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Evolution of Hood Patterns

by Nicholas Groves

Academic hood patterns come in a wide range of variations, and some can be said to be ‘hoods’ merely because they fill the function allotted to an academic hood. Where do they come from? Initially, they evolve from the actual medieval headgear used by everyone, and ‘you must not think,’ as Percy Dearmer once said, ‘when you see a hood upon the parson’s shoulders that once upon a time the Archbishop of Canterbury invented it one afternoon and cut the pattern out of brown paper and said that every priest was to wear it’¹—although, as will be seen, this is exactly what happened in the case of some of the modern patterns.

The medieval hood consists of three parts: the cowl (or hood proper), the cape (or shoulder-piece), and the liripipe² (or ‘tail’). Exactly what shape the medieval academical hood had is open to question, but it doubtless was the same as the hood in everyday use. A reconstructed version of this, known as the ‘**Warham Guild**’ shape

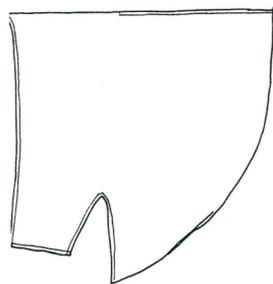


Fig. 1: ‘Warham Guild’ hood
[f11]

[f11],³ from the company that promoted its use in church, is shown as Fig. 1, and it will be seen that all three parts are present, although the liripipe is possibly much shorter than the medieval one would have been. As time went by, the hood was used less and less as an actual head covering, being replaced by various kinds of hats, and was worn off the head, hanging between the shoulders. When fuller hairstyles became the fashion—and, ultimately, periwigs—the cape was opened up along its front seam, so it could be put on without disarranging the wig, and held together by a narrow neckband,⁴ producing effectively the **Oxford full shape** [f5]. (A ‘full’ pattern hood has all three parts: cowl, cape and liripipe.) This, as can be seen from Figs 2 and 3, is the medieval hood opened up: the cape remains rounded, and the cowl has become larger, so as to show off the lining better.

¹ *Ornaments of the Ministers* (London: Mowbray, 1908), p. 10.

² There is a wide variety of spellings of this word, mostly revived medieval variants—laripip, lyrapipe, liripoop, etc., etc. I use the most common modern spelling. It also signified a cord or shoelace, and appears not to have been used specifically for the academical hood until 1737. Its etymology is unclear. (*Shorter OED*, s.v. ‘liripipe’.)

³ The shape-codes in square brackets refer to my classification system, whereby each shape is given a specific number, prefixed by a letter indicating whether it is full [f], simple [s], or Aberdeen [a].

⁴ It was a gradual process; contemporary illustrations show decreasing amounts of cape in front, until the narrow neckband still in use appears.

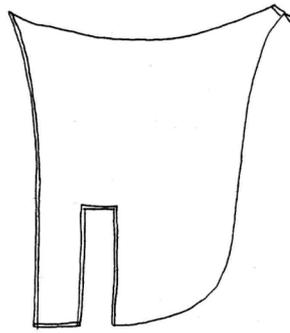


Fig. 2: Oxford full [f5] laid flat

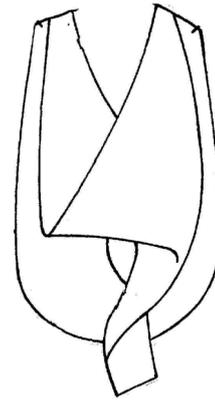


Fig. 3: Oxford full [f5] as worn

This shape was also used at Cambridge, although the **Cambridge shape [f1]** (Fig. 4) with which we are familiar today has a square cape. Quite where this development came from is a mystery at present; many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pictures and patterns show it having a rounded cape,⁵ while others show it as square. It may be that the practice of wearing the hood ‘squared’ led to this squaring of the cape: the cowl edge, as it lay across the back, would produce the effect of a square cape. (‘Squaring’ a hood means laying the hood out flat, and then placing it over the shoulders, with the neck in the ‘slot’ between the cape and the liripipe, which then hang on to the chest; they are pinned or otherwise fastened together.)⁶ There is a slight possibility that it may also be to make it easier to attach the fur binding of the BA hood—more easily done on a square than a round cape. This form of the full hood, with rounded base to the cape, was adopted

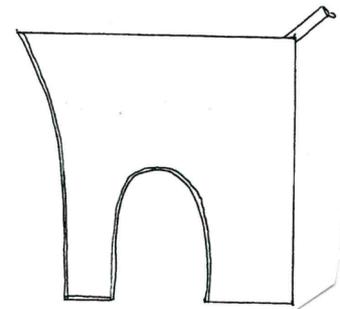


Fig. 4: Cambridge full shape [f1]

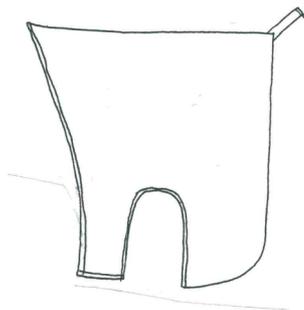


Fig. 5: Durham BCL [f7]

at Durham, where it has developed into three separate forms—the **Durham BA [f6]**, the **Durham BCL [f7]** (Fig. 5), and the **Durham doctors [f4]**. This neatly illustrates a principle of academic dress: that an institution will adopt the form current elsewhere at the time, and then fossilizes it, while the institution from which it was adopted changes. Thus Durham has adopted what was the Cambridge shape in 1837 (when it first awarded degrees), while the Lampeter LD hood (1884) is stated in the College records to be made in the Cambridge pattern, with an accompanying diagram clearly showing a hood of [f6] pattern. The hoods of London University, introduced in 1844, were changed for the current scheme in 1862. It is known that these were based on Cambridge use, and the **London shape [f3]** (Fig. 6) retains the cape with rounded corners—though the cape itself is somewhat squarer than the Durham version. We can put this down to being a

⁵ e.g. *Girls’ Own Paper*, 1880; Gilbert French’s catalogue, 18..(?); the instructions for the LD hood at Lampeter, 1884. Harraden’s 1803 plate of a BA shows a semi-circular base to the cape (see front cover—Ed.).

⁶ It may be that the rounded top to the ‘slot’ on the [f1] hood—as opposed to the square ‘slot’ on the [f5]—is to enable this practice (pers. comm. Bruce Christianson). (A proctor wearing a hood squared is illustrated on the front cover—Ed.)

variation brought about by local tailors—another important factor in the evolution of academical dress.⁷ This has covered the majority of the full hood patterns, with one exception—the **Dublin shape [f2]**. Dublin was founded in 1591, and its robes appear to be an amalgam of Oxford and Cambridge practice of the time. It had acquired its distinctive full cut by the nineteenth century, although the *Cutter's Practical Guide* of 1878 shows a slightly squarer pattern, with a less well-defined 'slot', and an addition to the cowl to enable a turning to be made. The Scottish universities have so far been left out, and this is because, although St Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen had academical dress in the Middle Ages, it was allowed to fall into desuetude after the Reformation (and thus Edinburgh, founded 1582, hardly had any at all), and hoods were given up completely. Those in use today were reintroduced in the 1870s,⁸ and the hood shapes are modern. That used by **Glasgow [f9]** is seen to be a variant on the Cambridge shape—possibly reflecting a fashion for large-sized hoods—while that of **St Andrews [f12]** retains the rounded cape.⁹ (The hoods of the other two universities will be dealt with later.)

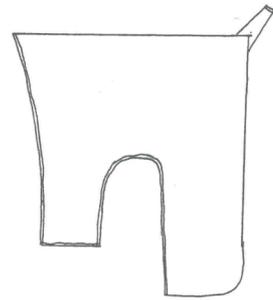


Fig. 6: London pattern [f3]

One of the things to have happened to the Oxford hoods (but not Cambridge) is that those for the lower degrees (BA, MA, BCL, BM, BMus) lost their cape. Again, the reasons for this, as also the date of its happening, are unclear. What seems to have happened is that the cape was removed by cutting across from the top of the 'slot' to the neckband, thus leaving a cowl and liripipe only. This gives the 'simple' hood. This travelled to Dublin, where it was used for the BA degree until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The late nineteenth-century creations, the Royal University and Queen's University, used the robes of Dublin undifferentiated, and when the National University of Ireland and Queen's University of Belfast were chartered, with their own robes, they continued to use this version of the simple shape [s3].

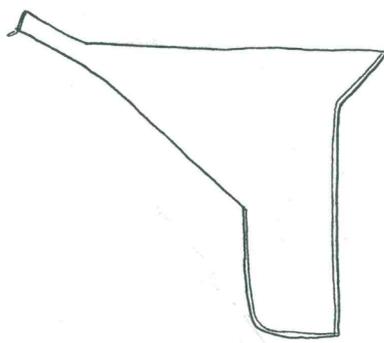


Fig. 7: Belfast simple [s3]

In the meantime, back at Oxford, the shape developed by the liripipe's growing a 'fishtail', thus developing into the **Burgon shape [s2]** (Fig. 8).¹⁰

For some reason, during the seventeenth century, the MA hood came to be worn back to front and inside out, so that only the crimson lining was visible.¹¹ This meant that the cowl had become redundant, and so it was cut away also. Thus we are left with a hood—the **Oxford plain shape [s1]** (Fig. 9)—in which the cowl is worn against the back, while the edge where the amputated cape should be is worn away from it. The liripipe here also grows a fishtail, but its point,

⁷ Even today, there is a huge degree of variety over the ways in which various robemakers (and in some cases, even the same robemaker) will cut any given hood pattern.

⁸ The exact dates for each of the four are unclear at present.

⁹ Indeed, it seems to have been almost the same as the London shape until about 1950, when the liripipe developed its angular setting (pers. comm. Philip Lowe).

¹⁰ There are several variants of the Burgon pattern, too: some have the cowl exaggerated; others have the liripipe set at various angles. Again, these are due to local variations in cut.

¹¹ A much fuller discussion of this point can be found in Bruce Christianson's article 'The Evolution of the Oxford Simple Shape' in *Burgon Society Annual*, 2002, pp. 30–36.

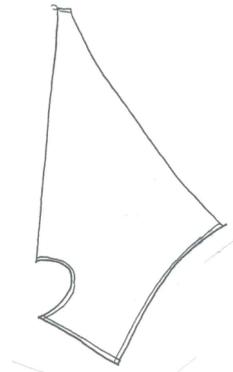


Fig. 8: Burgon shape [s2]

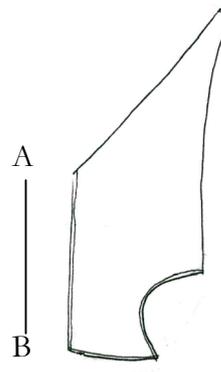


Fig. 9: Oxford plain shape [s1]

unlike that of the Burgon shape, points away from the back. This shape is then subject to various evolutionary changes, which are fossilized in other places. First, the edge A—B is elongated, resulting in a shape—the **Edinburgh simple [s4]**—which reveals a great deal of its lining when worn, preserved at Edinburgh, as it was the Oxford form used when hoods were re-introduced there; it is also found at Harvard (which of course uses the Oxford MA hood undifferentiated). Proof that this was the Oxford form in use is found in a picture of 1850 of the last Eucharist at Margaret St Chapel, before it was pulled down and All Saints' Church built on the site. The three ministers, wearing surplice and hood, are shown from the back, and all wear the Oxford MA hood in the [s4] pattern. A further development of the simple shape was to round off the end of what had become the cowl, so as to display more lining.¹² This appears to have been a development of the 1890s, as this form is preserved in the **Wales simple shape [s5]**—Wales being chartered in 1893. Again, this can be checked against an actual Oxford MA hood of the 1890s, which is made in just this shape.¹³ The Wales pattern itself has undergone a further evolution in the **Leeds simple shape [s7]**: here the rounded ends of the cowl have become squared, while leaving the slit, and the cowl is permanently turned out.¹⁴ The final nineteenth-century simple form to be considered is the **Manchester pattern [s9]**. This would appear to be a local variant cut on the Oxford plain shape, though with some influence from the [s4] version, as it is worn 'open' over both shoulders, displaying a good deal of the lining.

Thus far we have been dealing with hoods that have evolved organically, in some cases leaving fossilized traces. The remaining patterns seem to have been invented—if not by being cut out of brown paper, then the next best thing. As far as full hoods go, the remaining shape to consider is the **Edinburgh full [f8]** (Fig. 12). This is simply an Edinburgh simple hood [s4], with a cape sewn on—but sewn on to the wrong side (as of course the hood is now worn backwards)—and not only that, but back to front. As it is used solely for the three higher degrees of DD, LLD and MD, it is not (perhaps fortunately) seen very often. For the simple hoods, we have firstly the **Leicester simple [s6]**, invented when the University was chartered in 1957. This seems to be a variant on the [s1] model, with the liripipe somewhat 'rationalized'; and the same can be said for the **Aston shape [s10]**, of which it seems to be an angularized version. **Sussex [s8]** has taken the Manchester shape, and stitched on a separate liripipe, while the **Glasgow**

¹² As anyone who has ever worn an [s1] hood will know, displaying the lining is not easy.

¹³ It was worn by George Lilley, formerly Librarian of Lampeter, at the Burgess Dinner in 2001. He had borrowed it from a friend whose father had owned it, who had graduated 'about 1890'.

¹⁴ Leeds was chartered in 1903, after being part of the Victoria University of Manchester, chartered 1880. Manchester still uses the Victoria University robes.



Fig. 10: Edinburgh [s4]



Fig. 11: Wales [s5]

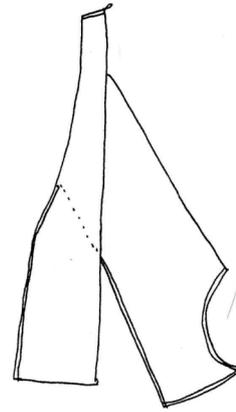


Fig. 12: Edinburgh full hood [f8]



Fig. 13: Leicester simple [s6]

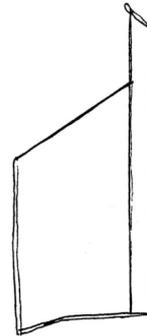


Fig. 14: Aston [s10]

Caledonian pattern [s11] appears to be a version of the Edinburgh shape with a very wide neckband, and a Leeds-style cowl.

The final development gives us the cape and cowl only hood—which seems to have come about first at Aberdeen, when they re-introduced hoods in the 1870s. Quite what the rationale of the **Aberdeen hood [a1]** is has not been (so far) uncovered: it appears to be a badly-cut Oxford doctor's hood. It remained the unique property of Aberdeen until 1963, when it was adopted, in an amended form, by the CNAA. This form has a rather larger cowl portion, which permits it to be turned out to show the lining. It has since been adopted by a large number of institutions—especially the post-1992 universities, who will have been familiar with it from the days when they awarded CNAA degrees. It is light to wear, and also cheap in comparison with other shapes! Variants on it include the **Leicester masters' [a2]** and **doctors' [a5]** hoods, and also the **East Anglia [a4]**

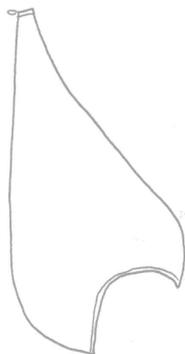


Fig. 15: Aberdeen [a1]



Fig. 16: Kent [a3]

hood. The final shape in this section is the **Kent ‘hood’ [a3]**, which is not really a hood at all, but merely a cape.

The era of ‘special’ hood shapes seems to be passing—most of the 1992 universities and other institutions which are having hoods designed seem to be sticking with the commoner patterns. As with all items of ceremonial clothing, they need to grow from an original, and not be invented from scratch. This is precisely where the older shapes—[s1], [s2], [f1], [f5] [a1], etc.—win over the special shapes of Kent, East Anglia or Leicester.

Hood Shape Codes

I drew up this system of codes for hood shapes some years ago; it is not entirely logical in progressing from one shape to another, as I had to work with what was available, and shapes were added to the end as they came to my attention. There may be still a few missing, and some codes cover a number of variants of particular shapes.

1. Full hoods

(cape, cowl and liripipe)

- [f1] – Cambridge
- [f2] – Dublin
- [f3] – London
- [f4] – Durham doctor
- [f5] – Oxford doctor
- [f6] – Durham BA
- [f7] – Durham BCL
- [f8] – Edinburgh DD
- [f9] – Glasgow
- [f10] – DipAD, NCDAD
- [f11] – Warham Guild
- [f12] – St Andrews

2. Simple hoods

(cowl and liripipe)

- [s1] – Oxford plain
- [s2] – Burgon
- [s3] – Belfast
- [s4] – Edinburgh
- [s5] – Wales
- [s6] – Leicester BA
- [s7] – Leeds
- [s8] – Sussex
- [s9] – Manchester
- [s10] – Aston
- [s11] – Caledonian
- [s12] – Surrey

3. Aberdeen hoods

(cape and partial cowl)

- [a1] –
- Aberdeen/CNAA
- [a2] – Leicester MA
- [a3] – Kent
- [a4] – East Anglia
- [a5] – Leicester doctor
- [a6] – Dundee