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Officers, Events in 2012; Fellows & Members; Editor's Note; Tribute to John Birch

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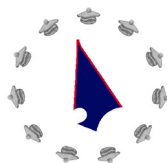
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TRANSACTIONS OF THE BURGON SOCIETY



Volume 12



THE BURGON SOCIETY

Founded to promote the study of Academical Dress

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Information about the Burgon Society can be found
on its website at www.burgon.org.uk

Transactions of the Burgon Society Volume 12 (for 2012)



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Front cover: Thomas Barclay, MA, DD, Principal of the University of Glasgow, photographed in 1870 wearing a professor's gown. Dr Neil Dickson describes gowns at Glasgow in his article beginning on page 10.

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Burgon Society Events in 2012

- 21 April** **Spring Conference**
OFFICES OF DELOITTE 2 New Street Square, London
Programme included:
Illustrated talks
Colin Fleming — *Hoods, Epitoges, and their Antecedents*
Alex Kerr — *Today's Academic Gowns and their Origins*
Graham Zellick — *A Life in Academic Dress*
Len Newton — *British Tradition and African Culture Combined in Academic Dress*
Neil Dickson — *Unusual Features of Glasgow Academic Dress*
Andrew North — *The Legislation of Oxford Academic Dress in the Twentieth Century*
- 12 May** **Visit to the University of Manchester**
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER University of Manchester
hosted by Philip Lowe
Sessions comprised:
Owens College and the Victoria University to 1903
The Victoria University of Manchester and UMIST from 1903 to 2004
The University of Manchester from 2004
The presentations were illustrated from an extensive display of past and current academical and official dress
- 21–23 June** **Visit to the University of St Andrews**
led by Jonathan Cooper and Kenneth Crawford
Programme included:
Thanksgiving service in St Salvator's Chapel
Visit to the University Museum to view historic academical dress
Tour of St Leonard's College Chapel
Attendance at the Conferment of Degrees Ceremony in the Younger Hall and at the Garden Party
- 13 October** **AGM and Congregation**
CHARTERHOUSE London
Annual General Meeting
Display of academic robes from the Burgon Society Archive
Admission to the Fellowship of the Burgon Society
Jason Testar (by submission — *The Introduction and Practice of Academical Dress in Japan*) *in absentia*
Professor Leonard Newton (by submission — *Factors Influencing the Evolution of Academic Dress at Kenyatta University, Kenya*)
Dr Neil Dickson (by submission — *Tradition and Humour in the Academic Dress of the University of Glasgow*)
Charles Ko (by submission — *The Development of Academic Regalia in China*) *in absentia*
Address: Professor Peter Galloway
Talk: Stephen Wolgast — 'The Demise of "Faculty" Meanings in U.S. Hoods'

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(as at 1 September 2013)

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Mr Leonard Brown, *died 2007*
Professor Bruno Neveu, *died 2004*
Dr George Wenham Shaw, *died 2006*

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Editor's Note

When a writer recently suggested in the opinion pages of the *Wall Street Journal* that American academic dress should return to black—because that was the Intercollegiate Code's intention, after all—he trod ground where critics of change often pace. His column, published on 12 June 2013, decried coloured caps and gowns because the Code limited colour to the hood. Even the velvet trim of the doctor's gown was to be black in the Code's first version. Like Henry Ford's Model T motorcars, academics could have their gowns in any colour they wanted so long as it was black.

Gowns today, like cars, seem to be selected from the array in a Pantone sample set by committees composed of anyone except a representative from the fine arts faculty. We are surprised, then, when new academic outfits actually please the eye.

When the *Journal* published letters to the editor responding to the column, one of the two writers surprised me with its point. Howard Schneiderman, a professor of sociology at Lafayette College, in Pennsylvania, brought up the 'doctrine of survival', a nineteenth-century idea proposed by Edward Burnett Tylor, whose ideas remain important to sociologists and anthropologists.

Examining old cultures and how some of their rituals survive, Tylor wrote in 1871: 'an idea, the meaning of which has perished ... may continue to exist, simply because it has existed.*' Schneiderman put academic dress in this category. 'That we only wear caps and gowns at graduations demonstrates that this regalia has survived merely as a symbol.' Cap and gown, he concluded, has lost its 'deeper meanings and hence the seriousness that accompanies utility.'

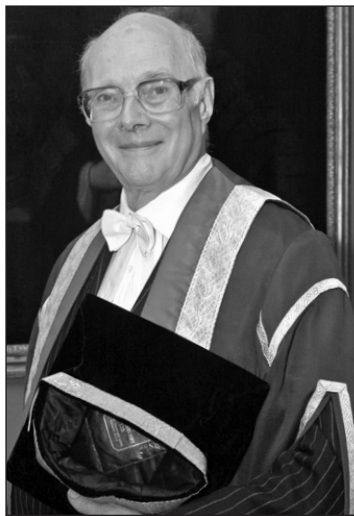
Certainly there are plenty of objects around today that once had grander meanings and utilities. Baptismal gowns, battle flags, and bachelor's degrees come to mind. Yet all remain relevant beyond their use as symbols.

Academic dress is a symbol too, as it has been for centuries. Its reinvigoration with new colours and cuts only adds to its relevance today. Driving the resurgence are the growing number of colleges and universities that want the trappings of their more prominent elders, the boom in the number of university students, and universities' interest in corporate branding. Institutions find utility in identification, and though utility may be too utilitarian a word for the importance of happy emotions, we all know that graduates rejoice in their shared accomplishments on their graduation day.

The authors in this volume give us many examples of utility in academic dress, spanning from fourteenth-century England to modern America. Coloured fabric and gilt gimp, robes for ceremony or gowns for daily use, all have utility in their settings. We don't need to recreate some original purpose of academic dress—not that getting students into sombre clothes wouldn't be a bad idea in some cases—to recognize its utility today.

—Stephen Wolgast

* E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (London: Murray, 1871; repr. New York: Brentano's, 1924), 2 vols, Vol. II, pp. 70-72, quoted in Margaret T. Hodgen, 'The Doctrine Of Survivals: The History of an Idea', *American Anthropologist*, 33 (1931), pp. 307-24, at <<http://www.aaanet.org/sections/gad/history/042hodgen.pdf>> (accessed 28 August 2013).



John Birch, 1929–2012

In Memoriam

John Birch, MA, DMus, FRCM, FRCO, FBS

Dr John Birch served as President of the Burgon Society from the Society's foundation in 2001 until October 2011, completing two five-year terms. He was an ideal President: always dignified, ready with encouragement, sage advice or (occasionally) a quiet warning that a course of action might be ill-advised. He attended Burgon events whenever he could and rarely missed a Congregation: most of the Fellows admitted during his tenure as President will remember the warm smile as he welcomed us to the Fellowship. He attended Trustees' meetings when able, but never interfered with the administration of the Society and was genuinely pleased to see the Society develop from a collection of enthusiasts towards being 'firmly established, commendably erudite and with an ever-growing world reputation' (to use his words). He was exacting in his standards and always pleased when they were met or surpassed.

John was born in Staffordshire in 1929 to a family of paper merchants. He was educated at Trent College, Derbyshire and the Royal College of Music, London. He won a scholarship in the oboe, but it was the organ that was to capture his attention under the tutelage of John Dykes Bower.

After National Service with the Royal Signals (during which he confessed to spending much of his time playing one instrument or another) he was appointed organist of St Thomas's Church, Regent Street, moving to All Saints Margaret Street in 1953. He also served in the 1950s as sub-organist for the Chapels Royal and worked with the St Michael's Singers under Harold Darke. In 1958 was appointed to Chichester Cathedral, where he served as organist and master of the choristers until 1980. During his time at Chichester he worked

closely with the Dean, Walter Hussey, in commissioning of new choral works for the Cathedral Choir, including works from the composers Leonard Bernstein, William Walton, Lennox Berkeley, William Albright, and Herbert Howells. He was one of the founders of the revived Southern Cathedrals Festival (with his colleagues at Salisbury and Winchester Cathedrals) in 1960.

Walter Hussey wisely advised him to keep his teaching appointments, as the Dean was aware that Chichester might not keep a bachelor sufficiently occupied. Thus, John was appointed a Professor at the Royal College of Music in 1959 and continued to lecture there until 1997. He also held the appointment of University Organist (1967 to 1994) and Visiting Lecturer in Music (1971 to 1983) at the University of Sussex.

Between 1982 and 1997, he was Director of Music at Temple Church, in the City of London. In 1984, he was appointed Curator-Organist at the Royal Albert Hall, a position that he held until his death. He was organist for the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and recorded widely, particularly in orchestral repertoire. His 1973 Decca recording of the 'Varhany (Postludium)' organ solo from Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* is still seen as the touchstone for all other performances.

It was rumoured that John was not appointed to St Paul's Cathedral in succession to Dykes Bower because he lacked an Arts degree: thus he was especially pleased when he was awarded an Honorary MA by Sussex and, in 1989, the Lambeth degree of Doctor of Music. Honorary MAs at Sussex wear the Doctors' dress robes without ribbons—a robe designed by John Piper, an artist associated closely with Chichester Cathedral. Wearing one of Piper's creations gave John 'added pleasure' as he remarked in an article in the *Burgon Society Annual* in 2002. In addition, he was a Fellow of the RCM and RCO (in Church Music).

He designed many of the hoods and robes now worn by the Royal College of Music (assisted by Dr George Shaw) as well as a re-design of some aspects of the academical dress of the Royal College of Organists. The elegant President's robe is one of John's designs.

John's interests went beyond his comprehensive knowledge of the musical repertoire: his patronage of art was another aspect of his life that received close attention. Here, too, Walter Hussey's influence was critical and led to an important collection including works by twentieth-century British artists including Jacob Epstein, Ivon Hitchens, John and Paul Nash, John Piper. The collection is now in the Pallant House Gallery in Chichester (which also has Hussey's own collection).

John suffered a stroke on 16 April 2012 and died on 28 April not having regained consciousness. His requiem was celebrated in his beloved All Saints Margaret Street and saw many of his former students and colleagues in the congregation. The reception afterwards was filled with laughter as we remembered a man of many facets, whom we were privileged to know and call our friend.

—Colin Fleming