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The Royal College of Music: Its History, Degrees, and Diplomas

By Douglas MacMillan

The Royal College of Music was established by Royal Charter in 1883, which empowered it to confer the degrees of Bachelor, Master, and Doctor in [*sic*] Music, an authority remaining unexercised until the presentation of an honorary doctorate to Her Majesty Queen Mary in 1933. There is no convincing trace of academic dress being worn by members of the College until after the Second World War, but with the increasing number of degrees available (both by examination and *honoris causa*) gowns and hoods were designed: the present article will outline the evolution of the academic dress of the RCM in relation to the changes in curriculum and examination practice of the College's degrees and diplomas.

A significant watershed in academic awards—and consequently in academic dress—occurred in the 1990s when the College invoked its authority to confer by virtue of its charter all of the degrees for which both undergraduates and postgraduates could study: previously, most bachelors' (and some masters') degrees were examined by the University of London. With the proliferation not only of bachelor's degrees resulting from the focus of conservatoires moving from diplomas to first degrees but also of an increasing variety of postgraduate qualifications, new robes were designed: a study of academic dress *in vacuo* inevitably places the robes as being of academic interest per se, whereas the changes in the gowns and hoods over the College's existence reflects changes in the awards, the changes in educational philosophy in conservatoires, and the occasions on which academic dress is worn.

A salient history

Growing out of the failed National Training School for Music, the RCM set out to be a centre of excellence in music education and to award with academic degrees and certificates of proficiency those who met its exacting standards and to fit its students for careers in the music profession as teachers or performers. Its most significant rival was the Royal Academy of Music, established in 1822.[1] Despite the privileges granted in the Royal Charter, the RCM did not award any degrees until the conferment of an honorary doctorate upon Her Majesty Queen Mary (Patron of the College) on the fiftieth anniversary of the charter in 1933. Academic dress was not worn; the Queen was presented with a jewel to mark the occasion.[2] The degree of DMusRCM was conferred only upon royalty until 1982, remaining *honoris causa* but thereafter open to

1 Other rival institutions included Trinity College London (1875) and the Guildhall School of Music (1880).

2 *The Royal College of Music Magazine*, 29.3 (1933), p. 100.

commoners until offered by examination in the 1990s with the first awards being made in 2003.[3]

The financial and political affairs of the College and its relations with similar institutions (particularly the RAM, Trinity College, London, and the University of London) will not be discussed here save for noting the institution of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) in 1889 and the usage by the RCM of University of London degrees prior to 1995.[4]

The Associated Board was instituted as a joint venture between the RCM and the RAM to provide regional examinations in theoretical and practical music with the dual aims of systematizing music tuition across the country and preparing students for entry to conservatoires. The Graduate of the Royal Schools of Music diploma (GRSM) was established in 1931 to confer pass-degree graduate status on members of the teaching profession, backed on the RCM's charter and its authority (unlike the RAM) to confer degrees. The College ran appropriate courses of study until the diploma was phased out in the 1990s, the final awards of the GRSM taking place in 1995. The Associated Board discontinued the DipABRSM (level 4) in 2023, replacing it with the ARSM; the Board continues to offer the recently modified graduate level diploma of Licentiate of the RSM and the master's level diploma of Fellow of the RSM.[5]

Degrees, diplomas, and dress

Amendments to the charter in 2009 authorized the College 'to award and revoke degrees and other distinctions (including without limitation, diplomas, certificates, fellowships, honorary degrees, honorary fellowships, memberships and associateships) in its own name and/or jointly with other education institutions'. From its earliest days the College awarded Certificates of Proficiency and, from 1886 to 2000, the diploma of Associate of the Royal College of Music (ARCM) and later, several diplomas including the Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip(RCM)), again with several variants and also the lower qualification of DipRCM. In 2024, the RCM could confer a bachelor's degree, six master's degrees, two doctorates, and three higher (postgraduate) diplomas in addition to honorary awards, the holders of which (obtained by examination or *honoris causa*) are entitled to wear academic dress.

To form a background to the gowns and hoods pertaining to the RCM, a brief history of each degree will be given in order that the academic attire is contextualized within the life of the College. The current degrees and diplomas of the RCM and their academic dress are based substantially on the changes in the award structure wrought in the 1990s and to further changes shortly after the millennium. Final paragraphs will note older robes which have been re-allocated to other qualifications and discuss those of diplomas which are no longer offered.

3 Ibid., 78.1 (1982), p. 115.

4 See David C. H. Wright, *The Royal College of Music and its Contexts: An Artistic and Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Giles William Edward Brightwell, '"One Equal Music": The Royal College of Music, its Inception and the Legacy of Sir George Grove, 1883–1895' (PhD thesis, University of Durham, 2007).

5 Online at <www.abrsm.org> [retrieved 11 May 2024].

Literature on RCM academic dress

Two definitive texts on academic dress refer to the attire of graduates and diplomates of the RCM. *Shaw's Academical Dress of Great Britain and Ireland* gives a brief history of the College and its awards, including revisions made in the year 2000.[6] The volume describes the dress of Bachelors, Masters, and Doctors of Music and the diploma of PGDipRCM. *Shaw's Academical Dress* is essentially concerned with the robes prescribed for the holders of degrees and excludes most postgraduate diplomas although the dress for PGDipRCM is described. The robes associated with these awards are, however, listed in Nicholas Groves and John Kersey's 2002 publication, *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges and Societies of Musicians in the United Kingdom*.[7] Groves and Kersey note that in 1970 the only qualifications to be granted robes were DMusRCM *honoris causa*, MMusRCM, and FRCM. Writing in 2002, the authors describe the HonRCM and FRCM robes in addition to the standard bachelor's, master's, and doctoral attire.[8] It does appear, however, that the ARCM diploma had acquired robes by the 1970s. There are minor variations between the descriptions of the robes given in *Shaw's Academical Dress* and *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges*, but it should be noted that only Shaw mentions headgear (illustrated in Northam's literature but in practice seldom worn at the RCM) and the authors do not refer to the high officers' robes. The RCM, as a degree-awarding body, is not referenced in Volume II (*Non-degree-awarding Bodies*) of *Shaw's Academical Dress* although the attire appropriate to the GRSM as a pass degree level qualification awarded by the ABRSM is included.[9]

There appear to be no other specific references to the academic dress of the RCM in its literature or in the bibliography of the Burgon Society, but Haycraft (1972) outlines the robes of the ARCM, FRCM, and MMus as awarded at that date.[10]

Bachelor of Music (BMusRCM)

Although the Charter authorized the RCM to award this degree, from the 1960s the College introduced a course leading to the BMus degree of the University of London in conjunction with King's College London, and also with the University of Durham.[11] In passing, it should be noted that the Faculty of Music at King's College in the University of London was established in 1964.[12] RCM students wore on conferment of the degree the light blue gown and hood of the University of London (see below). The bachelor's

6 Nicholas Groves (ed.), 3rd edn (London: Burgon Society, 2011), Vol. I: *Universities and Other Degree-Awarding Bodies*, pp. 347–48 (hereafter *Shaw* 3.I).

7 (London: Burgon Society, 2002), pp. 34–35 (hereafter *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges*).

8 Ibid., p. 35.

9 Nicholas Groves (ed.), *Shaw's Academical Dress of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3rd edn, (London: Burgon Society, 2014), Vol. II: *Non-degree-awarding Bodies*, p. 43 (hereafter *Shaw* 3.II.).

10 Frank W. Haycraft, *The Degrees and Hoods of the World's Universities and Colleges*, 5th edn, revised and enlarged (Lewes: printed privately by Baxter, 1972), p. 108.

11 Wright, p. 269; David Harpham, *Courses, Degrees, and Diplomas Offered by the Royal College of Music* (The Registry, RCM, 2023), p. 2.

12 Wright, p. 270.

degree of the RCM was not awarded until 1995.[13] Coinciding with the increasing emphasis on undergraduate academic (in additional to vocational) study in music, the standard of the new BMus exceeded that of the original ARCM and became the primary exit qualification.

While the BMusRCM course was being developed during the early 1990s, there was debate as to whether holders of the degree should wear a black gown or a 'College blue' gown of the London pattern; the black gown eventually became standard. A letter from the vice-director of the College to the robemakers William Northam on 14 August 1992 discusses black versus blue gowns, a pencilled note in the margin suggesting that black would be more practical and cheaper to manufacture and hire.[14] Unsurprisingly, the black gown was preferred and remains in current use.[15]

The academic dress for the BMusRCM degree was designed by John Birch and consists of a black stuff gown of the basic pattern [b1].[16] The hood is of royal blue silk in the Durham shape [f7], bound on all edges with 1" fur, with a 1" band of old gold laid next to the fur.

Master of Music (MMusRCM—several variants)

The MMus was instituted in the early 1940s and the degree has a somewhat complex history, despite being the first to be awarded by examination under the College's charter.[17] In 1949 the RCM introduced a master's degree modelled on university degrees. There were few applicants: the degree fell into disuse but was restored (again as a degree in theoretical music and composition) in 1961 with further alterations until 1973.[18] A further MMus in composition (validated by the University of London) was instituted in 1977. Essentially a study in theoretical and research aspects of music, the MMus continued to be examined by the University until 1995 although an MMusRCM in performance (examined by the RCM) dates from 1987. Eventually the dichotomy in examination boards was resolved in 1995 with both performance and theoretical master's degrees being examined internally. In 2011 all postgraduate diplomas (with the exception of the Artist Diplomas, level 8) became master's level 7 degrees. [19]

It is interesting to contextualize the chequered history of the MMusRCM in the light of academic versus vocational/performance training in conservatoires. Essentially, conservatoires emphasize the latter whereas university departments inevitably focus on academia: it is not unreasonable to posit that part of the difficulty with the

13 Guy Warrack, *The Royal College of Music: The First Eighty-five Years* (Typescript: RCM Library 780.7942), p. 460.

14 Chris Bottley of William Northam, email to MacMillan, 17 January 2024, enclosing copy of the letter dated 14 August 1992.

15 Shaw notes that holders of the BMusRCM may, in full dress, wear a bachelor's gown [b1] in royal blue silk (p. 347). The comment 'full dress' is of interest, in that the RCM does not have undress academic robes.

16 *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges*, p. 34; the terminology (b1, m2, etc.) is based on Nicholas Groves' work.

17 Ibid.

18 During the early 1960s several universities (notably King's College London) introduced faculties of music, their existence considerably influencing academic teaching in conservatoires.

19 Harpham, p. 11.



Burgon Society Archive, WBS-216(1)

Fig. 1. BMusRCM hood.



Douglas MacMillan

Fig. 2. DMusRCM and PhDRCM hood.

theoretical MMus at the RCM was that it was academic rather than performance related and examined outside the College with its predominant emphasis on performance. With the increasing academic focus and widespread adoption of music degrees in conservatoires and advances in masters' programmes in 1990s the previous doubts have faded into oblivion and the floodgates were opened for a profusion of MMus graduates.[20] In consequence, new gowns and hoods had to be devised and in 2000, new robes designed by Birch were introduced, and these continue to be worn by all Masters of Music, including MMus(Perf), MMus(Comp), MPerf, MComp, MSc and MEd.[21]

The prescribed gown is now in black stuff of the Cambridge MA pattern [m2]. The hood is of cream brocade in the Burgon shape [s2] lined and bound with old gold, the neckband also bound old gold.

Doctor of Music (DMusRCM) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhDRCM)

The DMus was the first RCM degree to be awarded and was offered *honoris causa* to Queen Mary 1933. As has been noted, the doctorate was awarded as an honorary degree exclusively to members of the royal family until 1982. Nevertheless, the DMus

20 At present, the College examines and confers the degree of Master of Music in Performance (MMus(Perf)) and in Composition (MMus(Comp)). Other master's degrees currently available are Master of Performance (MPerf), Master of Composition (MComp), Master of Performance Science (MSc) and Master of Education (MMusEd).

21 Bottley, email to MacMillan 11 July 2024, enclosing a copy of a letter dated 14 September 1998 from the then Registrar to Northam's (copied to John Birch), discussing these robes.

remained an honorary degree (albeit open to commoners!) until the mid-1990s when it became available by examination, with the first graduations being held in 2003. From 2011 the College has also awarded the degree of PhD.

The academic dress (gown, hood, and hat, designed around 1998 by Birch) instituted for this degree in the year 2000 exhibits slight differences as to whether the degree is awarded by examination or offered *honoris causa*. The same robes are worn by Doctors of Philosophy. Doctors of the RCM wear a cream brocade gown of the Cambridge pattern [d1], the sleeves lined and the facings covered royal blue silk with a blue cord and button on the sleeve. The hood is of cream brocade of the Cambridge pattern [f1], lined, and the neckband bound in royal blue silk. In full dress, a black velvet bonnet with gold cords and tassels may be worn. Should the degree be awarded *honoris causa*, the sleeves of the gown bear a gold cord and button, and the neckband of the hood is bound gold silk.



Chris Bottley (Northam)

Fig. 3. HonRCM gown and hood.

The honorary awards of the RCM

The first Fellows of the College (FRCM) were nominated *honoris causa* in 1921, the same year the ARCM distinction was awarded to professors and former students and the HonRCM (Honorary Membership of the RCM) was being bestowed on teaching staff who were not graduates of the College.[22] At present, Honorary Membership of the RCM is awarded to members of the professional or administrative staffs and to others who have rendered valuable service to the College and the Fellowship is conferred upon distinguished persons for services to music or to the College.[23] The College has conferred, and continues to confer, the degree of Doctor of Music *honoris causa* since its first presentation in 1933.

The HonRCM gown is comparable with the MMus, namely a black Cambridge MA pattern [m2] but with blue strings. The hood, designed by Birch in 1992 to replace the 1970 attire (described below under 'Defunct academic dress'), is of the Burgon shape [s2] in royal blue, fully lined gold, the cape and cowl edged gold.[24]

The FRCM gown is also of the Cambridge MA pattern in black [m2], but with facings of royal blue, edged with gold and with and a royal blue cord and gold button on the yoke. The hood is royal blue, lined gold in the full Cambridge shape [f1].

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22 Warrack, p. 183: Fellows were appointed by the president, HonRCM candidates by the Council. At present, both potential HonRCM and FRCM candidates are selected by Council, but the FRCMs require additional presidential approval (visit by MacMillan to RCM Secretariat, 22 May 2024).

23 *Annual Review*, The Royal College of Music, 1995.

24 *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges*, p. 35; Bottley, email to MacMillan, 17 Jan. 2024, enclosing copy of correspondence between the vice-director and Dr Birch, dated 24 August 1992.

The high officers of the Royal College of Music

The idea of a robe for the director was mooted in the early 1980s. Correspondence between John Birch and Dr George Shaw suggested that such a proposal should be left in the hands of the robemakers.[25]

Currently, the director wears a robe of the Oxford doctor's pattern [d2] in royal blue silk with facings and sleeves of gold; there is no hood but a bonnet is prescribed.[26] This robe may also be worn by the deputy director or chairman. A further robe of the Oxford pattern may be worn by the president or the chairman. It is of a lighter blue brocade, again with facings and sleeves of gold but the facings and top of the sleeves are edged with gold. This attire is not described in either *Shaw's Academical Dress* or *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges* and (controversially) is worn with or without a hood. On the occasion of the president's visit in 2019 King Charles (then Prince of Wales) wore a hood of a matching blue brocade, lined old gold and is most probably the hood of the pre-2000 DMus. It is described as being of the Cambridge full shape [f1] in *Shaw's Academical Dress*, Volume I, but close examination reveals that it has a rounded—rather than a square—cape, akin to the Durham [f4] hood. It seems reasonable to assume that the former Prince of Wales chose to wear the hood of his honorary doctorate with his presidential gown!

Defunct academic dress of the degrees and diplomas

Within the past fifty years, a number of diplomas has been discontinued but, although no longer awarded, the holders of these qualifications will continue to wear their appropriate robes as described below. Over the years, changes have been instituted in the MMus, DMus, FRCM, and ARCM not only in the requirements for the awards, but also in the prescribed academic dress. In 1970 (before the proliferation and modification of the College's degrees in the final decade of the twentieth century) only the MMus, DMus, and FRCM were assigned academic dress.[27] However, evidence exists that the gown and hood of the now defunct ARCM diploma were in use from the 1970s.[28]

Prior to the year 2000, holders of the MMus degree wore a black gown of the Cambridge pattern [m2] but without strings: the hood was of black silk of the Cambridge full shape [f1], lined royal blue, the cowl bound 1" old gold. Doctors of Music wore a robe of the Oxford pattern [d2] in royal blue brocade, with facings and sleeves covered old gold silk. The hood was of the Cambridge pattern [f1], lined gold silk.[29] FRCMs wore a black gown of the Oxford BA pattern [b8]: the hood was in the full shape, of black silk, fully lined with royal blue silk taffeta the cowl edged 1" old gold silk taffeta.[30]

25 Letter from Birch to George Shaw, 3 November 1981, Burgon archive SHAW/1/1/47: copied in an email from Chris Williams to MacMillan, 9 March 2024.

26 *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges*, p. 35; these authors incorrectly describe this robe as being of the Cambridge pattern [d1].

27 *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges,* p. 35. It should be noted that the MMus (for which there were few entrants) was the only one of the three taken by examination. The Hon DMus and FRCM were granted *honoris causa*.

28 Haycraft (1972), p. 108.

29 This hood is further discussed in the paragraphs on the academic dress of the high officers.

30 Haycraft (1972), p. 108.

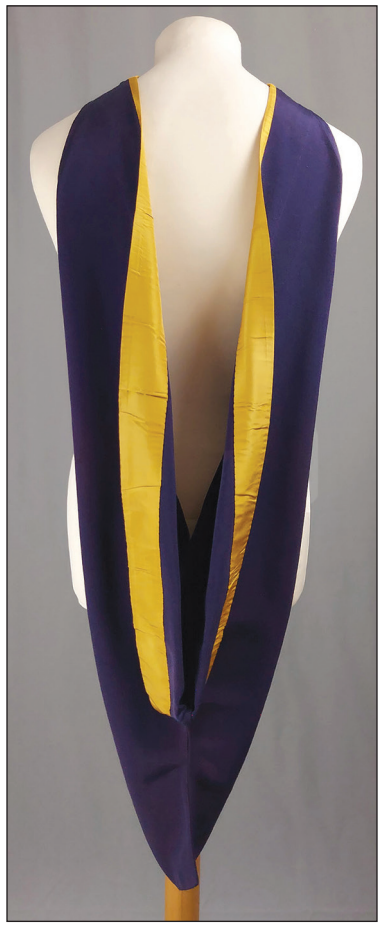

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Fig. 4. ARCM hood.

The diplomas of the RCM

With the general trend for conservatoires to offer degrees rather than a panoply of diplomas, many undergraduate and graduate-level diplomas (notably the ARCM and, at the RAM, the LRAM as a mainstream course) have been consigned to history. Diplomates holding the postgraduate Artist Diplomas of the RCM (instituted in 2002) in either Opera, Performance, or Composition wear the academic dress formerly assigned to the PGDipRCM, described below under Defunct academic dress.

ARCM

Associateship of the RCM was available by examination to internal and external students from 1886 to 2000, with variants for performers or teachers. At present it is not certain as to the date from which the ARCM acquired academic dress: a letter from the Registrar of the College to William Northam (then at 9 Henrietta Street, London) dated 13 November 1915 refutes any suggestion that there was a hood associated with the diploma at this time.[31] Similarly, Frank Haycraft notes that in 1923 there was no hood prescribed for the ARCM or for other diplomas of the College.[32] However, firm evidence exists of an ARCM hood in 1972 of blue silk taffeta, part lined and edged 1" old gold in the simple shape, which appears identical to the current hood.[33]

The academic dress worn by ARCMs includes a black stuff bachelor's gown [b1] with a royal blue silk hood of the Oxford simple shape [s1], the cowl edge bordered inside 3" old gold.

DipRCMPerf / PGDipRCM

In 1978 a four-year performer's course was introduced, leading to the award of the postgraduate diploma of DipRCMPerf, later to be designated as PGDipRCM. The final graduations took place in 1995.

Diplomates wore a black stuff gown [b1]; however, there is a discrepancy in the description of the hood. Shaw describes a royal blue hood of the Oxford simple shape [s1], bound on all edges 2" old gold, while Groves and Kersey relate a 'royal blue, bound 2" gold' of the full Cambridge pattern [f1], whereas the robemaker's im-

31 Bottley, email to MacMillan, 17 Jan. 2024, enclosing a copy of this correspondence.

32 Frank W. Haycraft, *The Degrees and Hoods of the World's Universities and Colleges,* 1st edn (Ware, Herts.: Jennings & Bewley, 1923), p. 30.

33 Ibid.

ages of 2015 illustrate a royal blue hood, bound on all edges with 2" old gold (below) as designed by Birch.[34] As the diploma is no longer awarded, the controversy is only of academic interest: essentially it is a royal blue hood with old gold borders. The robes, however, have been reassigned to holders of the postgraduate Artist Diplomas which were instituted in 2002.

Those holding the ARCM(PG) [postgraduate] diploma wore the same gown with an [f1] type hood of royal blue bordered with 3" old gold, the robes for this diploma being designed by Birch around 1993.[35] The qualification ultimately became the PGDipRCM.

The contribution of John Birch

Dr John Birch (1929–2012), a former student of the RCM and subsequently Professor of Organ (1959–97), designed in the 1990s the majority of the academic robes in current use at the College. Birch's substantial interest in visual art as well as in music no doubt contributed to the elegance of the hoods seen at the College's annual Graduation Day.

To the purist, however, there are features of Birch's designs which could be considered inconsistent or, indeed, controversial: these matters represent academic observations rather than suggestions that robes should be redesigned! Birch made use of various combinations of three College colours of royal blue, old gold, and cream brocade, although not all are present in each hood; in the BMus hood, cream brocade is replaced by fur. It is curious that there are combinations of Cambridge-style gowns [m2] with Oxford/Burgon hoods [s2], as in the MMus and HonRCM attire: in contrast, the higher award of FRCM wears Cambridge-style gown and hood. The (now outdated) PGDipRCM and the current Artist Diploma have the reverse combination of an Oxford gown with a Cambridge hood. Perhaps the outstanding anomaly is the Durham-style hood for the BMus, worn over a basic bachelor (or Oxford) pattern gown.

Academic dress of the University of London BMus, MMus, and the GRSM

The University of London

I have already noted that from the early 1960s to 1995 students at the RCM sat for the BMus and MMus (theoretical) degrees of the University of London, and it is seemly to include notes on the appropriate academic dress of these awards during the late twentieth century.[36] These matters (and the complex history of the academic dress of the music degrees of London) are discussed in Nicholas Groves' article in *Transactions of the Burgon Society* of 2022.[37] A point to be noted relating to the academic dress of the University of London is the addition of a white silk lining to the hood for bachelors.

Music degrees were conceived in the early 1860s but first examined in 1877. Their academic dress has passed through several permutations. Regulations imposed in 1910 gave BMus holders the right to wear 'A light blue silk or black stuff gown of the

34 *Shaw* 3.I, p. 347; *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges*, p. 35.

35 Bottley email to MacMillan, 17 January 2024, enclosing a copy of correspondence between Northam's and Dr Birch agreeing the design, dated 14 May 1993.

36 It should be recalled that the MMus in music theory was examined by the University of London; the MMus in performance was examined by the RCM.

37 Nicholas Groves, 'The Robes for the Degrees in Music of the University of London', pp. 24–33.

same shape as for the Doctor of Music', itself the same shape as the Doctor of Medicine gown. The MMus degree holders were granted the black gown common to the BMus and DMus and, if members of Convocation, the light blue BMus gown.[38]

By the 1960s (the years when RCM students began to read for London degrees) there were two versions of the BMus hood, the first for non-Convocation members. This was a standard bachelor's hood (London shape, with rounded cape edges [f3]) but in light blue silk with a 3" border of the faculty colour, namely white watered silk). A Convocation version of this hood was lined with plain white silk and a border of the white watered silk faculty colour— as Nicholas Groves observed, perhaps not the most imaginative design in view of the lack of contrast between the two white silks.[39]

To complete the saga of the London BMus post-Convocation academic dress (although not strictly relevant to the RCM), it should be observed that the present-day hood is of light blue silk, lined white silk, bordered inside 3" and bound ¼" on the cowl edge with faculty colour, white watered silk. The gown is a black flap-collar gown [modified d4].

The hood for the MMus is of mid-blue silk [f3], lined and bound with white watered silk and bound on all edges with ¼" with the faculty colour of white. In former years, members of Convocation also had an additional edging of 1½" of plain white silk.[40]

Involvement of the RCM with University of London degrees ceased in 1995, when the College, under the terms of its Royal Charter, began to award its own BMus and MMus degrees. The DMusRCM remained *honoris causa* until the 1990s and consequently there was never involvement with this degree on the part of the University of London.

The GRSM

The exact date at which robes for the GRSM were introduced is uncertain but lies between 1948 and 1970. After a history of over sixty years, the final students for this diploma were examined in 1995. The gown is in the form of the basic black bachelor's gown [b1]; the hood is of the Cambridge full shape [f1] in scarlet stuff, bordered inside the cowl with 3" royal blue silk, combining the 'signature colours' of the RAM and RCM.[41] The academic attire for the ABRSM diplomas of ARSM, LRSM, and FRSM is summarized in *Academical Dress of the Music Colleges* (pp. 2, 9).

The academic dress of the Royal College of Music in context

The development of the academic dress of the RCM

It is of interest to make a comparative study of the changes to the RCM academic dress between 1970 and the latter years of the 1990s, changes occasioned largely by the RCM's awarding only its own degrees and diplomas in formal graduation ceremonies with effect from 1995. We shall look first at the gowns and then compare the hoods which have been designed for the several degrees.

38 Groves, ibid., pp. 29–30.
39 Ibid., p. 30.
40 Ibid., pp. 30–31.
41 *Shaw* 3.II, p. 43.

As we have seen, in 1970 only the MMus, DMus, and FRCM were accorded robes, the MMus and DMus holders wearing gowns for master's and doctor's degrees respectively: the master's gown was based on the Cambridge gown [m2], whereas an Oxford pattern was prescribed for doctors [d2]. Fellows of the College wore a bachelor's gown [b1]. After the turn of the twenty-first century, the master's gown remained substantially unchanged but the new doctor's gown in cream brocade lined and faced with royal blue was now also of the Cambridge pattern [d1], replacing the old blue brocade. Fellows substituted the Oxford bachelor's gown in favour of the Cambridge master's gown [m2] presumably as being more appropriate to their status. HonRCMs made a similar change.



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Fig. 5. GRSM hood.

The hoods of these three awards were altered (as described and illustrated above) during the 1990s as the College gradually introduced its own degrees. All the new 1990s hoods except the BMus are either of the Cambridge full shape [f1], simple (Oxford) shape [s1] or Burgon shape [s2]. In terms of colour, the hoods are ingenious permutations of royal blue, old gold, and white, the master's and fellow's hood being worn with the appropriate black gown. The post-2000 DMus hood represents a straightforward exchange of a royal blue hood lined gold for a cream brocade lined royal blue, matching the gown of the degree, as did the pre-2000 gown and hood. However, the BMusRCM hood (first awarded in 1995) is an exception: it is the only RCM hood to be in the Durham BSc shape [f7] and to have fur trim and a rounded outer shell.

There is a marked similarity in colour (if not type) between the hoods of the honorary awards of HonRCM and FRCM, the former wearing a Burgon [s2] hood, the latter a Cambridge MA style hood [f1]; both, however, are based on royal blue with an old gold lining.

The wearing of academic dress at the RCM

Unlike the traditionally orientated universities of Oxford and Cambridge—where academic dress is regularly worn for many functions including matriculation and graduation ceremonies, college dinners, and other formal occasions such as examinations at Oxford—academic dress is worn at the RCM only on rare ceremonial occasions, particularly on Graduation Day and for the president's visit. It is appropriate, however, to comment on the usage of academic dress at the College over its 132-year history.

As long ago as 1894, some members of the professorial staff wore their gowns and hoods at the opening of the Blomfield Building (the College's home in Prince Consort Road, London) presumably to emphasize the hope that academia would be an integral part of College life.[42] The dates of origin of the robes appertaining to the College's

42 Brightwell, p. xl.

diplomas are not clear: the ARCM diploma was instituted shortly after the College's foundation but there is clear evidence (cited above) that no academic dress was prescribed in 1915 and it is at present uncertain when the ARCM hood was first worn. However, in the absence of graduation ceremonies, there would seem little need for a plethora of gowns and hoods. Groves and Kersey assert that, in 1970, the only distinctions offered by the College which had prescribed robes were the MMus, DMus, and FRCM, the latter two awarded *honoris causa* only. These robes have been described above. David Harpham observed that, in 1971, academic dress was worn only on the annual presidential visit (when honorary degrees were conferred) and by a few (presumably the platform party of senior personnel) at Prize Day, the forerunner of the present Graduation Ceremony and Prizegiving held at the end of the summer term.[43]

Prior to 1995 when the College began to confer its own BMus degree, all MMus degrees, and doctorates by examination, there was little need for a formal graduation ceremony: the BMus and MMus in composititon received their degrees from the University of London and all RCM doctorates were honorary.[44] In consequence the need for formal distinctive RCM academic dress was limited, although diplomates and GRSMs could wear their appropriate robes on Prize Day. University of London BMus and MMus candidates received their degree from the University but they could receive their degree certificate (but not graduation) from the presiding high officer or the guest of honour at Prize Day. Members of the (small) platform party would wear any academic dress to which they were entitled, although the director of the College wore their distinctive robe.

The need for distinctive academic dress essentially came into sharp focus with the conferring of multiple RCM degrees on what then became Graduation Day and Prize Giving, although the extensive list of prize winners (which could exceed 100) was drastically reduced as the number of graduands increased. By 1996, only those BMus candidates who were robed were entitled to present themselves for graduation. From the custom of only a few senior members of the College comprising the platform party wearing robes, academic dress was now worn by staff and those about to receive their degrees: distinctive RCM academic dress came into being out of functional necessity.

Conclusion

The foregoing pages have outlined episodes in the history of the Royal College of Music in order to provide a background on which to contextualize the academic dress prescribed for bachelors, masters, and doctors of the College and for its diplomates. The various gowns and hoods have been described, illustrated and compared together with robes of degrees of the University of London for which RCM students read prior 1995, after which date the College began to teach for, and to confer, only its own degrees.

The evolution of the College's academic dress has been traced in the light of changes in its modus operandi and curriculum development. The story of the gowns and hoods is greater than a mere description of academic regalia—fascinating although

43 Harpham, email to MacMillan, 22 January 2024.

44 The University of London does not hold graduation ceremonies and instead holds presentation ceremonies for its new graduates, when those who have already received their award are presented to the chancellor or vice-chancellor.

such a study may be—for it reflects episodes in the history of the Royal College of Music, an institution which lies at the very heart of the English conservatoire tradition.

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