

TOWARDS A STANDARD TERMINOLOGY FOR DESCRIBING ACADEMIC ROBES

Nicholas Groves, MA, BMus, FBS, FSAScot

It has been clear for many years that a standard, clear, terminology for describing academic robes is needed. Universities and colleges use very imprecise terms, and different institutions will use the same term with different meanings. A standard terminology should enable a gown or hood to be drawn accurately from its description, exactly as an heraldic blazon enables a coat-of-arms to be drawn.

1. *Patterns/shapes.*

A start has already been made here with my classificatory system, whereby the different patterns of full, simple and Aberdeen hoods are each assigned a number, and the various shapes of robes and gowns are similarly codified (see Appendix I). There are probably a few more to be added, and some apparently differing patterns are assigned the same number – e.g. the ‘Leeds’ version of the full hood (with short cowl) is assigned the [f1] of Cambridge, as the length of the cowl is of no importance; likewise ‘London’ pattern doctors robes are listed as Cambridge [d1] as the London version is a very recent deviation.

2. *Colours*

These need to be very carefully looked at. The British Colour Council’s *Dictionary of Colour Standards* is a useful base from which to work, but many institutions either do not use it, or use another system (e.g. Pantone). Again, shades vary over the years, either as a result of age, or because a new batch of silk has been woven. For example, the lining of the Lampeter BD, often described as ‘puce’, was in 1878 a very dark and dull violet; by 1935, it was much brighter, and now is a royal purple. So any over-precise description is probably to be avoided. What is needed is a list of corresponding colours: e.g. the Lampeter ‘puce’ is the same as London’s ‘violet’ for medicine, and Sheffield’s ‘purple’ for Engineering. In the meantime, all ‘exotic’ shades should be clearly defined in other terms – e.g. Durham’s palatinate purple is best described as ‘a soft mauve’; Leicester’s cherry is bright red, while the cherries of Cambridge Laws, Medicine and Music are anything but – they are, respectively, pink, crimson and maroon.

3. *Terms used for the trimmings.*

a) **hoods.**

The following should cover all possibilities:

lined – i.e. edge to edge, with no overlap. (e.g. *MA Cambridge*: black lined white).

lined and bound – with the lining brought over the edge, width to be specified (e.g. *MA Oxford*: black lined and bound 1/4” shot crimson.)

In many cases, the binding is irrelevant, and is put there as a matter of custom only (as at Oxford), and may thus be ignored. In others, it defines the difference between hoods – as, e.g., between BA and MA at Loughborough.

faced – where there is a partial lining, usually of 3 to 4 inches, width to be specified. (e.g. *BA Open*: light blue faced 3” gold).

faced and bound – as above, with the facing brought over the edge. (e.g. *BA Wales*: black faced 3” and bound 1/4” blue-shot-green).

Again, the binding is often a custom merely.

The depth of the facing is often fluid: two hoods for the same award may well exhibit different widths of facing – one being, e.g., 3 inches, and another 4 inches.

part-lined – it is suggested that this term is used where the facing is anything more than 4 or 5 inches; the width is rarely specified. (e.g. *BA Keele*: black part-lined gold, piped red.) (This might be used for the extraordinary description of the Bristol BA hood- ‘lined as far as the visible parts are concerned’).

bound – to be used where the binding is 2” or less, widths to be specified. (e.g. *BA Exeter*: grey bound 2” inside and out with blue; *St John’s Nottingham*: black, the cowl bound 1” inside and 1/4” outside

with scarlet.) Care should be taken to specify which edges are bound – cowl, cape, cape & cowl, etc. A binding may, of course, occur in conjunction with a lining or a facing (as at Nottingham).

This is a slightly artificial distinction, thus making a Wales BA faced and bound, but the St John's hood bound only. But I think the term 'binding' suggests a *narrow* edging, and anything over 2" is not narrow.

*pip*ed – usually used of a cord trimming, though it is possible to use silk. (e.g. *BA Keele*: black part-lined gold, piped red.)

*tipp*ed – this is used with Aberdeen-shape hoods (usually [a1]) which have a parti-coloured lining, divided in a chevron. The tipping is the lower colour when the hood is worn. (e.g. *MCSP*: black lined gold, tipped blue).

Other divided linings should be described exactly, saying whether the division is vertical or horizontal, and how the colours are disposed, using heraldic terminology: **per fess** for horizontal divisions, the *upper* colour is listed first; **per pale** for vertical divisions, the colour on the *left* shoulder of the wearer being described first. (e.g. *STh Lambeth*: black, lining divided per fess, white above blue; *MFA Glasgow*: black, lining divided per pale, stone-white and malachite green).

The order of descriptions should be:

shape; shell colour; lining; facing/tipping/chevrons; binding; piping.

Examples:

BSc Heriot-Watt: full [f1], black, lined red, faced 1" gold.

BArch Heriot-Watt: full [f1], black, lined red, faced 1" gold, set 1" in from the edge.

BSc Lancaster: burgon [s2], black, lined grey, faced 1/2" red, and 1/2" gold set 1" away.

PhD City: maroon, lining divided per pale, maroon and gold.

LGSM: simple [s1], black, lined white, with a 3" red chevron.

BMedSci Leicester: simple [s6], bright cherry, lined and the cowl bound 3" turquoise, the cowl edge bound royal blue, 2" inside and 1" out.

BA Durham: full [f6], black, the cowl part-lined and the cape bound 1" fur.

MMus Leeds: simple [s7], dark green lined white, the cowl faced 1" white watered set 1" in.

Salisbury-Wells Theological College: full [f1], grey, lined red, the cowl faced 2" gold and the cape bound 1/2" in and out with pale blue.

Wessex Theological College: aberdeen [a1], black, lined silver, tipped maroon, the cowl faced 1" gold.

I have deliberately avoided the terms 'edged' and 'bordered' as they are used by institutions with a variety of imprecise meanings.

Exceptions. These are East Anglia and Kent. In the case of **Kent**, the base colour should be noted (silver/gold/red) and then the colour of the velvet triangle (BA: kent [a3], silver with green triangle). For **East Anglia**, it is assumed that the hood is worn inside out, so the shell colour is dark blue, and the degree colour is then described (but higher doctors use an inside lining):

BA: aberdeen [a4], dark blue the cowl faced on the outside for 6" with coral pink.

MA: aberdeen [a4], dark blue, lined on the outside with coral pink, arranged in 4 wide folds.

LittD: cambridge [f1], dark blue, lined and bound 1" coral pink.

b) gowns and robes

gowns: It is usually sufficient in most cases simply to specify the style used: a black gown of [b4] pattern, but there are some instances where modifications should be noted:

BA Southampton: a black gown of [b4] pattern with an extra cord and button on the yoke; all cords and buttons are peacock blue/cerise (depending on which recension!)

PhD Warwick: a black gown of [m15] pattern, with facings of green-shot-red.

robes: again, it should be adequate to specify the pattern and colours:

LL.D London: a scarlet robe of [d1] pattern, the facings and sleeve linings are blue.

DLitt Oxford: a scarlet cloth robe of [d2] pattern, the sleeves and facings are covered with grey.

PhD Nottingham: a claret cloth robe of [d1] pattern, the facings covered in light blue (*it may be desirable to add*: the sleeves unlined).

PhD Leeds Met: a claret robe of [d1] pattern the facings covered with blue and the sleeves lined with gold.

PhD Portsmouth: a scarlet robe of [m2] pattern, the front of the sleeve below the armhole and the facings covered with violet; the facings also edged with ½” silver braid on each side.

(I think the term ‘edged’ is acceptable here as it is unambiguous, and I don’t like ‘..the facings faced...’!)

DLitt Plymouth: a terra-cotta robe of [d1] pattern, the facings covered and the sleeves lined with blue; the facings bound with 1” white on the outer edge.

The *outer edge* of the facings is that nearer to the shoulder when the robe is worn. The difference between ‘bound’ here and ‘edged’ for PhD Portsmouth is self-explanatory

DSc Wolverhampton: a scarlet robe of [d2] pattern, the facings covered and the lower ends of the sleeves bound for 9” with gold damask.

PhD Liverpool: a scarlet robe of [d1] pattern, the facings covered and the sleeves lined with black, edged with 1” scarlet velvet set 1” in from the edges.

It is assumed that [d1] robes all have cords and buttons on the sleeves; unless otherwise stated, they are assumed to be of the same colour as the sleeve lining. Some of the 1990 universities deliberately omit them: this should be stated.

Exceptions:

Leeds: the covering of the facings extends only halfway across, but it should be treated as though it were fully faced, as this seems to be a result of custom, rather than specification:

MD: a scarlet robe of [d1] pattern, the facings covered and the sleeves lined with dark green, and the facings also bound with 1” light green on the outer edge. [I have a feeling the sleeves also are bound].

4. *Materials*

These should be stated wherever possible. However, it is not always possible to tell what a material either is or should be. Some black stuff hoods are made of ribbed rayon, and so look like silk; some doctors’ robes are made of scarlet polyester or panama, instead of cloth. Many of the newer foundations omit this altogether (‘a scarlet robe...’) to get it wrong (East Anglia says its gowns are of ‘cloth’, but they mean stuff).

cloth is made of wool;

silk is made from the cocoon of the silk worm;

stuff is anything else – i.e. neither cloth nor silk .

Appendix I

CLASSIFICATION OF HOOD AND GOWN PATTERNS – HOODS

1. Simple hoods

s1: Oxford plain
s2: Oxford burgon
s3: Belfast
s4: Edinburgh
s5: Wales bachelors
s6: Leicester bachelors
s7: Leeds
s8: Sussex
s9: Manchester
s10: Aston
s11: Caledonian

2. Full hoods

f1: Cambridge
f2: Dublin
f3: London

f4: Durham doctors
f5: Oxford doctors
f6: Durham BA
f7: Durham BCL
f8: Edinburgh DD
f9: Glasgow
f10: [NCDAD]*
f11: Warham Guild
f12: St Andrew's

3. Aberdeen hoods

a1: Aberdeen
a2: Leicester masters
a3: Kent
a4: East Anglia
a5: Leicester doctors
a6: Dundee

GOWNS

4. Bachelors gowns

b1: Oxford BA
b2: Cambridge BA
b3: Cambridge MB
b4: London BA
b5: Durham BA
b6: Wales BA
b7: Bath BA
b8: Imperial College
b9: Belfast BA

5. Masters' gowns

m1: Oxford MA
m2: Cambridge MA
m3: Dublin MA
m4: Wales MA
m5: London MA
m6: Manchester MA
m7: Leeds MA
m8: Leicester MA
m9: Bristol MA
m10: CNA A MA
m11: Lancaster MA

m12: St Andrews MA
m13: Liverpool MA
m14: Open (all degrees)
m15: Warwick MA
m16: Bath MA

6. Doctors' robes

d1: Cambridge/London
d2: Oxford
d3: Cambridge MusD
d4: Cambridge LL.D undress
d5: convocation habit
d6: Sussex

7. Undergraduate gowns

u1: Cambridge basic
u2: Oxford scholar
u3: London
u4: Durham
u5: Oxford commoner
u6: Sussex
u7: East Anglia