

Weaving the Fabric of Success: Exploring Academic Attire at Eton College from 1440

By Martin Lewis

Laying the foundations

In 1440, Henry VI founded ‘The King’s College of Our Lady of Eton beside Windsor’ and, a year later, King’s College, Cambridge, which was to be supplied with scholars from Eton. The school was to be part of a large foundation, which included a community of secular priests, ten of whom were Fellows, a pilgrimage church, and an almshouse. Provision was made for seventy poor scholars to receive free education, and the staff and Provost were handpicked from the ‘rival’ Winchester College. These scholars would become the future applicants of King’s College, Cambridge, and were known as King’s Scholars. As the school grew beyond its original foundation, these King’s Scholars also became known as ‘Collegers’, due to their living in the original foundations of the College.¹

Henry VI endowed Eton with privileges such as valuable holy relics, which supposedly included fragments of the True Cross and the Crown of Thorns, and, also, land within Buckinghamshire and Berkshire that had been acquired from the ‘Alien Priors’.²

From the initial planning and building through to the official opening of the College, the official statutes of 1443 differed somewhat from the original sketches of 1440. These rules would govern specific dress codes to be adhered to by particular ranks of the College, and their evolution through time.

It is relevant to begin from Eton’s roots, Winchester College. Henry VI showed great interest in Winchester College, having practically handpicked his staff from here for Eton College. Eton’s first Headmaster, William Waynflete, was brought from Winchester, along with five Fellows, four Clerks and thirty-five scholars. The influence Winchester College had on the King would extend to Eton, sharing almost identical characteristics to the former. For example, the qualifications of the scholars would mirror those set in the statutes for Winchester and the building layout would be distinctly similar in arrangement. Soil was even transferred from Winchester to provide the foundations for the new Eton College. A young and naïve King may be foolish not to garner inspiration from an already successful college.³

An apt alliance

1 July 1444 was a key day in the history of Eton, when the *Amicabilis Concordia* (‘Friendly Agreement’) was signed with Winchester College. This agreement tied the two Colleges to-

¹ Nigel Goodman, *Eton College* (London: Pitkins Pictorials, 1976; reissues, 2003, 2007).

² Maxwell Lyte, *A History of Eton College (1440–1910)*, 4th edn (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 8. The ‘Alien Priors’ were suppressed properties in England under foreign control which were granted to the crown by parliament.

³ Winchester College, Traditions [online], available at <winchestercollege.org/traditions> [retrieved 7 Sept. 2017].

gether to aid one another in various political and financial matters. For some time from this point on, Eton gowns came from Winchester. Thus, in 1444, green cloth was purchased; in 1446 blue cloth; and in 1447 a cloth called the Mustredevillers.⁴ The latter woollen cloth was a mixed grey and highly sought after as a material.⁵

The other vibrant colours would likely be used by scholars specifically for chapel services on feast days.

As Henry's 'old' statutes of Eton College were adopted from Winchester, it would be correct to assume that the costume would be of a similar style, even though Pope Eugenius IV permitted Henry in 1441 to choose the Eton costume(s) himself. This was unusual and the Pope was even persuaded to grant Eton privileges unequalled anywhere in England. During the Middle Ages the King owed obedience to the Pope and canon law. One of the consequences at this time was the restriction on the colours that could be used in institutions like Eton.⁶

The colour of money

The statutes for members of the College not members of religious orders forbade four main colours: white, black, grey, and red. White, black, and grey had been worn for centuries by monks and friars, whereas red was reserved for higher ranks, royalty, and ecclesiastical and lay dignitaries, and certainly could not be adopted by a scholar or anybody of lower rank, although it should be known that some royal foundations were usually given some latitude, e.g. Queen's College Oxford. Red was also connected to the blood of Christ, making its wearer appear dishonourable or even sacrilegious in certain seasons. Mixed colours and striped fabric were assigned to laymen and would generally be worn by lawyers and the merchant class, so this would not be a permissible choice for other professions. English universities insisting on their members' taking minor orders meant that numerous prohibitions on dress could be imposed.

Between the 1300s to the 1600s, the colour that one could wear was determined by what were known as Sumptuary Laws. Colour was worn according to rank, and harsh penalties could be enforced for what we would now consider a crime against fashion, at the very most.⁷

Rank determined not only colour but also the quality and fabric of a garment, in addition to its styling. According to the original statutes of 1443, the robe colour for the

4 Lyte, p. 21. The 'Mustredevillers' was in use in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The name probably denotes the weave rather than the colour.

5 Definitions and descriptions of fabrics, garments, etc., from C. W. and P. E. Cunnington and Charles Beard, *A Dictionary of English Costume (900-1900)* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1976).

6 *The Wealth and Power of the Political Church*, at <saburchill.com/history/chapters/chap5103.html> [retrieved 7 Sept. 2017]. The Pope had the power to excommunicate, which was greatly feared during this time.

7 L.K. Alchin, Elizabethan Era, updated May 2012, at <elizabethan-era.org.uk/meaning-colors.htm> [retrieved 7 Sept. 2017]. Unfortunately, wealth was not a bargaining chip in this instance, and did not necessarily signify power; therefore, the mega-rich still had to abide by these rules, unless such wealth was born of nobility. For further reading on the later sumptuary laws, see Noel Cox, 'Tudor Sumptuary Laws and Academical Dress: An Act against Wearing of Costly Apparel 1509 and An Act for Reformation of Excess in Apparel 1533', *TBS*, 6 (2006), pp. 15-43, and from the same author, 'An Act to Avoid the Excess in Apparel 1554', *TBS*, 13 (2013), pp. 39-44.

scholars, clerks, choristers, and poor youths adopted by the College would be either the same as or similar to those of their seniors.

Scholars and their 'lower' associates would wear a robe almost identical to the Winchester model: a long gown reaching the shins, closed at the front and fastened at the neck and wrists. Specific rules were set in place for when this livery should be worn, namely on Sundays, feast days, or with permission of the Provost or his vice-server.

Senior members, including the Provost, would wear longer robes reaching the heel, made at greater expense and with higher material quality. This would provide visual distinction between the ranks.⁸

Other stipulations regarding clothing (and also colour) were on the hose, barring red, green, and white.⁹ We already know that colours such as red and black were reserved for high-ranking professionals, royalty, and the clergy. What seems to be overlooked is the use of the colour green in the fifteenth century, and how important individuals, such as judges and bishops, wore this colour on formal occasions. There is mention of the robes of English judges being of green cloth as early as 1387, and, by 1442, they wore summer robes of green cloth lined with green tartarin, stitched with gold, and winter robes of violet cloth dyed in grain, and lined with miniver. It is even argued that green was the colour for the faculty of theology, but this is speculative.¹⁰ One can understand Eton's restrictions on the aforementioned colours based on what was said above, but it could be possible that such restrictions may not just be due to their connotations of rank, but to the dyes involved.

From the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onwards, one must not consider restrictions on the colours red, black and so forth being so general as initially thought. The dyeing process had not advanced significantly until the 1600s and, therefore, the quality of dye would affect the overall shade. The best dyes produced the deepest and most vibrant colours, and the worst the duller (and even smelly ones).¹¹ Crimson, for example, would have been easily distinguished from a lacklustre red. Only the best quality cloth could tolerate the production of the richest colours. It is difficult to determine if Eton applied stipulations in this matter, or if red really meant 'red' (by today's standards) and black really meant 'black'. It is apparent that the most sought-after dyes would require considerable expense, yet even though most scholars during the Middle Ages were not from wealthy families, whether they could afford rich colours or not, the Sumptuary Laws would not allow them. Oddly enough, it so happens that the statutes of Winchester College did not forbid red.

It should be noted that, when university institutions were developing, the dress of a scholar was practically the same as that of a cleric. There was little distinction between ecclesiastical and academic dress. The very good reason for this was the scholar's having taken minor orders. He wore an undertunic with a long, closed overtunic over it and a hood over that. For formal occasions a graduate would wear an outer habit (a cloak or tabard) on top of the overtunic with the hood put on over that.¹²

8 Eton College, 'Eton Manuscripts', incl. Statute Book c. 1443 (MS300). An example of this long, closed gown can be seen on a brass of John Kent c. 1420 in Headbourne Worthy Church, Hampshire.

9 Hose continues in one form or another through to the mid-seventeenth century. It fitted the lower body and legs, and almost resembles tights.

10 Bruce Christianson, 'Doctors' Greens', *TBS*, 6 (2006), pp. 44–48.

11 Alchin. The cheaper dyes would have had additives that included urine and manure!

12 Natalia M. Belting, *The History of Caps and Gowns* (New York: Collegiate Cap & Gown, 1956),

Only through the evolution of this norm did distinctions appear to separate both scholar and cleric, and form the unique codes of dress we have today.¹³

A healthy comparison

As Eton's early dress regulations and provisions were based on that of Winchester's, it would be interesting to make a few observations on those of the latter.

The drawing, *c.* 1460, in Figure 1 is of Thomas Moore (1418–90), Warden of Winchester.¹⁴ The Warden in the centre wears a rich fur almuce over a surplice and tunic (cassock). The senior figures on his left and right are wearing a hood over a surplice and tunic. However, the figure on the Warden's left has dark, possibly black, so-called labels hanging down over his chest from under the cape of his hood. These were used in England to signify senior status, often some legal office.¹⁵ The figure to the Warden's right seems to have a bigger cowl to his hood and, unlike the others, the cape does not seem to be split down the front and held closed with small horizontal strips.

It is unknown who these two individuals could be, but it would be assumed that the other figures with hoods are fellows. The rest of the College wear a surplice over a tunic, the cuffs and upstanding collar of which can be seen. The collar is about two or three inches high and has a V-shaped cut at the front. None of the figures wears a cap but those with hoods are tonsured (i.e. at least in minor orders, but not necessarily priests). We have little information on the cuts and styles of the early Eton dress, but simply referrals to the Winchester model amongst sources.¹⁶

Shown in Figure 2 is the brass of John Kent¹⁷ (d. 1434), a Winchester Scholar, which is located at Headbourne Worthy Church, Hampshire. The brass shows him in the tunic without a surplice. The tunic is ankle-length, has sleeves gathered in tight at the wrist and the upstanding collar is like the ones worn by the warden and scholars. There appears to be an opening on the chest with two buttons in view. He does not wear a belt with this garment. This most likely parallels the early Eton dress.

Church issues

In Eton's Chapel services, the Provost would wear a surplice and almuce (a fur-lined hood) of grey. The Fellows and Schoolmaster would wear hoods trimmed with miniver¹⁸ or lined with silk, depending on the season. The Chaplains would wear hoods of black cloth furred or lined with tartarin.¹⁹ All would wear a more basic surplice than that belonging to the Provost. It may be possible that the 'forbidden' colours were acceptable in hood linings, and were permitted in the many observed church festivals.

in Hathi Trust Digital Library, online <babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiuo.ark:/13960/t2n58p14n;view=1up;seq=6> [retrieved 7 Sept. 2017].

13 Interpretation with thanks to Alex Kerr.

14 Engraving in J. Charles Cox (ed.), *The Schools of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1915), frontispiece, online at <educationengland.org.uk/documents/leach/leach1915.html> [retrieved 8 Sept. 2017].

15 Interpretation with thanks to Alex Kerr.

16 Interpretation with thanks to Alex Kerr.

17 J. C. Cox, p. 238.

18 A white fur of the ermine or most likely fur of the red squirrel. Nonetheless, a winter coat.

19 A type of silk, likely obsolete.



Fig. 1. Thomas Moore (1418–90), Warden of Winchester.



Fig. 2. Brass of John Kent (d. 1434), a Winchester scholar, at Headbourne Worthy Church, Hampshire

Garments were not always allocated due to wealth and/or rank. The aforementioned long, closed gown for the scholars would have proved useful during the cold winter months and would otherwise have been restricted to Sundays and feast days.

Statutes could not be applied to those not directly linked to the College. Important visitors such as merchants and lawyers would usually wear striped clothing of varying colours, and this was, indeed, forbidden by statute for any member of the College.

The bedesmen were generally elderly and had the responsibility of simply praying for the welfare of the person offering them shelter. They were prescribed a tabard of black russet with a white cross made of fine cloth on the right breast.²⁰ A symbol so unique to Christianity was hardly going to be represented by inferior fabrics, regardless of rank. Russet happened to be a coarse cloth worn only by the poorer classes, the name being more representative of the (lower) quality than the actual colour. It fell out of use after the sixteenth century.

Although not specifically related to academic dress as such, it is interesting to note the considerable expense for garments would most likely relate to anything used in church services. Around 1445, vestments were ordered from Robert Cocksale, a vestment maker of London, who would likely have been of some repute. Unfortunately, yet understandably,

²⁰ Lyte, p. 22.

payment was demanded by Cocksale in advance from the College due to the distrust for an institution still in its infancy. Much was ordered, but the key items were a set of a chasuble and two tunics, and two copes of white satin embroidered with gold. These would be reserved for the major liturgical festivals, such as those during Christmas and Easter. The cost for the total order amounted to £240 in the currency of the time,²¹ which was an enormous amount. On an interesting note, an additional charge was included for 'hallowing' the vestments.²²

Ringling the changes

During the fifteenth century, garments worn by the scholars would gradually move away from the ecclesiastical form and become what we now know as academic dress. Notable changes would be seen in the style of academic dress worn by the different faculties, although colour did not yet provide clear distinctions between them.

For example, dress for the Master of Arts after 1450 was a *cappa nigra*, a sleeveless tabard worn over a tunic and a hood consisting of a cape, cowl, and liripipe. It is suggested that a 'tippet' (a long fur scarf) formed part of this particular dress, although in Cambridge usage, it is apparent that the tippet refers to the cape of the hood. A brass example circa 1510 can be seen at Eton College Chapel.²³

Of the three brasses of schoolboys to exist in England, only two need mention: John Kent and John Stonor (Fig. 3).²⁴ It is presumed that John Stonor (d. 1512) was a scholar of Eton, but no records confirm this. What may detract from this identification is the certain peculiarity of his described attire.

The brass shows him standing on a bed of flowers. He wears a long ankle-length belted cassock with front and neck edged in red. The gown has closed sleeves with red edged cuffs, with the cuffs of an undertunic shown at the wrist. The trim is possibly made of silk. The unique hat partly resembles the academic mortarboard, with firm edges, which have been scored to allow pigmentation. The hat is attached to a wonderfully decorated chinstrap and a long scarf flows from underneath. The brass is located at the Church of St Andrew's at Wraysbury.

There are several key issues that relate to this brass. One should notice the complete dissimilarity between what he is wearing compared to the standard academic dress for Eton at this time. A silk-lined tunic is completely distinct from the norm. This may lend some credence to the possibility that he may not have been an Eton scholar at all. If we refer to the rules and regulations earlier and what one was 'legally' allowed to wear, only those of high rank were permitted extravagant clothing, and the Stonor family, although wealthy, were not born of nobility. Additionally, the brass description mentions edges of a reddish colour. Although the brass may not actually reflect the garment worn, it is still interesting as the statutes of Eton completely forbade red, yet those of Winchester did not. Nonetheless, to be one of only three schoolboys on surviving brasses produced in England is an astonishing feat!

21 £240 in 1440 is approximately £154,322 today. See <www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter> [retrieved 1 May 2019]. Enormous amount: Lyte, p. 28.

22 Hallowing is synonymous with consecrating.

23 Herbert Haines, *A Manual of Monumental Brasses* (Oxford: Parker, 1861), pp. 110–11, in The Library of Oxford University.

24 Brass of the Month: 1512, brass, Wraysbury, Buckinghamshire, at <mbs-brasses.co.uk/page148aa.html>, no longer accessible.



Fig. 3. Brass of John Stonor (d. 1512) in the Church of St Andrew at Wraybury.



Fig. 4. Brass of Thomas Edgecombe (d. 1545), a fellow of Eton College, in the College antechapel.

A good example that demonstrates progression in English academic dress is shown on the brass of Thomas Edgecombe (d. 1545), a fellow of Eton College and MA (Oxon.) (Fig. 4). It turns out to be a significant piece of evidence for developments in English academic dress in the sixteenth century. It is located in the Eton College antechapel.

He is shown not wearing a habit over his gown; earlier brasses of Masters of Arts would show him wearing a type of chimere, or *cappa nigra*, with the distinctive slits down the sides, worn over the gown. Convocation dress worn today by doctors at Oxford derives from a version of this.

Upon close inspection, one can see that the gown clearly opens at the front, with narrow facings added, which was a particular sewing advancement of the sixteenth century. Another innovation of the sixteenth century was sleeve widening, which is clearly shown.

There is further evidence of an under tunic, given by the narrow sleeves bound at the wrist, and from what protrudes above the hood. The vertical line at this point suggests a frontal opening. Earlier brasses of John Stonor and John Kent (and manuscripts) show hoods reaching right up to neck, or upstanding collars excluding further view. Additionally,

this hood does not reach as far down as pre-sixteenth-century hoods, and, therefore the front is starting to resemble a V-shape.

Our only primary sources from the 1400s are the statutes and those which are preserved in the Eton College archives; any other relevant evidence on academic dress specifically at Eton from this period has not been documented. There are specific rulings on chapel dress, but it is unclear what would be permissible elsewhere in the College. During later centuries, we have a good idea of what could or should be worn within Chapel, within class, within the College itself and outside the grounds. This will, of course, be explored later.

College inhabitants

The King's Scholars are, perhaps, the earliest example of high-ranking students at Eton. Taken from the title of King Henry VI himself, the King's Scholars were high achievers and since the beginning they have always been easily identifiable by their short and heavy black gowns. They were nicknamed 'tugs', a derivation from the Latin meaning 'wearer of gowns'.

The Commensals were generally students of wealthy and noble background, who lodged privately and were the only permitted students to accompany and dine with the King's Scholars in the hall at meal times. Interestingly, they wore the same black frieze gowns as the King's Scholars. A particularly wealthy family was the Cavendishes. A bill from around 1560 mentions two Cavendish boys wearing coats produced from a superior material known as 'fryzado', along with doublets lined with cotton, girdles of 'say' and furred gloves.²⁵ Oppidans were students who were required to lodge outside the College walls and were not permitted to dine in the hall with the King's Scholars.

Around 1634, Fellows at King's College, Cambridge (the 'sister' to Eton at Cambridge), were unhappy with 'outsiders' being granted fellowships at Eton without question, and with the reduction of fellowships from ten to seven. A petition was sent to the Archbishop and, on his visitation, the 'Articles of Complaint' were set in motion. Amongst the complaints put forth, minor ones which had no direct relevance to the Fellows themselves, were included for extra ammunition. One particular complaint regarded the Scholars. They were deprived of necessities such as bedding and clothing promised by statute, but, more importantly, they were reduced to wearing a short coarse gown.²⁶ During the Middle Ages, Eton Clerks would be required to wear a floor- or ankle-length gown closed at the front, as was the case within both English universities. By 1634, this requirement had fallen into complete abeyance. Eton had long passed the stage of potential collapse, and was clearly growing, so it was unlikely that finances were diminishing and causing corners to be cut. Also, the 'old' statutes were taken very seriously and seldom broken, if at all. Either the Fellows at King's were grossly exaggerating or simply lying in order to further their cause.

A fine fellow

An account of what a fellow of Eton would wear was given in around 1649 by John Aubrey. He describes the notable (and former) fellow, John Hales: 'He was in a kind of violet-coloured cloathe gowne with buttons and loops (he wore not a black gowne).'²⁷ Considering

²⁵ Fryzado, a type of serge, was a heavy worsted cloth, and say was a soft light twilled fabric of wool and silk. Lyte, p. 158.

²⁶ Lyte, p. 226.

²⁷ Lyte, pp. 238–39.

that this may have been a sole encounter, it may or may not be exactly the prescribed attire for a fellow, as his fellowship had been revoked at this point, which is why John Aubrey expected him to be in the customary black gown for an inhabitant of the College.

The 1600s offer little else in terms of notable changes in clothing at Eton itself, and uniform remained, well, uniform. If we step forward a little into the eighteenth century, we come across some interesting attires.

Troubled times

Unlike in previous centuries, discipline was strongly enforced under the stern whip of the Headmaster Dr Jonathan Davies (c. 1736–1809). Matters become so serious that a rebellion broke out in 1783, notably amongst the lower oppidans. Dr Davies was physically driven out and destruction ensued. Even the assistant Masters had ‘laid aside their gowns’.²⁸ The staff had no control over the situation and had relinquished their authority. School uprisings were apparently commonplace during this period.

When Davies was eventually made Provost in 1791 (despite protest from student and parent alike), Dr William Langford was Lower Master (otherwise Deputy Head). The official attire for Lower Masters until 1802 was a cauliflower wig and cocked hat.²⁹ There is an interesting drawing in the British Museum, dated 1793, representing Dr Langford in his official robes. He wears ‘a three-cornered hat over a wig; spectacles, a sleeved waistcoat cut low enough to show a plain linen shirt front, and a preacher’s gown such as a Doctor of Divinity wears now, but with shorter and less ample sleeves coming down to the elbows; the gown is looped or fastened together from the waist downwards, and shows neither coat nor cassock; stockings and plain shoes complete his attire.’³⁰ The high-ranking members of Eton seemed to employ attire based on personal preference and fashion, rather than adherence to religious law that was losing effect, and the former statutes.

Keate and Goodall

There were cheeky, mischievous students, deemed bad influences on their peers, known as the ‘cads’. They were expelled in 1829 from their daily resort, the Long Walk in front of Upper School. The school magazine in 1833 makes mention of them as ‘a fellow minus a coat with ragged hat’.³¹ This selection of attire may possibly be the anachronistic equivalent of the twentieth-century ‘dunce hat’.

Aside from the expected truancy, practical joking was commonplace at the time. The Headmaster John Keate³² (1773–1852) was often ridiculed due to his attire. The assistants had exchanged their cocked hats for trenchers roughly a century earlier, yet Dr Keate insisted to continue wearing the style of hat known as a ‘windcutter’.³³ His general attire was the gown of a Doctor of Divinity worn over a black cassock. The historian William Alexan-

28 Lyte, p. 350. To lay aside one’s gown would likely be purely metaphorical. They may have gone on strike!

29 *Ibid*, p. 352. A cauliflower wig was a closely curled bob-wig.

30 Arthur C. Benson, *Fasti Etonenses: A Biographical History of Eton, Selected from the Lives of Celebrated Etonians* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1899) pp. 220–221.

31 Lyte, pp. 424–25.

32 Benson, p. 286,

33 A cocked hat known by this name in Westminster, London.

der Kinglake describes his outlandish costume as a cross between Napoleon and a widow. Apparently, this was not unusual dress for a headmaster at the time.³⁴

In Figure 5 is Dr John Keate. A famous sketch of him exists (similar to this) crossing the school yard. His attire is described as follows, which elaborates on what was mentioned above.

He wore a silk cassock and a pudding-sleeved gown, such as is worn by clergymen when they are presented at Court now, only that Dr. Keate's gown appears to have had enormously ample sleeves: over this he wore a Doctor of Divinity's scarf, the ends of which streamed away behind him as he walked: a pair of white bands under the chin, and a large three-cornered hat completed his attire.

The cocked hat is still preserved at Eton in the Headmaster's Chambers, and was made of stiff cardboard covered with silk like a tall hat of the present day.³⁵

Provost Joseph Goodall (1760–1840) took the reins as Headmaster from Keate in 1809. He is regarded as one of the most liked and respected Provosts in Eton history; he was an almost ideal Provost. He had a tall and commanding presence. He always appeared in the full costume of an ecclesiastical dignitary of the last century. He wore a shovel hat decorated with a large rosette, a frill, knee-breeches, stockings, and buckled shoes. Every morning, he wore a new and powdered wig. The colossal marble statue of him in the garden at Eton is said to be an admirable likeness (Fig. 6).³⁶

It would appear that, although rules for dress in church were strict anywhere else the Provost was clearly almost free to choose his attire within reason, and relaxations on academic dress for students would soon manifest themselves.

To make brief mention of the scholars' dress of around 1816, one can describe the engraving in Figure 7³⁷ as a figure who wears a black gown reaching to the feet. The gown has no collar, but a yoke to which the back and sleeves are gathered like an Oxford scholar's gown. The sleeves are open but are cut horizontally above the elbow with the lower part ending above the knee and rounded into a double ogee curve.

Rites and customs

Many kinds of (informal) initiations take place in schools to this day globally and certainly do not form part of school protocol. Eton students were noted for observing what were known as 'rites of initiation'. Around the time of Dr Keate's tenure (from the beginning of the nineteenth century), a notable custom regarding such initiating was known as 'book-ing'. This would take place on a Monday morning when boys were promoted from lower school to the fourth form. Upon passing on their way to Upper School, a waiting assembly of (older) boys would hit them on the head with their books. Probably having been devised by the students themselves, the meaning remains unclear, with a possible explanation being to test the younger students' resolve upon entering 'manhood'.

A similar custom occurring in the same period albeit at night was known as 'bam-mocking'. When lower school passed into the Long Chamber, the fifth form would 'bam-

³⁴ Benson, p. 286.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* Henry Weekes, Joseph Goodall, 1845, statue, Eton College garden.

³⁷ Scholar by T. Uwins published in W. Combe and W. H. Pyne, *The History of the Colleges of Winchester, Eton, and Westminster: with the Charter-House, the Schools of St. Paul's, Merchant Taylors, Harrow, and Rugby, and the Free-school of Christ's Hospital* (London: Ackermann, 1816).



Fig. 5 (left). John Keate (1773–1852), headmaster. Fig. 6 (centre). Provost Joseph Goodall (1760–1840), in the Eton garden. Fig.7 (right). Scholar's dress of around 1816.

mock' them with their heavy cloth gowns.³⁸ I would be surprised if students would be permitted to remove their gowns during daytime hours, let alone hit someone with them!

The year 1863 marked when Collegers (King's Scholars) were exempted from wearing their black gowns during 'play hours',³⁹ and 1868 marked the end of an age-old custom known as 'ripping'. When a Colleger left Eton for King's College Cambridge, he would be summoned to the Provost's office with the requirement that he be dressed in 'evening dress, with black knee-breeches, silk stockings and pumps, gown tacked together in front with a single thread.' The Provost gave a few words and literally ripped open the gown, then dismissed him formally from the College.⁴⁰ One can only ponder the reason a custom unique to Eton could cause enough umbrage to be suddenly halted.

Over the years changes had come about, including how and when academic dress was used. Eventually a new set of statutes was commissioned in 1871, a sign of the College's moving with the times.

Rule relaxation

Student life at Eton during the early to mid-nineteenth century had not changed much from the previous centuries. Morning meals were not provided. An unknown critic had noted, 'the inmates of a workhouse or a gaol are better lodged than the scholars of Eton: the clothing supplied by the College is limited to a stuff gown.'⁴¹ Stuff was originally made from wool and is currently used in regulations of academic dress to refer to fabrics other than silk. It could be suggested that the scholars perhaps expected a silk gown. A similar criticism was made in 1634 in the 'article of complaints' mentioned earlier, when scholars

³⁸ Lyte, p. 589.

³⁹ 'Play hours' is an Eton College phrase for free time.

⁴⁰ Lyte, pp. 527–28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.452.

were being deprived of living necessities and made to wear a short coarse gown, which would be terrible for winter.

Subjects at Eton were widening, and whereas Latin was the prominent subject during previous centuries, the year 1851 saw the inclusion of mathematics in regular schoolwork. The mathematics assistant master was now on the same level as the classical assistants.

Unfortunately, his lower assistants were devoid of certain authority; that being so, they were not given authority to enforce discipline. They were forbidden to wear academic dress, although in 1852, following the death of Provost Hodgson, this costume restriction was revoked.⁴²

1858 saw the improved working conditions for the assistants, and they were now permitted academic dress in chapel and in school.⁴³ The inclusion of mathematics was no doubt part of a widening of the curriculum in response to the growing importance of science in this century of industrial revolution. It is uncertain what exactly the lower assistants to the assistant master would actually be wearing if academic dress was prohibited. It would likely have been something respectable nonetheless, perhaps a coat or jacket with trousers, or simply a suit appropriate to professional work of the day.

Interestingly, Collegers/King's Scholars had much less freedom than some of their peers during the early part of the nineteenth century. King's Scholars initially had to wear their gowns at all times. Eventually, through whatever cause, restrictions were relaxed on going 'out of bounds' and the norm was for Collegers to leave their gowns at a particular shop before roving elsewhere. Autumn 1864 marked the point when Collegers had to wear their gowns only in school, chapel, or hall, and a thin smooth cloth replaced the rough and heavy material used previously. It is unclear how relaxed were the clothing restrictions on Lower and Upper Schools. During the early part of the nineteenth century, Etonians who were either in or in close proximity to the College were expected to be seen in specific clothing: 'A black tail coat with a white cambric tie, or black jacket with black silk tie (sailor's knot), the head must remain bare except a tall silk hat was generally accepted.'⁴⁴

In 1865, Leading Oppidans came into chapel in greatcoats. Centuries earlier, anyone not following the rule of ecclesiastical wear in chapel would surely incur the wrath of the Provost and risk expulsion. Higher ranks within the College at the time had more of a say in what could be worn. Further easing of rules would see straw hats being worn outside of lessons in summer.⁴⁵

School dress even today signifies a clear link with the wearer's institution both in colour and style. Eton had palpably been building a positive reputation since its inception, and perhaps feared acts of public truancy outside the College walls on the part of its beloved King's Scholars would tarnish this, hence the initial restriction on their gallivanting outside College. If they were to leave their gowns behind, at least they may not be visually identified.

Striving for further change

After the nineteenth century, Eton became a more settled institution. However, a letter written to the Provost and Fellows in October 1938 may prove that some dissatisfaction was around.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.478.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.521.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 536.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 537.

A former student and master of Eton, a Mr Ledbury, felt that the costume was out of date, too expensive, unhygienic, ugly, and uncomfortable, and that a class divide was being promoted with the academic dress. His request for change was, unsurprisingly, promptly rejected on all counts. It could be agreed that, at the turn of the twentieth century, Eton was beginning to attract the aristocracy, the wealthy, and even royalty, through sheer reputation. This would at least explain expense. Eton was always going to stand its ground.

Anthony Chenevix-Trench (10 May 1919–21 June 1979) was the first non-Etonian to be appointed Headmaster, on 4 March 1963. This fact in itself probably doomed him from the start. He commanded little respect from the masters and created some controversy during his tenure. His downfall may be due to his endeavour to abolish school uniform completely! His one notable success was at least having been able to remove the requirement for smaller boys to wear the short ‘bumfreezer’ cropped jackets (Fig. 8).⁴⁶ He was apparently the first Headmaster no longer to wear the cassock, and his successors followed suit.⁴⁷

Figure 8⁴⁸ demonstrates the now ‘abolished’ cropped jackets. One can see how they may appear uncomfortable. This may be, in part, to what Mr Ledbury’s letter was referring.

It was a foolish endeavour for Chenevix-Trench, as any other Headmaster, to adopt such an extreme view on the complete abolition of uniform considering the long and important history Eton had acquired over five hundred years relating to the employment and evolution of academic dress.

Present day

Eton has, indeed, come a very long way over the centuries, in terms of both its dress regulations and its success. Gowns still hold a key role in Eton life to this day.

The teaching masters are expected to wear black bachelors’ or masters’ gowns to morning chambers, unless wearing a suit or the like. Even if the master holds a PhD, he would still attire himself in the undress black gown and not the scarlet or claret dress robes as originally prescribed.

Doctoral dress robes would generally be worn on special occasions, such as royal visits. Unlike in previous centuries, gowns are required to be worn only upon entering the building(s). Masters are always required to wear a gown when attending chambers;⁴⁹ this was crucial and a spare is always on hand. Interestingly, gowns were not subject to replace-

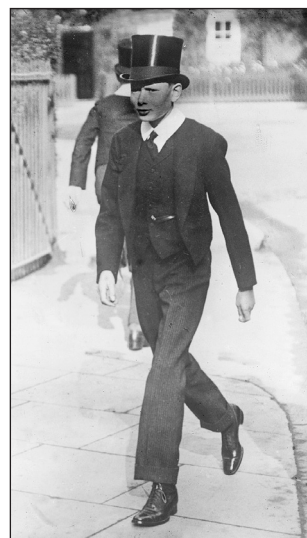


Fig. 8. The short ‘bum-freezer’ jacket.

⁴⁶ Anthony Chenevix-Trench, Wikipedia, at <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Chenevix-Trench> [retrieved 8 Sept. 2017].

⁴⁷ Tim Card, *Eton Renewed: A History of Eton College From 1860 to the Present Day*, 1st edn (London: Murray, 1994).

⁴⁸ Henry, Duke of Gloucester, c. 1914, available at <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eton_College>.

⁴⁹ ‘Chambers’ is a mid-morning break of 25 minutes for the schoolboys. Masters would gather in Upper School.



Fig. 9. Full school dress: a tailcoat, trousers, black waistcoat and strip tie.

ment after so many years. Gowns also must be worn in chapel, no doubt due to the stricter rules in place for such a location in centuries past and the fact that chapel attendance is generally looked on as a formal event.

For students, current full school dress would comprise a tailcoat, trousers, black waistcoat, and strip tie (Fig. 9).⁵⁰ For those in 'Pop' (the prefect group), a waistcoat of any colour is permitted, a stick-up collar and white bow tie. Gowns must be worn unless in winter or wet weather, when an overcoat can serve as a replacement. Half change comprises a sports jacket instead of a tailcoat and optionally without the waistcoat. Casual wear does not require gowns to be worn.

As Eton has been subject to many curious customs in the past such as 'ripping', traditions remain important for scholars. Another modern convention was for an individual to hold the gown sleeve of another if a question or conversation were desired, although this happened only in chambers and generally took place between masters.

The King's Scholar (Colleger) attire had always stood out since the nineteenth century, and these scholars were able to be more flexible with rules on academic dress, as mentioned earlier. Made solely by J. Wippell of Exeter, this black gown is noted for its short length and rather heavy nature. King's Scholars are required to wear their gowns at all times during the school day, except when in overcoats, and sources suggest no commotion was made on the matter.

Conclusion

The history of academic attire and its use at Eton displays both continuity and evolution down the years. Changes in the academic dress of student, master, Provost and so forth are

⁵⁰ Students of Eton College, at <pravoslavie.ru/english/96775.htm> [retrieved 8 Sept. 2017].

largely reflected in social, religious and likely economic change through the centuries, as attitudes were indeed changing as well. Since the College's inception we see how restrictions on garments gradually loosened, when rules which had been bound by the law of the land were once punishable, eventually disappeared. Through centuries of evolution, regulations and customs became more a way of developing a personality for the College. Comparing the old statutes with the new, the latter show a more thought-out and independent model from those of the former, which is not a criticism but a contrast. From 1440 to the present day, it is quite likely that, without all the discipline, decision-making, legislations, hardships, and other attributes, in academic dress as in other things, Eton would not hold the respected position it does today.