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The Use of the Academic Hood in Quire ¹

by Nicholas Groves

In recent years, it has become more common to see members of robed choirs wearing academic hoods over their robes—no doubt because the number of graduates is increasing, but also because the number of bodies granting the right to a hood is also increasing.² From time to time, arguments break out over when hoods may be worn, or by whom, or even if they should be worn at all.³ This paper is an attempt to cut through these arguments, and, while certainly not regarding itself as definitive, to make some suggestions which are based on historical practice. What I have to say applies largely to the Church of England (and to an extent therefore to other branches of the Anglican Communion), and this stems from the fact that the universities were (until the foundation of the ‘godless’ University of London) ecclesiastical organizations—at least in origin.⁴ Indeed, the use of academic dress at London can be traced back to an enquiry in 1843 by a clerical graduate who wished to know what hood he might wear over his surplice so as to conform with the Canon: ‘the Canon making it imperative upon clergymen being graduates to wear hoods.’⁵

- I -

It is, perhaps, first necessary to remind ourselves that robed choirs in parish church chancels are an invention of the nineteenth century. They had existed in cathedrals and other choral foundations,⁶ but the first permanent robed parish choir would

¹ I prefer to make a spelling distinction between the body of singers (choir) and the place where they sit (quire). I am, as ever, grateful to Professors Bruce Christianson and William Gibson, and Dr Alex Kerr, for comments on early drafts of this article.

² This includes an increasing number of ‘livery hoods’, awarded on the basis of membership of a guild or society, as well as those awarded after examination.

³ Notably in the Yahoo! discussion groups devoted to academic dress and ecclesiastical vesture, and also in the Facebook Choral Evensong group.

⁴ It is perhaps indicative that the ‘godless’ University College London was built in the classical (‘pagan’) style, while the slightly older Anglican St David’s College, Lampeter, was built in Gothic.

⁵ P. Goff, *University of London Academic Dress*, p. 27, and *vide infra*.

⁶ The Book of Common Prayer’s ‘quires and places where they sing’. Medieval parish churches may have had three or four singers in surplices; post-Reformation choirs were unrobed, and sat in galleries or special ‘singing-pews’. The ritual quire of a cathedral can in fact be in the architectural nave: e.g., Norwich Cathedral.

seem to have been in 1841, when Walter Hook instituted one at Leeds Parish Church. (A predecessor, Richard Fawcett, had made an abortive attempt as early as 1818.)

When these parish choirs became more common, around the 1860s, it was extremely unlikely that any of their members would have had the right to a hood, as the few graduates in any parish⁷ would not have joined them; it was not something a ‘gentleman’ did. On the other hand, graduate members of the choral foundations at Oxford and Cambridge would quite certainly have worn their hoods in quire—but so would all other members of the foundation.⁸ Likewise, members of cathedral choirs (lay clerks, lay vicars, etc.) were on the whole likely to be drawn from non-graduate parts of society, although the Organists (by whatever name they were called) were often graduates in that they held the MusBac or MusDoc of either Oxford, Cambridge, Dublin, or Durham (and occasionally Lambeth), though of course these degrees did not require residence, nor did they make their holders full members of their university,⁹ and it is unclear at what point they started to wear their hoods for services, but it is possibly quite late in the century.¹⁰ On the other hand, Dr Frank Bates, organist of Norwich Cathedral from 1886 to 1928, had previously been organist at St John’s Episcopalian Church, Princes Street, in Edinburgh, and when he took his external Dublin MusD, he remarked that the congregation objected to his red hood as too gaudy.¹¹ So far as choristers wearing hoods is concerned, Dearmer noted in 1921 that ‘readers, clerks, and choristers, who have a degree, wear also the hood of that degree’.¹² He had made a firmer statement in his earlier *Ornaments of the Ministers*, saying that ‘the Hood should be used as part of the normal choir-habit of graduates’—though whether he meant this to refer to lay choristers is unclear.¹³

So far as non-degree awards are concerned, the first examining body for church music was The Church Choral Society and College of Church Music, founded in

⁷ Other than the incumbent, this might include the physician, the lawyer, and possibly some schoolmasters if there were a grammar or public school in the parish. Some of the local gentry may also have taken a degree.

⁸ The earliest reference to members of a collegiate body wearing hoods ‘after their degree’ is in the foundation statutes of All Souls College, Oxford, of 1443, when Chichele required graduate fellows to wear ‘furred hoods lined with silk according to their degrees’. In the same year the graduates of King’s College, Cambridge, were required to wear their hoods in quire (Dearmer, *Ornaments of the Ministers*, p. 141).

⁹ At Oxford and Cambridge the BA (eventually proceeding MA) was required to become a full member; the position at Dublin and Durham is less clear.

¹⁰ It may well have started when the Organists decided they needed to conduct their choirs, rather than play the organ, which practice can be dated to the later twentieth century.

¹¹ F. Bates, *Reminiscences and Autobiography of a Musician in Retirement*, p. 25. It would appear that at this time the Dublin MusD hood was red lined rose, reverting to the cream damask shell later on.

¹² Dearmer, *Parson’s Handbook*, 10th edition, p. 141.

¹³ Dearmer, *Ornaments of the Ministers*, p. 144.

1872, later changing its name to Trinity College of Music, London. It is worth noting that the holders of its original awards, the Choral Associates (ChATCL) and Choral Fellows (ChFTCL) were entitled to wear black gowns only—although the Fellows were allowed purple facings on theirs. Only the Senior Choral Fellows (SChFTCL) were allowed a hood.¹⁴ Later on, hoods were allowed to Licentiates, but never to Associates.¹⁵ In 1888, the Church Choir Guild was founded, which became the Guild of Church Musicians. Again, this appears to have allowed only its Fellows to wear a hood initially, although they were introduced for all levels of diploma by the end of the century.¹⁶ A third early foundation concerned with choral singing, the Tonic Sol-fa College (founded 1863) followed this route: initially a hood for the FTSC only, and later for all diplomas except Associates.¹⁷ A number of other bodies were founded in the later nineteenth century, granting diplomas with varying degrees of rigour, each of which had a hood—indeed, some appear to have been set up purely to grant the right to wear a hood. Again, to what extent these diploma hoods were seen in the parish church choir-stalls is unclear, but certainly by the end of the nineteenth century, there was a plethora of them available to parish church organists and choristers, should they have wished for them.

- II -

Let us now consider some of the commonly raised objections to, and questions about, the use of hoods in quire. A good deal of what I have to say is founded on the Canons of 1604, which of course knew nothing of parish church choirs, but had a good deal to say about cathedral and collegiate choirs; they have been superseded by the current version, which says nothing about choirs either, but I would argue that where they do not contradict the 1604 Canons, then the 1604 provisions may still hold.¹⁸ Whether of course a voluntary parish choir can be held to be a collegiate body is another matter (I suspect not, though some have required formal admission and may thus be corporations, at least informally), but as they are modelled on that base, then the logical thing is to apply the same rules to them.

¹⁴ See further, N. Groves and J. Kersey, *Academical Dress of Music Colleges*, p. 45. The hood was black, lined violet silk, and bound fur; probably simple shape. The designations may have been suggested by King's College, London, which awarded a Theological Associateship—ThAKCL, instituted c.1846.

¹⁵ Loc.cit. This is still the case.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 16. The exact date of introduction is unknown.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 12. It is interesting that the original FTSC and FGCM hoods were almost identical, being of crimson, bound with fur: both seem to have been of the simple shape.

¹⁸ The relevant Canon is B8: 'The minister shall wear a surplice or alb with scarf or stole.' Hoods are now not mentioned at all.

‘Only hoods which relate to a music qualification should be worn.’

This is a very common misconception, and lies alongside the equally mistaken idea that clergy should wear only theological hoods. Canon 17 of 1604 says, albeit of members of the universities:

All masters and fellows of colleges or halls, and all the scholars and students in either of the universities, shall, in their churches and chapels, upon all Sundays, holydays, and their eves, at the time of Divine Service, wear surplices, according to the order of the Church of England: and such as are graduates shall agreeably wear with their surplices such hoods as do severally appertain unto their degrees.¹⁹

Further, Canon 25 says of cathedral and collegiate churches:

... when there is no Communion it shall suffice to wear surplices; saving that all deans, masters, and heads of collegiate churches, canons, and prebendaries, being graduates, shall daily, at the time of prayer and preaching wear with their surplices such hoods as are agreeable to their degrees.²⁰

And Canon 58, which relates to parish clergy, says:

Every minister saying the public prayers, *or ministering the sacraments*, or other rites of the church, shall wear a decent and comely surplice with sleeves ... Furthermore, such ministers as are graduates shall wear upon their surplices, at such times, such hoods as by the orders of the universities are agreeable to their degrees.²¹

Thus it can be seen that graduate clergy *must* wear their degree hood, whatever degree it represents.²² Of course, neither Canon refers to members of parish choirs, and they have been superseded by the current Canons, which also make no reference at all to the vesture of parish choirs, but they do serve to form an historical foundation from which we may extrapolate. Thus the idea that a PhD in chemistry or an MLitt in classics is not allowed to wear their hood, while the holder of a minor music diploma may do so, is seen to be contrary to the spirit of the Canon: as contrary as the PhD or MLitt, if a cleric, wearing their theological college hood ‘because it is their only theological qualification’. Indeed, it has

¹⁹ Quoted from J. H. Blunt, *The Book of Church Law*, revised W. G. F. Phillimore and G. E. Jones, p. 378. It was certainly the case that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries clergy who were graduates in Law or in Physick wore the hoods for these degrees in church.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 381.

²¹ Blunt, et al., *The Book of Church Law*, p. 398. My emphasis.

²² Canon 58 goes on to say that non-graduate ministers were not allowed to wear hoods, ‘under pain of suspension’; the same Canon allowed them the ‘decent tippet of black, so it be not silk’, the exact nature of which has caused much discussion. See further my ‘Who may wear the “Literate’s Hood”?’ in *Burgon Society Annual*, 2002, p. 15.

frequently been argued that, following from the above, *only* degree hoods are authorized to be worn, and that the use of diploma hoods—including theological college ones—is merely tolerated by custom.

‘Hoods should not be worn at eucharistic services.’

This idea appears to have two roots. The first is a notion that the hood is an article of personal adornment: ‘ornaments of merely *personal* dignity are out of place on those engaged in offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice’.²³ This appears to be an *obiter dictum* which has no foundation:²⁴ as we have seen above, Canon 58 says that a surplice is to be worn by clergy when ministering the sacraments, and goes on to say the hood shall be worn with it (*vide supra*): in other words, the hood is *required* to be worn when celebrating the eucharist, so that disposes of the notion of it as an item of ‘personal dignity’.²⁵ Again, the new Canons have authorized the ‘customary’ vestments (chasuble, etc.) but allow the surplice to be used also, in which case the hood ought probably to be worn with it.²⁶

The second root follows from this, and is that ‘all should approach the altar as equals’. This is clearly an untenable position: if followed to its logical conclusion, the whole congregation would wear surplices, hiding the differences in their street clothes,²⁷ or the choir (and clergy) would abandon their cassocks and surplices. It is also not applied consistently: in choirs where hoods are not worn at the eucharist, the various RSCM medals usually are, although these are just as much items of ‘personal adornment’, as they represent success in various tests.²⁸

A third strand also contributes to this argument, and that is that all should be ‘uncovered’ (i.e., bare-headed) in the presence of the Sacrament. This is also

²³ C. Atchley, ‘The Hood as an Ornament of the Minister’, in *Transactions of the St Paul’s Ecclesiological Society*, 4, p. 325, quoted in P. Dearmer, *The Parson’s Handbook*, tenth edition, 1921, p. 146. Of course, one’s own theological views on the nature of the Eucharist may come in play.

²⁴ It also pays no regard to the number of ‘ornaments of merely personal dignity’ that are worn by various Western prelates over their eucharistic vestments.

²⁵ It is worth reminding ourselves that such pioneer Tractarians as Edward Pusey and J. H. Newman (at least so long as he was an Anglican) wore surplice and hood at all services. Dearmer maintains (p. 146) that the ‘Ornaments Rubric’ abrogates the Canon by ordering the traditional vestments, and that therefore the hood ‘may not be worn’ by the celebrant and other ministers. This conveniently ignores the fact that the Rubric was a dead letter from the start, and that the surplice was the maximum that the bishops could insist on. The ‘Ornaments Rubric’ is notoriously difficult to interpret.

²⁶ As has been seen (note 8 *supra*), the hood is in fact not mentioned at all in the current version.

²⁷ This would at least be in accordance with primitive practice, when communicants wore a white linen robe.

²⁸ The writer once saw a RSCM officer, conducting a weekend school, wear his gown and hood for the two evensongs, but the gown alone for the Sunday eucharist. In what way did his gown not represent the ‘personal dignity’ that his hood did?

clearly nonsensical, as anyone wearing an academic hood (even if made in the revived medieval or ‘Warham’ shape) is ‘uncovered’—the hood hangs down the back.

But what of the choir? They are sitting in quire, and may be regarded as effectively being ‘clerks’; thus they should wear full quire dress: surplice and hood. This follows from Canon 25, where graduate members of quire in cathedral and collegiate churches are required to wear their hoods—and this means that clergy who are merely sitting in quire, and who have no part to play in the eucharist, ought to wear quire dress too. It is worth noting that even the *Ritualistic Notes on Ceremonial* (first published 1875) in its fourth edition (1903) directs that ‘An assistant priest or deacon at a Missa Cantata should occupy a stall in the quire vested in surplice and hood’.²⁹

‘The hood is a Protestant garment’.

This is an argument often heard in some extreme Anglo-Catholic churches, where all is to be as ‘Roman’ as possible. It betrays a woeful sense of history: in the seventeenth century, it was the Puritans who objected to the hood, along with the surplice, as ‘Popishe Raggés’, and did their best to avoid wearing either of them. (This was one of the reasons why hoods fell out of use in Scotland after the Reformation.) As has been demonstrated above, it remained the standard garb of the Anglican clergy until the start of the twentieth century; as the more ‘advanced’ clergy started to wear the traditional vestments for the eucharist, it remained the dress of the less advanced or old-fashioned clergy, and thus by default became seen as the Low Church dress. However, it was certainly worn for Mattins and Evensong (often with a black or coloured stole) by advanced Ritualists throughout the nineteenth, and well into the twentieth, century.³⁰ Its disuse was hastened by the adoption of the illegal cotta by the extremer clergy. The cotta was adopted from contemporary Roman Catholic practice; in that Church, academic hoods were not worn, and so the notion grew up that they ‘could not’ be used over the cotta.³¹ Thus, the unadorned cotta became the mark of the ‘correct’ Ritualist. As the cotta is merely a cut-down version of the surplice,³² what can be worn over a surplice can *de facto* be worn over a cotta. It is not unknown for hoods to be worn over cottas, although traditional hood shapes do not look well, owing to the cotta being

²⁹ *Notes on Ceremonial*, p. 146, art. 315. It goes on to remark that there is no authority for wearing a stole if sitting in quire. The use of the black scarf at this time was still restricted to canons and other dignitaries, and BDs and DDs.

³⁰ E.g., Edward Ram did so at St John Timberhill, Norwich, in 1884 (with black stole), and presumably did so until his death in 1918 (see *Daylight*, 17 April 1880, p. 5), as did Frederick Creeny (with white stole) at St Michael-at-Thorn (*Daylight*, 5 June 1880, p. 3).

³¹ This view did not prevent them using the stole over the surplice, which was equally incorrect.

³² The RC ritual books invariably refer to ‘the surplice’, and never the cotta. It is an abbreviated surplice, designed for use in hot countries such as Italy and Spain.

less full than a surplice. On the other hand, experiment shows that a Warham pattern hood [f11] does look well over a cotta. It is also notable that an increasing number of RC choirs use hoods—either weekly, or at least on special occasions, although not necessarily over cottas.³³

- III -

What has been said above applies largely to the Church of England, although, *mutatis mutandis*, it will apply to other branches of the Anglican Communion. Whether it can apply also to the Roman Catholic and Nonconformist churches³⁴ is another matter, but it may perhaps form an historical basis for discussion within those communions.

What I hope I have done is to show that the commonly cited arguments against the use of the hood in quire have no basis in fact, and that, if anything, its use is probably required at all services, at least for graduates.

³³ In London alone, St James, Spanish Place; St George's Cathedral, Southwark; and the Brompton Oratory.

³⁴ The use of robes among Nonconformist choirs appears to be increasing.

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The relevant section (B8) of *The Canons of the Church of England* is to be found here: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/churchlawlegis/canons/02b11-17.pdf>.