

In the Pink: The Strange Case of Trinity College Dublin

by Bruce Christianson

According to the frontispiece of Taylor's history of the University of Dublin, published in 1845, the MA hood of Trinity College was once lined with pink.¹ However in Gutch's table of 1858 the MA lining is listed as dark blue, and it has been given as blue (with various qualifications of the shade) by every authority since then.

It is natural to assume that the academic dress of Trinity College was, since the University's eventual foundation in 1591, developed from and subsequently influenced (although not constrained) by that of Oxford and Cambridge. Indeed, Hargreaves-Mawdsley asserts (p. 146) that the academic dress of Trinity 'was almost entirely copied from Cambridge, and in a few cases from Oxford'. I shall argue below that the influence of Oxford was in fact considerably more pronounced than this quotation allows, but in either case the pink lining of the MA presents us with a conundrum.

Was the pink intended as a compromise between the red of Oxford and the white of Cambridge? Was pink a 'corporate colour' for the new university, much as palatinate purple was later to be for Durham?² Or was the Oxford MA once lined with the same pink as was used there by the lay doctors?³

Gutch's table assigns a crimson lining to the Oxford MA in 1858 so any change away from pink for the MA lining at Oxford must have taken place before this date.⁴ However a pink MA lining originally derived from Oxford might persist at Trinity well after Oxford practice changed.⁵ An examination of MA linings at those early colonial universities showing traces of an Oxford influence

¹ See Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 147, n. 7. According to p. 148, n. 2, the plates date from about 1820, although they were probably coloured in 1845.

² Hargreaves-Mawdsley (p. 147, n. 9) points out that at Trinity the equivalent of an Oxbridge 'blue' is called a 'pink'. However, I am inclined to think this consideration anachronistic as far as the origin of the MA lining colour is concerned: the earliest reference to any 'corporate' use of the colour blue by either of the ancient universities is not until the use of light blue by Cambridge as an innovation in the boat race of 1836. The present foundation at Durham dates from 1832.

³ Lay doctors at Oxford had moved from scarlet to pink linings supposedly following Laud's ruling of 1636 (coincidentally the year of Harvard's foundation). However the DCL lining was described as scarlet as late as 1663 (Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 74, n. 2, citing Clark, vol. I, 494). See my 'Oxford Blues' for more on the use of pink by doctors at Oxford and Cambridge.

⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century (see Wood 1882) the colour of the lay doctors' lining at Oxford had become the same crimson as that of the MA, a situation which remained until the latter acquired its crimson and orange shot lining in 1957. The lay doctors appear in recent years to be in the gradual process of lightening their linings from crimson to scarlet, thus completing the cycle of change.

⁵ Nick Groves and I articulate a general thesis along these lines in our 'Wearing Mummy's Clothes', on pp. 42–43 in this *Annual*.

shows little enthusiasm for pink, although many use crimson,⁶ thus pointing to a pre-19th century date for any use of pink for the MA lining at Oxford.

The one significant (and anomalous) exception is the University of New Zealand. This sets the lining of the MA as pink and that of the LLB as light blue, the LLB being ‘bordered’ (in fact faced) with white fur.⁷ However, the University of New Zealand was founded in 1870 and the first specification of academic dress does not occur until the 1879 calendar, printed twenty years after the appearance of Gutch’s table.

Although the use of pink for the MA lining at Trinity appears to rest entirely on the evidence of Taylor’s plate, an eighteenth-century use of pink for the MA lining at Oxford cannot be ruled out.⁸

The change by Trinity College to dark blue for the MA lining also represents an interesting colour choice. It is a remarkable fact that many colonial universities founded during the middle part of the nineteenth century adopted various shades of blue for the MA lining.⁹ As I remark in my ‘Oxford Blues’, blue (usually dark) was the traditional colour of Arts/Philosophy over large parts of Continental Europe¹⁰ and so the choice by Trinity may reflect a European, rather than an English, influence.

Implicit in my argument so far has been the assumption that academic dress at Trinity was influenced by Oxford at least as heavily as by Cambridge. As discussed in note 17 of my ‘Evolution of the Oxford Simple Shape’, I am inclined

⁶ Examples (with foundation dates) include New Brunswick (1789), King’s College Nova Scotia (1802), Dalhousie Halifax (1818), and Madras (1857), all of which use the Oxford simple shape lined with crimson. Queen’s Kingston (1841) and Manitoba (1877) use simple lined and bound scarlet. Toronto (1843) uses simple lined cherry, Mount Allison (1843) the Oxford full shape lined and bound garnet.

⁷ The hoods for all degrees are specified as being ‘of the size and shape of the Cambridge Masters of Arts’ Hood’ (at that time the various degrees at Cambridge did not all share the same hood pattern: see for example Vincent’s *Cutter’s Guide*, Plate 32, p. 73). It is an old tradition in the NZ Federation of University Women (who sewed many hoods to raise funds for scholarships) that the initial New Zealand system followed ‘Cambridge patterns and Oxford colours’. A London influence is also discernible in some of the later developments, but the origin of the use of pink for Arts remains a mystery. I am obliged to Noel Cox for providing me with access to the early University of New Zealand regulations.

⁸ An alternative hypothesis, of course, is that the MA lining at Trinity was never pink at all, but was dark blue from the early days. The corresponding possibility of an early dark-blue lining for the non-regent MA at Oxford is advanced in my ‘Oxford Blues’.

The correspondent ‘DCL Cantab’ makes the interesting statement in *Notes & Queries*, 2nd ser., VI, no. 147 (1858), 337, that he has seen a Dublin MA hood which ‘was lined with lilac and not with blue; which is correct I know not.’ As Nick Groves has pointed out to me, the lilac could be the result of a blue lining having oxidized with age and exposure to light, in similar fashion to what happens with modern Oxford DPhil robes, but this explanation results in an extremely tight timescale for any change from pink to blue at Trinity: pink in 1845 when Taylor’s plates were coloured, and faded blue by some time prior to 1858.

⁹ Examples include: McGill (1821)—Cambridge full shape lined light blue; Sydney (1850)—Cambridge shape lined and bound blue; Melbourne (1853)—Oxford Burgon shape lined and bound blue; Calcutta (1857)—full shape lined dark blue; Victoria Manchester (1880)—Oxford simple lined with pale blue; and Tasmania (1890)—Burgon shape lined dark blue. In contrast, the University of New Zealand adopted dark blue as the lining for degrees in science from 1889.

¹⁰ Although the Arts colour is pink in part of Italy, including Florence, Messina, Perugia and Rome. See Volume II of Smith for details.

to regard the ‘proto-Burgon’ pattern used at Trinity for the BA until 1909, and still in use at Belfast and the National University of Ireland, as a preservation of a seventeenth-century Oxford practice.

Another living Oxford fossil may be the cut-out on the sleeve of the masters’ gown used at Trinity, which even today is identical with the shape shown on the boot of the Oxford MA sleeve by Nathaniel Whittock in his print of Buckland’s 1823 lecture (see Figure 1 below).¹¹



Figure 1: William Buckland in his Oxford MA gown, lecturing on fossils (1823)

The present-day undergraduate gown at Trinity (Smith, Plate 104, p. 428), although clearly debased from that of the Trinity fellow-commoner depicted in Taylor in the plate opposite p. 530 (see Figure 2 below) and described by Hargreaves-Mawdsley (p. 148, n. 5), is also arguably more nearly the full-dress gown of an Oxford gentleman-commoner) in the late eighteenth century than that of any fellow-commoner at Cambridge. Compare Loggan’s figure a gentleman-commoner, no. 5 on his Oxford plate (*pace* Hargreaves-Mawdsley, pp. 93–95), with the fellow-commoner, no. 4 on his Cambridge plate (Hargreaves-Mawdsley, pp. 130–31).

Although Dublin’s doctors’ robes follow pretty nearly the present pattern of Oxford, this shows nothing as to their origin, as the Cambridge robes did not diverge from this to their present pattern until after the time of Loggan’s plates.

¹¹ The same-shaped boot is shown for the MA in a series of Whittock’s Oxford prints, with dates ranging from 1822 to 1840 (see the references given below). Interestingly, the cut-out which Whittock shows on his 1847 print of the Cambridge MA gown is the form adopted in 1881 for the boot of the masters’ gown by the Victoria University of Manchester, an observation which I owe to Dr Alex Kerr (see Figure 3 below).



Figure 2: TCD Fellow-Commoner (c. 1820)

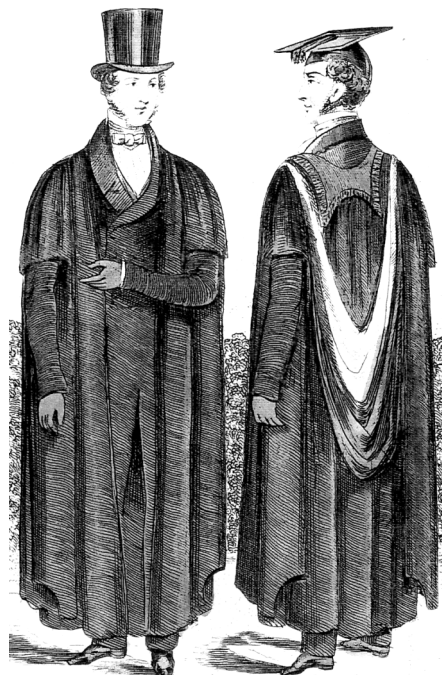


Figure 3: Cambridge MAs (1847)

The use of black silk for the DD lining at Trinity, as given in Gutch's table, is a clear Oxford influence¹² although Hargreaves-Mawdsley asserts (p. 147, n. 2), again on the sole authority of Taylor (plate opposite p. 530), that the DD lining was originally white at Trinity, thus providing us with a further conundrum.

However there is also a distinct possibility that the current LLD and MD linings at Dublin preserve a frozen snapshot of a transitional period at Oxford. Gutch assigns pink linings to both LLD and MD at Trinity in 1858.¹³ Although Hargreaves-Mawdsley (p. 147, n. 5) asserts that the MD lining at Dublin has always been crimson, not pink, his only cited authority for this assertion is Wood's later catalogue of 1875.

The present lining colours for LLD and MD at Cambridge (respectively light and mid-cherry) were not adopted there until 1889, and so are too late to influence Trinity prior to the time of Wood.¹⁴ On the other hand, Gutch's table assigns pink and crimson, the current Trinity colours for Law and Medicine respectively, to the DCL and DM at Oxford in 1858.¹⁵ Innovations in lay

¹² In 1858 at Cambridge the DD, LLD and MD linings were all identical shades of pink silk, according to 'DCL Cantab' (loc. cit.), the LLD having by then finally abandoned the use of the alternative ermine lining, thus copying the change made much earlier at Cambridge by the MD.

¹³ Probably on the authority of the Trinity resident John Ribton Garstin. See his posting to *Notes and Queries*, 2nd ser., VI, no. 120 (1858), 324. Garstin, and Gutch, refer to the Trinity LLD lining as 'light pink' and the MD lining as 'rose'.

¹⁴ Wood 1875 lists the Cambridge DD, LLD and MD all simply as 'scarlet lined pink'.

¹⁵ Gutch's table gives the Oxford lining colours in 1858 as pink for DCL but crimson for MA and DM. This assignment is disputed by 'DCL Cantab' (loc. cit.), who asserts that the Oxford DM lining is actually also pink. However, the Cambridge man may be recalling an older, and by

academic dress at Oxbridge were usually made by the medics and followed a generation or so later by the lawyers.

My hypothesis is therefore that the Oxford DM moved from pink to crimson lining at some time shortly before 1858, with the DCL making the same transition around 1880.¹⁶ Under this hypothesis, the medics' innovation made the transition to Dublin some time between 1858 and 1875, but the Trinity College system then froze with the lawyers still in pink.

The use of hoods with full-dress robes is now regarded as a Cambridge practice, but there are sufficiently late instances of it at Oxford to have informed early practice at Trinity (see for example the account of Charles I's visit in 1636 referred to in Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 67, n. 7). Conversely, the 1690 Cambridge plate of Loggan shows the hood as not then worn with festal dress. At Dublin, as at Cambridge, routine use of congregation dress has not been made by doctors for some time, and this may have lent encouragement to the practice of wearing a hood with festal dress instead. Apart from Doctors of Music, who had no congregation dress, the first evidence which I can find of a Cambridge hood worn with festal dress is that of the Doctor of Laws in Uwins's plates of 1815.

The fact that the Trinity cape has square corners might also be held as a Cambridge influence, although the presence of any binding at all is itself an argument for Oxford influence. However the square corners have a more likely origin in the decision of the Dublin tailors to bind linings over the cape (as well as cowl) edge of the full-shaped hoods.¹⁷ As Franklyn himself says (and I suppose that I had better let him have the last word) 'square corners are a tailor's innovation.'

then superseded, Oxford practice. See also his posting in *Notes and Queries*, 2nd ser., V, no. 129 (1858), 501–02.

¹⁶ Wood 1875 gives the Oxford DCL lining as pink and the DM lining as crimson. Wood 1882 gives crimson as the lining for both.

¹⁷ I am grateful to Philip Lowe for a convincing demonstration of the relatively greater difficulty of procuring such a binding on a cape with rounded corners. The shape of the Cambridge cape was never universally square until the reforms of the 1930s (First Report of the Council of the Senate, May 1932, IV (6), reproduced in Franklyn, p. 178) and the pattern adopted for the University of London cape reflects the Cambridge pattern being used by the London tailors in the 1860s.

Vincent's *Cutter's Guide* shows the Trinity MA with a square cape but a rounded liripipe in 1898, just as it is today. Franklyn's 1910 *Encyclopædia Britannica* article includes a picture of a Dublin MA hood with a rounded cape, but the item in question is on loan from a London robemaker. Franklyn's views on square-cornered capes are set out in his 1933 response to the Council of the Cambridge University Senate, in the section entitled 'General Errors' (Franklyn, p. 191, III (4)).

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