

Wearing Mummy's Clothes: An Introduction to Academical Archaeology

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This note is based upon the observation that the academic dress (AD) adopted by (former) British colonies and dominions potentially provides an archaeological record of UK AD.

Court and legal dress became fossilized in the eighteenth century and have remained largely (indeed almost completely) unchanged since then. In contrast, AD in the UK has continued to evolve in response to demands made by its wearers and by the authorities which imposed its use. In this respect AD is analogous to liturgical vesture, with which AD has long shared historical connections, in exhibiting both sympathetic response to changing lay fashion and deliberate reaction against it.

Most colonial universities initially borrowed their AD from the mother country, and particularly, in the case of British colonies, from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. These initial borrowings typically reflected aspects of 'home' usage at the point in time when the colonial university (or the wearing of AD there) was first established, although occasionally a later form of home use would be transplanted and grafted on to an existing colonial AD practice.

Once transplanted, colonial AD found itself largely removed from the influence of UK fashion and the related pressures for change. AD in the colonies was usually worn less frequently than at Oxbridge (where AD continued for much longer to be everyday wear), and had in any case a symbolic status, as an icon of continuity with a geographically remote intellectual tradition, which made it relatively resistant to ephemeral change.

But in spite of isolation and inertia, colonial AD did continue to evolve. As well as innovations necessitated by the establishment of new degrees, and of new degree-awarding institutions, two other forces have been at work. The first is inculturation, where AD gradually adapts to and in some cases adopts local cultural practices. Examples of this are the Maori dog-skin cloak worn over gown and beneath hood in New Zealand, rather like the shoulderpiece worn in the seventeenth century at Oxford, and the use of kente cloth to face the gowns of some African universities. A second force is globalization: as more of the former colonies look to the USA for cultural referents, so their AD has been influenced in design or use by the USA Intercollegiate Code.

However, both endemic and global changes are relatively easy to identify and so to factor out. Thus our hope is that in many cases it will still be possible to use colonial AD as an archaeological record of former UK usage. Such a record could be exploited in two directions, allowing us both to reconstruct the evolutionary history of 'home' AD and to deduce the date of introduction of AD in the colonies from the forms used there.

In one direction, where the date of colonial/provincial adoption (or readoption) of a particular pattern of AD is known, the corresponding

reconstruction of former ‘home’ usage can be securely dated. For example the University of Wales still uses the simple hood shape which was current in Oxford in 1893, although Oxford itself has moved on. Edinburgh did the same for the simple shape current in Oxford during the 1870s, which is when hoods were reintroduced to Scottish AD. Going further back in time Trinity College, Dublin (founded 1591) consciously borrowed AD from both Oxford and Cambridge, and for over three centuries preserved many aspects of sixteenth-century English usage.

Interestingly, one early form of Burgon hood shape is still preserved at Belfast and the NUI, which inherited it from TCD in 1909 when they were chartered, even though it had by then long been abandoned at Oxford, and has since been abandoned by TCD. For more along these lines, refer to the paper by Nicholas Groves: ‘Evolution of Hood Patterns’, *Burgon Society Annual*, 2003, pp.18–23.

Conversely, in cases where an early form already has a secure ‘home’ date, we can use this to estimate the date at which that article of AD was transplanted. This is not necessarily the date of foundation of the colonial/provincial institution: for example, Harvard (founded 1636) uses the Oxford MA hood in the same shape which was readopted at Edinburgh, thus pointing to a date of adoption in the latter half of the eighteenth century, but prior to the setting up of the ICC.

Although we stress that what we are proposing is a methodology for generating hypotheses for further investigation, and not a crystal ball with which to gaze into the past, our approach does emphasize the continuing importance of catalogues of AD; not only of the early editions of Wood and Haycraft, but also of the much later works of Shaw (1966) and Smith (1970).

Even the lists and patterns in Pear’s *Cyclopaedia* and the *Girl’s Own Paper*, far from being merely outdated trainspotting, provide not only a valuable snapshot of AD as it was at the time of compilation, but also a potential record of the effects of prior transplantations. A comprehensive survey of colonial AD with this agenda has yet to be attempted.