

1-1-2003

Where Did You Get That Hood? Study Day at St George's College, Weybridge; Robes and Robemakers. Study Day at Girton College, Cambridge

John Kersey

Alex Kerr
University of Oxford

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/burgonsociety>

Recommended Citation

Kersey, John and Kerr, Alex (2003) "Where Did You Get That Hood? Study Day at St George's College, Weybridge; Robes and Robemakers. Study Day at Girton College, Cambridge," *Transactions of the Burgon Society*: Vol. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1013>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Transactions of the Burgon Society by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Where Did You Get That Hood?

Study Day at St George's College, Weybridge

A great highlight of the Society's Study Day held on Saturday 21 June 2003 was the presentation by Nicholas Groves entitled 'Where did you get that hood?', which examined the evolution of the different shapes of hood and looked at some examples from the Burgon Society Archive. Nicholas Groves began by outlining the main hood shapes, and discussed the evolution of the simple from the full shape, and such outgrowths of this as the unusual Edinburgh full shape used for the degrees of DD, LLD, and MD. Such modern shapes as those in use at the Universities of Leicester and East Anglia, and the Aberdeen shape from which they are derived, the place of costume designers such as Sir Hardy Amies and Sir Cecil Beaton, and the fundamentals of hood design in the modern age were all discussed. Fuller details are given in the article 'Evolution of Hood Patterns', elsewhere in this *Annual*.

A particular feature of the day was the display of choice examples from the Archive, including the unusual hood of St David's College Lampeter, which is the first to use three colours, the special hood shape of East Anglia, which features folds, and was much criticised by Shaw, and the first hood of St Bees College, which was unique at the time in dividing the hood lining per pale. Thanks to Philip Goff, we were able to see one of the recently designed hoods for the London Institute, in which the neckband is a different colour from the rest of the hood.

After an excellent lunch, members of the Society and guests were able to browse in the Archive, and examine the large number of hoods and robes that are now collected within it. Of especial interest was the convocation habit of Charles Franklyn, which featured the watered blue silk that had been especially set aside for the University of Lausanne MD, as well as one of the first London PhDs awarded in the twentieth century.

We must express our gratitude to Br Dr Michael Powell for his generous hospitality, and look forward to being his guests once again at the Society's Garden Party in July 2004.

John Kersey

Robes and Robemakers

Study Day at Girton College, Cambridge

More than thirty Burgon Society members and friends gathered in Cambridge on 29 November 2003 for a study day entitled 'Robes and Robemakers'. The occasion was hosted by Dr George Shaw, FBS, at Girton College. The proceedings took place in the splendid surroundings of the Stanley Library. Time was allowed in the programme for informal talk over coffee and tea and at lunch in hall and for a tour of the College guided by George Shaw.

Robemaking in Cambridge

The first session opened with a formal welcome to Len Brown, who had been awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Society at the Congregation in October 2003 but had been unable to attend through ill health. The Chairman, Philip Goff, read the speech of introduction that he had given at the Congregation, and Len was invested with the FBS hood.

The rest of the morning was devoted to a wealth of reminiscences about robemaking in Cambridge by three of those involved in the business over many decades, Len Brown, Ron Brookes (also an Honorary FBS), and Maurice Ward.

Philip Goff's introduction, which is printed in our report on Congregation 2003, mentions that Len Brown had come to Cambridge in 1928 as a schoolboy and had been employed by the firm of Joshua Taylor in 1945, starting as a ledger clerk and rising to be a director of the company in 1968. Len recounted that the firm was making school uniforms at Portugal Place when he started there. Later it moved to new premises at Trinity Street, near Thebournes, and on the suggestion of Bill Plumb of A. G. Almond, embarked on making academic dress. (Bill Plumb was more interested in clerical than academic dress, which he just 'tolerated'! Almond made a lot items for Vanheem, Pratt, and Wippell, their ecclesiastical patterns coming from Pratt.) Initially Joshua Taylor made robes just for Cambridge, but later manufactured for the Oxford firms of Shepherd & Woodward and Walters, and supplied the London firm of Northam in bulk. The company expanded into robemaking for overseas institutions in Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. In due course they were making academic dress for Phelan in Ireland, for Stark Bros, and for a wide range of universities in the UK, including Edinburgh, UEA, Sussex, and Cranfield. Len confirmed that he had been in attendance at ceremonies at Cranfield over a forty-year period, and robed every honorand. He had close involvement with the scheme of academic dress adopted by the independent University of Buckingham in the 1960s.

Len recalled the many firms of robemakers active in Cambridge during his working life: Almond; Bodgers; Ryder; James Neal; Arthur Shepherd; Clothier; Stuart. This reminded Maurice Ward that all the robemakers in Cambridge had a workshop at the back of their premises, with two or three workers, most of them making undergraduate gowns for just one or two colleges. Taylor was the exception, making gowns for all of them.

Ron Brookes recounted how Moss Bros, which had a branch in every university town, stocking the relevant robes, had taken over the firm of Thrussell in Cambridge in the early 1960s. Ron had joined the firm to develop the academic dress hire business. Later, Moss Bros acquired Buttress, another Cambridge company, and Ron, as manager, oversaw the concentration of all the firm's academic dress business in Cambridge. Throughout this period there were good connections with Joshua Taylor; Ron's friendship with Len Brown has been a long one.

There were memories also of Radcliffe & Taylor of Heaton Moor, Stockport: Bill Radcliffe had been a cloth supplier and went into robemaking for Ron Brookes for Moss Bros in the 1960s. Ron admitted he used to get special orders from Ede & Ravenscroft and send them on to Bill Radcliffe to copy! Ron, Len and Maurice recalled Terry Gent, the manager of the military department of Moss Bros in London, who stocked some academic dress for London, Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Specialist firms supplied particular fabrics: Perkins produced a unique damask for the Cambridge MusD (to a pattern designed by John Woolvet's great-grandfather); Venner & Fennell, made silks at their premises in Sudbury, Suffolk, for Cambridge robemakers.

The gorgeous MusD robes of Elgar and Dvořák preserved in the museums devoted to these composers are examples of the superb workmanship of robemakers of the past.

Dr George Shaw

After lunch George Shaw spoke about his school days, university studies and research, his career in teaching, and about his long interest in and enthusiasm for academic dress. He said that he was delighted that the Burgon Society had been founded and he admired what it was achieving; the website, he thought, was especially impressive. He felt strongly that the Society must ensure that it became the authority on the subject.

When he was a pupil at Altrincham Grammar School, the masters had worn gowns, and this fired his interest in academic dress. George borrowed a gown to wear in school amateur dramatics—the master who lent it had two: one from Wales and one a plain Oxford gown, both very well cut. His English master always wore a London BA gown (with a Northam's label). And so George wrote to Northam's and purchased a second-hand gown for 12s. 6d. plus 6d. for postage!

He left school and worked in industry for two years in a company manufacturing DDT. He studied at UMIST, and his interest changed from Chemistry to Biology. He decided to go into full-time education, but 1946 was a bad time for finding a university place as everyone was coming back from the war. George gained a place at Swansea, but found it did not provide what he wanted and so he moved to Bangor. He remembered that there were not many gowns to be seen there! During his last year he spent time at the laboratory working on cryogenics and published a paper on the subject. After graduating he taught in Peterborough, and was impressed to find that the Head asked staff to wear academic dress. Then came research for an MSc at Cambridge, followed by a DPhil at Oxford. He found the life of a researcher rather lonely and he missed school life. He looked for a post in a public school, was interviewed at Lancing College and was appointed.

In his early days in Sussex, George saw a newspaper article by Dr Charles Franklyn and afterwards went to see him. Franklyn was a GP who had retired from practice in the late 1950s but still had a few private patients. His speciality was blood disorders—and his one prescription seemed to be no salt in the diet. He was an authority not only on academic dress but also on heraldry and genealogy, and tried to persuade George to petition for a coat of arms. He was also an authority on cats: his house was full of them. Franklyn was an irascible and opinionated man, and George remembered him being a difficult dinner guest! He was a bachelor and had a housekeeper who was still with him until she died at a great age. When he was eventually unable to live alone, he moved into a nursing home and died in 1982.

The new University of Sussex opened in 1962, and George submitted a scheme for academic dress. It was based on a claret colour and Wippell made up some hoods, which George took to the Vice-Chancellor. He had another set made up in blue. Then Dr Norman Hargreaves-Mawdsley put up an alternative scheme and was given the commission. He proposed a radical departure from traditional robes, trying to revert to medieval patterns. (Hargreaves-Mawdsley wrote to Len Brown at this time.)

In 1966 George published his book *Academical Dress of British Universities*. He had received help from many universities and robemakers while writing it, but Ede & Ravenscroft were uncooperative. Indeed, he felt they were annoyed that he had published a book on the subject at all. Franklyn reacted angrily to it: he obviously thought only he could write authoritatively on academic dress. His four-page, vitriolic review in *Oxford* was dismissive and consisted mainly of self-congratulation on his own

designs for Hull and Southampton. However, the book was well received elsewhere: Peter Preston wrote a review in the *Guardian* entitled ‘All Mod Dons’ and came to visit George for a day.

George designed robes for a number of academic institutions. Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, gave him a commission for a set all in green. Then Strathclyde adopted several revisions he proposed. In 1965 the Professor of Horticulture at Bath asked him to design a system of academic dress, which he based on the colour of Bath stone. The University of Bath recognised his work with an Honorary MA.

After the publication of *Academical Dress of British Universities* there were more commissions. Simon Bolivar University in Caracas asked him to design a system of robes and he was offered an honorary degree there (but he has never travelled to Venezuela to collect it). Also in 1969 he drew up a scheme for the new University of Ulster. His designs for the Institute of Physics and the Institute of Biology were commissioned and adopted in 1979.

Academic dress worldwide was to be surveyed in a series of cards commissioned by Ferrograde Laboratories, and George made a set of designs. The project was never completed, but at that time he began work on a book on the world’s academic dress. He then discovered that Hugh Smith had already embarked on the same project, and so he abandoned it.

George wrote to six successive Archbishops of Canterbury with proposals for distinctive academic dress for Lambeth degrees, but his suggestions have not been adopted.

E. W. Scobie Stringer had revised and published the fourth edition of Frank Haycraft’s *Degrees and Hoods of the World’s Universities and Colleges* in 1948. His family, who held the copyright, contacted Charles Franklyn, Hugh Boyd, Frederick Rogers and George in the late 1960s with a view to producing a new edition. Work on the Irish universities, which was undertaken by Boyd, did not progress, and Franklyn took over the editorship—and took possession of the whole project. He did not consult the other editors, but incorporated their material as he saw fit. The book was published in 1972, with a print run of 500 copies.

A second, much expanded edition of George’s book, now entitled *Academical Dress of British and Irish Universities*, was published in 1995. Unfortunately, he was in Italy when the proofs were produced, and a number of errors remained uncorrected, including wrong captions added to the photographs by the proof-reader. George offered apologies for these shortcomings, and he informed the meeting that he wished the copyright of his book to pass to the Burgon Society.

At the conclusion of his talk, George circulated a fascinating selection of letters and postcards he had received from Charles Franklyn and other documents, photographs and antique prints of academic dress which he had collected over the years. He has announced that he is donating his collection to the Archive of the Burgon Society. The Society is very grateful to George Shaw for his great generosity.

Everybody who attended the study day at Girton found it extremely enjoyable and illuminating. We offer our thanks to George Shaw and to Ede & Ravenscroft for their generous help for this event.

Alex Kerr