

## Academic Dress on Picture Postcards Published by Davis's of Oxford, their Rivals and Successors

By Alex Kerr

### Early history of the postcard

The penny post was introduced in 1840 at the suggestion of Rowland Hill, an educationalist and social reformer. Letters could now be sent anywhere in the United Kingdom at a uniform rate based on weight, using prepaid stamps. Over the next thirty years the Post Office brought in various types of its own official pre-stamped stationery in the form of printed wrappers and envelopes. From 1870 it issued plain postcards, again with the stamp printed on them, the postage being at the concessionary inland rate of a halfpenny. Then in 1894 permission was given for private companies to produce postcards and a profusion of decorative and pictorial issues soon appeared. A concessionary overseas postage rate for them of one penny was brought in at this time.<sup>1</sup>

The 1890s saw a worldwide craze for picture postcards, both to send as mail and as collectors' items. Any handwritten message had to be fitted round the image on one side of the card and the address alone written on the other side. However, about half the early cards offered on Ebay and elsewhere are postally unused: they may have come from somebody's collection and not necessarily from unsold stock. The most elaborate and artistic examples were produced on the Continent, especially in the German-speaking countries, where advances in postal services had stolen a march on those in Britain.<sup>2</sup> The only British pictorial card of this type illustrating academic dress I have come across so far is one of a woman student at Aberdeen in about 1900 (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

I am very grateful to Professor Bruce Christianson and Dr Jonathan Cooper for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Martin Willoughby, *A History of Postcards: A Pictorial Record from the Turn of the Century to the Present Day* (London: Studio Editions, 1992), pp. 22–32.

<sup>2</sup> Willoughby, pp. 44–61.

<sup>3</sup> Photographs of Alexandra, Princess of Wales, taken on the occasion of her admission as



Courtesy of Jonathan Cooper

**Fig. 1.** Undivided-back card: 'Lady Student—Aberdeen University', c. 1900, later reissued by William Smith at the Bon-Accord Press, Aberdeen.

In 1902 the British postal authorities sanctioned the divided-back card, and this allowed the picture to fill one side, with space for message and address on the other. The UK was the first country to allow this innovation. It heralded a Golden Age for the picture postcard, which lasted until the end of the First World War. Publishers and printers, large and small, all over the country were at once busy meeting the demand, producing series of themed postcards—artistic, photographic, comic—as much for collectors as for posting.<sup>4</sup>

## Davis's

The Davis family had run a picture-framing and printseller's shop first at 6 Turl Street in Oxford in the 1840s<sup>5</sup> and then next door at number 7 from the early 1850s.<sup>6</sup> From about 1872 George Davis kept what was termed a 'fancy warehouse' at 4 Turl Street,<sup>7</sup> which he moved round the corner and opened as a 'fancy repository' at 2 Cornmarket Street in about 1887. He died in 1891 but his widow, Matilda, with their son, George, carried on the business there until 1911.<sup>8</sup> From about 1907 to 1918 George Davis junior also had a photographic studio, George Davis Varsity Photographer, at the 7 Turl Street premises.<sup>9</sup>

Davis's produced some photographic undivided-back postcards of Oxford in the 1890s. From 1902, under the new dispensation, they set about publishing an impressive range of divided-back cards including street and river scenes, and views of university, college and public buildings. These were evidently aimed at both the tourist and the postcard collector. The firm ceased production of postcards after the First World War but continued trading until 1952 at 7 Turl Street in its other lines of business: photographic materials, prints and framing, other publishers' greetings cards and postcards, pottery and china.<sup>10</sup>

## Oxford University Robes

One of the Davises' first series of the new-style cards, *Oxford University Robes*, was launched in 1902. As became the custom, they were produced in sets over a period of years. The cards could be bought separately or together in a decorative envelope cover (Fig. 2).

The first set of eight consisted of 'Chancellor', 'Proctor (Full Dress)', 'Doctor of Divinity (Full Dress)', 'Doctor of Civil Law or Medicine (Full Dress)', 'Doctor of Science or Letters (Full Dress)', 'Master of Arts', 'Bachelor of Arts', 'Doctor of Music (Full Dress)' (Fig. 3). Although the anonymous, rather amateurish drawings have little artistic merit, the robes

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DMus *honoris causa* at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1885, were put on sale in so-called *carte-de-visite* format, but I am unaware of their being issued subsequently as true picture postcards.

<sup>4</sup> Willoughby, pp. 67–68.

<sup>5</sup> *Pigot and Co's* (later *Slater's*) *Royal National and Commercial Directory and Topography* (Manchester and London: Pigot (later Slater), 1839–), 1842 edition, Oxfordshire section, p. 28; 1850 edition, Oxfordshire section, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Oxfordshire* (Peterborough: Robert Gardner, 1852), p. 380.

<sup>7</sup> *Webster's Oxford Directory* (Oxford: Webster, 1872), p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> *Kelly's Directory of Oxford* (with several variant titles) (London: Kelly's Directories, 1799–1976), editions from 1887 to 1911; *Oxford History*, 'Cornmarket' <[www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/cornmarket/east/o2.html](http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/cornmarket/east/o2.html)> [all online material cited in this article retrieved 14 July 2019].

<sup>9</sup> Not listed as a separate business in the directories; known dates of individual photographs have been used to establish when the firm was active. See <[search.ssccommons.org/object/SS7729975\\_7729975\\_8649899](http://search.ssccommons.org/object/SS7729975_7729975_8649899)>.

<sup>10</sup> *Kelly's Directory of Oxford*, editions from 1883 to 1952.

and their colours are fairly faithfully represented, printed by a three-colour chromo-lithography process. This issue had printed vertically on the front of the cards 'Copyright Published 1902, by Davis's, 2 Corn Market, Oxford. Designed and printed in England.' and a stamp box on the back labelled 'Inland / ½d. / Stamp. / Foreign / 1d.'

The second set was issued about 1905, to judge by the earliest postmarks on some used cards. It comprises: 'Bellman and Marshal', 'Bedel of Arts', 'Bedel of Divinity, Law or Medicine', 'Doctor of Divinity (Convocation Dress)', 'Doctor of Divinity (Undress)', 'Doctor of Civil Law or Medicine (Convocation Dress)', 'Proctor (Undress)', 'Bachelor in [*sic*] Medicine or Science' (Fig. 4). For this issue and reprints of the first set the publisher's address, but now with no date, was printed on the back of the card.

The third set following a year or so later comprised: 'Verger', 'Doctor of Science or Letters (Convocation Dress)', 'Doctor of Music (Undress with Hood)', 'Pro-Proctor', 'Bachelor of Music', 'Bachelor of Divinity', 'Scholar', 'Commoner' (Fig. 5).

A singleton twenty-fifth card, 'Bachelor of Civil Law or Letters', was added to complete the series (Fig. 6).

At some point, perhaps about 1907, the design of the stamp box was changed. Although postal rates would not increase until 1918,<sup>11</sup> a logo representing Carfax Conduit with the words 'Davis's Oxford / Post Cards' replaced the prices for postage.<sup>12</sup> By 1911 the address was changed to 'George Davis, 7 The Turl, Oxford', when the firm moved out of the shop in Cornmarket Street.

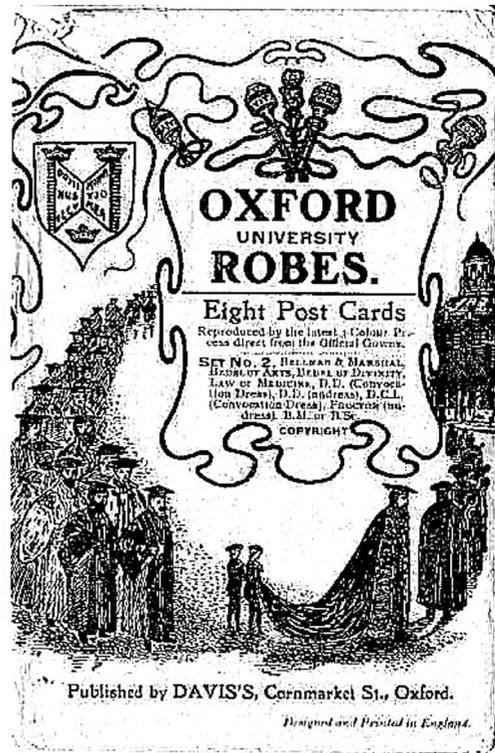
Several details in the *Oxford University Robes* series of cards are worth noting.

The chancellor has the white-haired, full-bearded features of the Marquess of Salisbury, in office 1869–1902.

The MA and BA are the only figures to be replaced by new ones in later issues. In the 1902 set they have Oxford plain hoods [s1] (Fig. 3, middle row, right, and bottom row, left). In the reissue of c. 1905 the figures in the new drawings have Burgon hoods [s2] and they

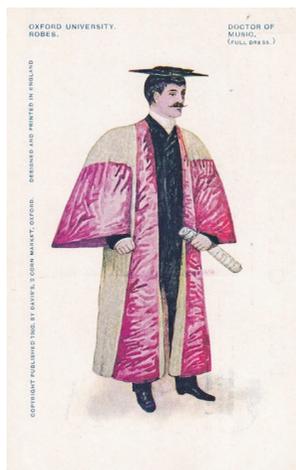
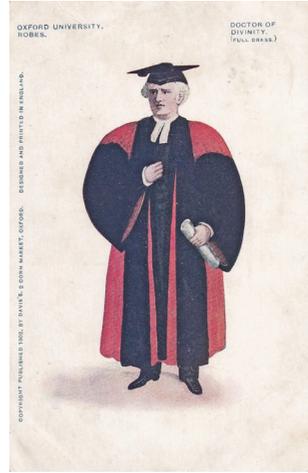
<sup>11</sup> See <[www.gbpc.org.uk/information/rates/inland/postcards.php](http://www.gbpc.org.uk/information/rates/inland/postcards.php)>.

<sup>12</sup> Carfax Conduit, an elaborate stone structure resembling a Renaissance version of a Gothic market cross, was built at the crossroads in the centre of Oxford in 1617. It provided water piped from a cistern at Hinksey Hill, two miles to the west. In 1787 it was removed for road widening and given to Lord Harcourt, who set it up at Nuneham Park, five miles to the south (Catherine Cole, 'Carfax Conduit', *Oxoniensia*, 29–30 (1964–65), pp. 142–68).

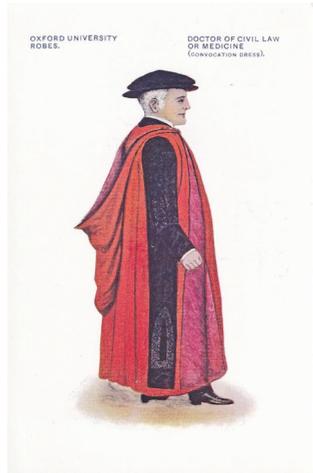
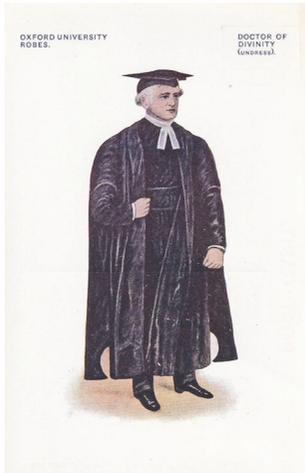
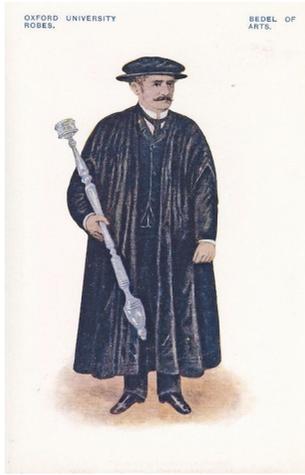


Courtesy of Paul Coxon

Fig. 2. Cover for *Oxford University Robes*, second set of eight cards, c. 1905.



**Fig. 3. Oxford University Robes, first set, 1902.**



**Fig. 4. Oxford University Robes, second set, c. 1905.**





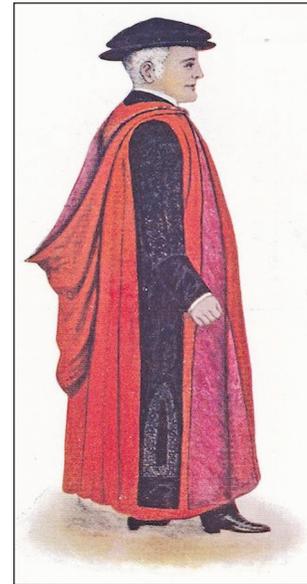
Fig. 5. *Oxford University Robes*, third set, c. 1907.



**Fig. 6. Oxford University Robes, additional card: BCL/BLitt.**



**Fig. 7. Oxford University Robes. MA and BA changed to Burgon [s2] hoods, c. 1905, the only images in the series that were redrawn.**



**Fig. 8. Oxford DCL/DM in convocation dress: Agar after Uwins, 1814 (left); Shrimpton, 1885 (centre); Davis's, c. 1905 (right).**

remain the only ones to get the new shape of hood. It is interesting that the lettering on the BA card announces ‘Bachelor of Arts. (Burgon Hood.)’. This is the earliest use of the term *Burgon hood* I have found anywhere in print (Fig. 7).<sup>13</sup>

Putting the DCL/DM in a square cap rather than a round bonnet with their full-dress robes looks like a mistake. Putting the DCL/DM in a bonnet rather than a square cap with their convocation dress also looks like a mistake, but this image echoes one in Shrimpton’s plate of 1885,<sup>14</sup> which in turn echoes one by Uwins in 1814.<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, the three images illustrate how the rose pink of the doctor’s silk gave way to salmon pink and then to crimson in the course of the nineteenth century (see Fig. 8). William Combe’s text in his *History of the University of Oxford*, which Uwins’ plate accompanies, reads: ‘The square cap is considered most appropriate to this dress, though a velvet one [i.e. a bonnet], which appears in [Uwins’] print, is frequently worn with it.’<sup>16</sup> The statutes of 1770, like those of 1636, give the impression that a round cap is suitable for any legal or medical graduates with any of their dresses. Laud’s statutes of 1636 read: ‘All graduates are to wear [ ... ] square caps or round ones (that is to say jurists and physicians) [ ... ]’;<sup>17</sup> the statutes of 1770 read ‘All graduates are to wear [ ... ] square caps with a tassel, or round ones (that is to say, the jurists and medical graduates [ ... ]’.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the question of which kind of headwear was correct was still not so fixed—or thought so important—about 1902 as we would now expect. It is difficult to say whether the Davis’s card reflects usage of the time or is simply copying an outmoded style from old pictures, but probably the latter.

As in many photographs from the mid-nineteenth century until after the Second World War, the Davis’s DMus (Fig. 3, bottom row, centre) wears a square cap with full dress rather than the bonnet worn before and since.<sup>19</sup> It seems there was a fashion to follow the example of the Revd Sir Frederick Ouseley, Bt, Heather Professor of Music from 1855

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13 The earliest MS reference to the Burgon shape by name that I have discovered dates from 1879 and appears in an entry in an 1876–85 ledger of the Oxford robemaker James Clarke & Son (Oxford, Oxfordshire History Centre, B16/4/F1/1, p. 55). Earlier in the ledger two shapes for both BA and MA hoods were denoted by the terms ‘New Shape’, ‘New Style’ or ‘N.S.’—presumably Burgon—and ‘Old Shape’, ‘Old Style’ or ‘O.S.’ (*ibid.*, pp. 1 ff.). Some years before that an [s2] shape Oxford MA hood was illustrated by Gilbert J. French in his *Tippets of the Canons Ecclesiastical* (London: George Bell, 1850), p. 6. However, conclusive proof of a link between J. W. Burgon and the hood named after him remains elusive (see, most recently, Nicholas Groves, ‘The Hood of the Determining BA at Oxford’, *TBS*, 17 (2017), pp. 76–83 (p. 83)).

14 *Shrimpton’s Series of the Costumes of the Members of the University of Oxford*, 2nd version (Oxford: A. T. Shrimpton; and London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., [c. 1885]).

15 William Combe, *History of the University of Oxford*, 2 vols (London: Ackermann, 1814), Vol. II, Pl. IV; reprinted in Nicholas Jackson, ed., *Ackermann’s Costumes of the University of Oxford and Cambridge* (London: Burgon Society, 2016), p. 19.

16 Combe, *Oxford*, Vol. II, p. 260; Jackson, p. 13.

17 *Oxford University Statutes*, trans. by G. R. M. Ward, 2 vols (London: William Pickering, 1845–51), Vol. I, p. 153.

18 *Oxford University Statutes*, Vol. II, p. 11.

19 See also *Shrimpton’s Series of the Costumes of the Members of the University of Oxford*, 1st version (Oxford: T. and G. Shrimpton [c. 1870]); and 2nd version, cited above.

to 1889, who exercised his right as a former gentleman commoner to continue wearing a velvet-covered square cap even with his dress robe (Fig. 9).<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this practice was reinforced when the DLitt and DSc, degrees introduced in 1900 and ranking immediately above the DMus, were given square caps for their full dress as they were to be awarded in the Faculty of Arts, as the BLitt and BSc already were. Arts and Theology historically were clerical faculties, for which the square cap was prescribed, while Music, Medicine and Civil Law were lay faculties, for which the round bonnet was usual—for doctors at any rate.<sup>21</sup>

There seems to have been a shift in the early twentieth century in what shades of blue were appropriate for hoods of various lay bachelors: BCL, BM, BLitt and BSc (in each case trimmed with white fur).

- Wood, in about 1882, said the BCL and BM had a blue hood.<sup>22</sup>
- The regulations of 1895 stated that the new BLitt and the BSc were to wear the same dress as the existing BCL and the BM.<sup>23</sup> If there was a difference in practice between the blues used for the BCL and the BM in 1895, an implicit ‘respectively’ (or its Latin equivalent) would require the BLitt to use the same colour hood as the BCL and the BSc to use the same colour as the BM—as indeed Davis’s cards have them, perhaps on information from Oxford robemakers at the time (Fig. 10).
- Wells in 1906 gave all the lay bachelors a blue hood.<sup>24</sup>
- Ealand, in 1920, had the BLitt, BSc and BCL in a bright blue hood and the BM/BCh in a dark blue one.<sup>25</sup>
- Haycraft copied this, in 1923, with the BLitt, BSc and BCL in a light blue hood and the BM in dark blue one.<sup>26</sup>
- In 1926 Franklyn, on his cigarette cards, grouped the BCL and BM together, with a blue hood darker than the BLitt and BSc. He said the latter should have a lighter shade to resemble a neutral or French grey colour, presumably like the DLitt and DSc—on his unwarranted assumption that Oxford had (or should have) a faculty colour scheme.<sup>27</sup>
- In 1927 Haycraft altered his list to show the BLitt and BSc in a light blue hood and the BCL and BM in a dark blue one.<sup>28</sup>

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20 F. W. Joyce, *The Life of Rev. Sir F. A. G. Ouseley, Bart., MA, MusD, Etc., Etc.* (London: Methuen, 1896), p. 86.

21 See Alan J. Ross, ‘*Togas gradui et facultati competentes: The Creation of New Doctoral Robes at Oxford, 1895–1920*’, *TBS*, 10 (2010), pp. 47–70 (p. 52, n. 26).

22 T. W. Wood, *Degrees, Gowns and Hoods of the British, Colonial, Indian and American Universities and Colleges* (London: Thomas Pratt, c. 1882), p. 7.

23 *Statt. Tit. xiv §3 cl.1*, in *Statuta Universitatis Oxoniensis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), p. 303.

24 J. Wells, *The Oxford Degree Ceremony* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 78.

25 C. A. Ealand, *Athena: A Year-Book of the Learned World—The English-Speaking Races* (London: A. & C. Black, 1920), p. 255.

26 Frank W. Haycraft, *The Degrees and Hoods of the World’s Universities and Colleges* (Ware, Herts.: privately printed by Jennings & Bewley, 1923), p. 5; 2nd edn (London and Cheshunt: Cheshunt Press, 1924), pp. 4–5.

27 *University Hoods and Gowns* [text by Charles Franklyn, illustrated by A. V. Wheeler Holohan], (Bristol: W. D. & H. O. Wills, 1926), nos 10, 13. See also Nicholas Groves et al., ‘Popularizing University Hoods and Gowns: Wills’s Cigarette Cards, 1926’, *TBS*, 7 (2007), pp. 48–74 (pp. 59, 62).

28 *The Degrees and Hoods*, 3rd edn (London and Cheshunt: Cheshunt Press, 1927), p. 5.

- Baty echoed this in 1934.<sup>29</sup>
- Buxton and Gibson, in 1935, took a line similar to Franklyn's—light blue versus grey-blue.<sup>30</sup>
- Stringer in his revision of Haycraft, in 1948, had all of them in light blue hoods.<sup>31</sup>
- By the time Venables and Clifford published their booklet in 1957 the BLitt and BSc were back to wearing a light blue hood while the BCL and BM were wearing a mid-blue one.<sup>32</sup> And so it remained until the BLitt and BSc were superseded by masters' degrees in the 1970s, when the new MSc and MLitt were given a blue hood lined with the grey of the DLitt/DSc.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, what actually happened is doubtless rather obscured by discrepancies between the regulations, makers' practice, wishful thinking and just plain error on the part of the witnesses.<sup>34</sup>

The colour description given by writers on academic dress for the Oxford BMus hood has also varied over the years:

- Wood (*c.* 1882, p. 7) and Wells (1906, p. 78)—blue
- Ealand (1920, p. 255)—mauve
- Haycraft (1923, 1924, 1927, p. 5)—lilac
- Franklyn (1926, card no. 13)—dark purple
- Baty (1934, p. 14)—blue
- Buxton and Gibson (1935, p. 40)—lilac
- Stringer (1948, p. 16)—dark lilac
- Venables and Clifford (1957, pp. 20–21)—lilac.

Although blue seems to have been thought the 'official' colour in the nineteenth century, the pictorial evidence is in favour of some purplish shade being used in practice, distinct from the blues of the other lay bachelors. Shrimpton's plate (*c.* 1885) has the BMus in a dark violet hood and the Davis's card (*c.* 1907) has him in a dark purple one (Fig. 5, middle row, centre).<sup>35</sup>

The distinctive gowns of servitors, students of civil law, gentlemen commoners and noblemen were obsolete by the end of the nineteenth century. The gowns of scholars and commoners, the two remaining categories of undergraduate, had become shorter and shorter, more drastically so for the commoner than for the scholar. By the time Davis's issued these cards, they had each shrunk from ankle-length in the early nineteenth century to what they still are today (Fig. 11).

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29 T. Baty, *Academic Colours* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha Press, 1934), p. 14.

30 L. H. Dudley Buxton and Strickland Gibson, *Oxford University Ceremonies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 40.

31 *The Degrees and Hoods*, 4th edn, ed. by E. W. Scobie Stringer (London and Cheshunt: Cheshunt Press, 1948), p. 15.

32 D. R. Venables and R. E. Clifford, *Academic Dress of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: [Shepherd & Woodward], 1957), pp. 20–23.

33 Venables and Clifford, 3rd edn (1972), pp. 18–19, and 5th edn (1979), pp. 18–19.

34 See Andrew North, 'The Development of the Academic Dress of the University of Oxford 1920–2012', *TBS*, 13 (2013), pp. 101–41 (especially pp. 120–21, 124–25).

35 Also see North, pp. 107, 123.

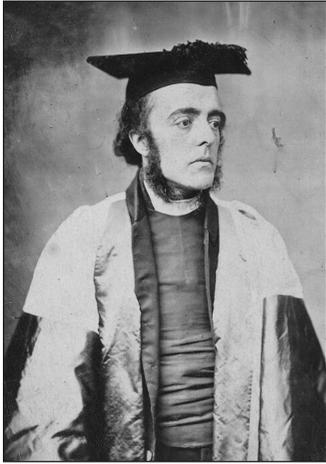


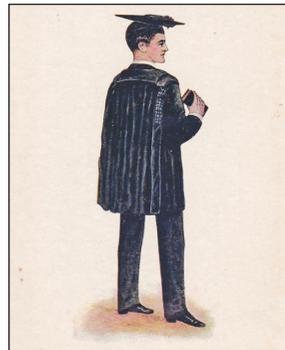
Fig. 9. The Revd Sir Frederick Ouseley, Bt, in Oxford DMus full dress with square cap—photograph by C. L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), 1860.



Fig. 10. BM/BSc in mid-blue hood, c. 1905, and BCL/BLitt in light blue hood, c. 1907, before the reallocation of the shades of blue in the 1920s.



Fig. 11. Ankle-length gowns for scholars and commoners in the early nineteenth century, as illustrated by Agar after Uwins in 1814 (above). They had shrunk to the length they are today by the time the *Oxford University Robes* cards were published (below).



## Cambridge University Robes

In what appears to be an afterthought, the firm published eight postcards of Cambridge dress, uniform with the *Oxford University Robes* series. The cards' provenance is given as 'Published by G. D. O. / Designed and printed in England.'—the firm's name and location in 'the Other Place' judiciously not mentioned. The set comprises: 'Chancellor'; 'Vice-Chancellor [in the cope]'; 'Doctor of Divinity [dress gown]'; 'Doctor of Medicine [dress gown]'; 'Master of Arts'; 'Bachelor of Arts'; 'Clare College Undergraduate'; 'Trinity College Undergraduate' (Fig. 12). The stance of each figure points to the images being derived from Nathaniel Whittock's Cambridge *Costumes* of the 1840s,<sup>36</sup> although a few changes have been introduced (Fig. 13). The chancellor has the red-haired, full-bearded features of the Duke of Devonshire, in office 1892–1908; the vice-chancellor has the grey-haired, clean-shaven features of Arthur James Mason, in office 1908–10. The set of cards may have been published in 1908, the one year in which their tenure overlapped.

The chancellor is closely based on Whittock's counterpart, but the skirt of the gown draped outwards over the wearer's right arm has been redrawn in such a way as to look as though it is draped inwards in an impossible way.

The vice-chancellor wears a cope that appears to have a wide sleeve on the wearer's left arm, while the front of the garment passes over his right forearm. This unconvincing image is produced by the Davis's card having an ill-advised change from the vice-chancellor in Whittock's print, whose left arm is completely hidden under the cope. The artist who drew the figure for Davis's seems to have missed the fact that the cope was sleeveless. The fur binding down the front ends a few inches short of the foot, while Whittock's continues right down and along the hem. This may have been a temporary feature (or a mistake on Whittock's part): Uwins in the early nineteenth century shows the fur binding much as it is on Davis's card.<sup>37</sup> It continued like that until at least the early 1990s,<sup>38</sup> but the current cope has the fur binding right down to the foot. Both Whittock's and Davis's vice-chancellors appear to have separate, detachable hoods—perhaps wrongly—while historically the fur cowl was part of the cope itself, and is so in the present-day garment. Unlike Whittock's, the Davis's Cambridge vice-chancellor has a round bonnet with gold cord and tassels indicating that he is a doctor in a lay faculty.<sup>39</sup> As the cope was until the early nineteenth century the congregation dress of Doctors of Divinity only, the square cap was the normal headwear. The recent custom has been to allow other Cambridge doctors to wear the lay bonnet with the cope on 'scarlet days', but not otherwise.<sup>40</sup>

The Davis's DD now wears the newly adopted Bishop Andrewes cap and no scarf.

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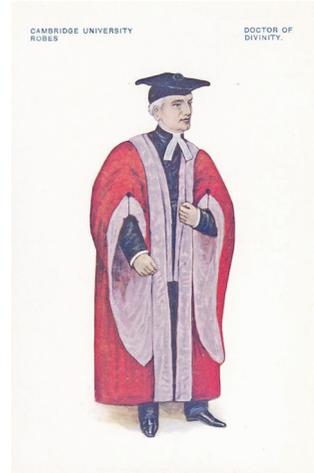
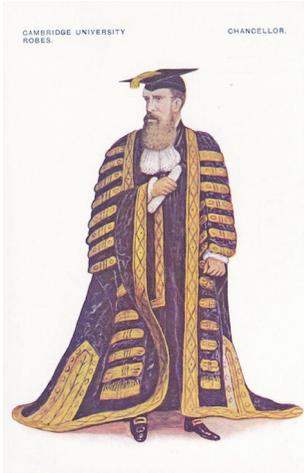
36 N. Whittock, *The Costumes of the Members of the University of Cambridge* (London: Whittock, c. 1843).

37 William Combe, *History of the University of Cambridge*, 2 vols (London: Ackermann, 1815), Vol. II, Pl. II; Jackson, p. 51.

38 See George W. Shaw, *Cambridge University Academical Dress, with Notes on Oxford Academical Dress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1992]), front cover.

39 Mason, who seems to have been the model for the figure, was, however, MA and BD and held no doctor's degree (Peter Davie, 'Mason, Arthur James (1851–1928), Church of England Clergyman and Theologian', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, printed edn, 2004; online edn, 2005, and frequently revised)).

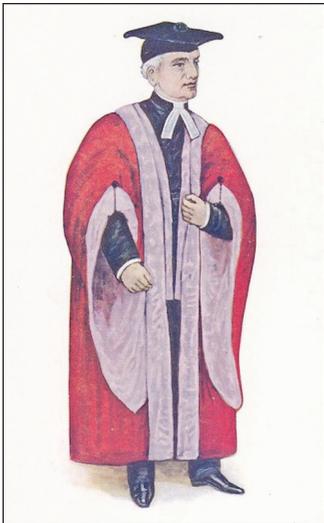
40 I am grateful to Timothy Milner, ceremonial officer in the University of Cambridge, for this information.



**Fig. 12. Cambridge University Robes, c. 1908.**



Fig. 13. Nathaniel Whittock's Cambridge DD, vice-chancellor and chancellor in the 1840s (above), the models for Davis's cards of c. 1908 (below).





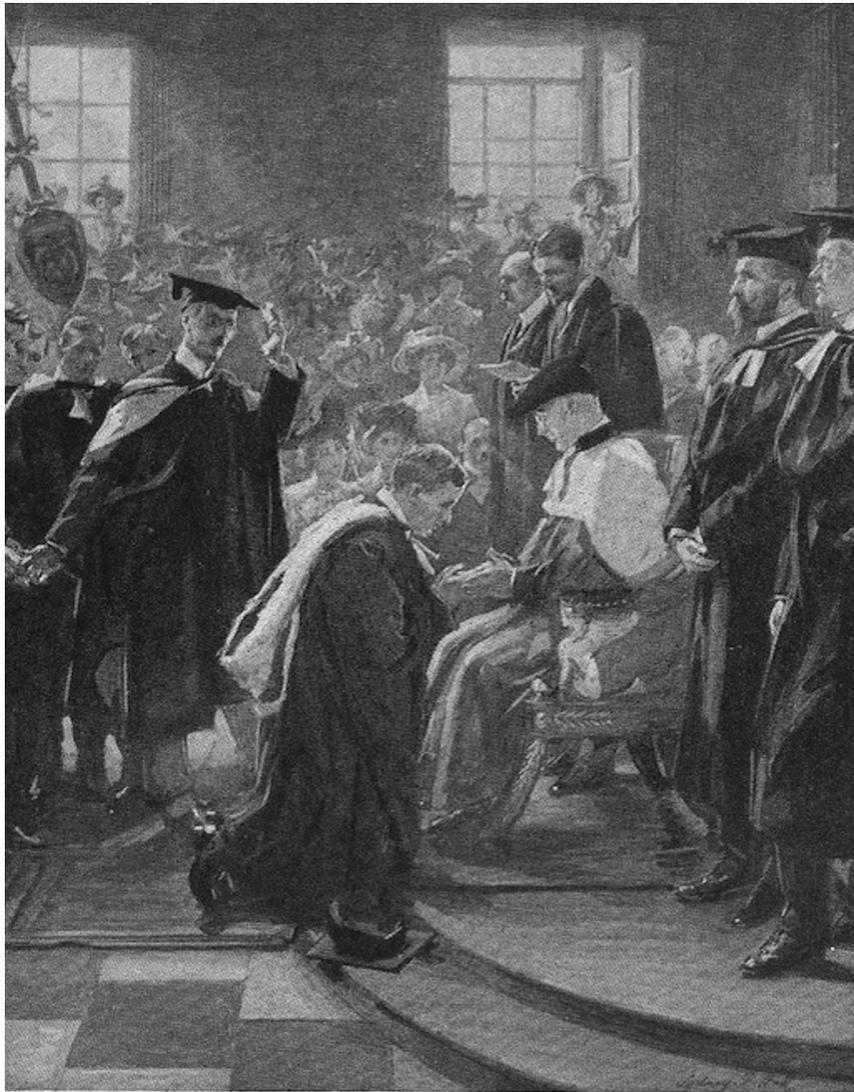
Drawn by Sydney P. Hall, M.V.O.]

["Graphic" Copyright.

#### THE CONFERRING OF DEGREES AT OXFORD.

The Degrees are usually conferred in the old Divinity School. The Vice-Chancellor confers them, and sits with the Senior Proctor on his right, the Junior on his left. The candidates are presented by senior members of their colleges. The Senior Proctor reads out the names of the candidates for the Doctor, Bachelor, and M.A. degrees, the Junior for B.A. And after reading them, the two together perform the strange survival of the Proctor's Walk. After this the candidates for the M.A. degree kneel, three at a time, at the feet of the Vice-Chancellor, who lays a Testament on their heads and recites the Latin formula of admission. It concludes with the words *in nomine Domini, Patris, Filii, et Spiritus, Sancti*, at which the Vice-Chancellor and the Proctors reverently raise their caps. The candidates for the B.A. degree do not kneel. After admission all retire, change their gowns and put on their new hoods, and then, led by the bedel, return and make their reverence to the Vice-Chancellor.

Fig. 14a. 'Conferring Degrees at Oxford' (enlarged). Card reproducing a drawing from the *Graphic* by Sydney P. Hall, 1904.



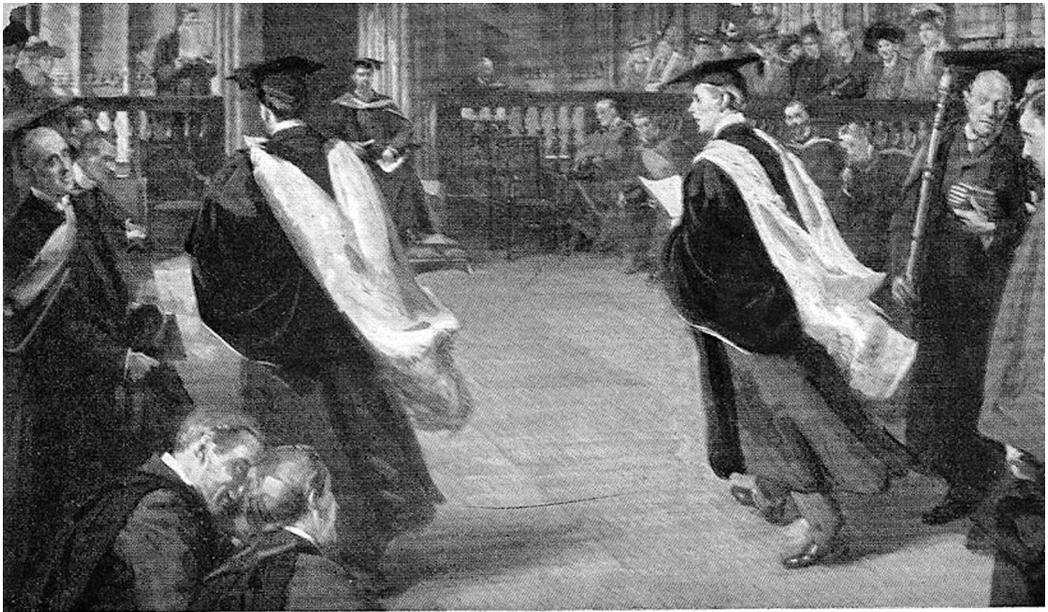
*Drawn by Sydney P. Hall, M.V.O.]*

*[“Graphic” Copyright.]*

#### THE CONFERRING OF DEGREES AT CAMBRIDGE.

The Degrees are conferred in the Senate House. Our illustration represents the great Degree Day after the Tripos, when the Wooden Spoon is swung over the heads of the candidates, and finally descends into the arms of him who has won it—the last of the Honour men—a dubious honour. The Vice-Chancellor sits on a raised dais, and the two Proctors stand on his left hand. The men come up by Colleges, led by a senior member, who presents them, and led in a very singular fashion. They come in fours, and each holds a finger of the right hand of their leader, who, as he introduces them, raises his cap. Then one by one they kneel at the feet of the Vice-Chancellor, with palms pressed together as suppliants, and the Vice-Chancellor presses their hands between his and utters the formula of admission.

**Fig. 14b. ‘Conferring Degrees at Cambridge’ (enlarged). Card reproducing a drawing from the *Graphic* by Sydney P. Hall, 1904.**



"SOLVITUR AMBULANDO." The Proctor's Walk at a Conferring of Degrees in the Divinity School, Oxford.  
 By Sydney P. Hall, M.V.O. By permission of "The Graphic."

Fig. 14c. "Solvitur ambulando": The Proctor's Walk at a Conferring of Degrees in the Divinity School, Oxford'. Card reproducing a drawing from the *Graphic* by Sydney P. Hall, 1904. An extensive description of the scene is printed on the reverse (Fig. 14d, below).

# POST CARD.

Copyright. Published by Davis's, 2, Cornmarket, Oxford.  
 Designed and printed in England.

**SOLVITUR AMBULANDO."**

The scene is the hall of the old Divinity Schools. At one end are three imposing thrones, that in the centre raised above the other two.

In these sit the Vice-Chancellor (in the centre) and the Proctors on either hand. At the opposite end are grouped the candidates, marshalled by the Bedel of Arts.

Down either side are benches, the front rows filled with Doctors and Masters of Arts, and other members of Convocation in their various robes and hoods, and behind them a still gayer assemblage of "sisters and cousins and aunts." Of all the candidates for degrees, it is the would-be B.A.'s that have the greatest claim upon the sympathy of the spectators. Here they are about to take their first serious step in academic honours, on the brink of the gulf which separates the graduate from the undergraduate.

Therefore, we will let the Doctors and Masters pass, and come to the lowest rung of the ladder. The Proctors rise, and the junior reads out the names of those "qui gradum Baccalaurei in Artibus ambiunt."

Then takes place a quaint relic of ancient ceremonial. The two Proctors, with the regularity of clock work, remove and replace their caps, walk rapidly down the hall, stop, raise their caps again, turn, walk back, raise their caps for the third time, and sit down. The meaning of this part of the proceedings is as follows:—the Proctors are collecting the votes of the members of Convocation on the subject of degrees being conferred. Had a voter knowledge of any "just cause or impediment," he would signify his objection by "plucking" the Proctor's gown, and should the objection be valid, the erring candidate would not receive his decree. Thus in the old days, any tradesman who was creditor for a large amount to any of the candidates would get a Doctor or Master to signify his dissent in the above manner.

But in these enlightened days, undergraduates, of course, never run into debt, or otherwise misbehave themselves, and the privilege has not been exercised for many years.

## Pictorial reproductions

Davis's issued three postcards of pictures by Sydney P. Hall that had appeared in the *Graphic* newspaper in 1904 (Figs 14a–c).<sup>41</sup> The drawings show moments in the degree ceremony at Oxford and Cambridge. The text accompanying the pictures is a fairly full and accurate description, taking up a lot of space. Indeed, the Oxford 'Proctors' Walk' card has extensive text entirely filling the message space on the back. It is likely that these cards were intended for collectors rather than for a 'Wish you were here' message to be sent by post and it is interesting that the Davises judged that there would be a sufficient sale for them. The *Graphic* was a hugely popular publication and the postcard-buying public might well have recognized the style of the pictures and their origin at a glance.

A painting by F. L. Hill of the 'Encaenia Procession Entering the Sheldonian' appears on an early Davis's card (Fig. 15).<sup>42</sup> Each office and degree is represented and identified by tiny captions on the image. Another contemporary Oxford publisher, Robert Peel Postcard Co., issued 'Costumes of the Members of the University of Oxford', a card in the same vein (Fig. 16). The picture is from a rare coloured print by Nathaniel Whittock back in the 1840s. Some of the figures are captioned but most are numbered in minute characters, their degree, office or undergraduate status being given in a key at the foot.

One remarkable Davis's card shows selected figures from Loggan's 1675 plate of Oxford dress.<sup>43</sup> On the whole they are accurately captioned and coloured. However, the MA is shown in a black hood with just some of the crimson lining displayed as worn now, whereas Loggan's original seems to be inside out with only the lining visible (Fig. 17).<sup>44</sup> Again, this looks like a collector's item rather than a card to be posted by tourists visiting Oxford.

Davis's put a number of views from times past on cards with colour added, some of them including figures in academic dress. For example, 'Old Divinity School, Oxford', after one of Loggan's plates,<sup>45</sup> and 'A View of Christ Church, Oxford', after a humorous drawing by Rowlandson, were issued in the *Old Oxford* series. Local rivals like the photographers and publishers Penrose & Palmer were also using reproductions of old prints, paintings and drawings, but they seem to have had a smaller range of such cards than Davis's.

The firm's *Artistic* series reproduces views of Oxford painted by an unidentified contemporary artist, some of which include tiny figures in academic dress (Fig. 18). This series is part of the trend for reproductions of bespoke new paintings and line drawings on postcards, a type that would remain popular through to the 1950s. Where academic dress appeared in views of university towns, it was usually just local colour incidental to the picture of a building or a street scene.

Raphael Tuck launched a number of hugely popular series in 1903 called *Oilettes*, using specially commissioned oil paintings of topographical subjects from all parts of the

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41 Hall was a painter of historical subjects. He was special artist of the *Graphic* during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) and a contributor for many years after that (Mark Pottle, 'Hall, Sydney Prior (1862–1922), Artist', in *ODNB*).

42 It is uncertain whether this artist is Frank Hill (1882–?), etcher, engraver and watercolourist, who exhibited chiefly in the provinces and in the USA (Grant M. Waters, *Dictionary of British Artists Working 1900–1950*, 2 vols (Eastbourne: Eastbourne Fine Art, 1975), Vol. 1, p. 162).

43 David Loggan, *Oxonia illustrata* (Oxford: the engraver, 1675), Pl. x.

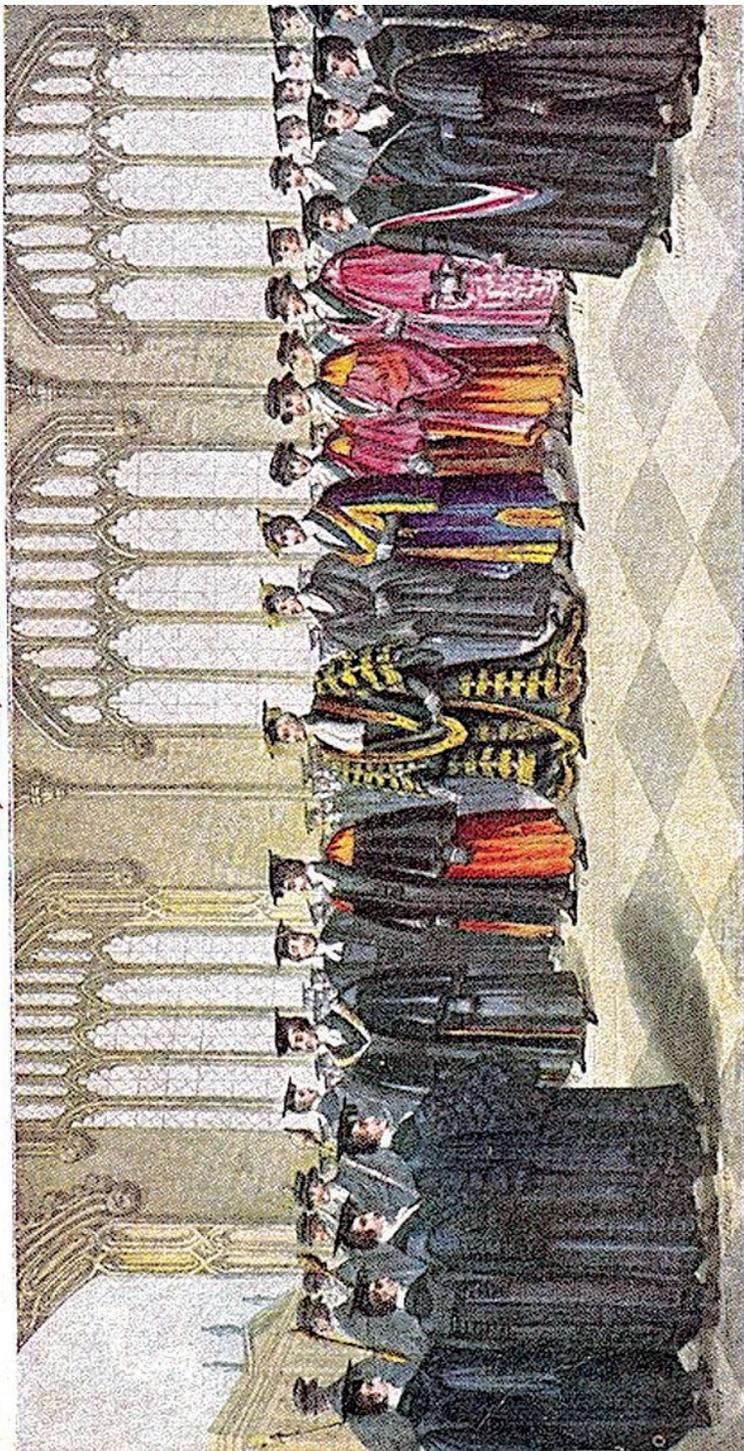
44 See Bruce Christianson, 'The Evolution of the Oxford Simple Shape', *Burgon Society Annual 2002*, pp. 30–36 (pp. 31–32).

45 Loggan, Pl. XIII.



Fig. 15. 'The Encaenia Procession Entering the Sheldonian Theatre' (enlarged), after a painting by F. L. Hill, c. 1905. Notice the tiny letters identifying the various degrees.

**THE COSTUMES OF THE MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF OXFORD.**



- 1.—Vergers. 2.—Yeoman Beadles. 3.—Esquire Beadles. 4.—Proctors. 5.—Doctor of Divinity. 6.—Do. in Dress Gown.  
7.—Chancellor of the University. 8.—Nobleman undress Gown. 9.—Nobleman Dress Gown. 10.—Doctor of Laws.  
11.—Doctor of Music. 12.—Doctor of Medicine.

Fig. 16. 'The Costumes of the Members of the University of Oxford' (enlarged), after an 1840s engraving by Whittock. Postcard by Robert Peel Postcard Co., c. 1905.

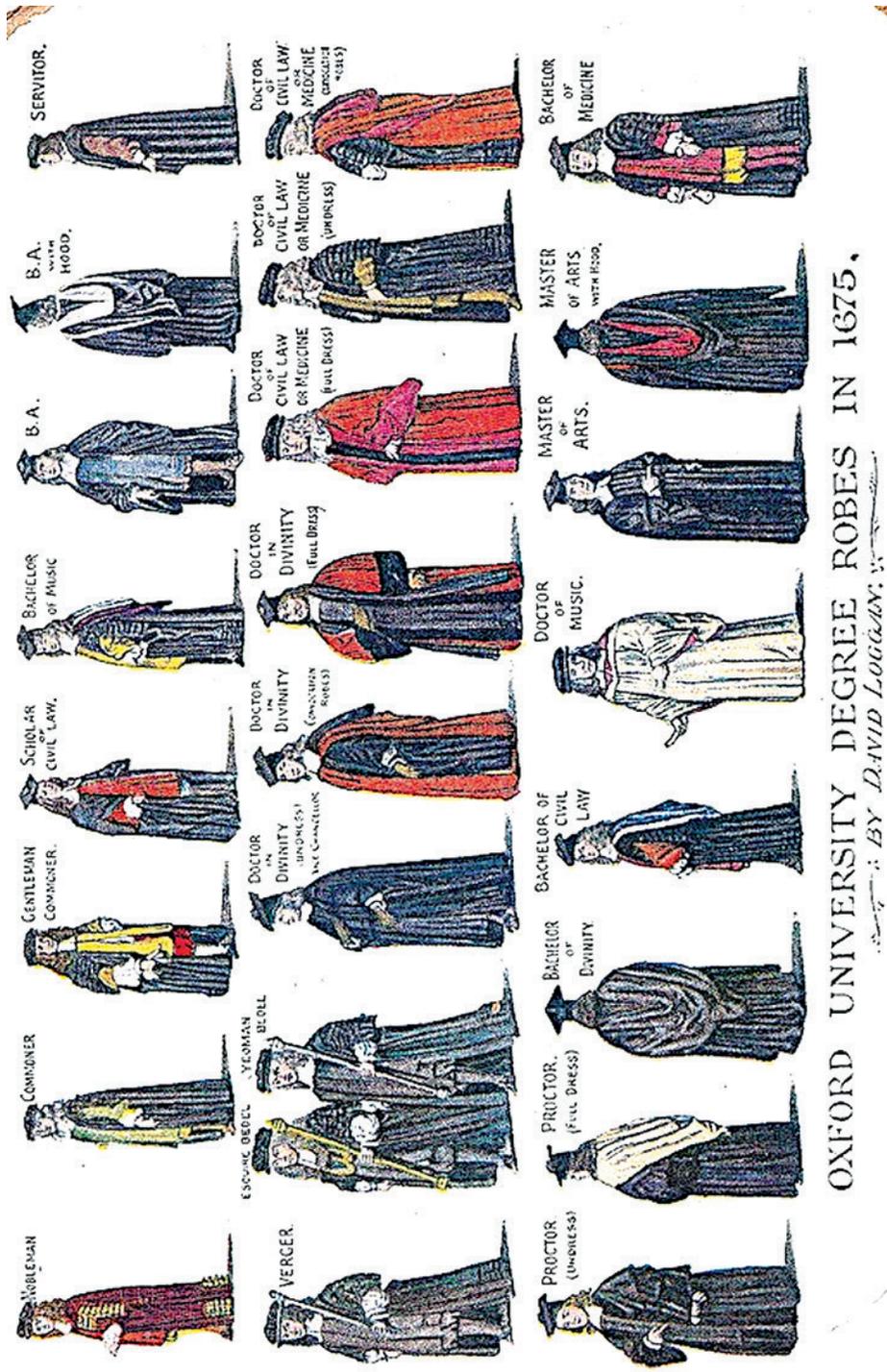


Fig. 17. Figures from David Loggan's academic dress plate in Oxonia illustrata of 1675 (enlarged). Davis's postcard published c. 1907.

country.<sup>46</sup> Several artists, such as Henry Wimbush, each painted hundreds of views for the purpose.<sup>47</sup> Quite a few Oxford and Cambridge colleges and street scenes are among them, although only a minority include figures in academic dress (see Fig. 19). Tuck's extensive series reproducing watercolours, *Aquarettes*, were also highly successful. Competitors like J. Salmon soon followed the craze for this style of card.<sup>48</sup>

The London publisher Adam & Charles Black issued postcards of vignettes taken from their Sketchbooks series. Several of those from *Oxford: A Sketch Book* by Fred Richards (1913) and from *Cambridge: A Sketch Book* by Walter M. Keesey (1918) include figures in academic dress (Fig. 20).<sup>49</sup> Particularly noteworthy is a set of thirty-six cards of line drawings by Ernest Coffin, issued in 1920 as part of a fund-raising campaign by the University of Liverpool.<sup>50</sup> They depict various university buildings and on six of them figures in cap and gown are included (Fig. 21).

A different purpose is served by drawings of figures in academic dress that appeared occasionally on ephemera to promote the cause of women's suffrage. A picture postcard with the title 'Polling Booth—Companions in Disgrace', published by the Artists' Suffrage League in or soon after 1907, shows a woman in cap and gown, and therefore evidently educated and respectable, standing beside a thuggish male convict in prison uniform with broad arrows. Here the woman in her robes is a key factor in achieving the intended impact. The verse below the image, by 'C. H.' (C. Hedley Charlton), includes the lines:

*When once the harmful man of crime,  
In Wormwood Scrubbs has done his time,  
He at the poll can have his say,  
The harmless woman never may.*<sup>51</sup>

## Comic cards

Davis's issued several series of comic Oxford postcards, some of them with figures in academic dress. One example, 'The Schools', is made up of sketches of students in various states of mind, taking their examinations (Fig. 22). 'A Run with the *ἄνθρωπο θηρωμενοι* Hounds' has sketches of the proctors and 'bulldogs' (Oxford University constables) pursuing, catching and disciplining a recalcitrant student (Fig. 23). The Greek *ἄνθρωπο θηρωμενοι* ('anthropo theromenoi') means man-pursuing. As so often with early comic cards, they are aimed at a knowing in-group, what are now termed alumni perhaps, who will recognize types of examinee on the first card or have enough Classical Greek to get the point of the caption on

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46 Willoughby, p. 79.

47 Henry Bowser Wimbush (1858–1943) was a landscape painter and book illustrator as well as a postcard artist; he exhibited frequently at the principal London galleries (Waters, Vol. I, p. 360; Family History—Henry Bowser Wimbush, <[www.jhsn.eclipse.co.uk/id19.htm](http://www.jhsn.eclipse.co.uk/id19.htm)>).

48 Willoughby, p. 79.

49 Frederick Charles Richards (1887–1932) was an etcher of architectural subjects and lecturer at the Royal College of Art (Waters, Vol. I, p. 278); Walter Monckton Keesey (1887–1970) was an architect, painter and etcher, who exhibited at the Royal Academy and for a time was art master at the Architectural Association (Waters, Vol. I, p. 187).

50 Ernest Maitland T. Coffin (1868–1944) is known especially for his railway posters and his drawings for postcards. His postcards include views of London, of the British Empire Exhibition (1924), and of St Bartholomew's Hospital for its Great Reconstruction Appeal (1929), as well as the Liverpool set.

51 <[suffragepostcards.wordpress.com/2015/01/01/polling-booth-companions-in-disgrace/](http://suffragepostcards.wordpress.com/2015/01/01/polling-booth-companions-in-disgrace/)>.



Fig. 18. 'The Founder's Tower—Magdalen College, Oxford', by an unnamed painter for the Artistic series by Davis's, c. 1905.



Fig. 19. 'Oxford—Tom Tower—Christ Church', painting by H. B. Wimbush for the Oillette—Picturesque Oxford series published by Raphael Tuck, c. 1910.

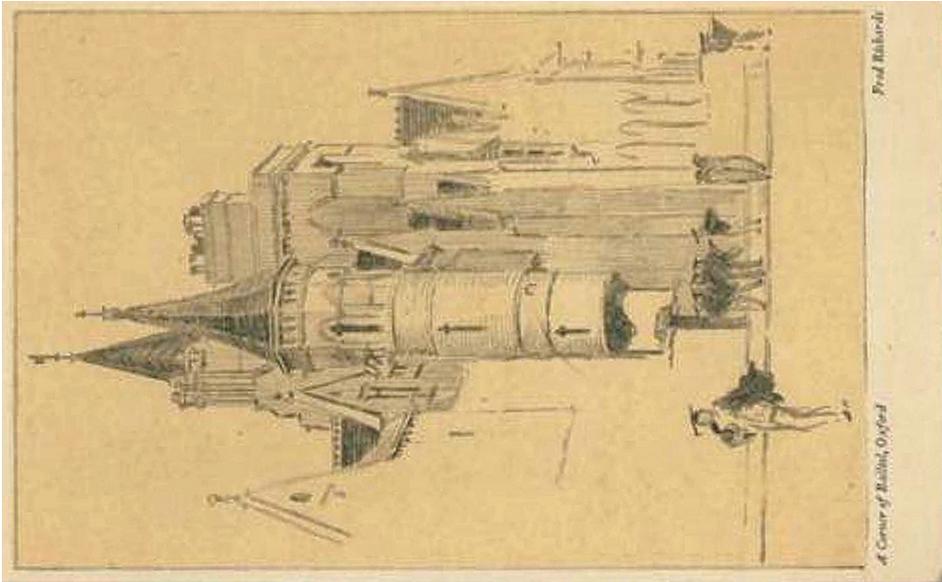


Fig. 20. 'A Corner of Balliol, Oxford', drawing by Fred Richards. From Black's Oxford: A Sketch Book, 1913.

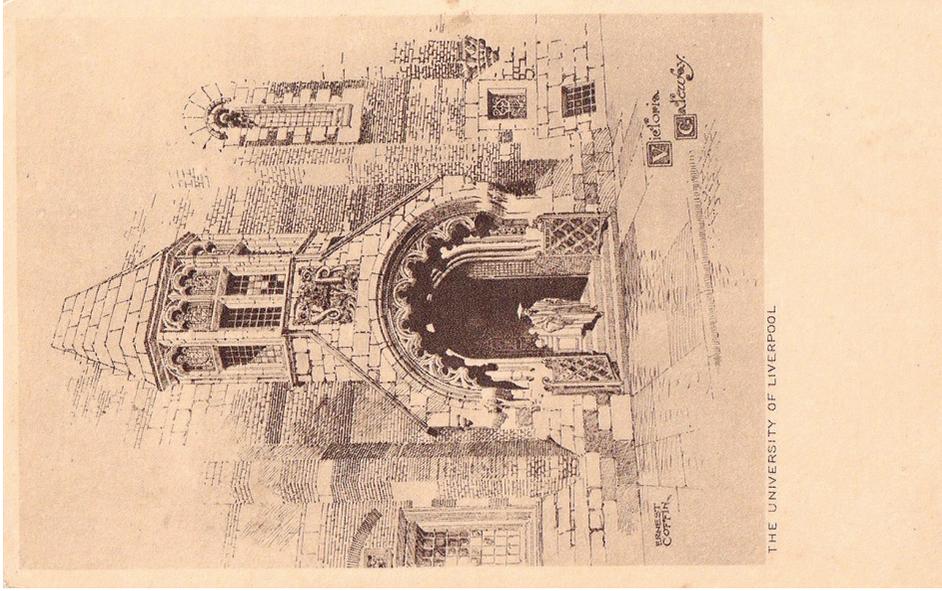


Fig. 21. 'Victoria Gateway', drawing by Ernest Coffin. From his thirty-six-card University of Liverpool series published in 1920.



Fig. 22. 'The Schools' (enlarged). Davis's comic cards published c. 1902.

A Run with the 'ἄθρωπο θηρώμενοι Hounds.



Fig. 23. 'A Run with the 'ἄθρωπο θηρώμενοι Hounds' (enlarged). Davis's comic cards published c. 1902.



Fig. 24 (far left). *Varsity Types* series, 'The Fourth-Year Man'; and Fig. 25 (near left). *Varsity Impressions* series, 'The Don Lock', both drawn by Graham Hoggarth, c. 1904.

the second. Incidentally, both these cards have a space for a brief message below the image, which suggests they were originally intended for the pre-1902 undivided-back format.

Series of comic cards with line drawings signed 'AHGH' or 'Graham Hoggarth'<sup>52</sup> look like in-jokes too, which perhaps members of the University especially would appreciate. From the *Varsity Types* series, 'The Fourth Year Man' wears a square cap with the corners bent and an almost non-existent tassel, his commoner's gown in tatters. Perhaps it was a fashion to have a gown that showed plenty of wear and tear, as it was at other universities<sup>53</sup>—but this one is absurd. And he is smoking, and that was forbidden while wearing academic dress (Fig. 24). In 'The Don Lock' card from the *Varsity Impressions* series the posture of the don rigidly holding his upturned square cap before him appears to be the source of the humour (Fig. 25).

On cards from the Davis's *Oxford University Statutes Illustrated* series a sentence from the statutes in Latin and an ambiguous translation is humorously misinterpreted in the accompanying drawing. On one a proctor and 'bulldogs' are dropping their victim's pocket watch into a sack labelled 'OU Chest' (the University's finance office) (Fig. 26).

Davis's produced a set of humorous cards depicting Americans, mother and daughter, in Oxford. The card illustrated here has one of the ladies mistaking a bedel for the

<sup>52</sup> As a young Oxford graduate Arthur Henry Graham Hoggarth (1882–1964) drew cartoons for *Punch* and other magazines. He published a collection of his Oxford cartoons with friends' contributions in prose and verse, as *Cap and Gown: Varsity Humours* (Oxford: Holywell Press, 1906). Later, while following a career in school teaching, he became a regularly exhibited landscape painter in watercolour (Waters, Vol. 1, p. 166).

<sup>53</sup> On Aberdeen see Jonathan C. Cooper, 'The Scarlet Gown: History and Development of Scottish Undergraduate Dress', *TBS*, 10 (2010), pp. 8–42 (pp. 26–27). On Dalhousie see John N. Grant (quoting P. B. Waite), 'The "Canadian Tradition" of Academical Costume in Nova Scotia: The Dalhousie University Model', *TBS*, 9 (2009), pp. 200–12 (pp. 204–05). On Trinity College, Toronto, see Matthew Cheung Salisbury, "'By our Gowns Were We Known": The Development of Academic Dress at the University of Toronto', *TBS*, 7 (2007), pp. 11–38 (p. 22).



Oxford University Statutes Illustrated, No. 1.  
 'De Procuratorum officio noctivagos diligenter investigare.'  
 STATUTES, p. 327.  
 To 'go through' carefully those who walk by night.

Fig. 26. Oxford University Statutes Illustrated series, 'To "go through" carefully those who walk by night'.



Fig. 27. 'Excuse me, reverend sir, but are you the Vice-Chancellor?' from Davis's *Americans in Oxford* series, published c. 1905.

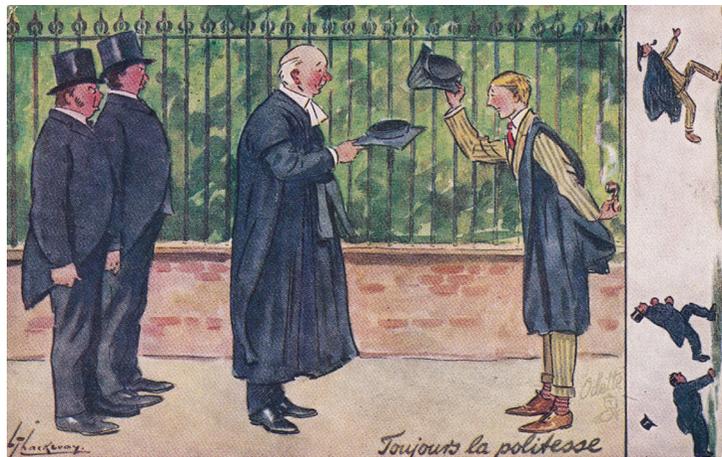


Fig. 28. 'Toujours la politesse', drawn by Lance Thackeray for Tuck's *Lighter Side of the Varsity* series, 1912.



Fig. 29. 'Oxford—Degree Ceremony' issued in 1914 by George Davis Varsity Photographer.

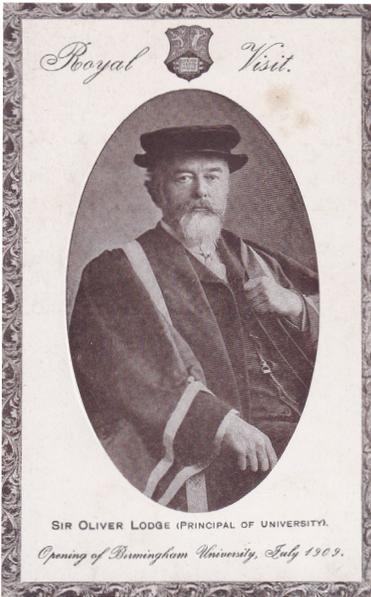


Fig. 30. 'Sir Oliver Lodge ... Opening of Birmingham University, July 1909', published by Rotary Photo, 1909, in its *University* series.



Fig. 31. Dr John Ash (1723–98), physician, in Oxford Doctor of Physic full dress, painting by Joshua Reynolds, 1788. Reproduced by permission of Birmingham Museums Trust, which published the image on a postcard in 2012.

vice-chancellor—and note the box Brownie camera, a fairly newfangled American invention (Fig. 27); most British tourists still bought picture postcards as souvenirs of their visit.

One of Raphael Tuck's *Oilette* series, *The Lighter Side of the Varsity*, with drawings by Lance Thackeray,<sup>54</sup> issued in 1912, includes three cards with academic dress in Cambridge: 'A Professor of Languages'—a gowned undergraduate at the college gate watching a new arrival; '9 A.M.'—a student on a bicycle with gown flying and, in a marginal vignette, falling off; and 'Toujours la politesse'—a student stopped by the proctors as he hides his still smoking pipe behind his back (Fig. 28).

Examples of such cards from universities elsewhere discovered so far are from Aberdeen and Manchester. The first, of two female students and a little dog being watched by a male student, appears to be a wry comment about women undergraduates in the University. It must date from about 1910 and was published by F. C. Morgan & Co.<sup>55</sup> The other is of a scene outside the Whitworth Building of the University of Manchester, showing a figure in cap and gown on a windy day with a copy of Plato under his arm, chasing a paper inscribed 'Professor's Love Story—Notes' that has blown away. The cards seem to be the kind of joke only members of the universities or local people would fully understand.

### Real photographic postcards

Although Davis's produced many photographic postcards of Oxford, they do not, it seems, include pictures of academic processions or ceremonies or indeed individual figures in academic dress. George Davis Varsity Photographer did issue at least one example, dated 1914, a degree ceremony in the Sheldonian Theatre (Fig. 29). The renowned contemporary Oxford photographer Henry Taunt, however, took photographs of the Encaenia procession from 1897 to 1907 and he reproduced some of them on postcards.<sup>56</sup>

Photographic portraits of distinguished people in academic or university official dress have appeared on picture postcards down the years. There are two from the University of Birmingham published in 1902 by Rotary Photo of London: the chancellor, Joseph Chamberlain, and the principal, Sir Oliver Lodge. In a picture from the same photo shoot, Lodge appears again in a set of cards issued to mark the opening of the new campus at Edgbaston in 1909 (Fig. 30). Incidentally, Lodge seems to have been the first senior university officer since the early nineteenth century to wear a bonnet rather than a square with his official gown. The vice-chancellor and principal at Birmingham still wears a bonnet.<sup>57</sup>

After the Second World War photography, often now in colour, took over more and more. Cards from university towns where undergraduate academic dress was still worn or where the university processed in robes in view of the public continued to appear. Vari-

<sup>54</sup> Lance Thackeray (1869–1916) was an English illustrator, known especially for his comic sporting illustrations involving billiards and golf as well as humorous postcards (Waters, Vol. 1, p. 325).

<sup>55</sup> See my 'Greetings from Aberdeen!', *Burton Notes*, 36 (Summer 2016), pp. 3–4.

<sup>56</sup> Malcolm Graham, *Henry Taunt of Oxford: A Victorian Photographer* (Yeovil: Oxford Illustrated, 1973), unpaginated, [p. 9]; Malcolm Graham and Laurence Waters, *Oxford Then and Now: From the Henry Taunt Collection* (Stroud, Glos.: Sutton Publishing, for Oxfordshire Books, 2006), p. 46.

<sup>57</sup> See Hugh Smith and Kevin Sheard, *Academic Dress and Insignia of the World*, 3 vols (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1970), Vol. 1, p. 594.

ous cards were published that include academic dress at, for example, Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, St Andrews, Kingston (Jamaica), Coimbra, and a number of American universities. The subject is now primarily the dress or the academic procession and therefore integral rather than incidental to the scene. Two relatively recent cards show graduands at Durham in gown and hood passing through the castle gateway. At St Andrews the Sunday pier walk, for which students wear their scarlet gowns, is a popular subject. At Kingston, Jamaica, the scarlet undergraduate gown, which figures on at least a couple of cards, was borrowed from St Andrews by Sir James Irvine, whose committee recommended the establishment of the University College of the West Indies in 1945.<sup>58</sup> At Coimbra cards show undergraduates in their academic cloak over a subfusc jacket or waistcoat (*capa e batina*), often adorned with the faculty-colour ribbons that they will burn after graduation (*queima das fitas*); on some they carry or play a traditional Coimbra *fado* guitar.<sup>59</sup> In fact, Coimbra academic dress appears on a variety of cards—serious, comic, romantic, cute—drawings as well as photographs.

### The last fifty years

When I first came to Oxford in the 1960s shops selling postcards for tourists had a number with students in gowns, the Encaenia procession, and reproductions from Ackermann's costume plates and Dighton's *A View from . . .* caricatures. There were even some of Davis's old *Oxford University Robes* from a stash discovered languishing in a warehouse a few years before. Since then several photographers have marketed series of views in Oxford and Cambridge that include members of the university in their robes. Among them are J. W. 'Tommy' Thomas—Thomas Photos of Oxford; Chris Donaghue (*Oxford Views—The Oxford Picture Library*); Chris Andrews (*The Romance of Oxford*); Joe Cornish (*Oxford Students*—with some of the subjects actually in University of London dress, but photographed in Oxford!); and Tim Rawle (*The Cambridge Portfolio*). A quick check in Oxford recently, however, revealed only one such card on display. It is of an Encaenia procession photographed by Chris Andrews in 1994. Having started from New College the robed figures are passing under the bridge at Hertford College and into Catte Street, a route that has not been possible for quite a few years because of harassment by protesters.

Today, photographs of portraits in oils with the sitter in academic robes are reproduced on cards for sale at the places where the original painting is in the art collection. To take two examples: John Cosin in Cambridge DD congregation dress, c. 1635, which hangs in Auckland Castle;<sup>60</sup> and John Ash in Oxford DM full dress, painted by Joshua Reynolds in 1788, on display in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (see Fig. 31). Of course, the robes in such portraits are incidental, but the cards do offer the visitor—especially where photography is not permitted—a memento to take away that carries an image of academic dress as it was when the picture was painted.

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<sup>58</sup> <[uwimuseum.wordpress.com/2012/08/22/gowns-ceremonial-garb-or-classroom-attire/](http://uwimuseum.wordpress.com/2012/08/22/gowns-ceremonial-garb-or-classroom-attire/)>.

<sup>59</sup> See Smith and Sheard, Vol. II, p. 1435. A very detailed study of academic dress at Coimbra and its history can be found in A.M. Nunes, *Identidade(s) e moda: percursos contemporâneos da capa e batina e das insígnias dos conimbricenses* (Madrid: Bubok, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> <<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/john-cosin-15941672-bishop-of-durham-16601672-43633>>.

The mobile telephone with built-in digital camera lets tourists send photographs with a message to friends and family instantly or post them on social media. Does this threaten the survival of picture postcards as a mode of communication? Not just yet, perhaps, but in due course might they become a thing of the past?

## **Conclusion**

The Davises were enterprising pioneers in the picture postcard business. It was they who first established academic dress and ceremonies as a suitable subject, just at the moment when there were plenty of enthusiastic buyers, senders and collectors of this form of popular ephemera. Their choice of images reveals their judgement of what would catch a buyer's eye and what would sell. In turn it reflects no doubt who the buyers might be and how academic dress might interest or amuse them. Long after the firm of George Davis ceased to publish cards, the subject has continued to feature through the changing fashions in picture postcard production down to the recent past, if not to the present day.