church each day during Lent, to dispute with anyone who might care to do so—either fellow-students or masters.⁶ At Cambridge, after the determinations, there was Tripos Day, the Thursday before Palm Sunday. The Tripos was a BA, chosen for his wit, who sat on a three-legged stool, which gave him his name.⁷ He disputed publicly with a number of determining bachelors; after sufficient of them had done so, the presiding proctor closed the ceremony with the words

In Dei nomine, Amen. Autoritate qua fungimur, decernimus, creamus et pronunciamus omnes hujus anni determinatores finaliter determinasse, et actualiter esse in Artibus Baccalaureos.⁸

(In the name of God, Amen. By the authority which we administer, we determine, create and pronounce all those of this year who are to determine to have finally determined, and in actuality to be Bachelors in Arts.)

Oxford had special robes for the determining BA, while Cambridge possibly did not (*vide infra*). The Oxford ones are to be seen in Loggan’s plates (1675) and in Grignion’s (1770). Roberts’s series of 1792 has no determining BA. A further set of plates of 1805, probably by James Green, were trialled, but never published. They included a determining BA, but no example is currently available.⁹

in chapter XI of Cuthbert Bede’s novel of 1853, *The Adventures of Mr Verdant Green*. Alas, Mr Green seems not to have been a determining BA.

4 Some stopped here and remained BAs; others went on to the MA, while yet others proceeded to a higher bachelor’s degree, and ultimately a doctorate—some sixteen years in all.

5 S. E. Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 31.

6 The same practice obtained in the first college hall at Harvard, where it was called ‘sitting solstices’ (Morison, *loc cit.*).

7 In due course, he became transmuted into schemes of study, as the History or Divinity Tripos.

8 Morison, p. 74. My translation.

9 I do not propose to discuss what Hargreaves-Mawdsley says on this topic: it is inaccurate to



Fig. 1. Loggan’s determining BA.

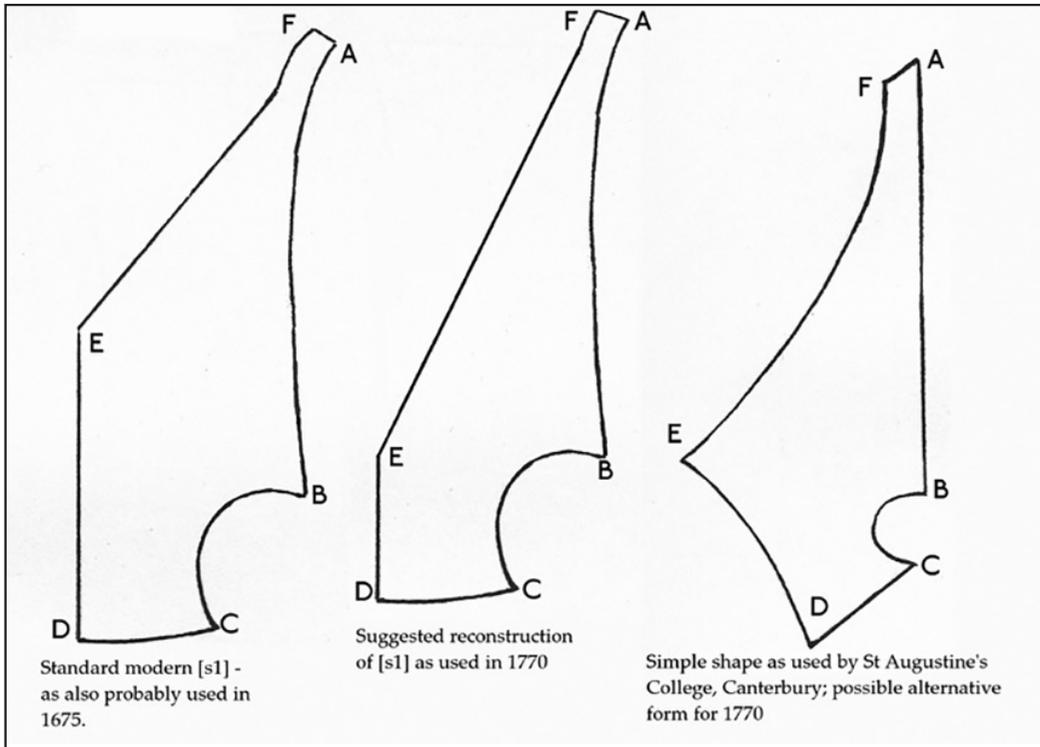


Fig. 2. Comparison of simple shapes: not to scale. The reconstructed form in the centre could even be longer A-D than shown here; it is in any case almost twice as long as A-D on the left-hand pattern.

It may be worth reminding ourselves at this point about the curious development of the Oxford hood.¹⁰ Over time, the Oxford hoods for all degrees except doctors and BDs lost their cape, grew longer and narrower, and were worn back-to-front. Parallel to this development, though not necessarily caused by it, the bachelors' hoods gradually lost more and more of their fur lining, until it came to be a narrow border on one edge—the edge where the cape had been cut away, though when worn, because it was back-to-front, it *appeared* to be the cowl edge. This is still how BA, BMus, BCL, BM hoods—and the former BLitt and BSc—are made if the [s1] shape is used (which it hardly ever is now). Cambridge hoods possibly never underwent this development, though the full fur lining of the BA hood was for convenience reduced to a wide (8") strip inside the cowl, and a 1" border on the cape: this may be relevant in due course.¹¹ It will be noted that the 1" cape border exactly parallels the Oxford development.

a degree. See Alex Kerr's critique of Hargreaves-Mawdsley's work in 'Hargreaves-Mawdsley ... Notes and Corrections', *TBS*, 8 (2008), pp. 106–50 (especially p. 127 for the determining BA).

10 See further, Bruce Christianson, 'The Evolution of the Oxford Simple Shape', *Burton Society Annual 2002*, pp. 30–36, and my 'Evolution of Hood Patterns', *Burton Society Annual 2003*, pp. 18–23.

11 There were no other bachelors' hoods at Cambridge until the late nineteenth century, the BD using the non-regent MA hood, the LLB, MB, and MusB either the non-regent hood, or the BA hood—but see below.

Returning to Oxford, nothing is said about the dress of the determining BA in Laud's statute of 1636, but part of the clause in the 1770 statute referring to BAs' dress reads thus:¹²

Quod Artium Baccaurei in omni Actu Scholastico Caputium Fimbriâ pel-
litâ praetextum gerant; in Tempore vero Quadragesimali Determinantes tum
in Scholis, tum in Choro Beatæ Mariæ Virginis, quoties ad celebrandas Prec-
ces convenerint, Pellem etiam lanatam, secundum Exemplar, adhiberant.

Ward's translation reads:

Bachelors of Arts are, during every scholastic act to wear the hood bordered
with the fringe; but the determiners during Lent time are to use the wool
fells also, according to the pattern, both in the schools and in the choir of St
Mary's, whenever they meet at prayers.¹³

'Hood bordered with the fringe' is what might be kindly called a 'very loose' trans-
lation of *Caputium fimbriâ pellitâ praetextum gerant*, which actually means something
like 'Hood with a border of fur', but it is clear that the hood is not to be fully lined: another
example of prescription following practice, the hood having undergone the evolution sum-
marized above.¹⁴

Alas, Loggan's 'full' BA is not only facing forward, but seems not to be wearing a hood.
However, the determining BA (*Artium Baccaureus in Quadragesima determinaturus*:
Bachelor of Arts determining in Lent) most conveniently, does have his back to the viewer,
and his hood can be seen. (See Fig. 1.) The gown is the same as the ordinary BA, but the
hood has a wide strip of fur (the 'wool fells' of the 1770 statute) added to one edge. He is
wearing the hood the correct way round (see below), with the narrow fur border against his
back, with the wide fur on the opposite edge. But the apparent shapelessness of the hood
(and indeed the manner of wearing it) is explained by the fact that he is wearing it partly
inside out: hence the liripipe does not show. This is also true of the MA and the proctor,
whose hoods are being worn inside out, and it is known that this was a fashion for simple
shape hoods at the time.¹⁵ The wool fells are attached to edge EF (see Fig. 2), on the inside,
but have been flourished (or turned out) so that they are clearly visible. The problem with
this is, as we cannot see the hood of the ordinary BA, we cannot know if the extra fur was
added for determination, or if it was still an integral part of the hood.

This can be reconstructed by using a modern [s1] BA. Figure 3 shows it being worn in
the manner customary now; Figure 4 shows it being worn in what we must assume was the
manner customary in 1675. Figure 5 shows it with the extra fur.¹⁶ This reproduces exactly
the effect of Loggan's plate, and thus tells us that the hood at that time was of a size much

¹² I am grateful to Dr Alex Kerr for providing this.

¹³ G. R. M. Ward, *Oxford University Statutes* (Oxford: OUP, 1845), Vol. II, pp. 10–11.

¹⁴ Alex Kerr suggests that the practice of adding the extra fur may have come in when the
hood started to be worn back-to-front. ('Hargreaves-Mawdsley ... Notes and Corrections', p. 127.)

¹⁵ Loggan's BCL/BM is wearing his hood like this, too, as the narrow fur shows against his
back; but it is not quite clear what the BMus is doing: his narrow fur appears to be on the opposite
edge. Loggan may simply be indicating that hoods could be worn either way round, at the wearer's
whim—as in indeed they still are on occasion! The proctors, of course, still wear their hood inside
out, but the correct way round.

¹⁶ I have in fact used a strip of crimson damask, as I did not have a strip of fur (or wool fells)
available, and also it is easily distinguishable from the fur on the other edge. It is attached in a man-
ner borrowed from the PhD robes of the sister university: with paper clips.



Fig. 3.

Fig. 3 (above). Modern version of [s1] Oxford BA.



Fig. 4.

Fig. 4 (above right). Modern Oxford BA worn as in Loggan.



Fig. 5. Modern Oxford BA with damask indicating position of wool felts for Determining BA.

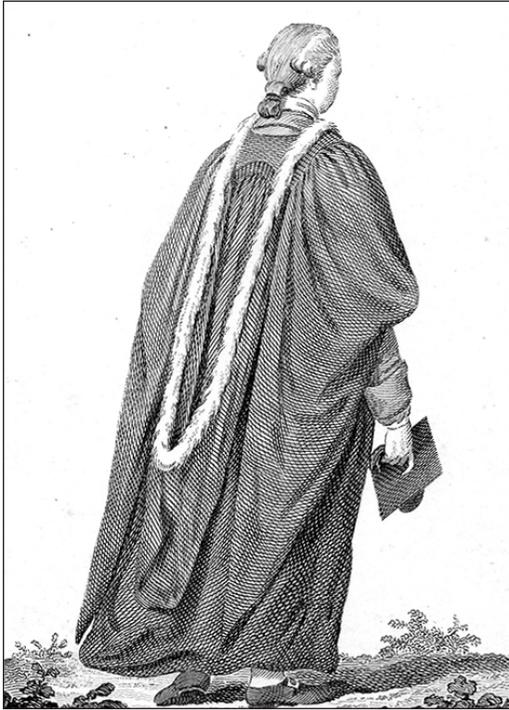


Fig. 6.

Fig. 6 (above). Grignon's Bachelor of Arts.
Fig. 7 (above right). Grignon's determining bachelor.



Fig. 7.

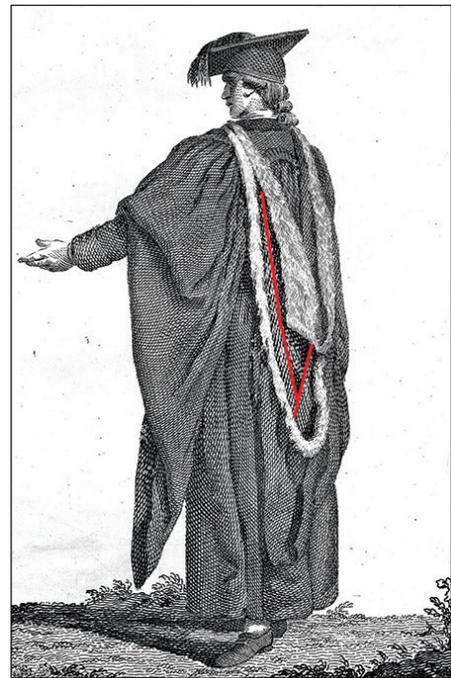


Fig 8. Grignon's determining bachelor, with
the inner part of the hood marked in red.

the same as we have now. But were there special ‘determining’ hoods, which were changed for the standard model once the process was over, or were the fells simply removed?

A hundred years later, Grignion’s BA (Fig. 6) is very handily walking away from us, and we can see that his hood is of an Oxford simple shape [s1], hanging almost to his ankles, in black, and the edge away from the back (edge AB in Fig. 2, which is technically not the cowl edge, recalling that the [s1] shape is worn backwards) is bound with fur—about 2” showing on either side. We can see that this and other hoods have returned to being worn outside-out, as it were. The liripipe is cut square and does not have the so-called ‘fishtail’ of the modern pattern which echoes the MA boot—this is quite plain in Grignion’s plates.¹⁷ Probably the two sides do not meet at AF, but are connected by a ribbon, which will make the hood hang well down the back—and will in due course become the neckband.¹⁸ But the whole hood has got longer and narrower, and the two sides are joined together much lower down. Indeed, we seem to need a further variation on the [s1] shape, with the ED line cut much shorter, and point E almost as low as point B, so as to allow for this deep division. It may resemble that in Figure 1, or possibly that in the third image in Figure 2, which is the form of simple shape given in Haycraft ’48¹⁹ for St Augustine’s College, Canterbury: it is merely a case of the angle of the lower end.²⁰

Grignion’s determining bachelor (Fig. 7), also facing away from us, wears exactly the same, but the hood has the extra fur. Now, where is this attached? It seems to be on the edge opposite that on which the fur is (EF), the same as in Loggan’s drawing. But allowing for the development of the hood pattern, the fells stop well short of that edge, and must be attached merely at either end, and otherwise hang loose. Figure 8 shows the Grignion plate with the edges of the hood marked in red: it can be seen that they are nowhere near the fells. This may well suggest that by this time, the fells were attached simply for the time being, and were removed (and doubtless recycled) in due course.

Why did Cambridge not have a special hood for its determiners? I suggest that (assuming they also wore the full BA dress) it is because the Cambridge hoods did not undergo the radical development that Oxford ones (except for doctors and BD) did, losing their cape and being worn back-to-front (and, indeed, inside-out). Thus the wide wool fells were already in place inside the cowl,²¹ but unlike Oxford, it was not removed on gaining the full BA status. A tantalizing thought surfaces when we look at Loggan’s Cambridge LLB/MB. This appears to be furred on the cape edge only, though it is possible that the hood has

17 The ‘fishtail’ or crescent cut first appears in the Shrimpton plates of 1870 and 1885.

18 There are many references to the use of ribbon well into the nineteenth century, and the BS Collection has at least one example of a hood so constructed.

19 F. W. Haycraft, *The Degrees and Hoods of the World’s Universities and Colleges*, 4th edn, revised and enlarged by E. W. Scobie Stringer (Cheshunt: privately printed by Cheshunt Press, 1948), p. 159.

20 Although founded in 1848, it is not clear when the hood was introduced. It is listed in T. W. Wood, *Ecclesiastical and Academical Colours* (London and Derby: Bemrose & Sons [1875]). Point E could possibly be brought closer to point D for the Grignion pattern. The interest lies in that the 2” border of scarlet cloth which is its distinguishing feature, is sometimes on EF, and sometimes on AB.

21 The use of rabbit fur for bachelors at both universities is comparatively late: historically wool fells were used to line the BA hoods at least as late as 1803 (W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 128).

fallen in such a way that the cowl fur is not visible.²² Is it possible that the LLB/MB hood was in fact furred on the cape only (and thus not a BA hood), and the wide fur inside the BA cowl is the extra piece added for the determinants, which was never removed? If so, this 'superior bachelor' hood was lost by 1815, as the lawyers and medics had taken to the non-regent MA hood (with MA gown).²³

So what was the purpose or significance of the extra fur at Oxford? Clearly it marked the determining bachelor as not yet a full BA: rather than a *graduate*, he was a *graduand*. But was it in fact a hangover from the original BA hood, which was lined with fur, as at Cambridge?

Once modern-style examinations came in during the mid-nineteenth century, the determining bachelor went out, and his hood with him.²⁴ Thus, so far as is known, none survive, although we may ask if in fact any would: was the final sartorial act to remove the wide fur strip from the hood on becoming a full BA? How did the tailors make them: as determining BA hoods, or as a hood which could easily be converted? And exactly *when* was the wool fells removed? After the proctors had made their declaration? Was there a bevy of scouts handy, with pairs of scissors, ready to make their young gentlemen into full Bachelors of Arts?²⁵

The final point to address is one I raised many years ago. The [s2] or Burgon shape, besides restoring to some degree the fulness of the hood, has the narrow fur border (correctly) on the same edge as the [s1], but also a wide fur border inside the cowl—i.e., where the wool fells were attached on the determining BA hood. The received wisdom is that Dean Burgon found 'an old hood' of this pattern, and promulgated its use. I have suggested elsewhere that it is possible that what he found was in fact an old determining BA hood. Had the determining BA and his hood disappeared so completely from the scene that Burgon had no idea what it actually was? However, we must recall that, so far, no firm link between Dean Burgon and the [s2] shape has ever been found,²⁶ and that, if the fells were attached *pro tempore* and removed after 'full' graduation, then such a hood is unlikely to have existed anyway.

22 It is also possible that Loggan has simply flipped his Oxford BCL/BM image: the use of the laced gown is inconclusive; it may have been used at Cambridge at this date.

23 One could wonder if this lies behind certain Durham bachelor hoods (the BLitt for one), which are unlined, and furred on the cape only. One might also wonder if a memory of it lay behind the original suggestion for the LLB, MB, and MusB hoods in the 1934 revision: black stuff, lined with the relevant shade of 'cherry', and furred on the cape. It was noted in the initial Report of the Council of Senate on Academical Dress (quoted in C. 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. 177) that 'The tippet [sc: cape] edged with fur is the general sign of the Bachelor'.

24 It was abolished in 1855: see A. Clark *Reg. Univ. Oxf.* II., i., 63, in n. 1, *supra*.

25 'Cuthbert Bede', published 1853–57, tells us that when Verdant Green graduated ('Chapter the Last'), 'the precincts of the Schools [were] tenanted by droves of college butlers, porters, and scouts, hanging about for the usual fees and old gowns, and carrying blue bags, in which were the new gowns. Then—having seen that [his scout] was in attendance with his own particular gown ...' he goes into the 'Convocation House'. It would seem that Green graduated BA in his commoner's gown, and was duly vested in the BA robes by his scout in the antechamber afterwards. It would seem that by the time the relevant section was written, the practice had stopped.

26 See further Clifford Dunkley, 'JW Burgon and the Eponymous Hood ...', *Burgon Society Annual 2003*, pp. 32–33.