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Reclothing Curwen

by Nicholas Groves

In 1998, it was decided to redesign totally the robes for the Curwen College of Music, and I was given the privilege of doing this.

Curwen College was formed in 1972 out of the old Tonic- Sol-fa College of Music (TSC), which had been founded in 1863. It awarded the following diplomas:

FTSC: light blue lined pink [f1]

LTSC: light blue bound 2" pink on all edges [f1]

ATSC – no hood

HonTSC: light blue bound 1/2" pink on all edges, the cowl faced 1" dark blue velvet. [f1]

DipMusEd TSC: light blue lined dark blue, faced outside 1" pink and 1" dark blue [f1]

(The pink was actually quite dark – a shade or so darker than crushed strawberry.) The FTSC gown was a black [b4] gown, but with three cords and buttons on each sleeve. All others wore a black bell-sleeved gown [d2].

There had been another scheme before this one, in which it seems only the FTSC was allowed robes. The gown was the London BA [b4], and the hood was of simple shape (it is not plain whether this was [s1] or [s2]), in ruby poplin, part-lined with white fur. I think it likely that the ‘pink’ of the scheme detailed above may in fact be ‘ruby’. It is not known when the second scheme was brought into use.

The TSC was one of the first music colleges to allow hoods to its diplomates, and there is a story that, before they were granted hoods in the 1960s, students from the RAM and RCM would go out to the College’s then premises in Forest Gate to take the FTSC, just so they could have a hood to wear!

The Curwen College hoods were quite different. All were made in the Warham Guild shape [f11], beloved of the first Warden, Dr Paul Faunch. The scheme was as follows:

FCCM: russet brown watered silk lined old gold.

LCCM: russet brown watered silk faced 3" old gold

HonCCM: russet brown watered silk lined dark brown bound on all edges 1/2" old gold.

ACCM: this diploma was never awarded, but Dr Faunch told me the hood would have been russet brown watered silk lined dark brown, and would be [s1].

For ACCM and HonCCM, the black bell-sleeved gown was used; for LCCM a London BA gown [b4] in black with brown cords and buttons; and for FCCM the flap-collar gown [d4], with facings of brown watered silk.



The original FCCM hood – in full shape!

The gowns were rarely seen, College members tending to use those of their degrees or other diplomas. The hood, were universally disliked, the shape being disparagingly called the ‘Magic Roundabout hood’. This led to the shape being altered, on Dr Fauch’s death in 1997, to the [f1] shape. But the brown watered silk was also becoming extremely difficult to obtain. No two hoods were the same shade – colours ranged from almost orange to almost black. It was decided in 1998 to redesign them completely.

It seemed to me that the obvious thing to do was to revive the old TSC colours, thus demonstrating our descent, and to keep the old gold from the 1972 CCM hoods as a form of difference. The colours now used are: light blue: as London BMus; pink: as Liverpool MA; old gold: as London BPharm. As will be seen, the scheme originally differentiated between earned and honorary awards, earned awards having a pink lining and gold binding, honorary ones gold lining with pink binding, but in 2002 it was decided to give all Fellows the same hood.

FCCM: light blue lined pink bound 1" old gold on all edges. [f1]

LCCM: light blue faced 4" pink bound 1" old gold on the cowl. [f1]

AMusCCM: light blue faced 2" pink the cowl edge bound 1/2" old gold. [s1]

HonCCM: light blue lined old gold, the cowl faced 4" pink. [f1]

FCCM *hon caus*: light blue lined old gold, bound 1" pink on all edges. [f1]

The AMusCCM and the LCCM wear a London BA gown [b4] in black; all others wear a CNA MA gown [m10] in black. silk



The redesigned FCCM hood.

It is never possible to please everyone: some have criticized these new hoods as too bright, and prefer the more sober colours of the original brown hoods; others have welcomed them as a change from the ‘dinginess’ of the old ones!

The author was admitted as an Honorary Life Member of the College (HonCCM) in 1991, and gained a Fellowship in Composition (FCCM) in 1993. He is a member of Council of the College, and is also Academic Advisor for the diploma syllabuses.