

The Scarlet Gown: History and Development of Scottish Undergraduate Dress

by Jonathan C. Cooper

The scarlet gown is synonymous with student life in Scotland. Although its beginnings are mysterious, the purpose of this article is to shed some light on its origin and to describe its development through the centuries. We shall examine Scottish student dress in pre-Reformation times and briefly survey the early use of red student gowns in Europe. The history of the scarlet gown at each of the Scottish universities is treated in order of their foundation followed by a general section on headwear. We shall touch on the influence of the Scottish scarlet gown abroad and conclude with a section on its use in modern times.¹

Scottish student dress in pre-Reformation times

1. The University of St Andrews

Founded by a bull issued by Avignon Pope Benedict XIII to Bishop Henry Wardlaw in 1413, St Andrews is the oldest of the Scottish universities. It has two constituent colleges: the United College of St Salvator and St Leonard, which was founded in 1747 as the result of an amalgamation of two older foundations; and St Mary's College, which has trained ministers in Protestant theology since not long after the Reformation and remains as the Faculty of Divinity to this day. Student dress was prescribed by regulation of the Faculty of Arts between the foundation of the University in 1413 and the establishment of the colleges, each of which developed its own rules.²

The ancient seal of the University of St Andrews (see back cover) cannot be dated precisely but is thought to have been made before 1418, the year that saw the

¹ At this point it is useful to introduce four terms particular to the Scottish universities. *Bajan* (later *Bejant* at St Andrews) describes a student in the first year; a *Semi* is a second-year student; a *Tertian* a third-year and a *Magistrand* a fourth-year. It should also be noted that the first degree taken at the Scottish universities became the MA (or AM), a practice which continues at the ancient universities to this day. The BA went into abeyance at the ancient universities after the Reformation and is only awarded today under specific circumstances. The BA is routinely awarded as a first degree only at the modern Scottish universities.

² Cf. R. G. Cant, *The University of St Andrews: A Short History* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1946), p. 19.

renouncement of Antipope Benedict XIII, Pedro de Luna, in favour of Pope Martin V. The Faculty of Arts met and withdrew its support for the Antipope, then advised that the country follow suit and Scottish allegiances switched from Avignon to Rome.³ The seal gives prominence to the arms of de Luna, as the Pope who issued the bulls of foundation, so it is likely to have been made in the first few years of the University's existence, before he fell out of favour.⁴ It shows a regent reading a codex to a group of seven students but the dress of the students was almost certainly black not red, as has been suggested.⁵ An embellished Victorian coloured impression of the seal even goes so far as to show the students wearing gowns with collars, which did not appear for some four centuries after the seal was engraved. Close examination of the original brass matrix reveals that a closed *supertunica* with a hood (including a cape covering the shoulders) was worn. One of the *Acta Facultatis Artium* of 1417 forbids students in Arts to have 'shoes pointed, laced or pierced' (*sotulares rostratos nec laqueatos nec fenestratos*); nor were they to put on 'a surcoat slashed at the sides' (*supertunica lescissum in lateribus*).⁶ Another statute of the Faculty of Arts from before 1450 states that students were permitted to go out 'a-hawking' on the condition that they wore their own clothes and not 'dissolute habiliments borrowed from lay cavaliers',⁷ so the gown was also worn outside the College walls. Finances were raised by the Faculty by allowing selected students to appear in chapel wearing secular costume and exacting fees for the privilege.⁸

St John's College was founded in 1419 but its records are sparse and nothing of student dress here is known.⁹ St Salvator's College was founded in 1450 and also

³ J. M. Anderson, 'The Beginnings of St Andrews University II', *Scottish Historical Review*, 8 (1910–11), pp. 333–60 (p. 353).

⁴ J. M. Anderson, *The Heraldry of the University of St Andrews* (Edinburgh: Johnston, 1895), p. 15.

⁵ J. Read, *Historic St Andrews and its University* (St Andrews: W. C. Henderson & Son, 1939), p. 28. Others have also suggested that the scarlet gown is medieval in origin (J. G. Hibben, 'The Scottish University', *Scribner's Magazine*, 29 (1901), pp. 741–55 (pp. 741–42)). The seal is kept in the University of St Andrews Library, Special Collections, UYUY103.

⁶ A. I. Dunlop, *Acta Facultatis Artium Universitatis Sanctiandree 1413–1588* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 11.

⁷ J. Robb, 'Student Life in St Andrews before 1450 AD', *Scottish Historical Review*, 9 (1911–12), pp. 347–60 (p. 355).

⁸ Robb, pp. 356–57.

⁹ In addition, the College had a 'Pedagogy', a collection of lecture rooms and residential accommodation, in 1430 and before long the two foundations became one (R. G. Cant, *The College of St Salvator: Its Foundation and Development* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1950), pp. 7–8). Matriculation records from the *Acta Rectorum* are all that survive (J. M. Anderson, *The University of St Andrews: A Historical Sketch* (Cupar: Fife Herald, 1878), p. 1).

suffers from incomplete records.¹⁰ However, St Mary's College, which resulted from a refoundation of St John's Pedagogy in 1538, modelled its ceremonial on that of St Salvator's; indeed its regulations for dress in choir specify that the manner of the older college should be adhered to, so it seems likely that student dress worn at St Mary's was worn at St Salvator's previously.¹¹ Chancellor Archbishop Hamilton's notes relating to the foundation of St Mary's College compiled in 1553, show that the students 'shall always wear, both at home and abroad, a robe bound by a girdle, to which they shall add, at their own expense, a black hood' (*nigrum caputium*) and that 'the students of theology, till they graduate, shall also wear hoods like the Parisians;¹² and all the pupils, however distinguished by birth, or other circumstances, shall wear belted gowns till they graduate'.¹³ St Leonard's College was founded in 1511 following a rather different model, however, and Prior Hepburn's statutes prescribed that students should go about the city 'in gown and hood' (*mantello et caputio*), almost certainly of monastic form, and for processions appear 'in surplices or colobia' (*superpelliciis aut collobiis*) at the discretion of the Principal.¹⁴ Of the sons of noblemen who joined the College, the statutes admonish: 'they are not to wear secular garb, to have their clothes slashed, or too short: they are not to wear caps of green, red, purple, grey, blue, yellow, or lightish colour, but rather adopt all the vestments, woollen and linen, that become sober men and people of the clerkly sort.'¹⁵

2. The University of Glasgow

The University of Glasgow was founded by a bull issued by Pope Nicholas V to Bishop William Turnbull in 1451. Glasgow's constitution was modelled on that of the University of Bologna¹⁶ and dress too was to conform to that of Bologna 'as far as the usage of Scottish clerks permits', a provision evidently influenced by

¹⁰ Bishop Kennedy's original code of statutes for the College is now lost (Cant, *The College of St Salvator*, p. 115).

¹¹ Cant, *The University of St Andrews*, p. 19; *The College of St Salvator*, p. 116.

¹² Only the Rector's gown survives as a true Parisian relic today (Cant, *The University of St Andrews*, pp. 20, 119).

¹³ C. J. Lyon, *History of St Andrews: Episcopal, Monastic, Academic and Civil* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), Vol. II, pp. 259–60.

¹⁴ J. Herkless, and R. K. Hannay, *The College of St Leonard* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1905), pp. 150, 167. The *colobium* is a tabard or tunic without sleeves (E. C. Clark, 'English Academical Costume (Mediaeval)', *Archaeological Journal*, 50 (1893), pp. 73–104, 137–49; 183–209 (pp. 140–41)).

¹⁵ Herkless and Hannay, p. 171. This is contrasted with the case at Oxford, where noblemen were allowed to wear brightly coloured silk gowns from 1490 (W. Gibson, 'The Regulation of Undergraduate Academic Dress at Oxford and Cambridge, 1660–1832', *Burgon Society Annual*, 2004, pp. 26–41 (p. 28)).

¹⁶ H. Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn, ed. by F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden (Oxford University Press, 1936), Vol. II, p. 312.

practice at St Andrews.¹⁷ Students in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Canon Law were to wear their gown loose without a girdle (*toga soluta sine cingulo*), according to a statute of 1451¹⁸ and a Faculty of Arts statute of 1452 states that students were not to wear hoods ‘swelling out too much in the circle of the face, which are plain evidence of light-headedness’.¹⁹ Statutes of the Faculty of Canons c. 1453, however, tell us that ‘no student in this faculty should wear a loose gown without a band’, so this was evidently a symbol associated with theological training.²⁰ Such statutes were enforced by means of an oath, which all students were required to take, and violation was considered as perjury and could even result in excommunication.²¹ In 1483, however, the statutes were modified to remove the threat of a charge of perjury for some minor dress violations.²²

According to the 1545 charter of foundation of the Collegiate Church of Biggar in the county of Lanarkshire, four boys were to be trained as choristers and were to be dressed in ‘*togis blodei coloris*’ in the manner of the choristers of the Church of Glasgow.²³ ‘*Blodei*’ has been translated both as ‘blue’, from the Latin *blodius*, and as ‘blood’, from the old English *blod*.²⁴ It would, however, be conjecture to suggest a link between the dress of choristers at the pre-Reformation Cathedral of Glasgow and the scarlet gown of later students at the University.

3. The Universities of Aberdeen

King’s College was founded in Aberdeen by a bull issued by Pope Alexander VI to Bishop William Elphinstone in 1495. A second university in the city, Marischal College, was founded in 1593 by the fifth Earl Marischal. The two universities,

¹⁷ R. K. Hannay, ‘Early University Institutions at St Andrews and Glasgow’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 11 (1913–14), pp. 266–83 (p. 271). The original text of the statute: ‘*Item in habitibus compositis se gerant quantum consuetudo clericorum regni permittit in omnibus se conformant studio Bononiensi · nec intrent in actibus publicis congregatione generali aut missa vel sermone universitatis nisi tabularibus induti*’ (C. Innes, *Munimenta Alme Universitatis Glasguensis* (Glasgow: Maitland Club, 1854), Vol. II, p. 13).

¹⁸ Innes, *Munimenta*, Vol. II, p. 19.

¹⁹ ‘*Item quod nullus studens utatur pectoralibus patentibus cuiuscunque coloris humeralibus calceis rostratis aut lacqueatis capuciis in circulo faciei enim istumentibusque levitatem animi palam manifestant / et si in aliquo horum quis fuerit deprehensus nisi resipiscat privetur ab omni promotione ut supra*’ (Innes, *Munimenta*, Vol. II, p. 24).

²⁰ J. Coutts, *A History of the University of Glasgow: From its Foundation in 1451 to 1909* (Glasgow: J. Maclehose & Sons, 1909), p. 30.

²¹ D. Murray, *Memories of the Old College of Glasgow: Some Chapters in the History of the University* (Glasgow: Jackson, Wylie & Co., 1927), p. 474.

²² J. Durkan and J. Kirk, *The University of Glasgow, 1451–1577* (University of Glasgow Press, 1977), p. 197.

²³ J. Stuart (ed.), *The Miscellany of the Spalding Club* (Aberdeen: The Spalding Club, 1852), Vol. V, p. 301.

²⁴ J. C. Jessop, *Education in Angus* (University of London Press, 1931), p. 30 n.

after several failed attempts, finally merged to become the University of Aberdeen in 1860. Records from the relatively short period between the foundation of King's College and the Reformation are sparse but it can be supposed that student dress in Aberdeen was similar to that at St Andrews and Glasgow. In 1549, Rector Alexander Galloway carried out a visitation of the College and ordered bursars to wear their hoods at all times, except when in their chambers or at chapel.²⁵ Students in theology were to wear a round hood (*caputium rotundum*) and appear in round clerical caps (*biretis clericalibus rotundis*).²⁶

Scotland broke with Rome in 1560. The religious and political upheaval which resulted brought an end to the influence of Holy See in the Scottish universities and the old traditions, including those of dress, were abandoned. University records from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are incomplete but it seems that little importance was placed on academical dress other than during the two periods of Episcopal government.²⁷

Early red student gowns

The original statutes of Queen's College, Oxford, founded in 1341, prescribe that 'blood red or purple robes' be worn in memory of Christ's passion.²⁸ The Latin wording in the statutes is: '*ac vestis et sanguinis Domini conformitatem, in palliis purpureis*', so the exact colour remains unclear.²⁹ The 1415–16 accounts of Thomas Eaglesfield, an undergraduate at Queen's, reveal that he paid '5s. for 2 yards of russet (*russeto*) for a gown' and '10d. for an ancient gown to line his gown of russet'.³⁰

Drawings by a Scottish student at Louvain in his notebook on lectures on Aristotle in 1467 indicate that undergraduates wore a red gown there.³¹ After its foundation in 1425, Louvain became a popular destination for Scottish students, who were displaced from the University of Paris in 1411 when the city was occupied by the English. Conveniently, there was a Scottish bank at nearby Bruges, which allowed tax-free money transfer to students from their families in Scotland.³²

²⁵ C. Innes, *Fasti Aberdonenses: Selections from the Records of the University and King's College of Aberdeen, 1494–1854* (Aberdeen: The Spalding Club, 1854), p. 261.

²⁶ Innes, *Fasti*, p. 260.

²⁷ Cant, *The University of St Andrews*, p. 20.

²⁸ Rashdall, Vol. III, p. 208.

²⁹ Her Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the State of the University of Oxford, *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1853), Vol. I, no. 4, p. 14.

³⁰ J. R. Magrath, *The Queen's College* (Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 321.

³¹ J. J. Carter and C. A. McLaren, *Crown and Gown 1495–1995: An Illustrated History of the University of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen University Press, 1994), p. 12.

³² W. Rüegg (ed.), *A History of the University in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), Vol. I, p. 295.

Some of the students of the German Nation at the University of Bologna appear wearing red gowns, and others green, as they approach the Proctor for matriculation in an illumination of 1497 which accompanies the Nation's statutes³³ but it is unclear whether the colour was the privilege of the Nation or of the nobles, as the statutes contradict the illumination in prescribing a black gown.³⁴

The scarlet gown in Scotland

R. G. Cant, historian to the University of St Andrews, tells us in a footnote about the scarlet gown that 'there are indications that, like other Scottish ceremonial dress, it may have been introduced during the latter part of the reign of James VI by the King himself'.³⁵ Despite this clearly being speculation on Cant's part, it is referenced by W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley as fact: 'All undergraduates of the university, irrespective of their college, were instructed by King James VI, perhaps in the latter part of his reign, to wear a scarlet gown, as were those of other Scottish universities.'³⁶ What is known is that in 1613 the King appointed a commission to visit the University of Glasgow under instructions to 'appoint decent and comelie habites and formes of vesture for the studentis, licentatis, regentis, doctoris and governoris'.³⁷ No record of the commission's visit, if indeed it actually took place, has survived. The only legal reference to student dress in the reign of James VI is to be found in a personal Act of 1621 applied to the University of St Andrews which orders that 'all masters, professors, students and founded persons within the said university shall hereafter walk in their gowns throughout all the said university according to the form that shall be prescribed to them by their visitors under the pain of expelling them out of the said colleges and university that do wilfully in the contrary thereof'.³⁸ So it would seem that King James was keen to standardize student dress at the Scottish universities and was active in appointing commissions to make recommendations on the matter but there is no evidence that the scarlet gown emerged during his reign.³⁹

Letters from Charles I dated 1633 and 1634 to the Archbishops of St Andrews and Glasgow and to the Bishop of Aberdeen, as chancellors of the respective

³³ E. Friedländer and C. Malagola, *Acta Nationis Germanicae Universitatis Bononiensis ex Archetypis Tabularii Malveziani* (Berlin, 1887), pp. 4–5.

³⁴ Rashdall, Vol. I, pp. 194–95 n.

³⁵ *The University of St Andrews*, p. 19 n.

³⁶ *A History of Academical Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 139.

³⁷ Durkan and Kirk, p. 368.

³⁸ Parliamentary Register, *Act in Favour of the University of St Andrews*, King James VI, 4 August 1621: Edinburgh, c. 6, p. 117.

³⁹ In 1610, King James VI ordered that Doctors of Civil Law at the Scottish universities were to wear black velvet collars and facings on their gowns ('Scottish Legal Costume', *Journal of Jurisprudence*, 27 (1884), pp. 62–71 (p. 67)).

universities, ordered that governors, doctors, regents, masters and students wear gowns according to their status in college, at chapel and on the streets.⁴⁰ Despite the significant detail that these letters go into, no mention of colour is made. A Covenanted Commission was appointed by Parliament in 1690 to visit and reform each of the Scottish universities. In its overtures, which were sent out to the universities for their opinions in 1695, was included the following:

That all Masters or Regents, and also the students in the seaverall Universities and Colledges within this kingdome, be obleidged to wear constantly gownes the tyme of the sitting of the Colledges, and the Regents or Masters shall be obleidged to wear black gownes, and the students red gownes, that therby the students may be discouraged from vageing or vice.⁴¹

This has led to the common belief that the red gown was instituted in 1690 as a direct result of the recommendations of the Covenanted Commission. What is far more likely is that the Commissioners saw the red gown being used by some and decided to make it universally compulsory because they thought it would discourage licentious behaviour among students by virtue of making them hard to miss in a crowd.

1. The University of St Andrews

During the 1640s, a Revolutionary Commission was appointed by the General Assembly to visit and reform the University of St Andrews. In 1642, they reported: ‘Since gravity in habite and carriage is very beseeming for Students, It is ordained, that the whole Students of the University, both in Divinity and Philosophy, go in there gownes, both within the Colledge and without upon the streets.’⁴² No mention is made of colour here and the reference to the ‘whole’ body of students may be read to indicate that gowns were worn previously by some but not all.

The first reference to the use of the scarlet gown in St Andrews is made in Thomas Kirk’s account of his travels through Scotland. A note dated 1677 tells us that ‘the students in all three Colleges wear red gowns’.⁴³ However, it would seem that this is erroneous as the divinity students of St Mary’s College are thought to have stopped wearing gowns by this point.⁴⁴ Admission to St Mary’s College required an MA degree from one of the other colleges of the University of St

⁴⁰ Cant, *The College of St Salvator*, pp. 203–04; Innes, *Munimenta*, Vol. I, pp. 248–49; Innes, *Fasti*, pp. 393–94.

⁴¹ Innes, *Munimenta*, Vol. II, pp. 516–17.

⁴² Parliamentary Commission, *Evidence, Oral and Documentary, Taken before the Commissioners for Visiting the Universities of Scotland (St Andrews)* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1837), p. 206.

⁴³ P. H. Brown, *Early Travellers in Scotland* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1891), p. 256.

⁴⁴ Cant, *The University of St Andrews*, p. 74.

Andrews or, indeed, from another university, and so it was essentially a postgraduate college and the wearing of the red gown by its students was considered inappropriate.⁴⁵ The use of the red gown at St Salvator's and St Leonard's, however, can certainly be traced back to 1677 and probably pre-dates this.

On 7 January 1689, the Privy Council of Scotland asked William of Orange to take over the responsibilities of Scottish government and two days later students at St Salvator's are reported to have used their gowns to conceal 'swords and battons' while attempting to break up a crowd which had gathered to listen to the King's declaration for Scotland being read at the market cross.⁴⁶ This indicates that there was Jacobite sentiment among some of the students but not that the gown was a symbol of their cause. In response to the overtures of the Covenanting Commission sent out to the universities in 1695, St Salvator's replied: 'Next, all with us wears gowns, the Masters black, and the Students red, which wee think most decent and becoming'; and St Leonard's: 'Anent the *sixth*, about Masters and Students wearing Gowns. As it is here punctually observed, so we judge it most fit to be observed in all other Colleges and Universities through the Kingdome, for the reasons mentioned in the Overture.'⁴⁷ These replies clearly indicate that scarlet gowns were being worn by students at both colleges before the Commission arrived. Whatever the use of undergraduate academical dress earlier in the seventeenth century, we can be sure that the scarlet gown had become firmly established by the dawn of the eighteenth.

Perhaps the most interesting point about the use of the gown at St Andrews during the early eighteenth century can be found in the accounts of the three Mackenzie brothers who were students at the University at this time. The gown of the eldest, Alexander, was purchased in November 1712 when he had just become a semi after taking two years to complete the *bajan* class. Taking up the gown was evidently symbolic of the transition from boyhood to manhood as the student progressed from *bajan* to semi status. This was linked to the tradition of 'semipoudering', which was a student festivity also celebrated in the semi year to mark the first time a boy was allowed to powder his head or to wear a wig.⁴⁸ The fact that Alexander Mackenzie was allowed to take part in semipoudering and to wear a gown only after he passed the *bajan* class and entered the semi class, although it was his third year at St Andrews, suggests that the tradition marked academic rather than social progression. There is no evidence of this practice

⁴⁵ J. Grierson, *Delineations of St Andrews* (Edinburgh: P. Hill, 1807), pp. 199, 201–02.

⁴⁶ R. K. Hannay, 'The Visitation of St Andrews University in 1690', *Scottish Historical Review*, 13 (1915–16), pp. 1–15 (p. 8).

⁴⁷ Parliamentary Commission, *Evidence (St Andrews)*, pp. 218, 220.

⁴⁸ W. C. Dickinson, *Two Students at St Andrews, 1711–1716* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1952), p. xxxviii.

having occurred at any of the other Scottish universities. Mackenzie's accounts specify the various components of the gown and their costs at the time:

Accounts, November 26th 1712

For his Gown:

4½ ells of frieze at £1 5s. the ell

12 ells of wattens at 3s. the ell

2 drop of silk 5s.

½ ounce threed 1s.

¼ ell of buckram 2s. 6d. £7 17s.

The making thereof £1 12s.⁴⁹

At a combined cost of almost £10 Scots for the materials and the making of the gown, it represented significant expenditure. The Mackenzie brothers' accounts also show that one of the younger siblings, Kenneth, inherited the elder Alexander's gown after he left the University.⁵⁰ This indicates that the gown was robust enough to last a few years of near-constant wear and was considered as too expensive simply to throw away and replace.

Further contemporary insights into the symbolic aspects of the scarlet gown can be gleaned from the minutes of the University's Rectorial Court which sat in 1716 to hear the case of a student, Arthur Ross, who was accused of 'attacking, in a hostile manner, any of his majesty's lieges on the highways'. He was found guilty and sentenced to be 'whipt the following day by his regent', to be 'extruded from that society' (St Leonard's College) and to 'have his gown stripped off, deliver up the pistol to the rector, and pay to the clerk of the court £12 Scots'.⁵¹ Ross confessed to his involvement in this local Jacobite plot.⁵² The very fact that a sentence of corporal punishment, a fine and expulsion from the University also specifically stipulated that the offender's gown be removed indicates that the garment was simply a mark of student status at the time and not especially a sign of anti-Jacobitism.

Daniel Defoe travelled through the country during the 1720s and tells us of St Andrews: 'the students wear gowns here of a scarlet-like colour, but not in grain, and are very numerous.'⁵³ The term 'in grain' here refers to kermes (*Coccus ilicis*), which is an insect formerly used to make scarlet, violet and mulberry dyes.⁵⁴ The

⁴⁹ Dickinson, p. 73.

⁵⁰ Dickinson, p. xxxviii n. At this time the pound Scots was worth one twelfth of the English pound (sterling).

⁵¹ Lyon, Vol. II, pp. 127–28.

⁵² Herkless and Hannay, p. 50.

⁵³ D. Defoe, *A Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 3 vols (London: Strahan, 1724–27), Part I: Perth and Fife, Letter XIII, p. 1.

⁵⁴ B. Christianson, 'Doctors' Greens', *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 6 (2006), pp. 44–48 (p. 44).

comment that the gowns were not ‘in grain’ might be interpreted to infer that they lacked the brightness of the more expensive well-dyed fabrics of the time.⁵⁵

In 1779, John Lesley (who later became Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh) arrived at St Andrews as a young *bajan*. Of him we are told: ‘It is remembered, as a characteristic particular, that having previously discovered, in some of those antiquarian researches to which he was early addicted, that it was not indispensable for students of the first year to wear a gown, he steadily refused, during this year, to exhibit himself in the accustomed academical habiliment.’⁵⁶ This shows that the practice of taking up the gown only once a student had progressed to the semi class, evident in 1712, had died out by the mid-eighteenth century. Despite Lesley’s observance of the tradition in 1779, it was clearly considered an archaic and long-dead practice by this time and all students, including *bajans*, would have worn the scarlet gown. In 1780, the United College resolved to remove the compulsion for students to wear gowns at all times but they were still required in the classrooms, the chapel, the common schools and the University hall.⁵⁷

It is not until the opening years of the nineteenth century that we are given some clue as to the form of the undergraduate gown at the United College of St Andrews, when it is described as ‘of scarlet frieze without sleeves’.⁵⁸ It is not known if this shape had remained constant as the colour had over the previous century and a half but it remained so through the late-Georgian period. In a poem of 1812, we are told that ‘St Andrews’ sprightly students first proceed, clad in their foppery of sleeveless gown’.⁵⁹ Further, around 1821, we are told of ‘threadbare students’ in ‘ragged red gowns’⁶⁰ and later in the same decade that the gown was ‘rather scrimp’ and that a new one cost £1 2s., although it was not uncommon to purchase a second-hand one.⁶¹ At St Andrews, students were traditionally divided into three distinct classes and their gowns varied slightly as follows:

⁵⁵ It is worth pointing out that silver archery medals awarded by the University throughout the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century in a fine collection currently held by the Museum of the University of St Andrews do not depict gowns at all but are a very fine source for the study of student dress during this period.

⁵⁶ M. Napier, ‘Biographical Memoir of Sir John Leslie’, *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*, 23 (1837), pp. 1–32 (p. 3).

⁵⁷ Parliamentary Commission, *Evidence (St Andrews)*, p. 287.

⁵⁸ A. Campbell, *A Journey from Edinburgh through Parts of North Britain* (London: T. N. Longman & O. Rees, 1802), p. 14. See also ‘Capriccio—View of St Andrews’, a landscape held by the Museum of the University of St Andrews dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

⁵⁹ W. A. Knight, *Andreapolis: Being Writings in Praise of St Andrews* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1903), p. 32.

⁶⁰ A. Lang, *Saint Andrews* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1893), p. 343.

⁶¹ P. R. S. Lang, *Duncan Dewar, A Student of St Andrews 100 Years Ago: His Accounts* (Glasgow: Jackson, Wylie & Co., 1926), pp. 86–87.

The first of these were called Primers. They wore gowns of a superior quality of cloth, trimmed in an elegant stile, and paid on entering to a class six guineas of fees. The second description were termed Secondars. These were furnished with gowns of an equally fine quality, but not so richly trimmed, and paid at their entrance to a class three guineas. And the third description were named Terners, who had gowns of an inferior sort of cloth, without trimming, and paid one guinea and a half of fees.⁶²

In the late-Georgian period, however, only the lower two distinctions were used; the last primar having been admitted by 1740.⁶³ There was student intention to petition the Senatus Academicus to remove the class distinction between the gowns in 1826 but the petition was never officially delivered.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the whole system of distinctions was finally abolished soon thereafter, in 1829.⁶⁵ In 1838, the students did deliver a petition that the gown be altered to serve more practically as a cloak that would offer some protection from the cold North Sea winds. The Senatus agreed and the gown was lengthened and long sleeves and a velvet yoke were added.⁶⁶ The gown worn by sometime Chief Government Chemist, Sir Robert Robertson (1869–1949) when an undergraduate at St Andrews between 1885 and 1889 is on display at the Museum of the University of St Andrews and shows the former pointed shape of the bottom of the crimson yoke. This became rounded in the early twentieth century and the design has remained unchanged ever since.

2. The University of Glasgow

It has been suggested that the red gown was coeval with the *Nova Erectio*,⁶⁷ which saw the restructuring of the University of Glasgow by Andrew Melville in 1577, but no firm evidence for this supposition exists. Sir William Brereton, travelled through Glasgow in 1635 and tells us that ‘here the scholars may be distinguished from others by gowns, though coloured, some red, some gray, and of other colours, as please themselves’.⁶⁸ This is the first reference to the red colour of the student gown at Glasgow and, indeed, in Scotland but we note that it was not universally of this colour.

⁶² Grierson, pp. 182–83. Alternative and more common spellings are *Primar* and *Ternar* and the distinction was, in fact, officially abolished by the University in 1698 and replaced by a distinction of students as either *Potentes* or *Minus Potentes*. However, this innovation never caught on and the old system remained (Parliamentary Commission, *Evidence (St Andrews)*, p. 37).

⁶³ Dickinson, p. xxviii.

⁶⁴ Parliamentary Commission, *Evidence (St Andrews)*, p. 85.

⁶⁵ Dickinson, p. xxviii.

⁶⁶ Cant, *The University of St Andrews*, p. 119.

⁶⁷ Murray, p. 473.

⁶⁸ W. Brereton, *Travels in Holland, the United Provinces, England, Scotland and Ireland, 1634–1635* (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 1844), p. 117.

In 1642, a Commission appointed by the General Assembly to visit the University of Glasgow recommended that ‘ilk scholler within the Colledge have a Byble, and weare a gowne’. Over twenty years later in 1664, the University replied that ‘the maisters and schoolars doe constantlie weir their gownes within the Universitie and the schoolars also in the streits according to the former practique and statuts’.⁶⁹ Further, in response to the overtures of the Covenanting Commission sent out to the universities in 1695, Glasgow replied: ‘we think it both decent and usefull that the students allways, and every quhair, be in their gowns, and masters on the Lord’s day and solemn occasions, quhich as to both parts ar in practise heer’.⁷⁰ These replies show that the gown was already long established at Glasgow.

In 1703 a student, Robert Fulton, was fined and publicly rebuked for ‘cutting his codisciple’s gown on the Lord’s day’, which may indicate the esteem held for the garment. The records of two incidents of rebellious and disorderly behaviour by students John Satcher and John Finch in 1714 and 1716 show that each threw off his gown as a symbol of removing himself from the College, just as in the contemporary case of Arthur Ross at St Andrews.⁷¹

Daniel Defoe, who visited Glasgow during the 1720s, tells us that the students wore red gowns,⁷² so it seems that the colour had become standard by this time. As for form, John Wesley, another visitor to the city, tells us in 1753: ‘the habit of the students gave me surprise. They wear scarlet gowns, reaching only to their knees. Most I saw were very dirty, some very ragged, and all of very coarse cloth.’⁷³ Richard Pococke, Bishop of Ossory, visiting in 1760, states that all of the students ‘wear red gowns mostly of cloth’, so the fabric used for the garment was not uniform.⁷⁴

In the second decade of the nineteenth century, there was a large influx of Irish students to the University of Glasgow and they had a reputation for wearing gowns that were so old and worn that their scarlet colour was barely detectable.⁷⁵ In 1823, we are told that the students were ‘dressed in gowns of red frieze, the sleeves of which they convert, by casting knots and inserting brickbats, into very decent weapons of offence, during the hours of relaxation which their masters permit them to enjoy’.⁷⁶ The practice of buying second-hand gowns continued and in the 1850s, frieze gowns of all conditions could be bought from the two booksellers opposite

⁶⁹ Innes, *Munimenta*, Vol. II, pp. 465, 482.

⁷⁰ Innes, *Munimenta*, Vol. II, p. 517.

⁷¹ Innes, *Munimenta*, Vol. II, pp. 378, 415, 419.

⁷² Defoe, *A Tour*, Part II: Glasgow, Letter XII, p. 2.

⁷³ J. Wesley, *The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley* (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane, 1837), Vol. I, p. 551.

⁷⁴ Murray, p. 476.

⁷⁵ H. Barclay, *Rambling Recollections of Old Glasgow* (Glasgow: John Tweed, 1880), p. 32.

⁷⁶ ‘Vindiciae Gailicae’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 13 (1853), pp. 93–99 (p. 94).



Fig. 1. The scarlet gown at Glasgow c.1840. The younger students wore a Glengarry cap and the elder wore a black silk top hat

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the College. Some students had their gowns made by their tailors and thus the cloth was of finer quality and of a brighter hue. However, many students considered it a badge of seniority to wear an old and faded gown.⁷⁷ We are told of one student who, when asked by a professor where his gown was, pulled from his pocket ‘what looked like nothing more than a torn and dirty red rag, and proceeded to drape it about his shoulders’.⁷⁸

The gown became longer at some point between the mid-eighteenth century, when they were knee-length, and around 1840, when they were depicted as calf-length in two watercolours (Fig. 1).⁷⁹ Hargreaves-Mawdsley supposes that this lengthening occurred in the late eighteenth century but it seems more likely to have occurred in the 1830s, contemporaneously with similar changes at St Andrews, although no record of an officially sanctioned alteration is to be found at

⁷⁷ Murray, p. 477.

⁷⁸ R. Renwick, *History of Glasgow* (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson & Co., 1921), Vol. III, p. 110.

⁷⁹ Glasgow, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections, MS Murray 593. Album of Academical Robes, Insignia, etc. connected with the University of Glasgow, by an unknown nineteenth-century artist (donated by Richard Cameron, bookseller of Edinburgh, 1889), fols 7 and 8.

Glasgow.⁸⁰ The thick cape may have been added to protect the wearer from the frequent and heavy rain in Glasgow and has been described as having ‘a scalloped edge and raised seams or ribs radiate from under the flap collar above to points between the curves, giving an impression of an open umbrella’.⁸¹

On the use of the gown, in reply to the Parliamentary Commission appointed to visit the University in 1830, the Senate said that the wearing of the gown was ‘not in practice observed by the senior students’.⁸² During the 1850s, the gown was universal amongst the junior humanities classes,⁸³ which were described as encouraging ‘the strong contagion of the gown’ and Professor Ramsay was recalled as being particularly sarcastic towards any student who dared to attend his lectures without it.⁸⁴ By the 1860s, the use of the toga (as it was sometimes referred to at both Glasgow and Aberdeen) had fallen into decline and in 1866 the General Council of alumni passed the following resolution:

That this Council, regretting that the ancient custom of the students wearing red gowns (approved as a then existing custom by the Commissioners of Parliament 1695) has recently fallen into disuse in this University refer to the Committee to consider the propriety of restoring such custom in whole or in part, and to report generally on the subject of academical costume both of graduates and undergraduates.⁸⁵

Following this, in 1868 the University Court recommended that ‘the practice of students wearing the red gown should be revived’.⁸⁶ The red gown was even worn to graduation by Arts graduands in recognition of the fact that it was not until the actual capping that they became entitled to wear the black graduate gown. This custom continued until 1887, when the black gown was prescribed for graduands. It seems that the scarlet gown once again went into decline, as the General Council passed another resolution that its use be enforced in 1892. When news of this reached the University Court, the Students’ Representative Council was asked for its opinion on the matter and they requested that it should not be enforced, so it was not.⁸⁷ An interpretation of student dress appears in a drawing of the arms of

⁸⁰ Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 142.

⁸¹ A. Kerr, ‘Hargreaves-Mawdsley’s *History of Academical Dress* and the Pictorial Evidence for Great Britain and Ireland: Notes and Corrections’, *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 8 (2008), pp. 106–50 (p. 143).

⁸² R. T. Hutcheson, *Notes on Academic Dress in the University of Glasgow* (University of Glasgow, 1965), pp. 4–5.

⁸³ Students in the Faculty of Arts were referred to as the *togati* and those in higher faculties as *non-togati* (J. Pagan, *Sketch of the History of Glasgow* (Glasgow: Robert Stuart & Co., 1847), p. 119).

⁸⁴ H. Craik, ‘Reminiscences of the Glasgow College’, *Aberdeen University Review*, 1 (1913–14), pp. 229–35 (pp. 230, 234).

⁸⁵ Hutcheson, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Hutcheson, p. 6.

⁸⁷ Hutcheson, pp. 9–11, 17.

William Thomson, Lord Kelvin, in which one of the supporters, granted in 1892, is an undergraduate of the University of Glasgow, where he was Professor of Natural Philosophy for over half a century.⁸⁸

3. The Universities of Aberdeen

In the 1593 foundation charter of Marischal College, there is reference to the use of the belt in academical dress: ‘bursars are to wear long gowns, girt with a white leather belt four fingers broad.’⁸⁹ However, as all students would have worn dark gowns in the sixteenth century, the belt was the only distinguishing feature of the bursar at this time. King’s College statutes promulgated anew in 1641, but based on the original foundation, state that bursars here too were to wear a white leather girdle (*balteum coriaceum album*) as proof of their obedience.⁹⁰ Further King’s statutes dated between 1641 and 1653 say that students were to go about in the *galero* and *toga* but to use the *pileus* and *pallium* when in town or on the playing fields.⁹¹

The first indication of the red student gown at Aberdeen is pictorial and is to be found in a landscape of King’s College dated *c.* 1640, where figures are to be seen wearing long scarlet gowns.⁹² The 1659 statutes of Principal John Row, who governed King’s strictly from 1653 to 1661, were for the guidance of bursars and stated that those who did not appear in their gown and hat (*toga et galero*) would be deprived of a day’s food on the first offence, of two days’ food on the second offence and could be expelled on the third offence. The statutes also state: ‘*sed nullus alumnus rubra utatur posthac toga sed coloris nigri vel fusci*,’ indicating that the bursars were to be distinguished from the other students by wearing a toga of black or dark fabric rather than red. Further, a bursar found to be speaking in the vulgar tongue was to go without his gown and with a broad white leather belt

⁸⁸ Murray, p. 139. Lord Kelvin’s arms are to be found in a stained glass window in Westminster Abbey, where he is buried.

⁸⁹ P. J. Anderson (ed.), *Fasti Academiae Mariscallanae Aberdonensis: Selections from the Records of the Marischal College and University, MDXCIII–MDCCCLX* (Aberdeen: New Spalding Club, 1889–98), Vol. I, p. 67.

⁹⁰ Innes, *Fasti*, p. 229. (See also Innes, *Fasti*, pp. 237–38.)

⁹¹ Innes, *Fasti*, p. 233. The original text of the statute: ‘In vestibus nec luxus nimius, nec dissoluti animi indicium conspicitur [*insit*], sed, pro gentis et qualitatis consuetudine, scholaeque gravitate, unus quisque vestitor, speciatim vero galerati et togatisunto [*praesertim galero et toga decentibus induitor*]: *pileati et palliatirarius; nec nisi quando in vicinam urbem campos vel usorios proficiscendum fuerit.*’

⁹² C. A. McLaren, *Aberdeen Students 1600–1860* (Aberdeen University Press, 2005), p. 18; Carter and McLaren, p. 26. Although the dating of the piece may seem somewhat imprecise, it omits the Cromwell Tower from the scene and this was started in 1658, so it can be firmly placed before this time at the latest.



**Fig. 2. Libertine student, Aberdeen, 1677.
The earliest known detailed image of the
scarlet gown.**

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Library, Special Collections)*

(extra togam, uti albo cingulo coriaceolato) as punishment.⁹³

At King's College, the belt seems to have changed function from a sign of punishment to join the black or dark gown as a general distinguishing feature of the bursar (as at Marischal) as Alexander Middleton, Principal during the 1660s and 1670s, writes of his students: 'they wear a red or scarlet gown with hanging sleeves; but those who are bursars a black gown with a girdle.'⁹⁴ This practice seems to have been confined to Aberdeen but the students at both colleges were split into two classes: the bursars and the libertines.⁹⁵ The former were from poor families but showed academic promise, so were provided with a scholarship from the college

and were required to wear black gowns with a leather girdle and to act as porters at the College gate when they were not attending lectures. The latter were wealthier, paid fees for their tuition and wore the red gown.⁹⁶ The scarlet gown cost £16 7s. Scots in the 1660s.⁹⁷

A 1677 portrait of a libertine, probably of Marischal College, shows that the gown at the time was worn closed and had short inverted-T sleeves (Fig. 2).⁹⁸ In

⁹³ Innes, *Fasti*, pp. 254–55. Note that the bursars' gown was not always black. The mortification of Walter Ogilvie dated 1676 wills funds to be used to maintain a number of bursars at King's College 'but also for furnishing ane sad coloured gown, not being black, to each of them at their entrie thereto' (Innes, *Fasti*, p. 181).

⁹⁴ W. Thom, *The History of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen: D. Chalmers & Co., 1811), Vol. I, App. 1, p. 27.

⁹⁵ Thom, 1811, Vol. I, App. 1, p. 44.

⁹⁶ Thom, 1811, Vol. I, App. 1, p. 45.

⁹⁷ M^cLaren, p. 61.

⁹⁸ University of Aberdeen, Marischal Museum, ABDUA: 30536; M^cLaren, p. 38; Carter and M^cLaren, p. 37. The sleeve here is quite different from that shown in a drawing of 1688 (see Fig. 3. below) so there may have been rapid development of shape during this period

response to the Covenanted Commissioners' recommendations that the red gown be worn universally, sent to the universities in 1695, King's College said that the 'overtures are our practise, and wee approve of them. Only by our statuts and customes our bursars are obleidged to weare black gownes.'⁹⁹ The distinction between bursars and libertines was apparently discontinued at King's College between 1730 and 1765 as a 'mark of inferiority' and at Marischal College by 1780.¹⁰⁰ It seems, however, that as the bursars' black gown was abolished, the libertines began to make additions to their own gowns perhaps in order to keep the class distinction alive, if not so obviously. Pryse Gordon, who went up to King's College as a bursar in 1776, tells us that 'the dress of the students is a plain scarlet gown, which being commonly of coarse materials, and having no appropriate cap or head-gear, has a mean appearance'. He adds that 'the sons of the richer lairds, or private gentlemen, having the privilege of wearing a scarlet cape to their gowns, hold up their heads, and look down on the poor bursars, who in return pelt them with snow-balls'. When he finally bought himself a new gown after the one he had inherited from his brother became too short and of 'many colours', presumably after the dye began to fade and run, he spent over £1 10s. on a new one and would have spent more had he not known that 'bursars dare not aspire to velvet collars'.¹⁰¹

Contemporaneously at Marischal College, we are told that in 1775 student James Leith paid 2s. 8d. to have a gown cleaned and mended and to have a collar, made from a ¼ yard of crimson velvet, attached.¹⁰² The gown in 1801 was the most expensive item of clothing a student would have bought at 7s. 7d. for the fabric plus an additional 4s. 6d. for tailoring.¹⁰³ The scarlet velvet of King's and the crimson velvet of Marischal were one of two distinctions between the gowns of the two colleges. They were described as 'broad velvet collars, of the same form with those of the clergy of the Church of Scotland' in the late eighteenth century.¹⁰⁴ The collar distinction, however, changed slightly at some point in the late Georgian period. It is said that a particularly overzealous Sacrist named Downie, who was responsible for student discipline at King's, caused this alteration. Downie's powers reached only as far as the College precinct but he is said to have done some sleuthing in the hostleries of the city and discovered a celebration of some rowdy undergraduates. The students were summoned before the Senate the next day and faced disciplinary procedures, so they decided to exact their revenge on Downie by

or, alternatively, the precise form may have been open to the interpretation of individual tailors.

⁹⁹ Innes, *Fasti*, p. 382.

¹⁰⁰ M^cLaren, p. 96. The Gilbert Ramsay bequest, endowed in 1727, required that the four bursars it supported should wear red gowns (P. J. Anderson, Vol. I, p. 414).

¹⁰¹ P. L. Gordon, *Personal Reminiscences* (London: Henry Colburn & Richard Bentley, 1830), pp. 13–15.

¹⁰² M^cLaren, p. 92.

¹⁰³ J. Don, 'A Student's Expenses in 1801', *Aberdeen University Review*, 2 (1914–15), pp. 58–59 (p. 58).

¹⁰⁴ Thom, Vol. I, App. 2, p. 74.

summoning him under false pretence to one of the city's hotels, where he was subjected to a mock court that had been set up by the irate students. The court found him guilty of 'acts offensive and hostile to the students' and 'excess of duty on every occasion' and he was sentenced to be beheaded. He was led to a block where a headsman stood with an axe but instead of the axe, a wet towel was brought down on Downie's bare neck. Having taught the Sacrist his lesson, the student court asked him to rise but found that he had died of terror. Aside from the body, all evidence of the proceedings was removed and the students were never found out. The story was finally recounted by the last of them on his death bed many years later. To commemorate this event, the velvet collar was replaced by one of cloth to symbolize the towel brought down on Downie's neck.¹⁰⁵ Despite the change in material, the scarlet colour of the King's collar remained.

As for form, the second distinction in the gown at each college, it is clear that from at least the late seventeenth century onwards, the gowns at King's had a 'close sleeve, below the entry for the arm' and that those at Marischal had 'long open sleeves'.¹⁰⁶ This distinction is evident in the frontispiece of a student notebook drawn in 1688 (Fig. 3).¹⁰⁷ It shows that the collars had not yet appeared, as the distinction between the bursars and libertines in gown colour was still seen, and that the gowns were long, reaching the ankles. The closed sleeve of King's College was originally long and baggy with a narrow wrist in the manner of a bishop's rochet. It is reported that students there would fill the sleeves with books and stones and would use them as offensive



Fig. 3. Student's notebook illustration showing the distinction between undergraduate gowns of King's College (left) and Marischal College (right) in 1688.

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¹⁰⁵ R. B. Strathdee, 'A Scarlet Cloke in my Land', *Aberdeen University Review*, 43 (1969–70), pp. 245–51 (p. 249). See also *Scottish Notes and Queries*, 2nd ser., 4 (1902–03), pp. 110, 127, 143; N. N. Maclean, *Life at a Northern University* (Aberdeen University Students' Representative Council, 1906), pp. 187–97.

¹⁰⁶ McLaren, p. 92.

¹⁰⁷ University of Aberdeen, Special Collections, MS M 182, 1688: 'Cursus ethicis (logicus, physicus, etc.) in Academia Marischallana a Georgio Peacock eductus'.

weapons in their skirmishes with other students and townspeople. The College put a stop to this practice by altering the shape of the sleeves to resemble the flat sleeves of the Geneva gown.¹⁰⁸ As for length, illustrations of c. 1640 and from 1688 (see above) show that it was ankle length and it is referred to as 'long' during the late eighteenth century.¹⁰⁹ A landscape of King's College dated 1808 shows students in red gowns reaching the calf and with collars of scarlet but the sleeves are the same as during the seventeenth century.¹¹⁰ In 1833, we are told of the King's student that 'his gown, which, hanging from his shoulders, only reaches his knee, and resembles something between a surtout and a labourer's smock, if either of these articles of dress can be imagined to exist of a bright red colour, and with hanging sleeves.'¹¹¹ If it is assumed that the shortening of the gown and the alteration of the sleeve at King's from baggy to hanging flap form occurred at the same time, the change can be narrowed down to the period between 1808 and 1833.¹¹² It may have been at the same time that the Marischal gown was altered to have the sleeve flaps over rather than under the arms.¹¹³

By the 1820s, the scarlet gown was worn only by the Arts students—the less numerous students of the other faculties wore no distinctive garb.¹¹⁴ The first references to the tradition of 'tearing', a peculiar practice, which seems to have been restricted to Aberdeen, first appear in the 1830s.¹¹⁵ The pristine bright scarlet gowns of the bajans marked them out for persecution by the tertians and magistrands: it was considered desirable for the gown to be faded through wear and for the collar to be ink-stained as soon as possible so as to avoid being tormented by the senior students, who were distinguished by their tattered and discoloured gowns.¹¹⁶ By the early 1850s, the tradition of tearing had escalated somewhat. On the first Monday of the term the bajans, in their newly bought gowns, approached the lecture halls to find a rabble of senior students lying in wait to set upon them and tear their gowns to shreds. It was recorded that some students' gowns were

¹⁰⁸ J. H. Burton, 'The Two Great Northern Universities', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 14 (1833), pp. 182–91 (pp. 185–86).

¹⁰⁹ Thom, 1811, Vol. I, App. 2, p. 74.

¹¹⁰ Carter and M^cLaren, p. 67.

¹¹¹ Burton, p. 185.

¹¹² Compare changes to the gown at St Andrews and Glasgow at about the same time (see above).

¹¹³ There is a toga dated 1831 in the Marischal Museum collection (ABDUA: 15874). However, it only has one sleeve, perhaps as a result of 'tearing' (see below), which appears to have been altered at a later date so its diagnostic usefulness is limited. The remaining sleeve seems to be a flap hanging over the arm, similar to the 1859 painting (see Fig. 4, below).

¹¹⁴ Parliamentary Commission, *Evidence (Aberdeen)*, p. 226.

¹¹⁵ In a record of 1722 detailing restrictions on student meetings and drinking, there is a stipulation that there be no 'sealing of gowns', which may be related but the meaning is unclear (Innes, *Fasti*, p. 444).

¹¹⁶ D. Masson, 'Dead Men Whom I Have Known; or, Recollections of Three Cities', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 9 (1863–64), pp. 325–43 (pp. 326–27).

reduced to a ‘small shred fixed to the button-hole of the coat’ by the time they had reached their final year. The issue reached the attention of the Senate in 1853 and the minutes record that it was agreed to represent the matter to the students.¹¹⁷ The practice of tearing survived, however, and was recorded into the 1870s, when it was described rather as a struggle between bajans and semis.¹¹⁸ A gown worn by Robert Bain at the turn of the twentieth century has its hems reinforced with cord to prevent tearing, by this period, by the boys of the town rather than by fellow students.¹¹⁹

In 1854, there was a proposal to house the Faculties of Arts and Divinity entirely at King’s College, situated in Old Aberdeen, some distance from the modern city centre, and the Faculties of Medicine and Law at Marischal College, in the heart of the city. Although this was agreeable to the Senate, it was not received well at all by the alumni and citizens of Aberdeen.¹²⁰ The Arts Faculty was symbolized by the scarlet gown and was thus the most visible representation of the University. To remove the gown from Marischal, therefore, was to remove the University from the city. The proposal was abandoned by the Senate and the gown remained.¹²¹

The form of each of the college gowns on the eve of the union can be seen in pair of portraits of 1859 (Fig. 4). They show the King’s gown with its open sleeves, with inverted T by this period, and broad scarlet cloth collar in two layers and the Marischal gown with its closed sleeves and crimson velvet collar. Although the gown was ankle-length at the end of the seventeenth century, its length had reduced to just above the knee by the mid-nineteenth. The Marischal gown is shown fastened by two buttons and the King’s gown has two buttons but they remain unfastened.¹²² A single gown was adopted at the union of the Colleges in 1860, combining the short sleeves of King’s and the crimson velvet collar of Marischal and has remained unchanged to this day. The gown is illustrated in Sir George Reid’s contemporary painting *Salve Toga Rubra* (Fig. 5), which was reproduced several times in the following decades in repeated campaigns to revive the old red gown at Aberdeen.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Maclean, pp. 48–54.

¹¹⁸ G. Henderson, ‘Student Life at Aberdeen University in the Seventies’, *Aberdeen University Review*, 8 (1920–21), pp. 47–50 (p. 47).

¹¹⁹ University of Aberdeen, Marischal Museum, ABDUA: 39463.

¹²⁰ R. S. Rait, *The Universities of Aberdeen: A History* (Aberdeen: J. G. Bisset, 1895), p. 350.

¹²¹ J. M. Bulloch, *A History of the University of Aberdeen 1495–1885* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1895), p. 196.

¹²² W. Johnston, *Some Account of the Last Bajans of King’s and Marischal Colleges* (Aberdeen: Adelphi, 1899), frontispiece; Hargreaves-Mawdsley, Pl. 16; M’Laren, p. 103.

¹²³ University of Aberdeen, Marischal Museum, ABDUA: 30707; *Alma Mater* (University of Aberdeen), 11 (1893–94); 39 (1921–22).



Fig. 4. The last bajans of King's College (left) and Marischal College (right), 1859–60.



Fig. 5. *Salve Toga Rubra*, George Reid, 1860. This painting shows the new gown of the united colleges.

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Students in Arts were required to wear ‘a scarlet gown in the classes, at Chapel and at all university ceremonies’, according to the calendars issued between 1864 and 1914.¹²⁴ In 1883, the motion: ‘Should Arts Students Wear a College Gown?’ was put to the University’s Debating Society. Mr Grierson, speaking in favour of the gown, said that ‘a gown universally worn would bind the students together, and instil into them a kind of esprit de corps’. Mr Abel, speaking against the gown, told the house that ‘Gowns might have been useful in the old days of residence. But in these modern times they are worse than useless. No utility, no beauty, only 18s. which might have been expended with more advantage on tobacco or some other necessary article.’ The division was close at 55 in favour of the gown and 59 against.¹²⁵ By mid-decade, we are told that only one quarter of Arts students wore the gown¹²⁶ and a student who arrived in 1887 recalls that there were few gowns as their use was not enforced, despite the notice in the calendar.¹²⁷ In 1888, a plebiscite was held to canvass student opinion on the matter across the University and, with votes cast in favour of compulsion to wear the gown totalling 258 and those against numbering only 32, the matter was settled for a few more years.¹²⁸ Our student tells us that he finally acquired a gown in his final year in 1890 when compulsion was once again enforced.¹²⁹ When women students were first admitted in 1894, a distinctive ladies’ gown was created by making alterations to the epaulettes and lengthening the collar to a V-shaped form.¹³⁰

4. The University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh, despite being recognized under Scots law as one of the ancient universities, was founded in 1583 and was thus modelled along different lines to the pre-Reformation institutions. Edinburgh’s University was tied to the burgh rather than to the church. Town Council records from 1583 stipulate that all students at the College were to wear gowns on pain of expulsion, although no mention is made of colour.¹³¹ The fact that the gown went into decline at Edinburgh in later centuries while still prevalent at Scotland’s other universities

¹²⁴ Strathdee, p. 249.

¹²⁵ *Alma Mater*, 1 (1883–84), p. 123.

¹²⁶ *Alma Mater*, 3 (1885–86), p. 81.

¹²⁷ G. W. Smith, ‘Ultimus Georgicorum’, *Aberdeen University Review*, 3 (1915–16), pp. 115–19 (p. 116).

¹²⁸ *Alma Mater*, 6 (1888–89), p. 114.

¹²⁹ G. W. Smith, p. 117.

¹³⁰ Strathdee, p. 250. See also the coloured plate ‘On Thin Ice’, depicting the gentlemen’s and ladies’ gowns in *Alma Mater*, 13 (1895–96), p. 95 (reproduced in Carter and M^cLaren, p. 96, and on our front cover). The archives of the Burgon Society contain an example of the Aberdeen ladies’ gown.

¹³¹ A. Bower, *The History of the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Waugh & Innes, 1817), pp. 53–55.

has been inferred to suggest that the gown was never worn.¹³² In an account of 1635 we are told by traveller Sir William Brereton that ‘in Edenborough they (students) use coloured cloaks’.¹³³ In the same passage we are told that ‘red gowns’ are worn at Glasgow, so one is led to presume that the Edinburgh cloak and the Glasgow gown differ in style and that the colour of the Edinburgh garment is not necessarily exclusively red. Indeed, further evidence of the use of the gown at Edinburgh may be gleaned from the writings of Thomas Kirk, who travelled through Scotland during the 1670s. Of Edinburgh he tells us that ‘the younger students wear scarlet gowns only in term time’.¹³⁴ This is the first and, indeed, only indication of the specific use of a scarlet gown as the colour of choice at Edinburgh. However, the same writer told us that students at all three St Andrews colleges wore the red gown, which was almost certainly not true, so it may be possible that he also was mistaken about Edinburgh.

It would seem that the use of the gown went into speedy decline soon thereafter. The 1690 Parliamentary Commission’s ruling that students at each of the Scottish universities were to wear the red gown included special reference to Edinburgh: ‘in regard that wearing of gowns has never been in custome in the Colledge of Edinburgh the comission doe therefore recommend to the masters of that colledge to endeavour to bring the custom of wearing gowns here in practise’ [*sic*].¹³⁵ Following this ruling, a complaint issued by the University of Glasgow in 1699 says of Edinburgh: ‘They have never so much as endeavoured to make their students wear gowns, all which occasions many youths who love a licentious liberty to withdraw from this and other Universities and weakens our hands in obeying of these and such lyke Acts.’¹³⁶ Indeed, it has been suggested that the red gown was never worn again at Edinburgh despite the ruling of the Commission;¹³⁷ and the complaint from Glasgow may even have caused further resentment for the scarlet gown. Daniel Defoe, during his travels through Scotland in the 1720s, notes that the students at Edinburgh do not wear gowns in contrast with those at St Andrews and Glasgow.¹³⁸ No further mention of the gown is to be found during the eighteenth century and in 1830 we are told of Edinburgh that it is ‘the only college in Scotland at which the students wear no peculiar academic dress: those at the

¹³² A. Dalzel, *History of the University of Edinburgh from its Foundation* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1862), Vol. II, p. 13.

¹³³ Brereton, p. 117.

¹³⁴ Brown, p. 256.

¹³⁵ Innes, *Munimenta*, Vol. II, p. 523.

¹³⁶ Innes, *Munimenta*, Vol. II, pp. 540–41.

¹³⁷ Dalzel, Vol. II, p. 13; A. Grant, *The Story of the University of Edinburgh during its First Three Hundred Years* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1884), Vol. II, p. 471; D. B. Horn, *A Short History of the University of Edinburgh, 1556–1889* (Edinburgh University Press, 1967), p. 35.

¹³⁸ Defoe, *A Tour*, Part II: Glasgow, Letter XII, p. 2.

other universities being distinguished by red cloth gowns without sleeves'.¹³⁹ This was clearly the cause of some tension during the early Victorian period. In 1843, there was disagreement amongst the students on the matter of academical dress and petitions were delivered. The Senatus Academicus formed a committee to consider the matter and it reported:

There are two petitions, the one for and the one against the introduction of a distinctive costume, each subscribed by nearly an equal number of students, while a still greater number appear to have taken no interest in the matter, they (the committee) are of the opinion that in the present circumstances of society any attempt to originate such a practice would be inexpedient, and unproductive of any of the advantages which in earlier times were expected to result from it.¹⁴⁰

The debate was thus quelled but it re-emerged in 1861 when Professor Blackie proposed a motion to the Senatus Academicus that 'the adoption of academical dress by the students of the University would be highly conducive both to discipline and to propriety'.¹⁴¹ A committee was established in order to consider the matter further and it reported that 'the adoption of an academical costume is desirable providing it meets general approval of the students', so it set out to ascertain their views.¹⁴² At the following meeting, the committee reported that 'there is in the Faculty of Arts a very large majority in favour of the adoption of an academical costume, while in the Faculty of Medicine there is a decided majority against it'.¹⁴³ The committee found it was unable to garner opinion in the Faculties of Divinity and Law due to the late period of the session and recommended that the matter be postponed until the following session—as far as the minutes reveal, however, it never was.

5. *The Modern Universities*

The University College of Dundee was founded in 1881, became a constituent college of the University of St Andrews in 1897, was re-named as Queen's College in 1954 and was finally granted a Royal Charter and independence in 1967. This same year saw the foundation of the University of Stirling and second universities were founded in both Glasgow and Edinburgh as the University of Strathclyde in 1964 and Heriot-Watt University in 1966, respectively. Because of its early ties with the University of St Andrews, Dundee is alone among the modern universities in sharing the tradition of the red undergraduate gown. It also holds 'ancient' status

¹³⁹ W. Chambers, *The Book of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Buchanan, 1830), p. 386.

¹⁴⁰ Minutes of the Senatus Academicus of the University of Edinburgh, 24 June 1843, 1838–44 volume, p. 475.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2 February 1861, 1861–65 volume, p. 7.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 23 March 1861, 1861–65 volume, p. 27.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6 April 1861, 1861–65 volume, p. 32.

under Scots law so elects a Rector as at the other ancient universities. In 1889, the Students' Representative Council of the University College of Dundee adopted the red gown of St Andrews with a distinctive badge.¹⁴⁴

The pentagonal badge was of the same crimson material as the collar and was worn on the left breast. A line pattern symbolic of the lilies on the coat of arms of both the University College and the City of Dundee was stitched on to the badge in gold thread (Fig. 6).¹⁴⁵ When the institution was renamed as Queen's College and

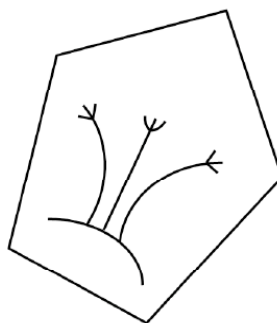


Fig. 6. The distinctive badge of the University College of Dundee.

restructured following a Royal Commission in 1954, the student gown became dark blue with a collar also in dark blue, although the shape remained the same. This gown was worn for a period of only thirteen years until the University of Dundee was given its charter in 1967, at which time the red gown returned but the distinction between Dundee and St Andrews was made by altering the colour of the yoke. The gown's colour is defined in the University's calendar as 'Union Jack red' and it is worn with a yoke, collar and facings of serge or flannel in 'Stewart blue'—very close in shade to liturgical blue, the colour of the Virgin Mary, the patron saint of the city. The shape and material of the gown at Dundee is identical to that at St Andrews. In celebration of the grant of university status from the Privy Council, the students climbed the Dundee Law en masse in their gowns: a spectacle which is said to have been visible from across the Tay in Fife.¹⁴⁶

Strathclyde prescribes a black gown with blue button and cord for its undergraduates thus straying from tradition altogether and neither Stirling nor Heriot-Watt requires any undergraduate dress. A further seven Scottish universities have been granted Royal Charters since 1992 but none of these prescribes any academic dress for undergraduates.

¹⁴⁴ M. Shafe, *University Education in Dundee 1881–1981* (University of Dundee Press, 1982), p. 50.

¹⁴⁵ A University College of Dundee gown and mortar-board worn by an undergraduate between 1908 and 1911 are on display in the McManus Art Gallery & Museum in Dundee.

¹⁴⁶ Shafe, p. 154.

Headwear

Little mention of student headwear is made at the Scottish universities until the nineteenth century and artists' impressions indicate that in the preceding centuries hats were worn according to the fashion of the time. In early Victorian St Andrews, provisions for headgear were not made in statute and the tile cap popular at the time was considered suitable for more formal occasions but the square trencher was introduced in 1865–66 and year groups were distinguished by coloured tassels: bejants wore blue, semis crimson, tertians yellow and magistrands black.¹⁴⁷ John Campbell Shairp, Principal of the United College of the University of St Andrews 1868–84, keenly disapproved of the students who had begun to wear the mortar-board. He is said to have ignored any greeting from a student wearing the square cap and viewed it as a vulgar aping of the style at Oxford and Cambridge. Shairp preferred that the Kilmarnock blue bonnet with a red tassel be worn as it had been by Lord Aberdeen and his brothers. However, the square mortar-board board became established.¹⁴⁸

Portraits of students at Glasgow *c.* 1840 indicate that the younger wore the Glengarry cap and the elder wore a black silk top hat, although this was not enforced by statute (see Fig. 1, above).¹⁴⁹ The students eventually presented a notice to the Senate on the propriety of wearing an academic cap and the resultant resolution in 1870 reads:

The Senate fully recognise the propriety of a suitable Academic Cap being worn along with the Gown. Two types of Caps have been suggested, each of which has distinct advantages. These are the English square Trencher Cap and a round soft Cloth Cap analogous to that depicted in Holbein's Portrait of Sir Thomas More's son, in the Queen's collection. The Senate recommend that one or other of these Caps be worn along with the Gown next session, leaving it to be determined after experience what cap shall ultimately be adopted uniformly.¹⁵⁰

The round cap was a favourite of Hugh Blackburn, Professor of Mathematics. The students were allowed to wear the cap of their choice for a short period but one year later in 1871 the following resolution was adopted:

The Senate fully recognising the propriety of a suitable Academic Cap being worn along with the Gown recommend that the Trencher Cap be worn, but desire that it not be worn without the Gown.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Cant, *The University of St Andrews*, p. 119.

¹⁴⁸ A. K. H. Boyd, *Twenty-Five Years of St Andrews: Sept. 1865 to Sept. 1890* (Edinburgh: Longmans, Green & Co., 1893), p. 25.

¹⁴⁹ University of Glasgow, Library, Special Collections, MS Murray 593, fols 7 and 8.

¹⁵⁰ Hutcheson, p. 11.

¹⁵¹ Hutcheson, p. 11. Headwear is no longer prescribed for undergraduates in the calendar of the University of Glasgow.

At Aberdeen, the mortification of Dr Duncan Liddell, endowed in 1612 to both King's and Marischal Colleges, required that the bursars it supported should wear a black bonnet to distinguish them from the other bursars and failure to comply with this regulation resulted in expulsion.¹⁵² A landscape of King's College dated c. 1640 shows that wide-brimmed black hats were worn by the red-gowned libertines and, by 1808, tall black hats were worn.¹⁵³ Although it appeared in portraits from before 1860,¹⁵⁴ students presented an official petition for the introduction of the trencher in 1870. The reply: 'The Senatus rejoice to observe in the students a disposition to respect their Academic garb, and give their cordial sanction to the introduction of an Academic cap, without making it imperative to wear it.' Thus the mortar-board became established at Aberdeen and became a distraction for the students who had hitherto only torn at the gowns of their fellow students.¹⁵⁵ The trencher proved wholly unsuitable in the windy climate of the city. However, it remained on the statute book and in 1888 a plebiscite at King's College found student favour in a proposal to differentiate between year groups by coloured tassels, as at St Andrews. Despite the large majority, this was rejected by the Senatus.¹⁵⁶ On the admission of women students to the University in 1894, a red tassel was added to their mortar-boards.¹⁵⁷ At the University College of Dundee, the coloured St Andrews tassels were worn until the University of Dundee was instituted in 1967.

Colonialism by gowns

The influence of the red undergraduate gown stretched out over the Atlantic in the early nineteenth century. Dr Thomas McCulloch was educated at the University of Glasgow and sent to Nova Scotia as a minister in 1802. There he founded Pictou Academy as a non-sectarian institution because King's College, the only other contemporary institution in the province, was open only to Anglicans. The Academy opened in 1818 and was modelled on the University of Glasgow. Under McCulloch's instruction students were obliged to wear the Scottish scarlet gown even before the Academy had applied for the power to grant degrees.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² P. J. Anderson, Vol. I, pp. 126, 130; Vol. II, p. 208.

¹⁵³ Carter and M^cLaren, pp. 26, 67.

¹⁵⁴ M^cLaren, p. 118.

¹⁵⁵ J. Smith and J. F. Cruickshank, *Records of the Arts Class 1870–74* (Aberdeen University Press, 1896), pp. 14–15.

¹⁵⁶ R. D. Anderson, *The Student Community at Aberdeen, 1860–1939* (Aberdeen University Press: 1988), pp. 47–48.

¹⁵⁷ Strathdee, p. 250.

¹⁵⁸ P. B. Waite, *The Lives of Dalhousie University* (Halifax, N.S.: Dalhousie University, 1994), p. 12; J. M^cGregor, *British America* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1832), Vol. II, p. 132. At Lathallan School in the county of Angus in Scotland, the head boy and girl

Sir James Colquhoun Irvine, Principal of the University of St Andrews 1921–52, was appointed Chairman of the West Indies Committee of the Asquith Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies and was instrumental in the foundation of the University College of the West Indies in 1948. Although the institution initially entered candidates as external students for the award of degrees by the University of London, as was common amongst colonial institutions at the time, Irvine made provision that his beloved scarlet gown be worn by students in Jamaica just as in Scotland.¹⁵⁹ Not only the colour but also the form of the gown was copied as it had ‘round sleeves cut above the elbow’.¹⁶⁰

Red undergraduate gowns were also worn at colonial African institutions including the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland; Makarere University College; University College, Nairobi; and The University of Ghana, although no direct link between the Scottish gown and these is evident in literature.¹⁶¹

The gown at the Ancient Universities in modern times

At St Andrews, there is plenty of photographic evidence to show that the scarlet gown was worn by many throughout the twentieth century but its use was particularly associated with the halls of residence and traditional University events. In the first few years of the twentieth century, it was required in only some of the classrooms but was experiencing something of a burst of popularity, being generally worn on the streets though not out of compulsion.¹⁶² The scarlet gown was worn only by Arts students during this period; medical students wore no gown at all.¹⁶³ James Read, who was Professor of Chemistry at St Andrews from 1923 to 1963, insisted that all candidates at oral examination wore the red gown.¹⁶⁴ Read’s passion for the garment no doubt rubbed off from James Irvine, who filled this role some years previously. During World War II and, indeed, until 1954 students brought their ration books with them when they arrived at university. Each scarlet gown required sixteen coupons—a significant proportion of the annual allowance.

(known as consuls) each wear a St Andrews scarlet gown. This tradition was instituted in 2009 by the new headmaster, a St Andrews alumnus (*Lathallan Former Pupil Newsletter*, September 2009).

¹⁵⁹ J. Read, ‘James Colquhoun Irvine: 1877–1952’, *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society*, 8 (1953), pp. 458–89 (p. 469).

¹⁶⁰ H. Smith and K. Sheard, *Academic Dress and Insignia of the World* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1970), p. 856.

¹⁶¹ Smith and Sheard, pp. 138, 335; J. M. Vlach, ‘Father Bacchus and Other Vandals: Folklore at the University of Ghana’, *Western Folklore*, 30 (1971), pp. 33–44 (p. 38).

¹⁶² L. Hutton, *Literary Landmarks of the Scottish Universities* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1904), pp. 156–57.

¹⁶³ *Notes and Queries*, 12th ser., 2 (1916), p. 538.

¹⁶⁴ E. L. Hirst, ‘John Read: 1884–1963’, *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, 9 (1963), pp. 237–60 (p. 245).

In order that the gown would still be seen in St Andrews, in 1942 the University ordered thirty-eight for the use of students.¹⁶⁵ In memory of John Honey, a student who proved his bravery by rescuing seamen from a ship wrecked off the Fife coast in 1800, the gown is never fastened at St Andrews lest students find themselves in the waters of the North Sea.¹⁶⁶ Undergraduate divinity students of St Mary's College wear a black gown with short open sleeves and a violet cross of St Andrew on the left breast, a reminder of the time when only graduates were admitted to the divinity college.

In Glasgow in 1904, we are told that the scarlet gown and mortar-board were not compulsory so were not worn by all but were seen in the classrooms and not often on the streets.¹⁶⁷ In 1907, the Senate made the following resolution thus instituting a distinction in the Glasgow gown still prescribed to this day:

Students may wear on the red gown a trimming distinctive to their Faculty. The trimming approved for this purpose is a narrow silk band of the colour of the hood lining proper to the degree of Bachelor in the Faculty, placed over the seam which crosses the breast of the gown on each side.¹⁶⁸

At Aberdeen in the 1920s, there was an attempt to revive the gown. In 1921, the Students' Representative Council recommended that it should be worn by both male and female students when attending classes and chapel. At first, more ladies than gentlemen were willing to comply but, when the sight of the scarlet gown had become familiar once more, more men were happy to wear it.¹⁶⁹ Although the compulsion for Arts students to wear the gown had disappeared from the Calendar in 1914, it reappeared in 1922.¹⁷⁰ The move, however, was not universally welcomed and led to confrontation between the students. There was even unpleasant ragging of the clothes of those who refused to wear the gown, echoing the gown tearing of the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁷¹ By 1924, two factions of pro- and anti-gown students had emerged and took part in public argument via University publications. We are told: 'It has never caught on to any extent among the men and is never likely to do so. A few of the women wear both toga and trencher: some wear toga alone: others carry the confounded thing over their arm, what for Heaven only knows.' The anti-gown party argued that 'when we leave the gates of King's we become citizens of Aberdeen in this year of grace 1924, and we ought to dress as such. We ought to do nothing which might serve to separate or to

¹⁶⁵ J. S. G. Blair, *The History of Medicine in the University of St Andrews* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 233.

¹⁶⁶ Grierson, p. 60.

¹⁶⁷ Hutton, p. 90.

¹⁶⁸ Hutcheson, p. 19.

¹⁶⁹ *Aberdeen University Review*, 9 (1921–22), p. 258.

¹⁷⁰ Strathdee, pp. 249–50.

¹⁷¹ R. D. Anderson, p. 89.

alienate us from the general body of the citizens.’ The pro-gown faction replied: ‘Let the insignia of the student be stamped on everyone’s back, and then there will be no need to cry—“Pull together Varsity!”.’¹⁷² The notice prescribing the scarlet gown continued to appear in the Calendar until the outbreak of World War II but was largely ignored by the students. In 1950, the Students’ Representative Council once again urged the University Court to review the matter and, after agreeing to subsidize its cost, the gown was once again officially prescribed. A pool of gowns was put under the charge of the Sacrist of King’s College and they were lent to students for use at chapel and at ceremonial occasions. During the 1960s, at the foundations of each of three new halls of residence, the wearing of the gown was enforced in the dining rooms.¹⁷³ Photographs from the 1980s indicate that the different ladies’ and gentlemen’s gowns still existed but were each worn by either gender.¹⁷⁴

The scarlet Russell cord gown now prescribed by Edinburgh is of the London undergraduate pattern and is very different from that at the pre-Reformation universities, although the red colour is retained.¹⁷⁵ Its use is largely restricted to the University choir, which can be seen wearing it at graduation ceremonies in Edinburgh’s McEwan Hall.

St Andrews is the only one of the Scottish universities where the gown is still seen frequently in the twenty-first century. It is worn to chapel services, formal dinners in the halls of residence, meetings of the Union Debating Society, by student ambassadors who give guided tours of the University to visitors and by a few to examinations. Most conspicuously, it is worn for the traditional pier walk, which takes place each Sunday in term-time after chapel. The coloured tassels on mortar-boards are now seldom used but are occasionally still seen on the cap of some stalwart traditionalists. A modern phenomenon is the so-called ‘academic striptease’ whereby bejants wear the gown high on the shoulders, semis wear it lower down, tertians in Arts wear it off the left shoulder and in Science off the right shoulder and magistrands wear it low off both shoulders, symbolic of their desire to cast off the scarlet gown altogether and take up the black graduate gown. In St Andrews the gown appears to be experiencing something of a renaissance; 2010 saw the institution of the ‘Scarlet Gown Society’, founded for the purpose of promoting its use across the University.

¹⁷² *Alma Mater* (University of Aberdeen), 42 (1924–25), p. 94.

¹⁷³ *Strathdee*, pp. 250–51.

¹⁷⁴ Carter and M^cLaren, p. 105.

¹⁷⁵ N. Groves (ed.), *Shaw’s Academical Dress of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3rd edn (London: Burgon Society, 2011), p. 169.

Summary

The scarlet gown is unlikely to have originated from a decree of King James VI (1566–1625) nor was it instituted by the Commissioners of 1690, both of which have been proposed. However, it is likely to have developed at some time in the intervening period. The red gown is first recorded at Glasgow in 1635, at Aberdeen c. 1640 and at St Andrews and Edinburgh in the 1670s.

At St Andrews, class distinctions between primars, secondars and ternars were evident in the ornamentation of their gowns until the early nineteenth century and, at Aberdeen, bursars were distinguished from the red-gowned libertines by their black gowns until the mid- to late eighteenth century, then by the addition of collars, which differed between the two Colleges until their union in 1860. At Glasgow, no class distinction was made. The early nineteenth century saw the addition of sleeves and the lengthening of the gown at both St Andrews and Glasgow. Conversely, the gown at Aberdeen shortened at around the same time.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Scottish students were ‘a race of young men, whose loose robes, varying from the brightest of fresh scarlet to the sombrest hue which years of bad usage can bestow on that gay colour’ but ‘the wear and tare [*sic*] of the gown is held indicative of advancement in the academic curriculum, and is rather encouraged than avoided’.¹⁷⁶ At Aberdeen, the new gowns of the bajans were reduced to rags by the elder students in the practice of ‘tearing’ during the mid-nineteenth century.

The last word we shall leave to James Lorimer from his treatise on the universities of Scotland:

The adoption of an academic dress would also, we believe, contribute towards giving to the students a corporate feeling, and generating an *esprit de corps*. It exists not only in the English Universities, but in the three older Universities of Scotland; and in all of them, we believe, good effects result from its use.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ ‘Student Life in Scotland’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 76 (1854), pp. 135–50 (p. 135).

¹⁷⁷ *The Universities of Scotland: Past, Present and Possible* (Edinburgh: W. P. Kennedy, 1854), p. 78.

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Left—Brass matrix of the ancient seal of the University of St Andrews, thought to have been made before 1418, showing students in supertunica and hood with shoulder cape; Right—A Victorian impression of the seal, coloured to show (anachronistically) the students in red gowns with crimson collars.

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ISBN 978-0-9561272-6-6

Printed by Information Press, Southfield Road, Eynsham, Oxford OX29 4JB, UK