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## **Bristol Blue: A Search for the Origins of Academic Dress at the University of Bristol**

By Paul Hayward

This article gives the results of research into the origins of academic dress at the University of Bristol, and is principally concerned with the regulations surrounding that subject. As such, it does not look into the actual use of academic dress. For example, undergraduate gowns still form part of the official regulations, but they are not to be seen in the University today. This falls outside the scope of this research.

### **The founding of the University**

The precursor to the present University of Bristol was University College, Bristol, founded in 1876. John Percival, who was the headmaster of nearby Clifton College, was the driving force behind the founding of the University College, who

wrote to the Oxford colleges observing that the provinces lacked a university culture. The following year he produced a pamphlet called ‘The Connection of the Universities and the Great Towns’, which was well received by Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol College, Oxford. Jowett was to become a significant figure, both philosophically and financially, in the establishment of University College, Bristol.<sup>1</sup>

Percival was also a campaigner for women’s rights through his Christian religious views, later becoming the Bishop of Hereford. He believed that women and men should both be eligible to receive higher education. Percival’s views on women’s education were obviously heard, as there were 164 women enrolled in the University College’s first year, alongside 173 men.<sup>2</sup> However, women could not initially study medicine.<sup>3</sup>

But what of the students of University College, Bristol? Let us not be misled by the associations of the word ‘university’, for the College had no power to award degrees. Within a few years Certificates of the College and, for those who pursued systematic studies for two years or more, Associateships were granted; but these were internal matters. [...] The path was set in 1883 when the award of a B.A. in arts to a student was granted by the University [of London] through external examination.<sup>4</sup> [...] It was not until 1880 that the University of London made its degrees open to women.<sup>5</sup>

The certificates and associateships were internal courses, so had no academic dress. University College, Bristol, later linked to the University of London’s external examinations, as did other University Colleges, and so their students were awarded a University of London degree and would wear its academic dress.

1 ‘History of the University’ [of Bristol], at <[www.bristol.ac.uk/university/history/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/history/)> [all online material in the article retrieved 11 July 2022].

2 Shelbourne, p. 3.

3 Shelbourne, p. 2.

4 Shelbourne, p. 2.

5 Shelbourne, p. 4.

The University of Bristol itself was granted its Royal Charter in 1909. Alongside the University College and Medical School, the University also incorporated part of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, which can trace its origins to 1595.<sup>6</sup> The foundation of the University is partly due to a generous financial contribution from two local prominent families, the Wills family (of tobacco fame) and the Fry family (of chocolate fame),<sup>7</sup> both have buildings named after them in the current university.<sup>8 9</sup>

## Materials found in the University archives, September 2021

Unfortunately, Ede & Ravenscroft, the University robemakers, were unable to offer any assistance to this project due to staffing constraints, so the primary sources come from the University of Bristol archives, where mentions of academic dress are few and far between. However, there is an important document found in a collection of papers from Arthur Mannering Tyndall, sometime Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bristol, that have been collected and donated to the University. Most of the papers are correspondence of varying formality, including with John Percival after he became Bishop of Hereford. Amongst them is the second report of the 'Men Lecturers' Committee' from April–June 1909, issued by the secretary of the University News Committee. There is little information available as to the origin and purpose of this committee.<sup>10</sup> It appears that a separate committee was formed to investigate academic dress, including those of other universities, and to make recommendation as to a scheme for the new University of Bristol, and the report of this 'Gown Committee' by Peter Fraser forms the majority of the overall report. The introduction of this stated its purpose:

As this Committee had practically finished its work in the way of gathering information and of verbal recommendation, it seems fitting that we should distribute our report as widely as possible with a view to such criticism which must be quickly forthcoming on such questions of taste as those involved in our discussions. We still have to choose the particular shades of colours which we intend to have specimens of hoods made up, but we hope to have everything ready to present to the body officially appointed to settle these questions as soon as such body is constituted.<sup>11</sup>

The above quotation implies that a body would be constituted to make the 'official' decisions, and the report does say that this committee 'we were acting as an entirely unofficial body'<sup>12</sup> although they 'have come to decisions with as much care and deliberation as if the ultimate choice lay with us.'<sup>13</sup> However, it does seem that this committee has conducted a large amount of research and had been commissioned to do so, which presumably would not be undertaken for a second time by an official committee, and that they had given a verbal report to its commissioners. Since the report was now be-

6 <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/history/> and <https://www.merchantventurers.com/what-we-do/education/>.

7 <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/history/>.

8 <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/venues/meetings-and-events/fry-building>.

9 <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/venues/meetings-and-events/wills-memorial-building/>.

10 Dyhouse, p. 169.

11 Bristol University Archives; Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Gowns Committee, Introduction. *Note, there are no page numbers in this document, so section titles are given instead.*

12 Mens Lecturer Committee Second Report, Introduction.

13 *Ibid.*

ing widely circulated in the University, it would imply some level of approval by those who had heard the preliminary verbal report. Regardless of the connection with the University of Bristol, the written report of the 1909 Gown Committee is an important document of historical interest in terms of academic dress as it not only details the recommended scheme for this University, but also gives a snapshot of academic dress at the time of the report, with some detailing of the academic dress at other universities at that time.

Thanks are offered in the introduction to Messrs Leopold Cassella & Co, Frankfurt for a number of samples of dyes used on silk; as well as Ede, Son & Ravenscroft, who had not at that time been approved as the official robemaker and understood 'that any assistance we received would be absolutely without prejudice to the electing of Official Robemakers or the selection of particular dye-stuffs.'<sup>14</sup> However, the first University Calendar<sup>15</sup> printed in 1910 does list the firm as the official robemaker.

The decadence of the pre-war era was referenced in the introduction, saying that although they had not suggested anything rash, they 'may have suffered from the vices of a decadent age and that a passion for systemisation may have led us to elaborate to the point of vulgarity.' However, they were concerned with 'distinguishing our academic dress among the varieties of the present [...] that it may [be] pleasurably recognised by any interested spectator and not merely by professional robe makers or by those who have been fortunate to serve on such a committee as the present.'<sup>16</sup>

After this document, there is no further mention of academic dress in the University archives. It seems that any paperwork that pertained to this has been lost to history. The final scheme drawn up for the University was probably overseen by Sir Isambard Owen, who is reported to have been both the first and second Vice-Chancellor of the new University of Bristol. This is probably because he was the first Vice-Chancellor to be appointed to the actual new university as opposed to leadership that was transferred from the old University College. Arthur Tyndall had an essay published in a collection of works to mark the centenary of the founding of University College, Bristol, in which he says:

Owen's first job was to draw up the Ordinances, Regulations and Standing Orders, and these have remained substantially the same ever since. He also drew up the ceremonial that we have for our degree ceremonies which is largely unchanged to this day. He also designed the University gowns ...<sup>17</sup>

As Owen was Vice-Chancellor between 1909 and 1921, it seems likely that he oversaw the development of the final scheme. He may well have had experience of this from being a 'major figure in the creation of the University of Wales. He drew up a proposal for the University in 1891, was actively involved in meetings to establish the University, and became its Deputy Chancellor from its creation in 1894 until 1910.'<sup>18</sup> His obvious interest in academic dress can be seen by the fact that he created and later amended in-

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14 Ibid.

15 University Calendar 1910, Regulations for academic and official costume.

16 Ibid.

17 Macqueen and Taylor, p. 211.

18 Dictionary of Welsh Biography, Isambard Owen, <https://biography.wales/article/s-OWEN-ISA-1850> .

dividual designs for his robes as the Vice-Chancellor that were completely different both from the other officers' robes, and from the ones that followed his tenure. The details are found below.

Further regulations then appear in the annually published University Calendar until the information was moved online in 2006. The University keeps a collection of these calendars, and provided a selection of them that had been pre-selected on my behalf by the University Archivist as being important with regard to academic dress through the aid she had given to other researchers, the results of which are not publicly available. Hence, my use of the terms 'by' and 'from' when addressing the regulations in those calendars is done for purposes of transparency, as I have not been able to scrutinize each individual calendar. These calendars are also available in national libraries of legal deposit, such as the British Library and the Bodleian Library.

### Undergraduate dress

Academic dress for undergraduates is well documented. In the report of the 1909 Gown Committee, under the summary of recommendations, it simply states that 'There is no academic dress for undergraduates.'<sup>19</sup> This is later expanded upon in its own section of the report, which details the universities that prescribe academic dress for undergraduates, those that don't, and when that dress is actually used.<sup>20</sup> The report recommends against the use of undergraduate gowns for two reasons. Firstly, that 'unless the wearing of the gown is made compulsory only a few students wear it.'<sup>21</sup> Second, on terms of expense to the student if it is only to be used on ceremonial occasions. The committee then provided two different suggestions, either that 'there be no gown at all or that the wearing of the gown be compulsory for all matriculated students whilst attending lectures, examinations, or academic ceremonies. The opting of the Men Lecturers' Committee was almost unanimously in favour of being no gown.'<sup>22</sup>

This recommendation was taken on board for a time, with the University Calendar in 1910 bearing no mention of academic dress for undergraduates. However, in 1911, the calendar states: 'Undergraduates shall wear a black stuff gown of the usual pattern, with a square academic cap of the mortar-board pattern.'<sup>23</sup> The usual pattern is not described, but is listed in *Shaw's Academical Dress of Great Britain and Ireland* as the Oxford Scholar's pattern [u2].<sup>24</sup> This is later expanded upon in the University Calendars, with sub-fusc being prescribed for women by 1925, stating that 'on ceremonial occasions women shall also wear a dark coat and skirt; a white shirt blouse; a University tie, black shoes and stockings and white gloves'<sup>25</sup> along with a 'soft square cap of black cloth without a tassel.'<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, there is no further description of the women's cap, which may have been similar to the Oxford Ladies' Cap [h5]. We also, sadly, have no description of the University tie.

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19 Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Summary of recommendations.

20 See Appendix A.

21 Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Undergraduate gowns.

22 Ibid.

23 University Calendar 1910, Regulations for academic and official costume.

24 Groves, p. 102.

25 University Calendar 1925, Regulations for academic and official costume.

26 Ibid.

The terminology is changed by 1934, replacing 'Undergraduates' with 'All full-time students'<sup>27</sup> which suggests that any student is bound by the regulations previously prescribed for undergraduates.

The University Calendar in 1962 further expands on the subject, providing details of clothing to be worn with academic dress and when it shall be worn.<sup>28</sup> This replaces 'full-time students' with 'undergraduates' once more. However, the section regarding graduate students seems ambiguous, which could mean that they are required to wear the same as undergraduates, but could also be taken to mean that they could wear their own gowns when undergraduates are required to wear theirs. Bristol was unusual in this fact, with only Oxford and Cambridge considering graduates of other universities in their regulations. It should be noted here that there is no mention of the 'mortar-board' for undergraduates from this point onwards, although the soft cap remains for women. It is therefore likely that the 'mortar-board' fell out of use at this point for both undergraduates and graduates (see below). These regulations are clearly more prescribed and stringent than their predecessors and were reprinted in calendars as far as at least 1996, which is the last printed calendar that was available in the University archives. An on-line calendar in 2006 keeps the same regulations.<sup>29</sup>

## Headwear

The use of headwear for graduate members of the University is also described over the years. The initial report from the 1909 Gown Committee recommends that 'ordinary black trenchers are worn except by doctors in full dress when they are replaced by caps of blue velvet (with a gold cord).'<sup>30</sup> The blue will be discussed below, and is replaced by the traditional black in the 1910 calendar, which dispenses with the doctoral cap entirely. All graduates are to wear 'mortar-board' pattern caps, with bachelors' and masters' being covered in black cloth, and doctors' covered with black velvet, with the tassels of all caps being of black silk.<sup>31</sup> The University of Wales also prescribed a black velvet cap for doctors,<sup>32</sup> which is a possible similarity carried over by Vice-Chancellor Owen during his time at both institutions. By 1925, the regulations include the wearing of soft black caps for women, made of the same cloth as prescribed for men.<sup>33</sup> By this time a doctoral cap is introduced for doctors 'of particular faculties' which is a term used to denote what are presumably 'higher doctorates' from the PhD degree. The new cap, to be worn in full dress only, is 'a doctors' bonnet of the Cambridge pattern, viz.: a flat broad-brimmed bonnet of black velvet with a narrow cord of gold at the junction of the crown and brim.'<sup>34</sup> As the University Calendar has not been printed since 2005, it is impossible to find any other information regarding current regulations on the University website, with the latest available being an archived version from 2006. Until mid-2022,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 1934.

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>29</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20071126123449/.http://www.bris.ac.uk/cms/go/statutes/regs/regulations/regscostume.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Introduction.

<sup>31</sup> University Calendar 1910, Regulations for academic and official costume.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.wales.ac.uk/en/AboutUs/RobesandRegalia/GownsHoods.aspx>.

<sup>33</sup> University Calendar 1925, Regulations for academic and official costume.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

the practice of the University was not to wear hats at graduation ceremonies. This was possibly the practice since around 1962 when the ‘mortar-board’ was withdrawn for undergraduates (see above), with the University website stating

Hats are not worn at the ceremony if you are graduating with a bachelors, masters or doctorate degree. Ede & Ravenscroft will give you the option of buying a hat, but this is not a requirement and you won’t be allowed to wear this at the ceremony. There are hats available for you on the day, to wear in official photographs.<sup>35</sup>

It is said that early male graduates either threw their hats from the nearby Clifton Suspension Bridge (similar to graduates at other universities and their own bodies of water), or at female graduates in protest to co-education, but these are almost certainly false due to the distance to the bridge, the fact that the University of Bristol and preceding University College had always taught both genders, and that the University regulations had included headwear for graduates since the initial report in 1909.

However, new advice was published by the University in April 2022 which brought back the use of hats at graduation, stating ‘This year students will be wearing mortar boards, which have not been part of University of Bristol graduation dress since the 1960s.’<sup>36</sup>

## Graduate gowns

The research and subsequent recommendations of the 1909 Gown Committee regarding gowns for graduates can be seen in Appendix B. As part of the committee’s task of creating distinctive academic dress, they decided to create a unique version of the masters’ gown. The report reads, ‘the standard gown is the master. The University to which a master belongs should be known by the spare [cut?] of his gown quite apart from its hood. The distinguishing member of the gown is the sleeve which hangs down the side after the manner of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.’<sup>37</sup> The fact that most university lecturers and officers would probably have held postgraduate degrees, as well as the fact that the doctoral undress gown of various universities would have been the masters’ gown (either modified or not) is probably the reason that the masters’ gown was chosen over the others in this way. It also reflects that lecturers and officers who were graduates of other universities would have also had their own masters’ gowns, and it seemed important to show the differences between them. A single piece of paper was referenced in the report and issued as part of it (see Appendix G). It had drawings of the sleeves of masters’ gowns from other universities as well as proposals for the Bristol masters’ gown. It also mentions adding ribbons for the sake of further distinction, which is interesting as the University of Cambridge uses ribbons to differentiate their graduates from ones of other universities who would wear their gowns as ‘status gowns.’<sup>38</sup> In the end, these designs were all rejected in favour of what is now the Bristol MA [m9] shape, the origin of which is unclear, appearing in the 1910 first printed calendar (see below).

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35 <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/graduation/before-the-day/gowns/>.

36 <https://alumni.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/2022/04/08/in-person-graduation-ceremonies-and-mortar-boards-return-to-the-university/>.

37 Men Lecturers’ Committee Second Report, Graduate gowns.

38 <https://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/graduation-and-what-next/degree-ceremonies/academic-dress>.

The committee then look at the gowns for doctors of the University, taking the masters' gown into account. 'There seems no need to differentiate the doctors' undress gown from this standard gown. The addition of lace (Cambridge) or braid (Birmingham) is unhappy, and as a master might have bought an expensive gown he would not be anxious to have it replaced by an entirely new one.'<sup>39</sup> However, lace and braid could be added to the older gowns, so the decision of the committee either shows a lack of research in this area or a possible prejudice against braid and lace. The shape of the full-dress gown had not yet been decided, but it is recommended to be worn without a hood 'as at Older Universities.'<sup>40</sup> They do, however, in two places recommend that a stole could be worn 'to indicate the wearer's degree to those situated behind him'<sup>41</sup> and this forms part of the official recommendation, which is highly unusual! However, it was not part of the approved scheme.

The committee wanted to ensure that a bachelors' gown was quite clearly a bachelors' gown and could not be mistaken for anything else, citing the lack of any similarity between bachelors' and masters' gowns at Oxford in order to intentionally denote the difference between the two levels of gowns.<sup>42</sup>

The Cambridge bachelors' gown is recommended due to its simplicity and the freedom it gave to the arms for teaching purposes. The committee also stated that this bachelors' gown could be converted into a Bristol masters' gown, 'as can any other bachelors' gown'<sup>43</sup> as it was possible for the sleeves to be removed and replaced, presumably at a lesser cost than buying a new masters' gown.

The recommended scheme of the 1909 Gown Committee can be seen in Appendix D, and bears some relation to the approved scheme, published in the University Calendar in 1910:

Bachelors shall wear a black stuff gown of the Cambridge B.A. pattern. The gown of Bachelors of Medicine may be stuff or silk.

Masters shall wear a black stuff or silk gown of the Oxford M.A. pattern, save that the sleeves shall be ended with rounded corners, and without any nick in the side.

Doctors in undress shall wear a black silk gown of the same shape as prescribed for Masters, but with the distinction of a triangular areas of scroll work in black braid above each armhole.

Doctors in full dress shall wear a scarlet cloth gown of the Oxford M.D. shape, save that the sleeves shall be entirely of cloth. The facings of the gown, to a width of three inches and a half, shall be in the colour proper to the degree as hereinafter prescribed.<sup>44</sup>

Here, we see the first mention of a distinct undress gown for doctors by adding braiding, which recognizes the fact that a doctorate was higher, in academic terms, than a master's degree. The distinction of slightly different robes for the MB is discussed later in the report regarding its hood colour, to which it is said 'if it should be objected

<sup>39</sup> Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Graduate gowns.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> University Calendar 1910, Regulations for academic and official costume.



that this places Medicine in too prominent a position it can be answered that the Bristol Medical School is the older foundation incorporated in the University.<sup>45</sup> A similar practice of denoting medicine degrees with different hoods can be seen in different universities, for example in the University of Wales where these hoods are fully lined as rather than bordered, although this is a later example.<sup>46</sup>

The colour chosen for the facing of the doctors' full dress gown (and hence, the lining of the hood) was salmon-coloured silk, which is referenced in Tyndall's essay in the introduction, saying:

[Owen] also designed the University gowns, but there I would criticise as far as my own gown — Doctor of Science — is concerned. I think the combination of salmon pink facings with the scarlet is perfectly hideous; but in fairness to Owen he was disappointed himself. He wanted the salmon pink to be as near as possible to the colour of some of the rock of the Avon Gorge after rain and they just couldn't find the dye to do it.<sup>47</sup>

By 1925, the PhD had been introduced, and there begins a differentiation between that and 'Doctors in particular Faculties', which are what we know as higher doctorates. Doctors of Philosophy are given the same gown as masters for undress, showing the distinction between the two types of doctorate, but in so doing, they demote the PhD. In full dress, they are given the same gown as the other doctors, save that the facings of the gown, and the sleeves for six to eight inches, are of dark purple cloth. This is later adapted to also be the gown for EdD (sometime before 1996), MD (before 2006) and today is described as postgraduate doctors (known elsewhere as professional doctorates, or simply those not known as higher doctors), being the degrees of DDS, EdD, EngD, DEdPsy, DSocSci and PhD.<sup>48</sup> An observation, looking at modern photographs of the doctors' gowns, is that the facings of the postgraduate doctorate gowns seem to be wider than the higher doctorate, which should not be the case. A second observation is that scarlet has historically been associated with doctorates, and the fact that there is more scarlet on the higher doctors' gown and that there is less on the postgraduate doctors' gown, is, in my opinion, a way to signify the difference between them – more scarlet equates to a higher level of doctorate. The higher doctorates are currently listed on the University website as DEng, DLitt, DMus, DSc and LLD.<sup>49</sup>

## Hoods

There are two main aspects to the recommendations and research of the 1909 Gown Committee regarding hoods, one being their shape, and the second being their colour. The committee note that there are two main patterns, which are called 'single pattern' known today as 'simple shape' and 'double pattern' known as 'full shape'. Although more expensive, 'the committee recommend the double pattern as lying better and as

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45 Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Colours of hoods.

46 Groves, p. 412.

47 Macqueen and Taylor, p. 211.

48 <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/graduation/documents/University%20of%20Bristol%20gowns.pdf>.

49 <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/graduation/documents/University%20of%20Bristol%20gowns.pdf>.

showing the colour of the lining more naturally.<sup>50</sup> The committee recommend that the University of Bristol had its own version of the 'double pattern' based on the Cambridge full shape but instead of the [plain] liripipe 'it is proposed to have an axe-shaped [liripipe] reproducing the oval we have selected for the end of the sleeve of the masters' gown.'<sup>51</sup> Although this was part of the recommendations, in the final scheme the basic Cambridge full shape was selected, rather than creating a unique version of it.

The committee undertook extensive research with regard to the colours of the hood, some of which is reproduced here under Appendix C. They note the use at other universities, saying 'most hoods are black with coloured linings'<sup>52</sup> although Leeds, Sheffield and the musical degrees of a number of universities use green and blue hoods respectively. A table, also reproduced in Appendix C, states four main faculties (arts, science, medical, engineering) and goes through a list of sixteen universities and states the faculty colour for their hoods as researched in 1909.

From here, the committee identified four methods for designing the hoods of the University of Bristol. The first was to have black hoods with linings chosen from the faculty colours of other universities, being:

Arts – Cerise (from Oxford)  
Science – Gold (from London)  
Medicine – Crimson (from Edinburgh)<sup>53</sup>

It is stated that 'this method was abandoned as it was considered bad taste to copy the colours of other universities.'<sup>54</sup>

The second method was to have black hoods which purposely avoid the colours associated with other universities. This was deemed too difficult since

even neglecting the Scotch and Irish Universities [they must avoid] Wales (by leaving out shot colours), Durham (by leaving out purple), Leeds and Sheffield (by leaving out green). We are left with a table containing every pure colour and many intermediate shades. It is only possible to avoid these by using pretty and delicate colours (such as mauve, heliotrope etc) or by differing very slightly from those already in use in which case only connoisseurs would be able to distinguish our hoods.<sup>55</sup>

This method then suggested the possibility of assigning known faculty colours to another faculty, for example giving gold (science) to arts, or red (medicine) to science, but this too was abandoned.

The third method was to look at having black hoods with a series of red linings. The colour was explained in the report.

We tried to discover some colour which has been associated with Bristol. 'Bristol Red', some tell us, was as well-known as 'Lincoln Gren', but this appears probable that the connection of this phrase with the City of Bristol is mythical, in fact that phrase 'Bristol Red' is a corruption of 'Brazil Red' and was a kind of cloth. The famous little Red Book of Bristol is paralleled by Red Books of many other cities. The colour of the boards of this volume has long ago disappeared but faint traces may be seen

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50 Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Shape of hoods.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.: Colours of hoods.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

inside the cover. Judging by [expert imitations] of it, it is almost a maroon. 'Bristol Nonsuch' (Red Lychius, Red Lighting) is the only coloured flower bearing the city's name, and it also a red. Botanists say it has nothing to do with Bristol.<sup>56</sup>

Looking ahead, it is clear that this paragraph is of importance since the hoods of the final scheme are a 'University Red,' defined as Pantone 187. We do not have any documentation to say how this shade was chosen, but this discussion of reds associated with Bristol is a starting point to try and understand it, even if it rules out more solutions than it presents. The mentioned *Little Red Book of Bristol* is described as 'registers designed with the common intention of preserving certain important documents, as well as displaying them to the best advantage for the purpose of convenient reference.'<sup>57</sup> These, no doubt, were documents of importance to the history of Bristol and were collated and printed in this volume in 1900. This could be the greatest contender for the origins of University Red as it was a verified part of Bristol's history, and was 'almost maroon' instead of bright red, being closer to the eventual 'University Red.' However, this is unverified.

Returning to the 1909 Gown Committee's proposal, the linings to this proposed method of black hoods with red linings were put forward as

Arts: Dark Red.

Science: Scarlet.

Medicine: Crimson.<sup>58</sup>

This method was rejected as doctors of the University would have scarlet hoods and the combination with those linings were not favoured. An unusual suggestion was to have black velvet replace the scarlet cloth, as found in some American universities and also found at Glasgow in the 1860s<sup>59</sup>. The second reason for rejection was that it would clash with other universities, as 'red is the colour for Medicine almost universally and many theological colleges give red hoods to those of their clergy who have no degree.'<sup>60</sup> Finally, having the shell of the hood be of red material instead was rejected as they would be too similar to doctors' hoods, which is probably a reason why a darker shade of red was selected for the final scheme.

The colour blue was a prominent part of the last method. A blue hood with blue lining, after the manner of the University of Leeds (which uses a number of shades of green as both hood shells and linings) was suggested, but rejected as there was not enough scope for expanding for future faculties. Instead, the outer shell of the hood being blue was recommended to the University, and it was proposed that this colour 'become the distinctive colour of the University and it should be prominent in the crest of the University and in its Athletic colours... It must be a pure blue, dark enough to throw the linings into relief, and bright enough to avoid looking dowdy on black.'<sup>61</sup> A problem was identified with doctors' robes as the blue would not be present, so the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> <https://archive.org/details/littleredbookbr02enggoog/page/n12/mode/2up>.

<sup>58</sup> Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Colours of hoods.

<sup>59</sup> Neil Dickson, 'Tradition and Humour: The Academic Dress of the University of Glasgow', *TBS*, 12 (2012), p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Colour of hoods.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

linings and facings of the doctoral robes would bear no relation to faculty but would, instead, be the University blue. The faculty colours proposed were a blue lining for arts, gold for science (as it was a combination associated with the preceding University College), silver grey for engineering, and scarlet for medicine, with the reasoning that some shade of red is almost universal for medicine. From here, the scheme could expand with shades of each of the faculty colours being changed slightly, and with 'dentistry being represented by pink (to be termed pale red), theology by blue (the same as the outside of the hood), commerce by heliotrope, education by violet, agriculture (branching from science) by yellow; white might be used for law, and one of the many shades of green which are still available might be used to mark a future Faculty of Mathematics.<sup>62</sup>

Research regarding the various ways to denote a bachelors' hood can be found in Appendix C. The question of denoting faculty colours in the way suggested (with an edging of the cape) was another reason for suggesting the 'double' hood. This last method was the one the committee preferred and recommend to the University, even though it was more expensive than the others. They wanted their bachelors 'to wear hoods made sufficiently unpretentious to denote the lowest possible degree.'<sup>63</sup> There is no further discussion in the report with regard to masters' and doctors' hoods.

The full recommendation with regard to hoods can be found in Appendix D, and the resemblance to that of the University of Sheffield should be noted, with Sheffield using the colour green for various hood outers. Following the recommendation, there is no further material available in the archives or elsewhere, and the next mention of hoods is in the first printed calendar of 1910. It is clear that the committee's recommendation was not acted upon and that a new scheme of academic hoods, built around the colour University Red, first appeared there:

Graduates shall wear hoods of the Cambridge pattern. The hoods of Bachelors shall be stuff or silk; those of Masters and Doctors of silk.

Hoods shall in all cases be of a registered colour; which shall be called University Red.

Bachelors' hoods shall be lined as far as the visible parts are concerned with a lighter shade of University Red.

Masters' hoods shall be lined throughout with white silk.

Doctors' hoods shall be lined throughout with salmon-coloured silk; the same being used for the facing of the full dress Doctors' gown.<sup>64</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no documentation to show where any aspect of this new scheme came from, and so there are unanswered questions regarding exactly how this new scheme came about.

It is worth noting that there is no mention in the printed calendar as to whether the doctors' hood was worn with the full dress gown, so it is presumed that it was (as is current practice) since there is nothing stated to the contrary. It is fair to say the original recommendation of the 1909 Gown Committee that the hood should not be worn in full dress was rejected. With regard to this, the University Red hood against the scarlet gown is described in *Shaw's Academical Dress of Britain and Ireland* as being 'unhap-

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62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 University Calendar 1910, Regulations for academic and official costume.

py<sup>65</sup> which mirrors Tyndall's previously mentioned comments regarding the salmon facings and the scarlet of the doctoral gown.

*Athena, a Year-Book of the Learned World 1920* lists the various degrees, stating that the bachelors' degrees are 'University Red, lined with lighter University Red silk'<sup>66</sup> This could be because the hood appears to be fully lined and there was no need to make further distinction in the small amount of space available in *Athena*. As time goes on, the lining of the hood decreases, and the hood of the present day is merely bordered 3" of lighter silk, much less than 'as far as the visible parts are concerned.' However, the last available regulations in 2005 still state that the lining should be 'as far as the visible parts are concerned' so this appears not to have been officially instigated by the University.

Further hoods were added as their corresponding degrees appeared.

The PhD is noted in Shaw as sharing the higher doctors' hood in 1920, and it has its own hood by 1925, which is lined throughout with dark violet silk. This is later shared, as with the gowns, by holders of the – DDS, EdD, EngD, DEdPsy and, DSocSci. At this point, the hoods for Bachelors of Medicine and Surgery also appear, being the normal bachelors' hoods but fully lined with the lighter red silk and bound at the edge with white silk for three quarters of an inch.<sup>67</sup> At some point between 2006 and 2022, this hood was also shared with Bachelors of Veterinary Science.<sup>68</sup> Different hoods for Bachelors of Medicine appear by 1925, adding a further distinction to the option of silk gowns presented in the 1910 calendar (previously mentioned). The reasons behind the choice of colours for these bindings and linings are not described or referenced anywhere.

By 1951, Bachelors of Law have a hood identical to the usual bachelors' hood but bound at the edge with violet silk for three quarters of an inch.<sup>69</sup>

From 1952, Bachelors of Music have a hood of University Red and lined throughout, and bound at the edge to three quarters of an inch, with lavender silk.<sup>70</sup> Shaw notes that this degree was not awarded since the 1960's, though the regulations appear in the most recent regulations in 2006.<sup>71</sup>

From this, the question of how much of the current regulations is still actively used and followed may be asked, as referenced earlier in this document but it falls out of the scope of the enquiries made.

In 2015, holders of the Postgraduate Certificate of Education were given a hood of University red, lined white and bordered green.<sup>72</sup> A key point that this document has to make with regard to hoods is summarized in the third revision of *Shaw's Academic Dress of Great Britain and Ireland*, namely that Bristol was the first to 'introduce

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65 Groves, p. 102.

66 Ealand, p. 38.

67 University Calendar 1925, Regulations for academic and official costume.

68 <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/graduation/documents/University%20of%20Bristol%20gowns.pdf>.

69 University Calendar 1951, Regulations for academic and official costume.

70 University Calendar 1952, Regulations for academic and official costume.

71 <https://web.archive.org/web/20071126123449/> and <http://www.bris.ac.uk/cms/go/statutes/regs/regulations/regscostume.html>

72 <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/graduation/before-the-day/gowns>.

a grade-specific' scheme, *i.e.*, one hood for bachelors, one for masters etc'<sup>73</sup> which is a statement of historical interest. Vice-Chancellor Owen and his associates moved away from the 1909 Gown Committee's scheme that included elements already in use at other institutions in favour of a completely new idea. This allowed them to achieve a scheme that was different to others, which was what they set out to do in the first place. Other universities would later use this as a model for their own hoods, and they are too numerous to effectively reference here.

The idea of having one colour for all hoods is also of importance. The University of Sheffield (1905) has this for bachelors and masters, although it has a totally separate shade of red for doctors.<sup>74</sup> The University of Exeter is another institution to have a similar scheme, prescribing 'dove grey' outers for all hoods apart from the higher doctors.<sup>75</sup>

### 'Academic Costume'

The final aspect to consider is the academic costume for university officers, styled this way in the University Calendars as opposed to the more usual 'Official Costume' or 'Official Dress'. The regulations for these only appear in the printed University Calendars and are, for the most part, as would be expected for such robes. The full regulations for 1910 are found in Appendix E. For the most part, they are unchanged down to the present day, with the addition of Pro-Vice-Chancellor's robes in 1911:

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor shall wear a gown of the same shape as the Vice-Chancellor's, but of black corded silk, looped and buttoned in gold similarly to the Vice-Chancellor.<sup>76</sup>

However, the Vice-Chancellor's robes need to be discussed separately. As noted above, the second vice-chancellor, who served until 1921, was Sir Isambard Owen and he was responsible for overseeing the creation of the University's academic dress, incorporating his own ideas. As such, he designed the most flamboyant of the officers' robes for himself, before later redesigning it. His original robe, described in 1910, was completely out of keeping with the other robes, and is described as,

The Vice-Chancellor shall wear, over a convocation robe of Durham pattern in University Red silk, a full-sleeved gown of black-figured satin, with the sleeves lined in University Red, parted in the front and looped with three loops of gold braid on each side; the loop and button at the back of the gown to be also in gold. The Vice-Chancellor's hood shall be lined in University Red silk.<sup>77</sup>

The fact that the Vice-Chancellor had a hood as part of his robes is very unusual! The robe was re-designed in 1911:

The Vice-Chancellor shall wear a sleeved cassock of University Red with ermine collar and cuffs, and over the cassock a full sleeved gown of black figured satin, with the sleeves lined in University Red, parted in from and looped with two loops of gold braid on each side. The Vice-Chancellor's hood shall be of the same material as the gown, lined with University Red silk and corded in gold.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Groves, p. 103.

<sup>74</sup> [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.553838!/file/academic\\_dress.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.553838!/file/academic_dress.pdf).

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/academicdress/>.

<sup>76</sup> University Calendar 1911, Regulations for academic and official costume.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 1910.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 1911. See Owen's portrait in this dress: <<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/sir-isambard-owen-vice-chancellor-19091921-185172>>.

After Owen's departure, Thomas Loveday became the Vice-Chancellor and the regulation dispensed with the hood and cassock, leaving the black gown, which was now more in keeping with the other officers.<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusion

Although the recommendations from the 1909 Gown Committee were not fully approved and implemented, I have included them at length in this document as it is important not only to show the process of designing a scheme, but also references robes of other universities as they were at the time of writing. I believe that the main document referenced has not been used in original research for some time, as I have found no reference to it and the University's archivist did not know of its contents. As documents regarding academic dress do not exist after the 1909 report before the initial publication of the approved scheme in the 1910 calendar, I have attempted to show my working for any theories I have formed from the information available, but there are obvious gaps that may never be filled. The other important findings are already noted, namely the introduction of a grade-specific scheme of hoods, and the use of one colour for all hood outers, regardless of course and faculty.

## Acknowledgments

My thanks must go to Karen Anderson, archivist at the University of Bristol, for her invaluable help in the preparation of various sources and documents, and for her hospitality when visiting the archives. Without her help it would not have been possible to write this article. I am also grateful to Dr John Horton and Dr Jonathan Cooper, and to the anonymous examiners for their comments on the latter stages of this report.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 1925.

## Appendix A. Undergraduate gowns

The 1909 Gown Committee states:

Gowns are not provided by Liverpool, Leeds or Edinburgh.

They are provided by Cambridge, Oxford, Dublin, London, Durham, Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Wales, St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen.

They are regularly worn within the precincts of the University at Cambridge, Oxford, Dublin, Durham and Newcastle, North and South Wales College, St Andrews.

They are worn by some students at King's College, London, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and St. Andrews.

They 'may' be worn at Sheffield.

In other universities, they are worn on occasions of ceremony only.

Undergraduate gowns are short (being above the knee) with pointed, square, or round sleeves. In the Scotch Universities they are of scarlet cloth with a velvet tippet.<sup>80</sup>

The 1962 University of Bristol Calendar states:

Rules governing the wearing of Academic Dress by Undergraduate Members of the University.

Full Academic Dress shall consist of a black stuff gown of the approved pattern, worn with a dark suit and black shoes, for men, or a dark skirt with a white blouse and black shoes, for women; women may also wear a dark coat and may wear a soft square cap of black cloth.

1. Full Academic Dress shall be worn on ceremonial occasions.
2. A black stuff gown of the approved pattern shall be worn by students:
  - (I) At lectures, except at those in subjects where laboratory work is associated.
  - (II) In Halls of Residence, as required by the regulations of the Hall.
3. Students shall also wear a black stuff gown, if instructed to do so, when called for interview by an officer of the University and at oral examination.

Graduate students are expected to conform to the above rules governing the undergraduate members of the University as far as they are applicable.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Undergraduate Gowns..

<sup>81</sup> University Calendar 1962, Regulations for academic and official costume.



## Appendix B. Graduate gowns

The 1909 Gown Committee states:

At other universities:—

London B.A. and B.Sc., Cambridge B.A. with looped sleeve

London M.A. and D.Sc., Cambridge M.A. with corner of sleeve rounded off

London M.B. and M.D., Cambridge LL.D with corner of sleeve rounded off

Manchester, Bachelor (except M.B.), Cambridge B.A.

Manchester, M.B., Master & Doctor, Cambridge M.A.

Liverpool, All Cambridge M.A. with facings of faculty colours for occasions of ceremony.

Sheffield, Bachelor: Oxford B.A.

Master, Oxford M.A.

Doctor, Oxford D.D. (modified)

Birmingham, Bachelor, Special with open sleeve.

Master, Cambridge M.A. modified by a slit in the sleeve.

Doctor, Masters' edged with braid.

Glasgow and McGill, Cambridge Gowns.

St. Andrews, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Special gowns.

Scarlet Robes are worn by Doctors at all Universities except St. Andrews where the robes are completely of faculty colour and Manchester where there is no distinction between ordinary and full dress.

The Cambridge LL.D. is used by London, Liverpool, Birmingham, Glasgow, McGill.

The Oxford D.D. is used by Sheffield.

These robes cost from 4½ guineas.

Ede, Son and Ravenscroft are noted as the Official Robemakers to the universities of London, Durham, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Wales etc.<sup>82</sup>

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82 Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Graduate Gowns.

## Appendix C. Hoods

The 1909 Gown Committee states the following with regard to other universities:

Most hoods are black with coloured linings.

At Leeds they are green with green linings (different stuffs).

At Sheffield they are green with different colour linings.

The hoods for the rare musical degrees of Wales, St. Andrews, and the Royal University of Ireland, are blue but of very different shades, and the B.C.L. of Oxford is blue lined with rabbit skin.

The colours of the linings distinguished the faculties or the degrees. A list of the four faculties which principally concern is given.<sup>83</sup>

University	Arts	Science	Medical	Engineering
Cambridge	White		Red	
Oxford	Cerise			
Dublin	Blue			
London	Russet-brown	Gold	Violet	
Durham	Purple	Purple (scarlet band)	Scarlet (purple lining)	
Manchester	Pale blue	Pale red	Red	Terra cotta
Liverpool	Apple blossom	Slate blue	Lavender (watered silk)	Orange
Sheffield	Crushed strawberry	Apricot	Red	Purple
Birmingham	Electric blue	Silver grey	Cardinal	
Wales	Blue shot with green	Bronze		
R. Univ of Ireland	Blue	Gold	Scarlet	Green
St. Andrews	Red	Amaranth	Crimson	
Glasgow	Red Purple	Gold	Scarlet	
Aberdeen	White	Green	Crimson	
Edinburgh	White	Green	Crimson	
McGill	Pale blue	Yellow	Dark blue	

The 1909 Gown Committee states the following with regard to denoting a Bachelors' hood:

Bachelors' hoods are considered to be so by one of two ways. Either:

(1) By the presence of fur [...] adopted by Cambridge, Oxford, Dublin, Durham, Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, Edinburgh.

(2) By edging the hood instead of fully lining it with coloured silk [... as] at London, Birmingham, Wales and Glasgow. [...]

In case (1) the fur may be used in different ways:

(1) As an edging to a hood lined with proper silk (Liverpool, Edinburgh).

(2) As a narrow strip inside an edging of proper silk (Manchester).

(3) As a rabbit skin (Cambridge, Oxford, Dublin, Durham and Sheffield). Where faculty colours have to be introduced they are put as an edging to the back part of the double hood.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Hoods.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix D. Proposed scheme

The proposed scheme as recommended by the 1909 Gown Committee, as they wanted it to appear in the University Calendar.

The 1909 Gown Committee states:

There is no academic costume for Undergraduates.

GOWNS: Bachelor: Cambridge B.A. gown.  
Master: Oxford M.A. gown with ribbons added, and with the end of the sleeves cut in a curve distinctive of this University.  
Doctor: (Ordinary) Same as Master.  
(Full Dress) Scarlet Gown having facings, and linings of the reversed sleeves;  
(and stole) covered with blue corded silk of an approved shade distinctive of this University.

HOODS: All of the Double (or Cambridge) pattern, with the tail of the hood reproducing the curve of the sleeve of the Master's gown.  
Bachelor: Blue cloth, lined with rabbit skin, and having the back edged with satin (or silk) of faculty colour.  
Master: Blue corded silk (fully) lined with satin (or silk) of faculty colour.  
Doctor: (Ordinary) Scarlet cloth, fully lined with blue corded silk.  
(Full Dress) No hood is worn.

FACULTY COLOURS: Arts: Pale Blue.  
Science: Old Gold.  
Engineering: Silver Grey.  
Medicine: Scarlet.  
Dentistry: Pale Red (or Lavender).

CAPS: Ordinary black trenchers are worn except by Doctors in full dress when they are replaced by caps of blue velvet (with a gold cord).<sup>85</sup>

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85 Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, Summary of Recommendations.

## Appendix E. Academic costume

The 1910 University of Bristol Calendar states:

1. The Chancellor's robe shall be of black-figured satin of the pattern and with the gold ornaments customary in Chancellor's robes.

2. A Pro-Chancellor shall wear a black silk gown of the same pattern as the undress Doctors' gown, but with the ornaments above the sleeve and the loop and button at the back worked in gold instead of black silk.

3. The Treasurer shall wear a similar gown with a further distinction in gold on the upper part of the facing.

4. The Vice-Chancellor shall wear, over a convocation robe of Durham pattern in University Red silk, a full-sleeved gown of black-figured satin, with the sleeves lined in University Red, parted in the front and looped with three loops of gold braid on each side; the loop and button at the back of the gown to be also in gold. The Vice-Chancellor's hood shall be lined in University Red silk.

5. The Registrar shall wear a gown of black corded silk of the pattern of the Masters' gown, but braided on the facings and over the armholes.

The above officers shall wear academic caps of the customary 'mortar-board' pattern covered with black velvet; the Chancellor's cap being distinguished, according to custom, by a gold tassel and gold braid binding, and the Vice-Chancellor's by gold braid binding<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> University Calendar 1925, Regulations for academic and official costume.

## Appendix F. Images from the University website



**Fig. 1. All Bachelors apart from Bachelors of Music, Law, Dental Surgery, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.**



**Fig. 2. Bachelor of Law.**



**Fig. 3. Bachelors of Dental Surgery, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.**



**Fig. 4. All Masters' degrees.**



**Fig. 5. Junior or 'postgraduate' doctorates.**



**Fig. 6. Higher doctorates.**



Images retrieved 11 July 2022.

## Appendix G. Masters' gown sleeve designs

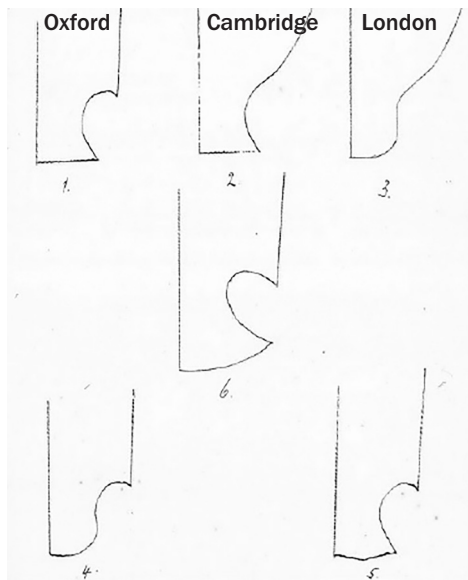


Fig. 7. Drawings 4, 5 and 6 are provisional schemes for the Bristol MA Gown. Drawing 6 is the one preferred.

The paragraphs in the report that references these drawings read:

The standard gown is the Master. The University to which a Master belongs should be known by the spare of the gown quite apart from its hood. The distinguishing member of the gown is the sleeve which hangs down the side after the manner of the fourteenth century. The Edinburgh sleeve is plain. The Oxford sleeve hangs straight down in a primitive fashion and has part of an upright oval cut out of one side at the bottom ([drawing] 1) The Cambridge sleeve slopes all the way down one side and has a similar oval but the top corner is rounded off ([drawing] 2). Birmingham modifies this sleeve by introducing a slit, and London has rounded off the remaining corner of the oval ([drawing] 3). The Dublin sleeve is very narrow and delicate but hangs badly.

The Committee preferred the Oxford sleeve and many modifications of it were suggested. Some of these are:—

1. Round off the bottom of the oval, thus treating the Oxford sleeve as London has treated the Cambridge one – it would be difficult to say which gives the less beautiful result (fig. 4)

2. Introduce a peak to correspond with the peak of the cap or simply curve the bottom of the sleeve. These alterations are all too slight, as these curves differ considerably according to the tailor (fig. 5)

3. Close the oval more; to make its axis slope; make the bottom slope towards the oval. This bottom might be plain or curved (Fig. 6).

The committee, and also Messrs Ede, Son and Ravenscroft, recommended the last sleeve with the curved bottom which presents an axe-shaped appearance. It is quite distinctive, even the most perverse tailor could not shape it so as to be confused with the Oxford sleeve.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Bristol University Archives, *Men Lecturers' Committee Second Report, April-June 1909, Section 4. Gowns Committee, 3. Graduate Gowns.*

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