

## An Overview of the History of the Academic Dress of the University of Exeter

By David C. Quy

The development of higher education in the Exeter area goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century with the creation of a School of Art, founded in 1854, and later the Royal Albert Memorial College (RAMC). However, university-level education in Exeter can be said to begin in 1922 when the RAMC was recast as the University College of the South West of England (UCSWE). Hector Hetherington and John Murray, two distinguished and visionary principals of UCSWE, prepared the early advance towards university status.<sup>1</sup> In those early days students came mainly from the south-west and were prepared, in common with those at other establishments, as external students for degrees of the University of London. The yearning for university status gathered momentum during the 1940s and into the 1950s and, once the wheels had been set in motion, there was simply no going back.<sup>2</sup> A formal decision to petition the Privy Council was taken by the Court of the University College on 14 January 1955. The response was, by all recorded accounts, astonishingly rapid and on the 28 October of the same year the clerk to the Privy Council wrote to the College's solicitor ' [ ... ] to inform you that the Queen was pleased [ ... ] to approve the grant of a Charter constituting and founding a University within the City and County of Exeter'. The Charter passed the Great Seal in December 1955 and the University of Exeter came into existence. The final transition from the former UCSWE had been executed and the feeling around the campus, recorded in the annals of the time, was one of palpable optimism and excitement.<sup>3</sup>

After almost seventy-five years of tangible progress—not without difficulties at times—and an increasing reputation for its inspirational research, Exeter has achieved and built upon a reputation of which it can be justly proud, both nationally and internationally. One result is that it was admitted to the prestigious Russell Group in the early twenty-first century. It now has a campus in Penryn, Cornwall, with graduation ceremonies being held in Truro cathedral. Such an outstanding institution deserves to have the history of its robes investigated insofar as written records and information obtained from specific sources allow.

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1 Petition recorded at Special Meeting of Senate, 11 Nov. 1953.

2 B. W. Clapp, *The University of Exeter: A History* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1982), pp. 102–17; Jeremy Black, *Exeter's University: A History* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2018), pp. 5 ff. In the latter Black rewrites and updates his earlier, extensively illustrated work published for the University's diamond jubilee: *The City on the Hill: A Life of the University of Exeter* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2015). None of these histories discusses the University's academic dress.

3 Senate Minutes, 31 Oct. 1955. All minutes and reports cited in this article are in the University's archives: Exeter, University of Exeter, Bill Douglas Library, Special Collections.

## A new university requires its own academic dress

### *Robemakers in the early days*

It was at this time (1955) that a first reference to academic dress was made:

Graduands to be presented to the Vice-Chancellor of London University should provide their own academic dress but [ ... ] the College (UCSWE) would arrange with Ede and Ravenscroft (robe makers to London) for the supply of gowns and hoods to be made available for hire to Graduands.<sup>4</sup>

The vice-chancellor of the newly created University of Exeter reported that the ceremony of installation of the chancellor would take place on the morning of 13 July 1956 and that, in readiness for the occasion, alterations were now being carried out by Ede & Ravenscroft on the chancellor's robe.<sup>5</sup> J. Wippell & Co. Limited, rather than Ede & Ravenscroft, had been entrusted by Exeter with the creation of new robes for the vice-chancellor, pro-chancellor and treasurer,<sup>6</sup> thus distancing itself from London. However, this meant there was a duality of robemaker; Ede & Ravenscroft appeared to accept that Wippell's—established since 1789 as a clerical outfitter—were now gaining momentum in the domain of academic robes and therefore they requested to be joint robemakers. The Senate rejected this proposal and decided to remain exclusively with Wippell's on account of the excellence of their robes, which had been inspected and thoroughly approved.<sup>7</sup>

### *Exeter's journey towards autonomy*

Although Exeter had gained independent university status, which meant it no longer had to meet London's entrance requirements and could now devise its own degrees and syllabuses and conduct its own examinations, there still existed the 'special relationship' between London and Exeter, not least because it was not until 1959 that all students finally took Exeter degrees. Furthermore, in those early days, although Exeter tutors marked finals papers, they were moderated by University of London examiners.

Understandably, whilst still under the influence of London, Exeter was most anxious to create and emphasize its own identity. One way of doing this was, of course, to establish its unique scheme of academic dress and especially the design and colour of its hoods. A regulation from November 1955 required students to wear academic dress (undergraduate gowns) at lectures, classes and tutorials, in chapel and when visiting members of the academic staff officially.<sup>8</sup> Men, on all occasions when academic dress was worn, were obliged to wear a tie; women were to wear a dress or a skirt. Later, when Alan G. Bartlett was academic registrar, the wearing of academic dress was rather more sharply and comprehensively defined:

- at public and official ceremonies—full academic dress; Doctors in scarlet;
- at meetings of the Court—full academic dress; Doctors in scarlet;
- at meetings of the Council, the Senate, Boards of Faculties and general meetings Faculties—black gowns;
- at inaugural lectures—black gowns and hoods;

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4 Senate Minutes, 8 Oct. 1955.

5 Senate Minutes, 7 Dec. 1955.

6 Senate Minutes, 25 April 1956.

7 Senate Minutes, 25 April 1956.

8 Senate Minutes, 11 Nov. 1955.

- at public lectures—black gowns;
- when giving lectures or taking classes (except in the case of Laboratory Sciences where, by tradition, academic dress omitted)—black gowns;
- when attending Chapel—black gowns except when full dress is specified.<sup>9</sup>

Wippell's had become the official robemakers of the newly created University in February 1956 and a letter from the University thanks Wippell's for 'help given during past months for their assistance in the choice of designs and academic colours ...'.<sup>10</sup> Henceforth, the University authorities and robemaker seemed to have worked in partnership; such a close liaison would endure for the next sixty years or so. It is worth noting at this stage that in 1956–58, many students at Exeter were still reading for London degrees. Indeed, in 1954, students in three departments (I was unable to identify which) were allowed to opt for an Exeter degree; others continued with the London award, considered by many to be a more prestigious qualification. By the time that all students were taking Exeter degrees, any fears that they might be considered of inferior academic quality or status disappeared surprisingly quickly.<sup>11</sup>

### *Ceremonials Committee*

The Ceremonials Committee was initiated by the Senate of the University and this body of academics consulted professional robemakers, stating that

with regard to robes of graduates of the University, it is most important that identity with those of any other university should be avoided. The suggestions made are believed to achieve this aim through their combination of colour and shape of hood as far as universities of the Commonwealth and USA are concerned.<sup>12</sup>

The following year the Committee, enthusiastically settling into its new role, approved an LLD gown with hood and bonnet submitted by Wippell's, who recommended that the inner and outer edges of the hood should be two inches wide all round in the faculty colour and also that the brim of the bonnet should be made of stiffer material. At around the same time, it also approved a revised pattern of the academic dress of Doctors of Law and Science to encompass a broader edging of the hood together with a bonnet with the stiffened brim.<sup>13</sup> The task of drawing up draft statutes and ordinances prior to the Charter fell to Alan Bartlett, the academic secretary, and Professor Garland, acting principal of the UCSWE. Significantly, both men were Cambridge MAs. There was also a powerful contingent of other Cambridge men among the professoriate, who held sway over the adoption of academic dress at Exeter. This is no doubt the most plausible reason for the decision to adopt Cambridge-style robes. The gowns, therefore, followed the Cambridge pattern as regards the sleeves and were, in an early stipulation, to be provided with strings; these disappeared quite quickly, however.<sup>14</sup> The bachelor's gown was designed with a slit in the sleeves,

<sup>9</sup> Senate Minutes, 2 July 1956.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from the University to J. Wippell & Co. (date unspecified). All copies of correspondence between the University and Wippell's cited in this article were consulted at the offices of Wippell's in Exeter.

<sup>11</sup> Clapp, pp. 123–24.

<sup>12</sup> Ceremonials Committee Minutes, 2 July 1956.

<sup>13</sup> Ceremonials Committee Minutes, 23 May 1956.

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Ceremonials Committee for Submission to the Senate, 2 Nov. 1955; Clapp, p.

something which survives to this day. The hoods, following the Cambridge pattern, were to be of the full shape [f1], based on the design of the early theological colleges.<sup>15</sup> It was further prescribed at this early stage, that the black gown of Doctors of Letters and Science [m1] was to be decorated with Cambridge lace around the sleeve openings and around the yoke. The black gowns of Doctors of Philosophy were to be of the masters' pattern using long, gathered sleeves with doctor's lace around the sleeve openings only.<sup>16</sup>

Another issue was resolved in those early days as the result of a joint decision of the Senate and the Ceremonials Committee concerning graduation day itself. It was decreed that the chancellor should be seated when conferring first degrees. Female graduands were to keep their soft hats on, whereas their male counterparts were expected to remove their hats *before* approaching the chancellor, as a mark of respect to both the chancellor and the other notables on the platform. They were to replace them 'immediately after being admitted and receiving the diploma'.<sup>17</sup> Very few male graduands removed their hats at the 2018 ceremonies that I observed either in the Great Hall or on live streaming; discipline was seen to have slipped somewhat.<sup>18</sup> It is now optional and male graduands are no longer advised to remove their cap.<sup>19</sup> This change may well be ascribed to the interests of gender equality, especially as the women now all wear mortar-boards. In the early 1960s the Committee recommended that an indication of the appropriate academic dress be included on notices of meetings and agendas of University committees, for guidance of members of these committees. Heads of department 'from now onwards should be asked to use every opportunity to persuade students to wear gowns'.<sup>20</sup> Just over twenty years later, in 1985, this was rescinded and the Standing Committee supported a proposal to delete from posters advertising public lectures the statement that academic dress was compulsory. By making it optional it accepted the view that wearing academic attire achieved nothing and might even discourage attendance. The Committee agreed with the vice-chancellor, however, that at inaugural lectures, the speakers should wear academic dress and that the chairman (normally himself) should be similarly attired.<sup>21</sup> The report was approved. This was all far removed from the stipulation in 1958 when the Committee ordained that all full-time students in residence at the University 'shall wear a gown of the approved pattern. Academic dress does not include the academic cap, but women students participating in religious services or in processions out of doors may wear the soft Oxford-pattern cap'.<sup>22</sup>

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15 Alphanumeric codes in square brackets refer to the Groves Classification System. See *Shaw's Academical Dress of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3rd edn, ed. by Nicholas Groves (London: Burgon Society, 2011), p. 24; <[www.burgon.org.uk/academic-dress/classification/](http://www.burgon.org.uk/academic-dress/classification/)>.

16 Ceremonials Committee Minutes, 2 July 1955.

17 Senate Minutes, 5 March 1959.

18 Observation by Professor Nicholas Orme, second and final chairman of the Ceremonials Committee, by email, 1 May 2019.

19 Confirmation by telephone from the Student Information Desk (Graduation Department), June 2019.

20 Regulations for Students, Calendar 1961/62.

21 Standing Committee of Senate, 27 May 1985.

22 Senate Minutes, 21 May 1958.

## The academic robes<sup>23</sup>

### *Faculty colours of hoods*

Bachelors' hoods [f1] were to be a dove grey material, unlined and bound with faculty colour two inches inside and out round the cowl and cape, and masters' hoods [f1] similarly of dove grey and lined with the faculty colour. The system of faculty colours for hoods was proposed by the Senate and appears to have been accepted unanimously and with alacrity. The colour selected was blue or various shades of that colour:

- Arts—kingfisher blue
- Law—purple
- Science—turquoise
- Social Studies—dark blue
- Education—ultramarine blue
- Divinity (DD)—kingfisher blue
- Music—kingfisher blue
- Engineering—salvia blue

In the event of further faculties being created, the following colours were suggested as being available; royal blue, light blue, and lupin blue ...<sup>24</sup>

Dr Charles Franklyn, the scholar of academic dress, was actively involved in the academic dress of several universities but appears to have had no direct contact with the University of Exeter. However, in his history of the subject he was particularly scathing of the 'new' Exeter robes. He wrote:

The robes laid down for Exeter are given in Shaw's catalogue on pp. 58–59; they follow the Cambridge patterns. The Regulations are very sketchy, lax, and drawn up by non-experts and the bachelors' hoods would be a disgrace to any British university, being of dove grey flannel, unlined, but edged or bound with two inches of various shades of blue (purple for Law) which renders them indecipherable, and worse than theological college hoods.<sup>25</sup>

Professor Nicholas Orme, the last chairman of the Ceremonials Committee, believes, to the best of his recollection, that dove grey was chosen because no other institution had adopted that colour, whereas the major colours were already in use elsewhere. He presumes that grey in itself was not considered sufficiently colourful and so faculty colours were added. He thinks also that the various shades of faculty silks were abolished in 1986 probably because Wippell's felt it was too complicated and costly to produce all the variations. Henceforth, spectrum blue was to be adopted for the hoods of all faculties for more cost-effective production.<sup>26</sup>

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23 The records contain considerably more information about the design of the gowns of the chancellor and other senior officers than about the robes for the University's graduates. I am grateful to the staff in Special Collections for providing facilities to access, as they put it, their 'records such as they are ...'.

24 Report of the Ceremonials Committee, 2 Nov. 1955.

25 *Academical Dress from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Lewes: W. E. Baxter, Ltd, 1970), p. 208. 'Shaw's catalogue', referred to here by Franklyn, is G. W. Shaw, *Academical Dress of British Universities* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1966).

26 Email from Nicholas Orme.



**Fig. 1. Bachelor's gown [b2] and hood [f1].**



Photographs by Peter Durant

**Figs 2 (top), 3. Front and back of scholar's gown.**

An alternative suggestion is that the change was initiated by the controversial professor of Theology, Roy Porter.<sup>27</sup> This change was to be effective for graduation ceremonies the following year.

Throughout the history of the development of robes at the University there appears to have been very close collaboration and significant agreement between the Senate, the Ceremonials Committee and Wippell's.

### *Headgear*

From the start doctors in full dress wore a round bonnet; otherwise, male graduates wore a mortar-board and female graduates wore an Oxford-style soft square cap. The Senate of the University had been considering the question of headwear for female students for a number of years; it came to the conclusion in 1990 that women should wear a mortar-board instead of the soft cap. In the event, this stipulation was delayed by a year to enable sufficient stocks of mortar-boards to be supplied.<sup>28</sup> Apparently, this had been envisaged for a considerable period of time and was possibly to achieve parity of dress and esteem (or so perceived) with other more established and prestigious universities. Thus in 1990 Senate agreed that all graduates except doctors in full dress would wear black mortar-boards irrespective of sex.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Recollection of Peter Durant, FBS, a student at Exeter University at that time, who admits the claim may be slightly tenuous. On Porter see Black, *Exeter's University*, pp. 102-03, 128-29.

<sup>28</sup> Senate Minutes, 14 Feb. 1989.

<sup>29</sup> Senate Minutes, 1990 (day and month unspecified).

### *Scholar's gown*

Peter Durant was able to send me the two pictures of the elusive scholar's gown shown in Figures 2 and 3. The accompanying note describes it as 'a unique and rare robe ... the Scholars' gown for the University of Exeter is of the London Undergraduate pattern with striking dark green facings and yoke'. Barrie Behenna, academic secretary at the University between 1962 and 1997, has confirmed that the principal colour of the UCSWE was green, which Exeter inherited with this particular robe in its quest 'to be different'. He recalls the gown vividly and remembers that it was worn exclusively by the president of the Students' Guild on very formal occasions, such as attendance at the University Court. Furthermore, he recalls that the gown of the registrar of the University College had green facings to give it a more ornate appearance.<sup>30</sup> Further investigation might reveal a fuller history of the scholar's gown.

### *Benefactors' gowns*

The College of Benefactors was established in 2006 and, during the following year, there was much discussion about producing robes (gowns only) that would adequately acknowledge the generosity of donors who were being offered membership of that august body. Exeter regarded induction into the College as being the highest honour it could bestow on its philanthropists and red taffeta was the colour and fabric that the authorities first considered. All would be invited to attend but only some would want to walk in procession at the University's annual graduation ceremonies. These included Bill Douglas, who has a library named in his honour on campus. After further consideration, the benefactors' gown was to have a Wedgewood blue body with red sleeves, facings and trimmings and with a blue cord and button on the sleeve. The aim was to build up a stock of gowns purely for the ceremony itself. The headgear was to be a black velvet bonnet with a red cord and tassels to differentiate it from an honorary graduate's, which was a black velvet bonnet with a blue cord and tassels. The robemakers would be holding four gowns of differing lengths (45" to 56") and a gown of 52" was to be purchased, thus accommodating a range of sizes and covering most—if not all—eventualities!<sup>31</sup>

### *New degree courses*

From the late 1990s and during the early years of the twenty-first century, it would have been evident to anyone in the academic world that Exeter was striving towards its ultimate goal of election to the elite Russell Group of leading research universities. This was reflected in success in creating new degree courses and the feeling in the locality, the country and internationally that Exeter, by now a strong force in the academic world, could climb much higher, as indeed it did, in a relatively short time.

### *Undergraduate masters*

Commencing in 1995, the University started conferring a new type of degree described as an undergraduate master's degree, namely, the Master of Physics (MPhys), the Master of Chemistry (MChem) and the Master of Engineering (MEng). These degrees were awarded

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<sup>30</sup> Information supplied by Barrie Behenna, former academic secretary, by telephone.

<sup>31</sup> Correspondence (2007–09) between Wippell's and Chris Hibbs, development officer, University of Exeter.

as a first degree after four years of study and along similar lines to those awarded at other universities.<sup>32</sup> It was considered inappropriate that the hoods for such degrees should be the same as those for existing masters (all higher degrees) and equally unacceptable that they should be the same as those for bachelors' degrees. It is interesting to note that the University had already provided for the BPhil by designing a bachelor's hood with white piping. The decision was taken, therefore, to design a hood [f1] of similar style to the BPhil but with different coloured piping.<sup>33</sup> Purple, gold and red were presented for consideration before Professor Nicholas Orme, the ceremonials officer and former sub-warden of Crossmead Hall in the 1970s. He was deemed to be happy with the hood and the gold-piped version was chosen. After much debate and comparison with other universities which awarded such a degree, a master's-style gown [m2] was selected.<sup>34</sup>

### *MA in International Relations*

The MA in International Relations was first awarded in 1997. Vibrancy of colour seems to have been the order of the day and the edging of the standard master's hood in bright scarlet was approved: that is the straightforward fully lined master's hood, but with the addition of a scarlet cording around all the edges. Fifteen hoods were converted into the new design for the fifteen new graduands in July 1997. The standard MA gown [m2] and mortar-board completed the attire.<sup>35</sup> However, the regulations have been revised so that MAs in International Relations now have the same hood as other masters.

### *Master of Mathematics (MMath)*

The Master of Mathematics degree was also instituted in 1997. The dress code was identical to that provided for the Masters of Engineering and Physics—a standard bachelor's hood [f1]—but with gold cord edging and the gown a standard master's [m2] in black ribbed cotton and viscose imitation silk.<sup>36</sup>

### *Doctor of Clinical Psychology (DClinPsych)*

The Doctor of Clinical Psychology degree was introduced at Exeter in the late 1990s. The robes were to be identical to the PhD's, along the same lines that Southampton used: therefore no special or new robes were needed.<sup>37</sup>

### *Double degrees*

Double degrees relate to students who had been awarded a master's degree by Exeter and also a separate degree by another European institution. For the Exeter degree the graduates were to be eligible for the normal master's degree dress only. At that time (2003) Exeter had a stock of double degree hoods with a red cord which was in the process of being removed, thus reverting to the customary master's hood. Discussions were also taking place as to whether the Peninsula Medical School robes were considered an award of the two universities, Exeter and Plymouth. It was eventually agreed that reference be made

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Barrie Behenna to Wippell's, 13 Jan. 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Information from the University Academic Division to Wippell's, 19 Jan. 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Note from Barrie Behenna to Robin Richardson, director, Wippell's, 2 Feb. 1995.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Barrie Behenna to Robin Richardson, 10 Jan. 1997.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Wippell's to the University, 2 May 1997.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Wippell's to the University, 13 May 1999.



Fig. 4. PGCE hood.

to the fact that the academic dress was specific to the PMS on account of the use of grey Pantone as being part of Plymouth's corporate colour.<sup>38</sup>

### *Foundation degree*

Although foundation degrees were initiated nationally just after the turn of the millennium, it was not until 2011 that the robes were being finalized at Exeter for the graduation ceremony the following year, which two students wished to attend. The gown was to be black, of the usual Cambridge BA pattern but the hood was to be of the CNAA [a1] shape to align it with that of the sub-degree diploma/certificate hood and also to differentiate it from the usual bachelor version. The body was to be of the same grey cloth and the edging on the inside was to be 2" wide of the customary spectrum blue silk taffeta. The cap was to be the traditional mortar-board with a black tassel.<sup>39</sup>

### *PGCE robes and graduation*

Postgraduate Certificate in Education students attended their first summer ceremony in 2014. Wippell's were asked to give their opinion on suitable robes and the outcome appears to have been a fusion of ideas from robemaker and University.<sup>40</sup> These robes seem to have been inherited from precedent: other universities had already established formats for postgraduate/diploma students and Exeter now followed that pattern apart from those for its diploma students.

It was felt that the master's academic dress should not be worn as that would have made it unique in the whole country. Other red-brick universities already had postgraduate awards of this nature and none of them prescribed the same robes as worn by postgraduate degree holders or even undergraduate masters. Records retained by Wippell's give the distinct impression that Exeter did not want to go out on a limb principally to avoid devaluing their masters' robes or, indeed, their degrees for fear of the unfavourable reaction they might reasonably have expected from comparable institutions. Happily, an ideal compromise by the Senate was reached. A bachelor's gown was to be worn rather than a master's and the hood was to be exactly halfway between those of bachelor and master: that is a master's style, full-shaped grey hood 'partly' lined with spectrum blue (so-called strap-lined and edged on the outside of the cowl). A black mortar-board with black tassel completed the outfit. It was emphasized, however, that the robes were only available to PGCE students and not to other students who held a postgraduate diploma.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the PGCE dress was:

38 Letter from Wippell's to the University, 6 Oct. 2003.

39 Correspondence between Wippell's and the University, 29 Oct. 2014–11 Nov. 2014.

40 Letter from Wippell's to the University, 8 April 2014.

41 Correspondence between Wippell's and the University, 25 Feb. 2014, 27 Feb. 2014, 8 April 2014, 23 April 2014, 20 May 2015, 2 Oct. 2015, and 25 Oct. 2015.

Gown: a black robe of the bachelor style.

Hood: a grey hood of the same full shape as used by other awards, partly lined in blue HS 415 together with the same style edging inside the cowl as used for Plymouth University bachelor hood. Strap lined and edged blue.

Hat: black mortar-board.

### *Doctoral hoods*

The regulations stated that the hoods for Doctors of Philosophy [f1] were to be of dove grey cloth lined with scarlet cloth, whereas the hoods for Doctors of Letters, Laws and Science [f1] were to be of scarlet cloth lined with dove grey cloth. In 1967 it was thought that it would be an improvement if the PhD version could be lined with scarlet taffeta and the higher doctors' hoods be lined with dove grey taffeta. It was readily agreed that it would be desirable to reduce the weight of fabric in the hoods by the substitution of taffeta for cloth linings. It was also accepted that a deeper shade of scarlet would be preferable, if available.<sup>42</sup> This question of weight was raised a number of years later in respect of higher doctorate hoods. The Ceremonials Committee under the chairmanship of Professor Nicholas Orme gave its consent to the replacing of the heavier cloth with the lightweight scarlet 'panama' material. Some time later, there was a problem in obtaining the grey taffeta that had been used for the honorary doctorate hood. The shade of grey was no longer available owing to health and safety restrictions on the dyes used in that particular grey. A slightly lighter (and safer) alternative was proposed and accepted.<sup>43</sup> Ten hoods were held by the robemakers and had their grey replaced by the lighter shade. What particularly concerned the authorities was the unacceptability of having a mixture of dyes which would seem incongruous in any Congregation.<sup>44</sup>

The Committee responsible for graduation ceremonies recommended that the University keep a supply of higher doctorate gowns for loan to recipients of honorary degrees but that it should make a gift of the appropriate hood and bonnet to each honorary graduate. Also at this time it was stipulated that academic dress should be worn for University examinations and it was recommended that invigilators should also wear gowns. Another decision taken at this stage was that doctors (other than PhD) 'should be prescribed a scarlet cloth lined grey hood, bordered 2" in and out with faculty colour, strap lined, to ½" and the PhD to be of grey cloth lined with red taffeta, strap lined with red rather than the new blue'.<sup>45</sup>

### **Officers' robes**

Specific robes were prescribed in 1955 for officers of the University: chancellor, pro-chancellors, vice-chancellor and treasurer. The gowns were to have MA-style sleeves and be decorated with gold lace. 'MA-style sleeves' evidently just meant closed sleeves with armholes at elbow level: the chancellor and pro-chancellors were given square-ended sleeves with inverted-T armholes, the vice-chancellor MA-style sleeves with a crescent cut in the boot and inverted-T armholes.<sup>46</sup> Mortar-boards were to be adorned with gold tassels and gold

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42 Letter from Wippell's to Roderick Ross at the University, 11 May 1967.

43 Ceremonials Committee Minutes, 24 Jan. 1984.

44 Letter from Wippell's to the academic secretary, 10 Jan. 1997.

45 Letter from the Ceremonials Committee to Wippell's, 14 Dec. 2005.

46 See Plates 154 and 155 in Hugh Smith and Kevin Sheard, *Academic Dress and Insignia of*

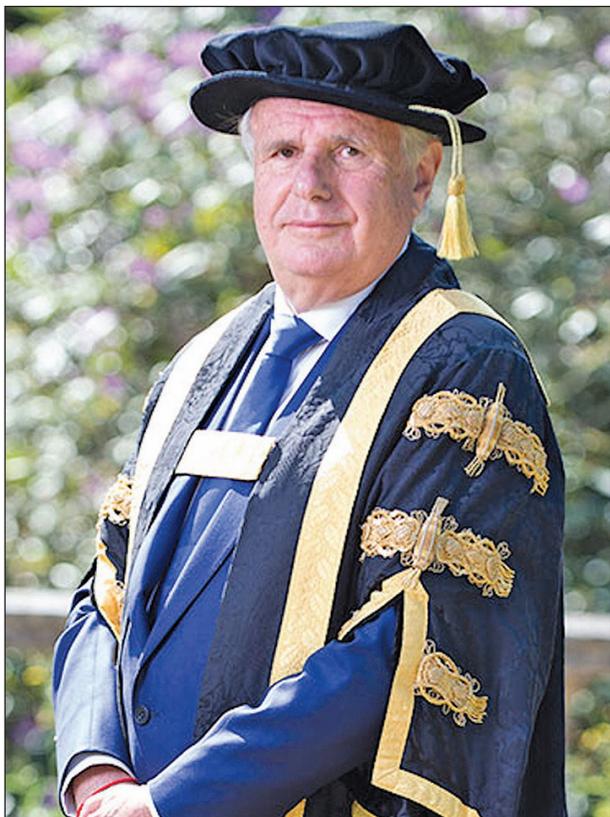


Fig. 6. Professor Sir Steve Smith, the vice-chancellor, who has chosen to wear a bonnet instead of the square cap.

Fig. 5 (left). Lord Myners of Truro, CBE, wearing his chancellor's robes. Note the morse, which seems to have been added about the beginning of this century.

edging. The quality of the lace around the armhole and around the yoke to be 'greatest for the Chancellor and should be least for the Treasurer'.<sup>47</sup> Presumably the other two positions fell some way between the greatest and the least! Various robemakers sent in samples but 'attention was requested to be drawn to those supplied by Messrs Wippell'.<sup>48</sup> As of 2018 Wippell's are no longer the official robe supplier to the University of Exeter, that position now being assumed by the company Graduation Attire Limited, headed by Martin Lewis.

### *Pro-chancellors' robes*

By 2008 the three pro-chancellors' gowns were also under active consideration, mainly on account of the size of one incumbent and material that was showing signs of extensive wear. Wippell's held two such gowns at this stage—a 1956 and a 1966 version—each of a different waist size. Whereas the earlier version was of pure black silk damask called Gothic and unavailable in more modern times, the gown created in 1966 was made in black St Nicholas silk damask, which was still available. It was agreed to make one new gown and to repair and refurbish the two older gowns. The new gown was to be created using the black St Nicholas damask with a two-inch gold oak leaf lace trimming at the facings, flap collar

*the World*, 3 vols (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1970), Vol. I, pp. 626–29.

<sup>47</sup> Senate Minutes, 1 July 1955.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from the University to Wippell's, 17 Feb. 1959.



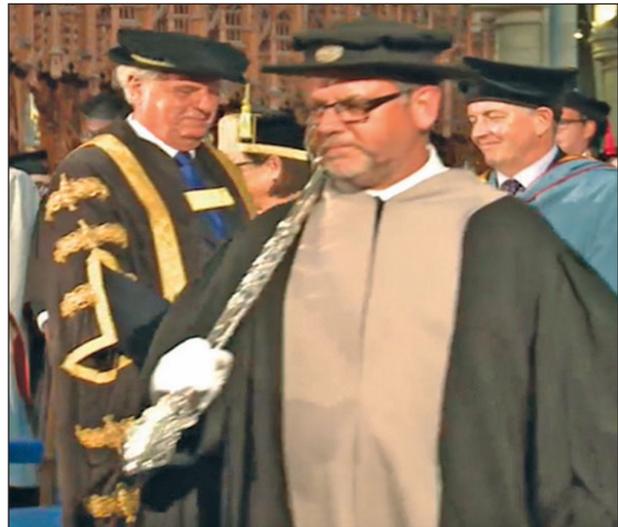
Figs. 7 (right), 8 (above). Pro-chancellor's robe and cap.



Fig. 9. Chancellor's bonnet.



Fig. 10. Treasurer's cap.



Figs 11 (left), 12. Mace bearer's robe.

and sleeve chevron, together with the hem and inverted armhole edged by one-inch gold oak leaf lace, at a cost of of £2,450 plus VAT.<sup>49</sup>

### *Mace bearer's robe*

The mace bearer was clearly considered to be a personage of considerable distinction and much attention was focused on his costume. There were two possibilities for his apparel: a tricorne hat trimmed with gold lace or a court folding hat worn sideways-on in the Napoleonic manner instead of 'fore and aft' as was (and is) the norm in civic processions.

Anticipating that their first two designs might prove prohibitively expensive (as was indeed the case), the authorities' thoughts then turned to a round cap—referred to as a 'Beefeater's Hat'.

This was, of course, very similar to that worn by doctors and led to the suggestion that the neck dividing the top from the brim could be deepened and stiffened—if need be—to vary the effect. As the cost, at a relatively modest price of £4, was about a third of the other two versions, it was understandably adopted. Thus it remains to this day ...<sup>50</sup>

### *The cost of officers' robes*

The agreed cost (1955) for the robes of senior officers, as supplied by Wippell's, was as follows:

Pro-chancellor's gown of silk damask	£67.10s	Cap	£ 3.15s
Vice-chancellor's gown of damask	£60.00s	Cap	£ 3.10s
Treasurer's gown of ribbed silk	£25.00s	Cap	£ 1. 3s 6d <sup>51</sup>

As at other universities, the pro-chancellors appear to take precedence over the vice-chancellor and, on ceremonial occasions, walk immediately behind the chancellor. Indeed, they are always listed in the University calendar ahead of the vice-chancellor. The quality of the damask would seem to reflect the difference in price and their higher status.<sup>52</sup>

### *Brief history of chancellor's robe*

It is recorded—significantly—that the first vice-chancellor stated that the Marquess of Salisbury, had offered to give to the University of Exeter the robe worn by his grandfather, the 3rd Marquess, in his capacity as chancellor of the University of Oxford. Exeter accepted the offer with alacrity and deep appreciation and ensured that it was adapted for use as the robe of its own chancellor. The alterations were duly completed by Ede & Ravenscroft and the robe was first used at the induction of the chancellor, Mary Cavendish, Dowager Duchess of Devonshire, in St Peter's Cathedral, Exeter, on the morning of the 13 July 1956. Her grandson asked to act as page on the occasion; this was agreed.<sup>53</sup>

She requested that a ticket be attached to her robe stating that it was made for the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, her grandfather, a three-time British prime minister in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This request was granted. The same chancellor also said that she had been promised the use of a sword for the page when he was attend-

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49 Letter from the director of Wippell's to Registry Services, 6 Nov. 2008.

50 Records of Wippell's, 1955 (day and month unspecified).

51 Report of the Ceremonials Committee, 2 Nov. 1955.

52 Report of the Ceremonials Committee, 2 Nov. 1955.

53 Senate Minutes, 31 Oct. 1955.

ing her. Apparently, Ede & Ravenscroft had been storing it but they suggested it might be better kept with the page's uniform.<sup>54</sup>

### Honorary graduates

Distinguished honorary graduates feature strongly in the life of most universities and Exeter is no exception. One such honorary graduate—widely believed to be the renowned sculptor Barbara Hepworth—was unhappy with the weight of her doctor's hood.

There is a reference in Wippell's 1998 records as to the production of two new gowns for honorary graduates in the School of Engineering. The gowns were originally to have had a dark blue body with white facings and scarlet cord and button on the sleeve. This was later changed to a blue polyester material being identical to the rest of the body rather white taffeta.



Fig. 13. Honorary graduate.

The reason for this was that the blue taffeta would show through the white ...!<sup>55</sup>

### Renewal, alteration and repair of officers' robes in the twenty-first century

There was copious information regarding the ageing robes of officers when I researched their development in the new millennium. By this time, many of the robes had been modified and had become extremely worn as a result of the requirements of a succession of post holders of various shapes and sizes. To make the gowns shorter, particularly when changing from a male to a female chancellor, was an extremely intricate process. In one instance, this involved shortening the chancellor's gown by turning up the hem around the skirt and also at the bottom of each sleeve, with the result that, unfortunately, the gold oak leaf was not visible. This, it was hoped, would shorten the gown by approximately 7"; in practice 10" was required, this being the difference in height between the former and new chancellor. In this way, it was hoped that the gown would be maintained in good condition when worn correctly. It was obviously very heavy on account of its elaborate ornamentation.<sup>56</sup>

### Joint awards of Exeter and Plymouth

It was important that the University's academic dress be subject to formal regulations regarding the joint awards of Exeter and Plymouth. In the first instance this was to distinguish the attire of the Peninsula Medical School (founded in 2000) from Exeter-only robes. The Ceremonials Committee agreed that the robes should follow a logical pattern. The main corporate colours of Exeter (spectrum blue), Plymouth (terracotta) and Peninsula Medical School (grey) were all incorporated within each level of academic dress. It was purely a coincidence that this aspect of the dress concurred with Exeter's.

Masters' gowns were selected for bachelor and postgraduate certificate/diploma awards to reflect the length and level of study. A small grey trim was added to the master's gown to differentiate this robe from the others. As far as the doctors' robes were concerned,

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Wippell's to the University secretary, 7 Sept. 1962.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Wippell's to Dr J. Knezevic at the University (date unspecified).

<sup>56</sup> Correspondence between Wippell's and the University, 26 Nov. 2009, 14 Sept. 2011, 14 June 2013, 14 June 2014, 3 Oct. 2014, 25 April 2016, and 9 May 2016.

as Exeter used a Cambridge PhD style [m2] and Plymouth a Cambridge higher doctors' style [d1], it was agreed—to avoid any perceived favouritism—to adopt the Oxford-style gown [d2] but to maintain the Cambridge style hood [f1].<sup>57</sup> The Peninsula Medical School became the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry in 2006, but was dismantled in 2013, each university setting up its own medical school. The scheme of academic dress remains in the regulations for any joint awards that may be conferred.

## **Major review of robes in 2011 and the advent of a twenty-first century chancellor ...**

It is probably no coincidence that Exeter carried out yet another—extensive—review of its officers' robes in the year before it was admitted to the world-renowned Russell Group.<sup>58</sup> In anticipation of acceptance (it must have been given some positive indication the year before), the University clearly desired to have its graduation day officials robed in academic sartorial elegance of the highest order!

The chancellor's gown was old and deteriorating rapidly, even disintegrating, according to expert sources, and was deemed impossible to repair. The twenty-seven gold double frogs with olivets and an identical number of single tassel frogs had all become very tarnished and were starting to break up. A replica in black silk and cotton damask was urgently needed.

The facings on the treasurer's robe were splitting where the material had worn through and the facings were beyond repair as the silk material was literally falling to pieces.<sup>59</sup>

The pro-chancellor's robe was in only a slightly better condition, being very worn around the neckline, the edge of the facings and the armholes. There was some good news, however, when it was reported that the vice-chancellor's robe made in 2002, of a black Truro cotton and silk damask, was in a very good condition. However, this approval was nothing in comparison to the report on the secretary's and registrar's gowns, which were evidently not part of the original scheme of officers' robes. They had both been manufactured in a plain black cotton and wool material (Persian cord) in the master's style but trimmed with black velvet braid and green cording. Although the velvet was observed to be wearing badly, the main body of the gowns was described as being in 'excellent condition'.<sup>60</sup>

## **Chancellor Floella Benjamin**

Chancellor Floella Benjamin (2006–16) always greeted each and every graduand with outstretched arms and a ready smile and most responded by hugging her effusively. The robemakers were concerned that 'as the Chancellor frequently greets graduands in an exuberant manner, she might inadvertently damage the gown with the result of its potentially falling apart during the actual graduation or in pre- or post-reception events where the Chancellor chats to and mingles with graduates'.<sup>61</sup> It was explained to her that the price of a new gown could well rise to £25,000 or more given that the cost of embellishments (frogs

<sup>57</sup> Letters exchanged between Wippell's and the University, 2 June 2003 and 6 Oct. 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Admitted to the Russell Group, August 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Correspondence between Wippell's and the University, 29 April 2013, 8 Oct. 2013, and 3 Oct. 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Wippell's to the University, 16 Aug. 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Wippell's to the University, 29 April 2013.



**Figs 14, 15. Oak leaf on sleeve of chancellor's robe.**

and olivets, together with the lace) had risen substantially in recent years.<sup>62</sup> Much discussion seems to have ensued among the chancellor, the University and the robemakers about such important matters.<sup>63</sup> The chancellor chose the most intricate sleeves for her gown with embroidered epaulettes and an alternative gold oak leaf lace. In the event she did not wish to have a similar epaulette trimming and preferred to keep costs down by reducing the number of embellishments on the sleeve. All was finalized in spring 2014 with regard to frogs, double frogs with olivets and fringes at both ends in a gilt quality. The chancellor also asked to have deeper armholes to accommodate her 'hugging' and general arm movements, including raising her arms above shoulder height! The gown was clearly not designed for such vigorous movements and this was compounded when the black ties added to the inside were fastened around the torso of the chancellor quite tightly; her movement then became severely restricted. The idea was proposed—and accepted—that both sleeves would be replaced with deeper ones, to allow for generous movement of the arms. Such alterations, it was believed, would enable the robe to be worn by a number of chancellors with different body measurements, as the gathered yoke did allow for some flexibility.<sup>64</sup>

### **Towards the future**

After sixty-five years of existence Exeter can look forward to a bright future despite inevitable financial constraints. Its array of academic robes is now well established and will

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Wippell's to the University, 1 May 2014.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Wippell's to the University, 5 Jan. 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Letters exchanged between Wippell's and the University, 29 Oct. 2014 and 11 Nov. 2014.

develop as and when new degrees are added to its programme. It has never had a subfusc tradition—that was never the intention—and academic dress is now only seen on graduation days. A former graduate of the University who now works at the Devon and Exeter Institution reports that when he was first there in 1961, gowns were still worn by Law and Theology students but not by the Sciences nor the majority of the Arts and Social Studies students. They were still worn at formal dinners at that time including at the hall of residence which I attended in the early 1970s.<sup>65</sup> However, significantly, academic dress virtually vanished when the Guild discontinued its second-hand gown shop around 1970. When I was accepted as a PGCE student at Exeter in the days of Ted Wragg, then a lecturer in German and subsequently professor of the Education Department, academic dress was never mentioned, let alone seen. There was, however, one small exception: a public lecture was to be given on some aspect of learning in schools by a visiting speaker. Although the notice advertising the event stated ‘black gowns and hoods’ I did not see a single robe except for that of Professor Richard D’Aeth, MA, PhD (Cantab), who wore an MA gown. At the end of the year we merely received a certificate but no invitation to attend a ceremony or to wear a distinctive hood. Forty years on, that sorry state of affairs has been rectified ...

### Current regulations

The current academic dress regulations of the University of Exeter, which include those for joint awards with the University of Plymouth, can be consulted here: <[www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/academicdress/](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/academicdress/)>; those of the University of Plymouth here: <[www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/12/12693/Section\\_E\\_-\\_Awards.pdf](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/12/12693/Section_E_-_Awards.pdf)>, pp. 14–16.

The dress will also be described in *Shaw’s Academical Dress of Great Britain and Ireland*, 4th edn, ed. Nicholas Groves (London: Burgon Society, forthcoming).

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