

The Robes of the Medical Royal Colleges and Other Societies: Medical Education outside the Universities

by John L. Brennan

In his book *English University Life in the Middle Ages* Alan Cobban remarked on the theoretical nature of medical education in the Middle Ages.¹ Many men who graduated were more interested in teaching the subject than in the practice of medicine. A more practical approach would be gained from Continental centres, Padua and Leiden, but the non-academic bodies in London, the two Royal Colleges and the Society of Apothecaries would play an important part.

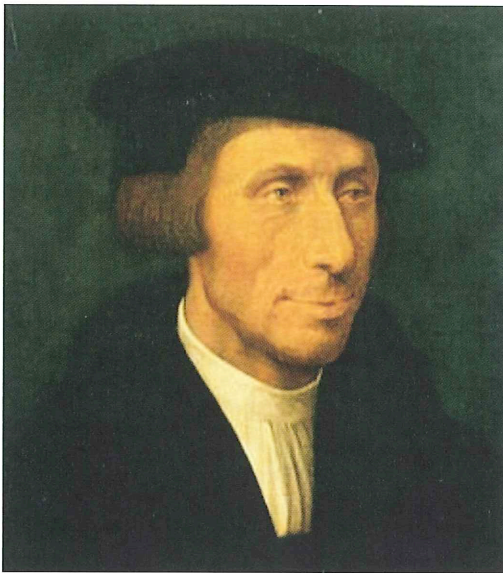
As a doctor, I wanted to see how the formation of the profession as we know it today would also influence the development of ceremonial robes outside the two ancient universities. The seventeenth, eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century would see, after a good deal of rivalry and infighting, the crystallization of physicians, surgeons and apothecaries into the unified profession of registered practitioners qualified in medicine and surgery, culminating in the Medical Act of 1858.

The early foundations

It is not so easy to demonstrate the evolution of ceremonial robes, since they do not seem to have developed in any logical or systematic way, as at the universities. The physicians might be expected to have brought their academics from Oxford or Cambridge, but some like William Harvey had studied abroad. A gown, often trimmed with fur, was worn by all men of dignity, whether lawyers, doctors or merchants, in Tudor times and Linacre, the founder of the physicians' college, is so portrayed (Fig. 1). Apothecaries and barber-surgeons, humbler practitioners little above the rank of tradesmen, would not wear anything so grand. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they would make a deliberate effort to raise their status and one way would be to create for themselves and particularly for their Presidents a dignified robe.

This article is based on a paper submitted for the Fellowship of the Burgon Society in 2006. I am very grateful to all those who assisted me in its preparation by providing information, illustrated booklets and photographs and especially to Professor Bruce Christianson for his help and encouragement.

¹ (London: UCL Press, 1999), pp. 169–70.



**Fig. 1. Thomas Linacre (1460?–1524)
in a furred gown**



**Fig. 2. 'The Apothecary or The Spice shop'
by Pietro Longhi (1752): apothecary with a
physician writing a prescription**



**Fig. 3. William Harvey (1578–1657)
in an academical gown**



**Fig. 4. Sir William Brown, PRCP,
portrait painted in 1767; the gown
lacks some of the modern decoration**

(Images reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Physicians of London)

The picture of an Italian apothecary at work (Fig. 2) shows a homely man in an apparent nightcap and shirt-like garment, but in fact a coat buttoning down the left side, examining a young woman. At his desk sits a dignified man in full-bottomed wig and black gown, apparently writing a prescription. It would seem that the physician has come and wants some medicine made up. ‘Certainly, *s’accomodi, Signor dottore!* Sit down, there’s pen and paper.’ I do not think this well-dressed man in his black knee-breeches and buckled shoes can be a mere colleague. The poor apothecary has patients waiting, but is not lacking in courtesy to his important visitor. This eighteenth-century Italian painting may not represent the exact state of affairs in England, but the smart physician could be a fashionable London doctor, but for the gown, not commonly worn outside the universities by then.

The seventeenth-century scholars were polymaths in an age when nearly every university-educated man would claim some knowledge of medicine and ‘natural philosophy’. In his book *A Priest to the Temple* that exemplary village parson George Herbert told his readers that the priest should be prepared to give his poorer parishioners legal and medical advice.² By this time lawyers were better organized than doctors and the two branches of the profession, barristers and attorneys, were apparent. By the next century the medical profession would begin to organize itself with the rise in status of the surgeons, some of whom, like John Hunter and Percival Potts, teaching at the Royal College and practising in the London hospitals, would rival the physicians in wealth and importance.

Even so, educated amateurs such as Samuel Johnson were confident enough to write on medical matters. He helped a doctor friend, Robert James by contributing several articles to his *Medical Dictionary*.³ John Wesley, with no formal training in medicine at Oxford, was the author of a home doctor, *Primitive Physic*, which ran into several editions and was still read in the early 1800s. The eighteenth century, when the present robes of both Royal Colleges in England were apparently designed and worn, was remarkably casual in its attitude to ceremonial dress. In this regard its way of thinking was more modern than that of the Victorians who enjoyed pomp and ceremony. Durham University, founded in 1832, had a full set of robes designed and seems to have had graduation ceremonies *ab initio*; London held presentation ceremonies from 1850.

It is difficult to deduce much from silence, but the one great man whose life was meticulously recorded by his biographer, Samuel Johnson, received three honorary degrees, apparently never attending any graduation ceremony. He received his MA after publication of his dictionary in 1755,⁴ his LLD from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1765⁵ and his DCL from Oxford in 1775.⁶ Johnson, very pleased and grateful,

² Ch. 23, ‘The Parson’s Completeness’.

³ Boswell’s *Life of Samuel Johnson* Everyman edition (London: Dent 1910), p. 96.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 533.

wrote letters of thanks in Latin. There was no ceremony; he was not invited to attend, nor did he suffer any disappointment, although Boswell records several informal visits to his alma mater.

The lack of ceremony in conferring a doctorate on the most outstanding literary man of his day does not tell us anything explicitly about the medical colleges and their robes. It does, however, explain why there is so little mention of gowns, their design and the occasions when they were worn in the historical records of the physicians' and surgeons' colleges in the eighteenth century. As now, each President could choose his style of dress for his formal portrait. Most simply wear the civilian dress of their age and one or two their scarlet MD gowns. No very precise description of the Fellows' dress has survived but apparently the second President of the Royal College of Physicians, John Caius (1510–73), who had studied at Padua, was keen to promote a dignified ceremonial for his college. It was he who designed the silver caduceus, the President's wand of office, which was ordered to be carried in front of him by the beadle in processions, but usually held by the President himself or herself in formal portraits up to the present day (as in the portrait of Sir William Browne in Fig. 4). The serpent was intended by Caius to represent that fashioned by Moses, to which the children of Israel looked for healing (Numbers 21. 9) rather than the pagan serpent of Aesculapius. Caius ordered that Fellows should wear their scarlet gowns, presumably their MD robes from Oxford or Cambridge, on feast days (red letter days in the Prayer Book) and for 'solemn meetings'. On other occasions black gowns were worn with a purple cap, of unspecified shape. A Fellow failing to wear this was liable to a fine of 2s. 6d.⁷

In the more narrowly confined life of a Cambridge college, Gonville, of which he was Master, now Gonville and Caius College, it was easier to enforce rules regarding academical costume. It was not so easy to discipline London physicians, who were for the most part, busy prosperous men. The Tudor age was one of transition; a long robe was worn by all men of dignity, whether statesmen, lawyers, clergymen or physicians. At the universities, gowns would be worn outdoors, although the hoods were already recognizable, since the oldest Prayer Book orders that they are to be worn over the surplice by cathedral clergy and preachers.⁸ A hundred years later, Stuart noblemen and professional men would no longer wear long robes in daily life. The portrait of William Harvey (Fig. 3) shows him wearing what appears to be an academical gown with a T-shaped opening to its sleeve over his ordinary dress, the orange-brown sleeves of his doublet. With all the disturbance of the Civil War and the Puritan dislike of ceremonial, Caius's regulations about robes seemed to have become a dead letter. By Queen Anne's

⁷ G. Clark, *A History of the Royal College of Physicians of London*, 3 vols, (Oxford University Press, 1964), Vol. II, pp, 137–38.

⁸ *First and Second Prayerbooks of King Edward the Sixth*, Everyman edition (London, Dent, 1910), 1549 Prayer Book, p. 288.

reign (1702–14), although each Fellow had in theory his own black gown, they were rarely worn at meetings. A compromise, still the present arrangement, was agreed by which only the President, Treasurer, Registrar and the four Censors would wear gowns.⁹ The Presidential gown follows the pattern of the Lord Chancellor's. Such gowns decorated with 'guards' of gold lace began in the sixteenth century. The first such gown is seen in a portrait of Sir Robert Broke, speaker of the House of Commons in 1554.¹⁰ The other officers wore and still wear a black silk gown resembling that of a QC. Referring back to the portrait of Sir William Browne (Fig. 4), one of the earliest PRCPs to have his full-length portrait painted wearing his official gown, it will be noted that this 'primitive' robe does not have the full decoration of the present gown (Fig. 5) or even that of John Latham in his portrait painted in 1816 (Fig. 6). The gold lace edging down the front is missing and there are only three bars on the glove sleeve, near the bottom.



Fig. 5. A modern President of the Royal College of Physicians



Fig. 6. John Latham, PRCP, 1816

(Images reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Physicians of London)

The Royal College of Surgeons only received its charter as such in 1822, though it had existed as the Company of Surgeons long before that. Its Master wore the black velvet gown with crimson facings and this has served as a kind of template for medical Royal Colleges, if they use any robes at all.

Before going further, it is pertinent to ask 'Why gowns faced with a colour, and not gowns and hoods?' There is no intrinsic objection to the use of hoods; theological and musical colleges prescribe them for their diplomates. In the case of theological colleges, however, the wearers, future clerics would need hoods to wear over their surplices in church. Many music diplomates too, as organists, choirmasters and cathedral lay clerks, will do the same.

⁹ Clark, Vol. II, p. 534.

¹⁰ J. Derriman, *The Pageantry of the Law* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), p. 160.

Surgeons and apothecaries would have had no connection with the universities, being trained by apprenticeship. Their bodies, the Surgeons' Company and the Apothecaries' Society were City Companies and, as such, were accustomed to seeing their Masters in some kind of gown, often furred and more akin to a modern mayor's robe, than a university doctor's. Rarely universities have dispensed with hoods; Ceylon (1942) and La Trobe (post-war) use gowns with some kind of coloured facings. There seems to have been an attempt to introduce a hood for the MRCGP and MRCS in 1975,¹¹ both black, the former Oxford simple shape, edged inside with 5" of white silk, the latter Cambridge full shape, lined black silk, edged 2" of red, but I have never encountered these in use. Medical men, even the most competent, seem to have a knack of putting on hoods reversed with the tippet outside. Twice I have had to turn a colleague's hood straight, once an Edinburgh MD for a consultant and the other, a Cambridge MA, for a GP at a service. One cannot go wrong with a faced gown!

The surgeons were very grateful to George IV for his generosity in the gift of a fine mace bearing their coat of arms below the royal arms. They responded by voting their President a 'more splendid gown' to wear at the Coronation.¹² This was of scarlet cloth, with gold decoration and is described fully in the Appendix. The modern President has a third gown, a light-weight edition of this, especially designed for air travel, since he may have occasion to bestow an honorary Fellowship on a distinguished foreign surgeon at a ceremony overseas. In course of time, the College would prescribe gowns with different facings, for Fellows in Dental Surgery and of the Faculties of Anaesthetists and Radiologists. When these specialists formed their own colleges they retained the same colours, but in both cases designed a more elaborate gown for their respective Presidents.

Before the first Medical Act was passed in 1858 many young men wanted to be able to practise both medicine and surgery and so after suitable training took the examinations of both the RCS and the Apothecaries' Society to become MRCS, LSA. It was only in 1884 that the two ancient colleges agreed to hold examinations for a joint diploma MRCS, LRCP, which has been known as the 'Conjoint', until modern times. It was only abolished as recently as 1996, when the Membership of the Surgeons' college was raised to a specialist diploma on a par with the MRCP. The Fellowship is now a higher diploma to be obtained after several years practice as a surgeon and, as with the Edinburgh Fellowship, the candidate elects a special branch of surgery, orthopaedics, neurosurgery, etc. This has not affected the academical costume of the College. The Fellows and Members still wear a black gown faced with broad and narrow crimson facings respectively.

Separated from the grocers in 1617, the apothecaries formed their own Worshipful Company, still a City company today. Compounders of medicine for

¹¹ See *Hoodata*, 7 (Autumn 1975).

¹² Z. Cope, *History of the Royal College of Surgeons of England* (London: Blond, 1959). p. 40.

the physicians and medical advisers to humbler people (as in Fig. 2), their status was improved by the Act of 1817, establishing their qualification, LSA. The Medical Act 1858 made it obligatory for every practitioner to be qualified in medicine and surgery and from 1907 the amendment LMSSA was substituted. The Master and Wardens of the Society had always worn gowns. The Licentiate's gown was designed only in the nineteenth century, being the customary BA shape, of blue alpaca with sleeves bound about 1" in blue shot gold silk and facings, which continue round the back of the neck, covered in the same silk. According to the Clerk, none has ever been made. Many like the present author, who first qualified LMSSA before going on to the MB, BS London three months later, will wear the robes of their higher degree. Others, mainly general practitioners who are content with the diploma will, perhaps, never have an occasion to wear academical dress. From 1928, the Society conferred a higher diploma by examination, the Mastership in Midwifery, for which a turquoise blue gown with white budge trimming was prescribed, but it was discontinued in 1963.¹³

Today the LMSSA is rarely granted but the Society examines for a large number of diplomas, for example the Diploma in Medical Jurisprudence (DMJ) and the Diploma in Genitourinary Medicine (DipG-UMed). None of these gives rise to academical dress.

Scotland and Ireland

Conditions in Scotland and Ireland were not quite the same as those in London.

In Edinburgh, there were barber-surgeons and apothecaries in the city before there were university-trained doctors, since the university was founded only in 1582, seventy-seven years after the surgeons received their first charter. The physicians' college would not follow until 1681. There must have been physicians practising in the Scottish capital before that, but they were either graduates of St Andrews, Oxford or Cambridge or of foreign universities, notably Padua or Leiden.

It was said that it was easier here for an impecunious man to qualify in medicine, for all he needed was 'Latin and three guineas'. Also the social division between university graduates, surgeons and apothecaries was not so marked since all lived in similar lodgings and not in college. For this, or for whatever, reason, both Royal Colleges do not seem to have devised any robes for their diplomates until the nineteenth century.

The Glasgow college received a charter from James VI in 1599, granted jointly to Peter Lowe, surgeon, and Robert Hamilton, Professor of Medicine, and was from the first a united body for physicians and surgeons. There was still some rivalry between the medical faculty of the University and the surgeons of the College, who disputed the right of university graduates to practise surgery. The University countered by granting its own Master of Surgery (CM) degree. With the

¹³ [An article on the origins and surviving examples of the Mastership in Midwifery robes will be published in *Transactions of the Burdon Society*, Vol. 8. (Ed.)]

passing of the Medical Act, 1858, all students had to qualify in both medicine and surgery with the MB, ChB degrees or the Scottish Triple diploma: LRCSE, LRCPE, LRFPSG. There seems to have been little demand, or perhaps practical need, for academical dress in Glasgow, for the College adopted its President's gown only in 1869 and Fellows' and Licentiates' robes in fairly recent times, 1905, when any ill feeling between Glasgow University and College had gone.

In Ireland, although university education, at Trinity College Dublin, had existed since 1591, medical education seems to have been theoretical and unproductive. Over a period of thirty-one years (1743–73), for example, only twenty-nine MD degrees and twenty-seven MBs were awarded, an average of fewer than two annually. The physicians' college received its first charter from Charles II in 1667, though it became known as the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland only in 1890. The society of surgeons in Dublin received its charter from George III in 1784. The Conjoint diploma, LRCPI, LRCSI, was started in 1886 to provide an essential qualification in medicine, surgery and obstetrics. Students of the Cecilia Street Medical School, part of Newman's Catholic University, were allowed to take this qualification. Nearly a century later, in 1978, the National University of Ireland recognized the Licentiates as having the equivalent of the MB, BCh and BAO (Bachelor of Obstetrics). The Chancellor of the NUI, Senator T. K. Whitaker before conferring the first degrees on the Licentiates, referred to the debt owed by the Catholic University to the Royal Colleges in helping its students to qualify. He went on:

Now, by a somewhat paradoxical, but most welcome turn of events, the Royal College of Surgeons has itself become a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland, and today as Chancellor of that University it is my privilege to return the historic compliment by conferring degrees on the students of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.¹⁴

The Fellows and Licentiates of the RCSI have had, since the nineteenth century, black gowns with wider and narrower St Patrick's blue facings respectively, to be described more exactly in the Appendix. Since 1978, they also have had the right to wear the green and scarlet hood of the NUI medical degrees.

Like those of London and Scotland, the Dublin physicians did not adopt any distinctive robes before Victorian times. Portraits of the founder, John Stearne (President 1667–69), and of Sir Patrick Dun (five times President) show both men in scarlet doctors' gowns. The first of Oxford or of TCD, for Stearne had studied at both, has facings of almost the same shade of scarlet. Sir Patrick Dun was elected President in 1685, ten years after coming to Ireland. In his portrait of 1687 he also wears a gown of Oxford/TCD shape with hood, the facings and linings of rich gold, not associated with any known degree then.

¹⁴ J. D. H. Widdess, *The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and its Medical School, 1784–1984*, 3rd edn (Dublin: RCSI, 1984), p. 7.

The present President's robe is similar to the London college's gown, but with broader lace bands, embellished with buttons and loops on the front. The gown of all other Fellows and officers is of black poplin with facings of czar violet. This colour may have been chosen rather than some shade of green, because a number of Trinity College hoods have linings or edgings of green, whereas only one hood, the MAO, has a purple lining, not quite the same colour (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. The President and officers of the RCPI in their robes—

l. to r.: Secretary (in MA (TCD) robes); Registrar; Treasurer; Vice-President; President; Censor

(Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland)



Fig. 8. Princess Diana with the President and officers of the RCOG on the occasion of her honorary Fellowship—

l. to r.: Hon. Treasurer; President; Princess Diana; Vice-President; Hon. Secretary

(Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists)

The later medical Royal Colleges

Although the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists may be termed the first 'modern' college, it holds a key position in medical education and indeed, for the design of academics for those of subsequent colleges. In incorporating his new institution, Sir William Blair-Bell, its founder-President had to overcome opposition, not only from the two older colleges but also from many of his fellow obstetricians. Some, including the senior 'honorary'¹⁵ at Westminster (the writer's medical school) refused to join and when Blair-Bell invited the Duchess of York, our late Queen Mother, to open the College in 1932, the then PRCS tried to

¹⁵ i.e. unpaid consultant in the Voluntary Hospitals.

dissuade her! Sir William ‘knew that ceremonial proceedings and the wearing of academic gowns would give an air of dependability and status to the organisation ...’.¹⁶ He had to push his ideas through against the opposition of several members of his own council. Blair-Bell designed the new robes in black, blue and silver himself and produced, in the author’s opinion, gowns which were, and still are, handsome and dignified (Fig. 8). He also introduced what might be termed the ‘heraldic principle’. With the help of a friendly expert, Sir George Bellew, Somerset Herald, he produced a beautiful coat of arms which would feature the same main colours, black, blue and silver. The shield, party per pale, azure and sable, charged with a Star of Bethlehem argent¹⁷ symbolized day and night, for babies are born at any time. The notion of having the same two or three colours both for the gowns and for the achievement¹⁸ would be adopted by a number of other new bodies as follows:

Royal College of General Practitioners—black and silver (see Fig. 9a, below)

Royal College of Ophthalmologists—silver and gold (see Fig. 10a–b, below)

Royal College of Paediatricians—blue and gold (President’s only)

Royal Society of Medicine—red and green (recently designed robes)

The author, and, if it is not presumptuous to suggest it, the Burgon Society, owes William Blair-Bell a debt of gratitude, for carrying through his designs for the arms and robes of his new College, in the face of opposition from his own council. Had he given way, it would have been a precedent for newer institutions to dispense with ‘all this flummery’. Even in the 1940s, some of my fellow students, mainly left-wing, would have abolished all forms of academical as well as legal dress. In the event, most of the new colleges adopted some gowns, at least for their officers, and all a grant of arms.

Strangely, none of these bodies had anything but support and good will from the ancient colleges. Most of their premises were large private houses, and for many years, the Physicians have given my second college, the RCPATH, the hospitality of their fine building for the admission ceremony of new Members.

Before dealing with the remaining new Royal Colleges, it will be convenient to include one body overlooked by Smith and Sheard, because they must have regarded it as a society or ‘club’ and not a college: the Royal Society of Medicine. Created in 1805 as the Medical and Chirurgical Society of London, it was founded as a forum for doctors and surgeons to meet, exchange views and to form a library.

A number of special societies dealing with various branches of medicine were included and in 1907, with a charter from Edward VII, the now large body became the RSM. The present building, at 1 Wimpole Street, was opened by King George V and Queen Mary in 1912.

¹⁶ P. Barnett, *75 Years of the RCOG, 1929-2004* (2005), p. 7.

¹⁷ Divided vertically into blue and black halves with an eight-pointed star superimposed.

¹⁸ The complete coat of arms, shield, supporters, crest and motto.



Fig. 9a. PRCGP (r.) with a Fellow (l.)



Figs 9b and 9c. PRCGP's badge and chain

(Photographs reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of General Practitioners)

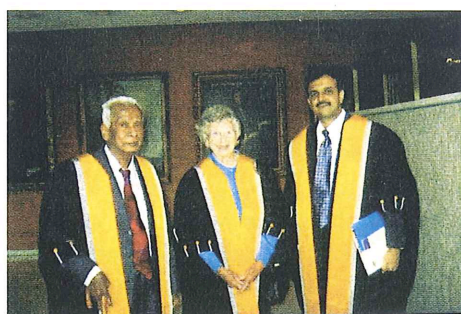


Fig. 10a. Honorary Fellows of the RCOphth

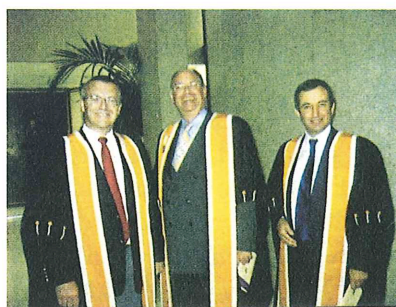


Fig. 10b. Council Members of the RCOphth

(Photographs reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists)



Fig. 11. The original Presidential robe presented in 1931

(Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the Royal Society of Medicine)

Although the RSM holds no examinations and grants no diplomas, except the honorary Fellowship, it plays a vital part in postgraduate education; the writer has been a Fellow since 1949. Its interest for this paper lies in its four gowns, all comparatively modern. By courtesy of officers at the RSM, I was able to see all their gowns. The first President's gown (Fig. 11) was given by Lord and Lady Dawson in 1931 on the termination of Dawson's Presidency. It is claret colour and is supposedly based on the robes worn by the Rector of Padua. Beautiful and interesting, this bears no resemblance to the Padua rectorial robes described in Hargreaves-Mawdsley.¹⁹ Lord Dawson's gift is designed to give the effect of two robes, an under-cassock-like tunic, the figured material of which consists of two false sleeves or cuffs sewn inside the wide bell sleeves, and the neckpiece folded over the cross bar of the hanger, which

has a row of tiny buttons down the front. This is meant to cover the wearer's collar and tie. The outer robe is open to the lower chest and then fastened in the Chinese fashion with loops and toggles. (The only comparable robe in Britain is the St Andrews higher doctors' undress gown, designed to resemble a black cassock under a gown.)²⁰ It was allotted to the Vice-President in 1959, when a new black and gold barred gown with the Society's arms on the right breast was introduced for the President. The President usually wears this robe when presenting the honorary Fellowship of the RSM to a distinguished doctor or lay person. The recipient is invited to wear his or her scarlet Doctor's gown or the corresponding European academicals. At the same time, I was able to see two new gowns designed recently for the Society. Both have flap collars and long straight glove sleeves, with a vent in the skirt, the shape of the QC's, or the London LLD undress gown. Again the heraldic colours have been used and the two robes are complementary. That of the Dean is deep red with green facings passing round to

¹⁹ *A History of Academical Dress in Europe* (Oxford: OUP, 1963), pp. 20–22.

²⁰ G. W. Shaw, *Academical Dress of British Universities* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1966) pp. 24, 84.

the flap collar at the back. The Vice-President's new robe is green with similar red facings. Both have a gold trim passing round the back to the edges of the collar, on which the Society's arms are embroidered.

The supporters of the shield are Ss Cosmas and Damien, the early martyred doctors portrayed here in the costume of Renaissance physicians with wide hats and their gown sleeves lined with ermine.

The new colleges, all post-war, are the result of the complexity and specialization in twentieth- and twenty-first-century medicine. The purpose of each may be defined as

- (i) to lay down conditions for training doctors in its specialty;
- (ii) to examine them for their fitness to practise it; and
- (iii) to define ethical problems peculiar to such specialists.

So far as academical dress is concerned, the colleges which are 'daughters' of the RCP, as might be expected, do not prescribe robes for their Fellows and Members:

The Pathologists have a scarlet Presidential gown and a black gown for other officers.

The Paediatricians have only a Presidential gown.

The Psychiatrists have no robes. They discarded white overalls as a potential barrier between doctor and patient and presumably robes are viewed in the same light, though the patients would not normally attend College functions. For formal purposes, e.g. a portrait painting, the President would wear his or her university robes.

Those colleges who are 'daughters' of the RCS have tended to prescribe gowns for all Fellows as the Surgeons' College does. The radiologists and the anaesthetists started as faculties within the RCS and their qualified specialists were entitled to put 'FFR RCS' or 'FFA RCS' after their names. The ophthalmologists' college had a similar history and, like the other two bodies, had to appoint a President and a council. All three would design special robes for their new Presidents.

The Royal College of General Practitioners, founded in 1952, might be said, like the RCOG, to be a 'daughter' of neither ancient college. Like the obstetricians, the GPs in the 1950s felt that robes would add dignity to their new institution. The first President, Dr William Pickles was a Yorkshire doctor who did some outstanding clinical research in his practice. He was an MD of London University and on ceremonial occasions wore his scarlet gown. In 1961, however, the present robes were designed. The President's, of black silk with silver facings, was worn with his silver chain and badge (Figs 9a–c). All other Fellows wore a black rayon

gown, looking very similar but for the College arms embroidered on the right breast. Members wore, and still wear, the same gown without the arms.

One other body attracted the interest of the author and deserves mention, although its purpose is not educational. The Academy of Medical Sciences has a President, two Vice-Presidents, a Registrar, a Treasurer and about six hundred Fellows and therefore, at first sight, might be mistaken for the equivalent of a medical college. It is in fact a registered charity, founded in 1998, which exists to co-ordinate medical research between universities, medical schools, government bodies like the Lister Institute and the large drug firms. Its Fellows, doctors and medical scientists, are all outstanding research workers. It holds admission ceremonies for new Fellows and an annual dinner, but in the main, it is a practical body. It prescribes no robes for its President or any other officers or Fellows.

It would be a bolder man than the author who could say with confidence, that the number of medical Royal Colleges has reached saturation point and that we, whether the profession or the public, need no more. The Faculty of Community Medicine was founded in 1972 as a joint body of the Glasgow, Edinburgh and London RCPs. The Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine was a body founded between the same three bodies in 1989. Finally, the Faculty of Accident and Emergency Medicine was formed as a joint body between the London RCP and the English RCS, since casualty departments are now staffed by consultants who have to diagnose and deal with both medical and surgical conditions. Such bodies may, like the radiologists, anaesthetists and paediatricians, eventually want to assert their independence by becoming colleges in their own right. When they do this, they will at least, one supposes, award their President a gown! So this article cannot be the last word on the matter.

Conclusions

The robes of the medical Royal Colleges have been derived for the most part from those of city companies or trade guilds, rather than from university gowns.

The 'heraldic principle' introduced by William Blair-Bell—the use of two or three main colours both on the facings of the gowns and as the main colours of the armorial bearings—has been adopted by more recent colleges, the general practitioners, the ophthalmologists, the paediatricians, for their Presidential gown and the Royal Society of Medicine for its two recently designed gowns.

It is unlikely that the pattern of gowns in this specialized field will have much effect on mainstream academical dress where gowns and hoods are still the norm. Several of the new universities already employ the heraldic theme for their hood colours, drawing on their coats of arms. So far as new medical Royal Colleges are concerned, it appears likely that they will use no ceremonial dress except perhaps for a Presidential gown.



Fig. 12. The PRCPath in scarlet Presidential gown

(Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Pathologists)



Figs 13a and 13b. The PRCA gown



Fig. 13c. The FRCA gown: this is the old FFA RCS gown unchanged

(Photographs reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Anaesthetists)



Fig. 14a. RCR President's gown



Fig. 14b. RCR Officer's gown



Fig. 14c. RCR Council gown

(Photographs reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Radiologists)

Appendix

The medical Royal Colleges and other learned bodies and their academical dress

The Royal College of Physicians of London

11 St Andrew's Place, Regent's Park, London NW1 4LE (0207 935 1174)
www.rcplondon.ac.uk

From its incorporation in 1518, the College granted Licences to physicians practising within seven miles of the centre of London. (See also the 'Conjoint' diploma under the RCS below.)

The Membership has been granted by examination since the early nineteenth century and has always been a qualification for would-be specialists. It is now granted in cooperation with the RCPE and the RCPSG as the MRCP(UK). This diploma grants no privileges of Membership of the College. The successful candidate becomes a Collegiate Member by paying an annual subscription.

The Fellowship is granted to an established consultant by the Comitia of the College. He or she cannot apply, as a barrister does to 'take silk'.

Robes

President: a robe of black damask, generally resembling that of the Chancellor of Oxford University. There are four bars of gold lace on the upper sleeve and five on the hanging part of the glove sleeve, compared with the seven of the Oxford Chancellor's. The edging of the front facings, round the skirt and on the flap collar is the same. The gown does not, however, have a train which needs to be carried by an attendant.

Registrar, Treasurer and four Censors: a gown of black silk with straight glove sleeves and flap collar resembling that of the QC or the old London undress LLD gown.

Other Fellows and Members: no robes.

The Royal College of Surgeons of England

35–43 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3PE (0207 405 3474)
www.rcseng.ac.uk

The Company of Barber-Surgeons received their charter from Henry VIII in 1540. The Company controlled the practice of surgery in London for about two hundred years until an independent Company of Surgeons was created in 1745. The College received its charter from George III in 1800. In the early nineteenth century it was common for London students to qualify MRCS, LSA.

The 'Conjoint' or MRCS, LRCP qualification was introduced in 1884 as an alternative to the MB, ChB degrees. The Fellowship as a specialist surgeon's qualification was started in 1844. In 1996, the Conjoint was abolished and the MRCS introduced as a specialist qualification on a par with the MRCP(UK). The FRCS is now a higher qualification to be taken after some years as a practising surgeon and the candidates elect one particular branch of surgery. The FRCS and MRCS gowns remain the same as before.

Robes

President:

Full dress—a scarlet cloth robe with a train. The facings and square collar at the back are of purple velvet. The facings, the collar and the bottom of the sleeves are trimmed with gold lace and the sleeves also with gold ornaments. A second (light-weight) gown is also of scarlet silk but with scarlet satin facings replacing the purple velvet. The gold ornaments and lace edging appear to be the same.

Undress—black silk gown, with facings in front continuous with a square collar behind of crimson velvet. The sleeves are trimmed with black lace and tufts.

Vice-President: similar to the President's undress gown but with facings of crimson satin, not velvet.

Members of the Council: the Fellow's gown (see below).

Members of the Court of Patrons: a gown of crimson Russell cord with facings of crimson satin, continuous round the neck. The sleeves are looped up with gold silk cord and button.

Lecturers: a gown of black silk with facings like those of the Vice-President's.

Fellows: a gown of black stuff with a long wide open sleeve similar to that of Cambridge doctors, looped up with a crimson cord and button. (In practice the gown is usually made up in the Cambridge MB shape, which has rather shorter sleeves.) The 6" facings and yoke are covered with crimson silk.

Members: a similar gown but with 2" facings covered with crimson silk and a 2" band of crimson silk across the base of the yoke.

Former Fellows of the Faculty of Anaesthetists; see Royal College of Anaesthetists below.

Fellows in Dental Surgery: a similar gown to that of the Fellows but the facings consist of two crimson cords 6" apart with a crimson satin vertical band 3" wide between them.

Licentiates in Dental Surgery: a black gown with two crimson cords 2½" apart as facings.

Headgear. President, Vice-President and Members of the Council: a round black velvet bonnet trimmed with gold cord and tassels; honorary Fellows: a round black velvet bonnet with crimson cord and tassels; other Fellows and Members: a black cloth mortar-board with black tassel.

The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London

Blackfriars Lane, London EC4V 6EJ (0207 236 1189)

www.apothecaries.org.uk

From a medieval guild of Pepperers, the Grocers' and Apothecaries' Society developed until the Apothecaries became a separate body in 1617. The first Master was Edmond Phillips, 1618-1621. The Licentiate'ship (LSA) was first awarded in 1815, after the passing of the Apothecaries Act. The examination included surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology from 1885 and was amended to LMSSA in 1907.

Robes

Master: a black cloth gown trimmed with musquash.

Wardens: a gown of black cloth trimmed with fitch.

Clerk: a barrister's gown trimmed with blue ribbons.

Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery (LMSSA): a dark blue gown with a wide, open sleeve not quite so long as that of Cambridge doctors. The facings of blue and gold shot silk taper from 3½" at the bottom to 2" at the neck. There is a narrow edging of the same silk on the outside of the sleeves (about 1"). See Smith, p. 815, Plate 219. The Society rarely awards the Licentiate'ship now.

Master of Midwifery (MMSA), first awarded in 1928 and discontinued in 1963: a gown is of a lighter blue than the Licentiate's. It has facings of white budge (treated lamb's wool) about 4" wide above the arm slit and two further rows on the straight glove sleeve. There is an epitoge on the right shoulder, divided vertically, the inner half being white, the outer half blue (Smith, p. 816, Plate 220, incorrectly shows the epitoge on the left shoulder).

Headgear. Recipients of both these diplomas wear a black Canterbury cap.

Other diplomas, including a higher diploma, Master in Medical Jurisprudence (MMJ): no academical dress.

The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9DW (0131 527 6406)

www.rcsed.ac.uk.

The College was founded in 1505, ratified by a charter of James IV the following year. There is a Membership examination comparable to that of the RCS of England. The Fellowship is specialty-based in one branch of surgery: orthopaedics, neurosurgery, etc. In Scotland, the comparable diploma to the English Conjoint, was the Triple Qualification—LRCSE, LRCPE, LRFPSG, i.e. Licentiate of the two Edinburgh Colleges and of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. This was introduced in 1884 and 'faded out', according to my informant,

in the 1990s. I take it this means that it was not formally abolished, but that candidates ceased to apply for it.

Robes

President: a gown of dark navy corded silk, with wide facings of azure blue silk, edged with wide (about 1") silver lace. These are continuous with shoulder pieces and a square collar behind. The straight glove sleeves are trimmed with silver lace bars, six above and eight below the armhole.

Vice-President: a similar gown, but with four rows of lace, on the upper arm only. The hanging glove sleeves are plain.

Secretary and Treasurer: a similar gown but with only three rows of lace on the upper arm.

Clerk to the College: a dark navy gown with a wide sleeve of the BA pattern with a silver loop and button. There is a circular badge on each breast, apparently the same, and silver decoration on the shoulders.

Regent (functions unclear): a gown with the same azure and silver trim facings. It has a long glove sleeve, the T-shaped opening of which is piped with silver, but there is no other decoration.

College officer(s): a gown with open sleeves. It is plain except for a small shield-shaped badge on the right breast and a larger oval badge on the left breast.

Fellows: a navy gown with an open sleeve, as shown in Plate 218 on p. 809 of Smith. The facings are azure with two horizontal white braid frogs on each side. The sleeves are pleated in front with a single white silk cord and button.

Licentiates (according to the photo supplied by the College, more recent than Smith's information): a plain gown with no coloured facings. The sleeves are, however, apparently pleated with a single white cord and button.

Headgear. President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer: a black velvet John Knox cap; Fellows and Licentiates, and lower officers of the College: a round bonnet of the same navy material as the gown.

Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

9 Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1JQ (0131 225 7324)

www.rcpe.ac.uk

Informal meetings of physicians were held from 1680 and a royal charter was granted in 1681. Examination for the Membership was first held in 1682. Fellows are elected by the whole body of Fellows.

Robes

President: a gown of black corded silk with an open sleeve pointed behind and gathered up into folds in front with a gold cord and button. The sleeves are decorated with

two gold frogs and lined with crimson taffeta. The gown is faced with crimson velvet 5" wide.

Vice-President: as for the President, except that the frogs, cords and buttons are all silver.

College Secretary, Council Members and past Presidents: a similar gown, except that the frogs and buttons are black and the cords crimson.

Fellows: a gown of the same shape but made of black queen's cord woollen material. Facings of crimson velvet as for the higher officers. The sleeves are gathered up in front with a black cord and button and are unlined. See Smith, p. 808, Plate 218.

Headgear. President: a black velvet birretum with a gold button and tassel; Vice-President: a black velvet birretum with a silver button and tassel; College Secretary, Council Members and past Presidents: a black velvet birretum with a black button and tassel; Fellows: none specified.

Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

232–242 Vincent Street, Glasgow G2 5RJ (0141 221 6072)

www.rcpsg.ac.uk

The College was founded by royal charter of James VI in 1599. The joint Founder Presidents were Peter Lowe, surgeon, and Robert Hamilton, physician and professor of medicine. Previously the Royal Faculty of Physicians, etc., it was renamed the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow by an Act of Parliament of 1962. The College now cooperates with the Edinburgh and London RCPs in examining for the MRCP(UK). As at the other surgeons' colleges the basic specialist qualification for a surgeon is the MRCSG followed later by the FRCSG, a higher diploma in one branch of surgery.

Robes

President: a black corded silk Geneva gown, the sleeves lined with scarlet silk. Facings are of black velvet, 10" wide, bordered on the front edge and inside with 3½" of scarlet silk and having yellow (whin blossom*) piping behind the scarlet silk and at outer edge of the black facings. There is a velvet tippet, loose and 5" deep at its centre with a 4"-wide semi-circular collar of scarlet silk piped with yellow and showing 1" of velvet at the yoke.

Other office bearers (Visitor, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Librarian, Hon. Secretary and ex-Presidents): a gown of black corded silk of the Bar gown shape with a looped sleeve. The facings are of black velvet, 9" wide at the bottom tapering to 5" at yoke, with bordering of yellow silk 3" wide, with scarlet piping (i.e. the colours reversed from those of the President's). Scarlet silk piping at the back edge of the yellow. The

* *Whin* is another name for gorse, from Scandinavian.

velvet tippet, loose, is 7½" deep with semi-circular collar of yellow silk, 4½" at its deepest and showing 1" of velvet at the yoke.

Fellows and Members: a gown identical with that of the Office bearers, except that there is no scarlet piping.

Licentiates: a gown of black Russell cord of the Bar shape with a looped sleeve. The facings are of yellow silk, 4" broad below tapering to 2" round the yoke.

Headgear. Officers, Fellows and Members: a black velvet John Knox cap; Licentiates: a mortar-board.

The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland

Frederick House, 19 South Frederick Street, Dublin 2 (01 8639700)
www.rcpi.ie

The College received its charter from Charles II in 1667. Founder-President: John Stearne. Its Latin title was changed to the 'King and Queen's College' by William and Mary in 1692. It became the RCPI only in 1890.

Robes

President: a gown of black Irish poplin trimmed with gold lace after the pattern of Chancellors' gowns. The pattern is very unusual however. The facings are decorated with horizontal bars, bounded on the outside edge by a narrower lace edging (about 2"). At the bottom of the gown in front, the lace edging is continued *inwards*, it does not go round the skirt like that of the London PRCP. The bars are broad, about 5" and each is surmounted by a cord and gold button after the manner of those seen on gorget patches on the uniforms of high army officers. There are three similar bands on the upper sleeve and three more of equal width on the glove sleeve. I do not have a photograph from the back, but the gold lace appears to continue round the square flap collar. The opening of the sleeve is T-shaped and has a narrow edging of gold lace, about ½" wide. See Fig. 7.

Vice-President: although Smith makes no mention of a gown for this office, the Vice-President, standing to the left of the President in Fig. 7, is wearing a different robe from the other Fellows. The facings are of a more reddish purple and the flap collar appears to be edged with gold lace.

All other officers and Fellows: a black velveteen gown of the Oxford doctors' shape with facings continuous round the yoke, of czar violet poplin. (Smith at p. 444 describes facing on the sleeves, but in all the photographs of Fellows in robes, in the publications sent to me by the College, violet is only apparent on the facings down the front.)

Members: a black stuff gown of the Dublin University (i.e. TCD) masters' shape with facings of czar violet.

Licentiates: a black stuff gown of the Dublin University bachelors' shape with czar violet facings.

Headgear. Officers and Fellows: a black velveteen cap with a black tassel; Members and Licentiates: a black cloth mortar-board with a black tassel.

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

123 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2 (01 402 2400)

www.rcsi.ie

The College received its royal charter in 1784. The first President was Henry Morris.

Robes

President: a gown of black poplin, with long closed glove sleeves trimmed with scrolls of gold lace. The facings of claret (material not specified, so presumed poplin) are edged with gold lace. The square collar behind is covered with the same material and has lace edging.

Vice-President: a similar gown of black cord with facings and square collar behind of St Patrick's blue, similarly edged with gold lace.

Secretary: a black cord gown with crimson poplin facings and a pen-wiper's badge (on right breast?) in silver.

Council Members: a black cord gown with crimson poplin facings.

Examiners: a black cord gown, with pointed sleeves, faced with St Patrick's blue poplin.

Registrar: a black cord gown of the Dublin University masters' shape with facings of St Patrick's blue poplin and with the armorial bearings of the College worked in silk and gold in front (presumably on the right breast of the gown). The width of all the officers' facings is not specified but one would expect it to be wider than on the Fellows' gowns, perhaps 6".

Fellows; a black cord gown of the Dublin University masters' shape and faced with St Patrick's blue poplin, 4" wide.

Fellows of the Faculty of Anaesthetists: a gown like that of the surgical Fellows but faced with celtic-blue poplin.

Fellows of the Faculty of Dental Surgeons: a similar gown faced with emerald green.

Licentiates; a black cord gown of the Dublin University bachelors' shape, with ½" of St Patrick's blue poplin down the outer edge of the facings.

Headgear. President: a black velvet mortar-board with a gold tassel and gold lace edging. None specified for other officers, Fellows or Licentiates.

Apothecaries' Hall of Ireland.

This institution (with which I did not correspond) used to grant a medical qualification, LAH. Like the English LMSSA it seems to have fallen into disuse.

Robes

Governor: a gown made from purple velvet and trimmed with gold lace.

Members of the Board of Directors: a black gown trimmed with purple velvet and edged with gold lace.

There was never any gown prescribed for Licentiates.

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

27 Sussex Place, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RG (0207 772 6200)

www.rcog.org.uk

Founded in 1929, the College was granted the title 'Royal' in 1939, but World War II delayed the drafting of the charter until 1948. The Founder-President was Sir William Blair-Bell, who designed the robes himself. Would-be specialists are admitted to the Membership after examination. Promotion to the Fellowship is not automatic but may be granted after a minimum period of ten years to Members who have made an important contribution to obstetrics and gynaecology, either in clinical diagnosis and treatment, or research. The honorary Fellowship may be granted to distinguished persons, e.g. to Princess Diana (see Fig. 8), whether medical or lay, or to foreign specialists.

Robes

President:

Full dress—a gown of black satin damask, with blue silk facings 5" wide, continuous over the shoulders with a square flap collar behind and trimmed on the edge with silver lace. The armorial bearings of the college are embroidered at the top of each facing. The glove sleeves are decorated with bands of silver lace both above the elbow and on the hanging part.

Undress—a gown with a long wide open sleeve, looped up in front with three silver cords and buttons. The facings are like those of the dress gown, 5" wide and decorated at the top with the armorial bearings. This undress gown is also worn by past Presidents.

Fellows: gown of the same shape as the President's undress gown (Smith, p. 80, Plate 217) but of black stuff and with blue silk facings 4" wide with lace 1" wide. The sleeves are looped up in front with three silver cords and buttons; similar cord and button are sewn on the yoke.

Members: a stuff gown of the same pattern, but with blue facings 1½" wide, edged with ½" silver lace. The sleeves are looped with black cords and blue buttons.

Diplomates no longer have an admission ceremony and as the DRCOG is meant for general practitioners practising obstetrics, their gown would not be made up or worn very often. The gown is of the same shape as Members', but without coloured facings. It is decorated high up on the breast on each side with a blue and silver flash, 4" long by 2" wide. Each flash is of blue silk 1½" wide with a ½" edging of silver-grey silk.

Headgear. Presidents and past Presidents: a black velvet mortar-board with a blue button, a silver tassel and silver lace edging; Fellows and Members: a black cloth mortar-board; diplomates: none specified.

The Royal Society of Medicine

1 Wimpole Street, London W1G 0AE (0207 290 2900)

Website www.rsm.ac.uk

Although two hundred years old as a body, it has only used any academics since the 1930s. Originally a medical club or forum for London doctors and surgeons, it never set out to train men for a qualification or set examinations. Beginning as the London Medical and Chirurgical Society, it was renamed the RSM in 1907 and was open to Members or Fellows from all over Britain. A distinguished doctor was appointed President but had no robe or badge of office until in 1925, Sir St Clair Thompson, the then President, presented the Society with a seventeenth-century gold chain of office. Lord Dawson of Penn was President from 1928 to 1930 and on retirement he and Lady Dawson gave the RSM a claret-coloured robe and cap (see p. 86 above, and Fig. 11). In 1959 the red gown was replaced by a more conventional black robe decorated with gold lace. In recent years robes have been introduced for the Vice-President and the Dean.²¹

Robes

President: a black gown, edged along the facings, round the skirt and along the glove sleeves with gold lace. This gown is very similar to that of the PRCP, except that a badge of the RSM's arms is sewn on the right breast. A modern silver chain of office, presented by Sir David Innes Williams (President 1990–92) is now worn.

Vice-President: a green gown shaped like the QC's court gown; with a square collar behind, long straight glove sleeves and a vent about 9" long in the skirt behind. The facings are deep red or maroon, bordered along the outside with gold lace about 1" wide, continuous round the edge of the collar behind. This collar is embroidered with the arms of the RSM.

²¹ By the kindness of Ms J. Rose, PA to the Administrator, I able to view the four gowns of the Royal Society of Medicine for myself and confirm that the two new robes did not in fact have attached 'hoods' but flap collars. I obtained a clearer idea of the make up of the 1934 red gown than my impression from the colour photo.

Dean: a gown similar to the Vice-President's, but with the colours reversed—it is deep red or maroon with green facings

Headgear: apparently none.

The Royal College of General Practitioners

14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park, London SW7 1PU (0845 456 4041)

www.rcgp.org.uk.

Formed as the College of General Practitioners in 1952, with Dr William Pickles as its first President, it became a Royal College by charter in 1972. All doctors intending to enter general practice must work first as trainees and from 1967 have had to take the examination for the Membership. Fellowship may be by nomination or assessment. Promotion is not automatic but awarded for outstanding work in practice.

Robes

President: a gown of black silk with an open sleeve. The gown is faced with silver silk, the facings about 4" wide. The sleeves are bordered with about 1½" of silver silk. With this gown, the President wears a silver chain and a badge bearing the arms of the College (see Fig. 9a–b).

Fellows: a gown of black rayon with a glove sleeve and inverted-T opening. The facings and edgings are of the same width as the President's. A large badge bearing the college coat of arms is sewn on the right breast.

Members: the Fellows' gown, but without the arms.

Headgear: apparently none.

The Royal College of Radiologists

38 Portland Place, London W1B 1JQ (0207 636 4432)

www.rcr.ac.uk

After Roentgen discovered X-rays in 1895, they were swiftly applied to medical diagnosis and were found to be efficacious in the treatment of malignant disease. By the time of the writer's student days (1939–44), both radiologists and radiotherapists were established specialists. The Faculty of Radiologists, attached to the RCS, was formed in 1939. It received a royal charter in 1953 and became the Royal College (RCR) by supplemental charter in 1975.

Robes

President: a black gown with glove sleeves (Fig. 14a). It is faced with blue silk about 5" wide bordered on the outside by gold lace 2½" wide. This continues round the skirt

of the gown. There are diagonal flashes on both shoulders of blue silk bordered on both sides with gold lace. The inverted-T shaped armhole of the glove sleeve is bound with gold lace. There is one band of gold lace 2½" wide on the bottom of the sleeve.

Officers: a black gown with facings of blue silk about 4" wide with flashes of blue silk on the shoulders (Fig. 14b).

Council: a black gown with broader blue silk facings, between 5 and 6" wide (Fig. 14c).

Ordinary Fellows: a black stuff gown, with long straight glove sleeves and inverted-T opening. The blue silk facings are about 5" wide and are continuous with the facing of the square collar behind. This is the former FFR's gown (see Smith, pp. 803 and 805. Plate 217).

The Royal College of Pathologists

2 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AF (0207 451 6700)

www.rcpath.org

Virchow, the German pathologist associated postmortem changes with disease in the 19th century, but in Britain, physicians performed their own postmortems and GPs those for the coroner. Koch and Pasteur pioneered bacteriology on the Continent, but only Lister took note of their work here. Pathology as a specialty developed in the 1920s and 30s with the formation of the Association of Clinical Pathologists. The College, formed in 1962, received its royal charter in 1970. Candidates for the Membership hold approved laboratory posts and take two examinations. Promotion to the Fellowship is automatic after eight (formerly twelve) years. The first President was Professor Sir Roy Cameron.

Robes

President: a scarlet cloth gown with black facings about 5" wide, edged with white a little more than 1" wide. The long wide sleeves, like those of a Cambridge doctor's gown, are lined with black and have the same white edging. With this is worn the Presidential badge, bearing the arms of the College on a red and gold ribbon.

Headgear: a black John Knox cap with a gold button at its centre. This is Smith's description, but the writer, who remembers Professor Cameron from 1965, had never seen him, or any subsequent President in photographs, actually wearing the cap (see Fig 12).

Other officers: a similarly shaped black gown with the same white edging.

Fellows and Members: no robes.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists

17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG (0207 235 2351)

www.rcpsych.ac.uk

The Medico-Psychological Association has existed since 1841. It became the Royal Medical Psychological Association and by a further royal charter in 1971 the Royal College. Specialists in mental disease have been recognized in this country since the eighteenth century and treated their patients often very harshly; even a royal patient, George III, fared little better. A more humane policy was introduced in the nineteenth century. The term 'psychiatrist' was first used in Germany in 1808 but here about a century later (the old term was 'alienist'). Training, as for other specialists, consists of holding a number of recognized appointments in mental hospitals and passing the examinations for the Membership (MRCPsych). There is no automatic promotion to the Fellowship. After a minimum period of five years, a Member may be nominated by two Fellows and his/her name approved by a sub-committee of the Court of Electors.

Robes

None,

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists

17 Cornwall Terrace, London NW1 4QW (0207 935 0702)

www.rcophth.ac.uk

Specialists in eye disease have existed since ancient times. A German, Bartisch, wrote a treatise on treatment of eye conditions in 1583. A Frenchman, Jacques Daviel, described the method of extraction of the lens for cataract in 1745. In this country, the Faculty of Ophthalmologists of the RCS became a separate college in 1988 and added 'Royal' to its name in 1993. Training in recognized posts leads to three exacting examinations for the Membership. The final 4½ years as a specialist Registrar lead to the FRCOphth examination with a numbers of submitted cases. A Diploma is available to those intending to practise outside Britain.

Robes

President: a black gown with wide open sleeves gathered up with three gold loops and buttons. This gown is faced with a broad band of gold and a broad band of silver grey outside this, each about 5" wide.

Council Members: a similar gown, with a wide band of gold bordered with a narrow edging of silver-grey on both sides, about 1" wide.

Fellows, whether honorary or by examination: a similar gown, but with the silver-grey edging only on the outside of their gold facings (see Fig 10).

Members: a similar gown, but the facings are a narrow band of gold with a narrow band of silver outside.

Diplomates: a similar gown, but with only one loop and button on their sleeves. The facing is a narrow band of gold, edged with silver-grey on the outside only.

The Royal College of Anaesthetists

Churchill House, 35 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4SG (0207 092 1500)

www.rcoa.ac.uk

Nitrous oxide, ether and chloroform were all used as anaesthetics in the nineteenth century and at first any junior person could pour the liquid on a cloth over the patient's face. Almost a century went by before the need for properly trained experts was recognized and the Faculty of Anaesthetists was formed in 1948 within the RCS. The College was formed in 1988 and received its royal charter in 1992. Doctors who train as anaesthetists proceed at once to examination for the Fellowship. The modern anaesthetist is a skilled physician with care of the patient, before, during and after operation. Some specialists now concentrate on palliative medicine, the relief of pain in incurable disease.

Robes

President: a gown of black figured damask with long glove sleeves. The upper sleeve is decorated with three broad bands of gold lace and a further five on the hanging part. There is a decoration of narrower lace on the upper arms. The facings are of crimson like the Fellow's gown (see below), but about 5" wide below tapering to about 2" at the neck and bordered outside by a band of gold lace about 2½" wide. This is continuous behind on the square collar which is covered with crimson silk, embroidered with the arms of the College (Figs 13a–b).

Fellows: a black gown with wide sleeves, gathered up with a crimson cord and button and with broad facings like those of the FRCS gown, except that the crimson silk is divided in the middle by a 2" band of black (Fig 13c).

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

5–11 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8SH (0207 092 6000)

enquiries@rcpch.ac.uk

Several physicians began to take a special interest in children's diseases in the eighteenth century and by the nineteenth; Barlow, Still and Hutchison were famous. Dickens describes the forerunner of Great Ormond Street in the East End but there were older children's hospitals in Northampton and Glasgow. The British Paediatric Association became the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health by royal charter in 1996.

Robes

President: a gown of Giotto blue wool with a wide open sleeve of the Cambridge doctor's style lined with gold silk taffeta. The facings, 2½" wide, are of blue silk taffeta bordered with gold lace having an oak leaf design. There is a double helix gold wire design round the skirt of the gown. The sleeves are looped back with a green button and two blue and gold tassels. (This gown was the gift of the Welsh Paediatric Society and the green button is a reminder of the Welsh connection.) The blue and gold are the main colours of the College arms. There is a lightweight version of the gown for air travel, without the wire border and tassels.

The Academy of Medical Sciences

10 Carlton House Terrace London SW1Y 5AH (0207 969 5288
www.acmedsci.ac.uk

The Academy exists for the purpose of coordinating medical research between universities, medical schools and members of the Forum, companies engaged the production of drugs, medicines and vaccines. It has a President and other officers and about six hundred Fellows, all experienced research workers. Each has the right to put FMedSci after his or her name.

Robes

None.

John Brennan, MD (London), LLM (Keele), MRCP, FRCPath, LMSSA, DipTheol, FBS, qualified in medicine in the war years and later specialized in pathology. He worked as a USPG missionary at the Christian Medical College and Hospital in Ludhiana, Punjab, for ten years. He was ordained there and has worked both as a pathologist and priest subsequently.

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