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THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMICAL DRESS AT THE VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Philip Lowe RMN LTCL FBS

This paper is an abridged version of the first section of a more comprehensive survey from 1851 to the present day]

1. Adoption of an academical costume.

Pre-1880 – Owens College

It was not until 1880 that Manchester gained a University with the powers to award its own degrees. In that year a Charter was granted creating “The Victoria University”: a federal University, initially with just a single college – Owens College - which was later augmented by the incorporation of University College Liverpool & also Yorkshire College, Leeds. ‘The Victoria’ was the first University in the North West of England.

Owens College, Manchester had been founded in 1851; students studied for, and sat the examinations of London University, graduating with its degrees, and thus gaining the right to use London academic dress.

The College handbook and calendar contains very little reference to academic dress, not surprisingly, since the institution did not have the right to a system of costume of its own, however advertisements from robemakers to London University figured from time to time.

A brief history of the college in 1902 ¹ recalls

On Thursday March 13th 1851 the first session began in Quay Street with two of a Series of introductory lectures ..” Soon after eleven o’clock on the first day, staff entered the room ‘attired’, to quote local papers in ‘collegiate gowns & carrying college caps in their hands’”

Two pictures of Senate (1862) & (1872) in Charlton’s history², show the teaching staff, in full Academic Dress, [with hoods, including two members wearing London convocation hoods]

Also mentioned in the 1902 Jubilee booklet³ is that circa 1854 “the students petitioned for academic dress”

“The authorities deemed it inadvisable to allow the wearing of a costume so incongruous with the squalid surroundings of the college, and not until the Jubilee year (1901/2) were the days of probationary plain clothes fulfilled, and the distinction of cap & gown conferred on undergraduates”

Although London undergraduates did have a gown, there are no indications, pictorial or otherwise, of Owens students using gowns, apart from the following brief note which appeared in the College Calendar from 1877, onwards.

¹ Portrait of a University – H.B.Charlton 1951 Manchester University Press

² Portrait of a University – H.B.Charlton 1951 Manchester University Press

³ Record of the Jubilee celebrations of Owens College – Pub. Sherratt & Hughes 1902

“Regulations concerning attendance and conduct”

“At this meeting [presentation of prizes] & at all Public meetings in the College, Associates & Students who are graduates or undergraduates of any University are invited to wear the Academical Costume which they are entitled to wear”

On examination of the same section in an original 1876 copy, this amendment appears, appended to the existing text, in the handwriting (in all likelihood) of the Principal, Dr Greenwood.⁴

A further directive, from the Vice-Chancellor⁵ (the same Dr.Greenwood) with regard to the first meeting of the University Court on July 14th 1880, & a reception for the Chancellor, later the same day, is stronger in tone:

“On both occasions full academical dress (gowns and hoods, scarlet for doctors) will be expected to be worn.”

Clearly then, there was some tradition, if not necessarily widespread of the use of Academic dress at Owens before it became part of the new university, and figures of influence, who favoured the adoption by ‘the Victoria’ of it’s own Academic dress, were also in evidence.

Early years of The Victoria University.

The inaugural meeting of the Court, in July 1880 must indeed have been lengthy with all that there was to do in enabling the University to begin its operations; One of the last items on the agenda⁶ was

“11 .To instruct the Council to report on various matters; including..... ‘The adoption of an Academic Costume’”

A report was produced in due course, Council having delegated the matter to a committee (who were also considering several other items). They dealt with the matter in a general way and at the outset proposed:⁷

*“(a) The Committee do not recommend the adoption of an Academical Costume for Undergraduates.
(b) The Committee recommends that for Bachelors, Masters, and Doctors, gowns as ordinarily worn in other English Universities be adopted, together with hoods of distinctive colours. “*

With regard to clause (a) ; the rejection of an academic costume for Undergraduates may have resulted owing to the non-residential nature of the new University, though we cannot say for certain since there is no documented evidence of the discussions which took place.

Clause (b) suggests some common knowledge, on the subject, perhaps including experience of what was used further afield than England; Certainly Professor Ward had held an appointment in Glasgow. In addition the printed calendars of other universities were available in the library.

The 1881 “Costume” Committee.

Subsequently Council sent the matter to a smaller ‘specialised’ group for consideration, resolving, at its meeting on 14th February 1881,

⁶ Proceedings of COUNCIL Victoria University volume 1 page 21

⁷ Report of Committee to COUNCIL Page 36 14/2/81

“That a Committee consisting of the Vice-Chancellor, The Dean of Manchester, Mr.Dill, and Professor Ward be appointed to prepare detailed recommendations as to the gowns and hoods to be worn by Bachelors, Masters, and Doctors in the Several Faculties of the University”⁸

The Vice-Chancellor: Dr.J.G.Greenwood was a graduate (BA) of London University, & a fellow of University College, in addition to being a Cambridge LL.D. (1874) & later also of Edinburgh.

The Dean of Manchester, the Very Revd. Benjamin.M.Cowie B.D. was educated at St.John’s College Cambridge- also holding a fellowship. He served at Manchester from 1872-1883, from where he moved to a similar position at Exeter.

Samuel Dill Esq. MA was Headmaster of Manchester Grammar School , & a graduate of Oxford & Queens University, Ireland.

Professor Adolphus W. Ward. was also a Cambridge man, having studied at Peterhouse, gaining a first class degree & fellowship. He held appointments both there and at Glasgow University as a lecturer and held both a Litt.D. from Cambridge & an LL.D. from Glasgow.

No doubt the personal recollections of committee members concerning what was used at their own former colleges, would have some bearing on the discussions; comment is hardly necessary in respect of the multiple affiliations to Cambridge within the group!

Published information c.1880

The respective Universities published their *Calendars* & booklets of ordinances, including their own Regulations for Academic dress; the information varying in usefulness & detail. Oxford’s Calendar like that of Cambridge contains no details. Information is in a separate booklet of statutes which is in Latin(!)⁹ In a similar publication Cambridge, gives little detail about what is used, apart from saying when it should be worn!¹⁰ In contrast London is quite specific, and this is the information which the committee were most likely to have had access to.¹¹ Durham did not include details in the *Calendar* until 1890, although the Scottish Universities tended to print costume regulations in theirs.¹²

Information on the subject was scarce, and though it is possible that other sources were consulted, such as the periodical “Notes & Queries” which was available in the library, this seems unlikely given the timescale within which the Committee were working. (A hand written copy of items from N&Q also appears in a workbook belonging to Messrs. Brown’s, the University robe makers- however, at this stage they were, presumably, not involved: their appointment dating from October 1882)

Apart from factual information, the attitude of the Academic authorities towards an official costume was clearly a key element in the evolution of the Manchester system, and this becomes apparent as one follows through the sequence of events – notably during the Convocation debate of November (1881)

⁸ Proceedings of COUNCIL Victoria University volume 1 page 38 14/2/81

⁹ Oxford calendar Statuta Universitatis Oxoniensis for 1881. Publisher: Oxonii : Enlargement Typographeo Academico, 1857-

¹⁰ The historical Register of the University of Cambridge 1910 ed. J.R.Tanner . (Camb.Univ.Press 1917) & Ordinances of the University of Cambridge . Ch.7 (Camb.Univ.Press 1885)

¹¹ The calendar of the University of London Publisher:: University of London 1880

¹² St.Andrews University Calendar 1880 Calendar / University of Edinburgh Publisher: University of Edinburgh 1880. The Glasgow University calendar Publisher: Glasgow : Printed by Hutchison and Brookman, for Robertson & Atkinson, 1880

2. The 1881 Regulations

The Committees proposals were as follows:¹³

REPORTS OF UNIVERSITY COUNCIL.

VII. AS TO ACADEMIC COSTUME

1. There shall be no Academic costume for undergraduates.
2. The gowns shall be alike for the two Faculties of Arts and Science, and of the same fashion as those worn by Cambridge graduates, except that the Doctor's gowns shall be the same as the Masters'.
3. The bachelors' gowns shall be of stuff, and the Masters' and Doctors' gowns shall be either of stuff or silk.
4. The hoods for Bachelors and Masters shall be of fine black cloth or silk trimmed with silk in the following manner:-
 - For Bachelors of Arts- an edging of pale blue silk;
 - For Masters of Arts – a lining of pale blue silk;
 - For Bachelors of Science – an edging of pale red silk;
 - For Masters of Science – a lining of pale red silk.
5. The hoods of the Doctors of Literature, Doctors of Philosophy, and Doctors of Science shall be of velvet or satin serge of a gold colour, lined with silk of a lighter shade of the same colour.
6. The caps for all Graduates shall be the ordinary Academic caps.

By comparison with the 'glories' of Oxbridge and Durham, the Manchester system was characterised by its simplicity and restraint: Conventional gowns - (although none for undergraduates); Masters and Doctors to use the same gown (whatever this means!); a system of faculty colours (in common with London & Glasgow); Bachelors hoods without fur; a single cap for all graduates and the same velvet hood for all doctorates, a matter as unusual as the absence of Scarlet from the make-up of the hood. Thus, several important matters of style seem to have 'fallen' to the robemakers to decide.

Seemingly straightforward, the regulations are ambiguous in places and important omissions exist; for example, no reference to the Doctors full dress robe, or regarding the shape to be used for hoods, though this is less surprising considering that the London regulations do not mention hood shapes. One can well imagine the committee considering matters, simply with copies of a few University calendars on the table, sharing occasional reminiscences about their former *alma mater*.

Considering the proposals in detail:

UNDERGRADUATES:

Regulation 1. The original recommendation to council eschewing undergraduate costume, was endorsed by the 'Costume Committee', however, the discussions & reasons relating to this are not minuted. When details of the Universities intentions became known (via the press) representations from a number of students appeared in the newspapers regarding the lack of a costume for undergraduates;¹⁴

¹³ Draft regulations submitted by Council to Court Victoria University 13th April 1881

¹⁴ Evening Mail, Sat. 30th Apr. 1881

“Sir,- Would you kindly permit me to express some little astonishment at the absence of some academic costume for the Victoria undergraduates. Why the court should have accepted the suggestion of the council without comment “that it is provided that there shall be ‘no academic costume for undergraduates,’” or why we should not wear the gown generally worn by undergraduates- even by undergraduates of the London University, with which we have been so closely allied – I indeed wonder. Certain it is not generally satisfactory to the students. However, we still hope that the court may yet direct some provision for an undergraduate costume-

Yours, &c., A STUDENT, April 29, 1881”

Some made comparisons with other British Universities which prescribed gowns for students ‘why should Manchester be treated differently?’ was their message; others believed that the use of gowns would create and foster “esprit de corps”. However, the situation remained unchanged, until the matter was again raised, in the period leading up to the Jubilee of 1901/2 .

GRADUATES GOWNS

In regulation 2. it is indicated that gowns are to be in the same style as those of Cambridge² (i.e. with a sleeve- slit for Bachelors; the distinctive cut-out to the Master’s sleeve which can be seen in several very old scarlet Doctors robes still in existence the Manchester version came later, and in all cases with strings), early pictorial evidence supports this, too. However with regard to Doctors, it is not clear which gown is being referred to i.e. the ‘undress’ black gown or a full-dress scarlet gown. [Indeed the distinction between the two is not acknowledged.]& the omission to mention colour in regulation 3 is unhelpful in ascertaining what was intended (in a copy of the meeting minutes belonging to Professor Henry Roscoe, he had penned in “Black” before ‘stuff’). Throughout the committee’s proposals, details regarding fabric are quite specific vis: fine black cloth...velvet.. satin serge....Consequently, the directive that gowns “shall be of stuff or silk” seems peculiarly inadequate if it was meant to cover the description of a scarlet doctoral cloth.

BLACK UNDRESS DOCTORS GOWNS

In respect of the Black (undress) Doctor’s gown, Cambridge at this time, (in common with London, Oxford and probably Durham) prescribed at least two, if not three different styles, dependent upon the doctorate concerned :

- Legal/lay gown,- MD. LLD, MUS.D;
- Masters gown + lace- SC.D
- ‘Preaching gown’ or MA gown - DD

Thus, one might argue “*the doctor’s gowns shall be the same as the masters*” indicates that there is to be a single undress black gown for Manchester Doctors;(more than one style, in such a straightforward set of regulations would in any case seem improbable.) This would also seem to ‘tie-in’ with the manner in which the London regulations are laid out: For each degree, the gown is described first i.e. in the case of Doctors the undress gown, -in detail- as regards style, further on the scarlet gown is briefly mentioned

Note, too, that when the dress regulations for Law & Medicine were drafted in 1884¹⁵ by a committee which included two members (Professors Greenwood & Ward) from the original 1881 group, an additional regulation (not part of the committees remit) was proposed: “*(That) Doctors are entitled to wear scarlet gowns and Doctor’s hats on the occasion of important public ceremonies.*” Giving the impression that the matter had initially been passed over or ‘forgotten’.

Hastily formulated regulations; pressure of business at the time¹⁶ with many other important statutes to

¹⁵ Page 144 in Appendix I to Minute book of Proceedings of Council Victoria University

¹⁶ See Agenda First meeting of University Court. V.U. Wed 14th July 1880

be dealt with in order that the new University could begin its work, support this idea, more so if one remembers that outfits for Doctors were a less 'pressing' matter than those of Bachelors and Masters, there being a likely 3 to 4 year wait before the first Doctors would graduate.¹⁷

It is puzzling therefore that this new clause never found its way into the regulations, and one wonders if it was not to the approval of those who later brought in the rule that Scarlet could be worn , ...but **only** by members of Convocation.

SCARLET DOCTORAL GOWN

In the light of all this one questions if it had originally been intended to provide Doctors with Scarlet robes in the Master's shape. If intentional, the move was entirely without precedent, which would seem odd, having originally agreed that: "(b) The Committee recommends that for Bachelors, Masters, and Doctors, gowns as ordinarily worn in other English Universities be adopted," i.e. in either, the Oxford style, with bell-shaped sleeves; or like those of Cambridge with pointed sleeves, and the lining turned back at the elbow.¹⁸

Thos. Brown & Son who were not appointed robe makers until 18 months after the regulations had been formulated were known as Church embroiderers & vestment makers – by contrast with the academic background of Ede & Ravenscroft – (& judging by the adverts in the year book were probably not actively involved with academical supplies previously.) hence a certain lack of expertise in the protocols of academic costume may have contributed to this outcome.

My own hunch would be that as a result of the wording in the Calendar, Browns when producing sample gowns for the Doctorate, followed the regulation (2) to the letter, interpreting this as including the full dress robe/gown - cutting it in the master's shape. It would appear that the finished product, no doubt both handsome & distinctive, met with the approval of the authorities, and in the same way that the Doctor's *Tardis* got stuck as a Police Box, so the Manchester Doctor's gown got stuck as a Master's! From what we know of the opinions of those professors involved- they would probably not feel that it was anything to get 'too excited about', in any case! (i.e. that the shape wasn't correct)

BACHELORS AND MASTERS HOODS

Regulation 4. Although style of Gown is indicated in regulation 2 , there is no indication here, as to proposed shape of Hoods, possibly since shape was not considered by the committee. One could argue that the Oxford/Simple shape was used to avoid confusion with the London Hoods- also Black edged/lined with faculty colour. though a contemporary illustrations of London ceremonies clearly depict graduands wearing simple shaped hoods!; On the other hand it may simply be that Browns had an Oxford MA hood to hand when they produced the original, some time later..

Of the English Universities, only London did not use fur on Bachelor's hoods, Manchester's adoption of a similar style is a further indication of London's influence. Dissatisfaction with the original bachelor's hood soon became apparent: – Whereas London BA's acquired a 3" border, at the Victoria 'your edging was a meagre 1" wide. (or possibly narrower! - a note in a work book belonging to William Northam Esq., records that Manchester edgings were made from 3/4" ribbon).

A photograph of 1895, [once the property of Mrs. Mary Tout] shows a group of BA's (+ one MA) in full academical costume, wearing hoods which are edged with silk, on all open edges, - the edging would appear to be approx. 1" wide in-side & less than 1/2" outside – the shape seems to be an Oxford Simple shape with reversed [long] neckband, edged with faculty colour.

¹⁷ The first Doctorate awarded was to Edward GORDON, who graduated as an MD in 1886

¹⁸ See Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W. N.. - A history of academical dress in Europe until the end of the eighteenth cent. – Chapter 3: Harte, Negley, – The University of London 1836-1986 : an illustrated history. Plate 147 – pg. 126

DOCTORS HOODS

Regulation 5. No other university in Great Britain prescribed the same hood for all its Doctors!, and it is a fact that this has been a bone of contention almost since the ink was dry on the page, right up to the present day. Velvet for the outer shell of the hood had been used at Glasgow & coloured hoods for doctorates were a feature in Scotland at St.Andrews & Aberdeen, however, with the exception of musical doctorates, scarlet was pretty well universally used in Dr.'s hoods in England, so whether the use of a colour other than 'red' occurred, related to the "right" to wear scarlet by members/non-members of Convocation (as at London) is debatable. Periodically there have been attempts to introduce additional features into the doctoral hood, in order that it be distinctive to particular faculties and, amusingly, such 'moves', without exception, have come to nothing.¹⁹

CAPS.

In Regulation 6 the terminology is pretty "loose", but without doubt refers to the square cap. That it is prescribed for all graduates including Doctors, is a further instance of duplicating the practice at London University. The velvet cap came later.

3. Opinion of convocation sought

The Regulations having been approved by Court were sent to Convocation for "rubber stamping" which debated them at its annual meeting the following November (1881). The minutes show, how, in the event Convocation used the occasion to "flex its muscles" challenging the Courts proposals. Professors Ward & Adamson moved the motion, but an amendment was tabled by Mr. Charles Hughes supported by Dr. Raynor (a future chairman of Convocation) "That in the opinion of Convocation the University should not appoint any Academic Costume" The meeting was reported in several papers and the following extract reveals a little of the 'minds' of those involved, and of the proceedings.²⁰

"Professor WARD moved that the regulations concerning academic costume as remitted to Convocation be approved. He said that whilst the Council attached no special value to the article of costume, they felt it was desirable that the graduates of the Victoria University should have the ordinary distinguishing mark of University graduates on given occasions. Professor ADAMSON seconded the resolution. Mr.CHAS. HUGHES moved, as an amendment, " that in the opinion of Convocation the University should not appoint any academical costume." He remarked that the case now resolved itself into this- that when graduates were presented with their degrees they were to hire a gown from some dealer in second-hand clothes. He thought there were very few graduates who would in any way suffer through not being able to assume their gowns as members of the Victoria University, and he strongly urged that the University should set an example of simplicity and common sense in not adopting any academic costume. Dr. E. RAYNER seconded the amendment. The CLERK said the question was one of some importance to the new graduates. It was not proposed to compel any of them to wear the University gown if they objected, but he considered they would be doing a serious wrong to some members of the community if they did not allow them the right of wearing a distinguishing costume equally with the graduates of other universities. All the universities in the United Kingdom and also in the colonies had adopted an academic costume. If the amendment were

¹⁹ See a. Appendix Page 144 in Appendix I to Minute book of Proceedings of Council Victoria University October 31st 1884: b. Pg. 205 & 6 Proceedings of Council vol. 1. 17th May 1894 (Regulation 2): c. Pg. 65 Victoria University Convocation Committee book 1880-1920 . 17th Oct.1895 note 3: d. Outline of business for meeting of Court 11th Nov. 1897 (note 4): e. Extract from Committee of Convocation Annual Report October 1898

²⁰ There are no details accompanying this newspaper extract from the Cuttings books of the University archives –regarding exact date & which paper.

adopted the result would be a serious deprivation upon graduates belonging to the clerical profession, who would not be enabled to appear in official costume among graduates of other universities in the services of the church. He asked the House to accept Professor Ward's resolution. The VICE-CHANCELLOR said that, besides the clerical body, there was another class of graduates to whom this was a matter of no little interest. He meant those who would, no doubt, in time succeed in gaining positions as professors in other colleges. It would hardly be fair to graduates of the Victoria University that they alone of the professorial members of the college to which they were attached should be unable to wear a gown significant of their academic rank. He would not describe it as a serious hardship, but it would certainly be an appreciable hardship. On a division, the resolution, which received 24 votes was carried, only four members supporting the amendment. "

Summary

If one now looks back at the regulations as proposed, the evidence clearly points towards the intention being for a system less complicated, and more restrained than Oxbridge and Durham, adopting a logical pattern of Faculty silks (as used at London & Glasgow) and making one item 'do' in the place of several e.g. the Doctoral hood and gowns.

Clearly, Manchester's was a "no-frills" system of academic dress, and certainly the associations with dress at London & Cambridge were quite marked.

