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Designing in Circles, Conversing in Triangles, Dressing in Squares: Evolving the Academic Dress of the University of Sussex, 1958–1963

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Designing in Circles, Conversing in Triangles, Dressing in Squares: Evolving the Academic Dress of the University of Sussex, 1958–1963

By Andrew Plant

Abstract and methodology

The University of Sussex was the first of seven Plateglass Universities¹ created in England during a major expansion of higher education following the Second World War.² Paradoxically, the determined modernist outlook of the foundation led to a reimagining of some of the oldest elements of academic costume. With this unorthodoxy came startling departures from the parameters then obtaining, notably an unmistakable bachelors' hood with a lining of grey fur squares, the allocation of a *pileus* for officials and holders of higher doctorates, and the discarding of scarlet or claret robes in favour of innovative designs in vivid shades of yellow. This eccentricity attracted opprobrium, speculation, bewilderment, and several urban myths, although its indebtedness to older models was frequently asserted. Influences on Hargreaves-Mawdsley's original scheme are here posited and discussed for the first time, especially his unique reinterpretation of heraldic furs, and the iconographic medieval glass in the Chapel of Merton College, Oxford.

This complex gestation and development is explored through unpublished material held at the extensive archives of The Keep, Brighton, including many rare examples of animated correspondence in the notoriously challenging handwriting of Charles Franklyn. These have been deciphered as far as possible, and the majority presented in full.

For reasons of space, what follows here is only the first chapter of a longer study.

Preliminary negotiations for a university in Brighton had begun in 1911, but it would not be until February 1957 that matters gained real momentum, prompted by a debate on higher education in the House of Lords. Progress towards the new foundation was keenly observed by Charles Franklyn, who had long desired the potential pearl of Sussex, and he alerted William Stone, Director of Education for the County Borough of Brighton, to his services in customary unbridled fashion. Stone would create the colleges of further education that amalgamated into Brighton Polytechnic, and later became the University of Brighton; but Franklyn's application to design for an insti-

¹ A term coined by Michael Beloff in *The Plateglass Universities* (1968); in fact, the dominant feature of Sussex is red brick.

² It was quickly followed by York (1963), Warwick (1964), East Anglia, Essex, Lancaster, and Kent at Canterbury (all 1966); in Scotland, the University of Stirling was founded in 1967.

tution before the establishment of its forerunner must be something of a record, even for him.³

Sunday 27 April 1958

A University College for Sussex at Brighton

Dear Mr Stone,

For years I have followed with much interest the plan for a University College, growing into a University for Sussex: we have been connected with Brighton since 1887 at least and lived in Hove 1908–12. My own connection with Universities is considerable, a member of the Standing Committee, Uni's of London since Feb 1927 & Senior member since Jan 1934 & just reselected in Jan. until 1961. If you have in your office a 'Who's Who' & 'Kelly's Handbook to the T.L. [Titled, Landed] and Official Classes' you would find ample details, the main parts being that I designed the complete systems of Academical and Official dress for 4 British Universities, most of that for a 5th (Nottingham)⁴ & the new hood for Chichester Theological College in Nov. 1948. I also designed the Arms for St Peter's Hall, Oxford, Malaya University etc, and put through the Patents as also for The British Transport Commission (England & Wales & Scotland) in 1956. When a University College is established, robes will be needed for the President & Principal: a degree granting University graduate robes will be necessary. These I would like to design. If you are not the right man for me to write to, kindly tell me who is, & I will also keep in touch with Walter Oakeshott as he was head boy at my school.⁵

Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn

Franklyn was fully aware of the standing of a University College, since the universities of Exeter, Hull, Leicester, Nottingham, Reading and Southampton had begun as such. Stone's amicable reply the next day was happily oblivious to the lengthy, obstinate, and ultimately fruitless correspondence that would be precipitated. His point that no-one was yet able to consider such matters had no effect on Franklyn, who at once dispatched a postcard with his habitual trope.

30 April 1958

Many thanks indeed for your kind letter of yesterday; let us keep in close touch. Regarding Arms, I have a basic design in mind now which might (when the time comes) form a useful starting point for consideration. Southampton & Hull have the most beautiful systems of Academical Dress in Great Britain, probably in the world.

Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn (By the way, I am not 'Mr'!)

3 It is necessary only to direct the reader unhesitatingly to Groves, *Charles Franklyn: A Man of Strong Opinions* (2022).

4 Franklyn's input to Nottingham, later described as 'revise and convert' (see below) was minor, and seems to have been confined to changing the hood shape (Groves, p. 50). Much of Nottingham's system, notably partly lined hoods, with Cambridge gowns for bachelors, does not reflect his habitual practice. It is possible that the blue University silk is Franklyn's suggestion, but he certainly would not have stopped there unless constrained.

5 Walter Oakeshott (former school captain of Tonbridge) was then rector of Lincoln College Oxford and a member of the Academic Planning Committee of the Preliminary Council for the University College of Sussex. Franklyn must have discovered his involvement, although the implication that Oakeshott would discuss such presumably confidential matters with him reads like an uns subtle attempt to pull strings.

The official announcement of John Fulton⁶ as the new vice-chancellor spurred Franklyn to try again.

Sat 21 Feb 1959

Dear Mr Stone,

Further to your kind letter of 28th last,⁷ I was most interested to learn from today's Times p. 4 of the advances made and of the nomination of the first V-C of U.C. of Sussex. Normally, a U.C. has a Principal, & he becomes usually the 1st V-C when full University status is attained.

Having designed the complete systems of academical and official dress for four British Universities (see 'Who's Who' etc), having given to Southampton and Hull the most beautiful systems (surpassing Oxford, Cambridge and London) and having been associated with Sussex since 1887 at least, I would very naturally love to give to the University in Sussex an equally fine beautiful system. The PhD Southampton has been admired continuously since its creation.

On the arms side, I designed the Arms for St Peter's Hall, Oxford, Canford School, Malaya, and the British Transport Commission, Bridgnorth, and so on, and I have in mind a basic design for the new U. C. Sussex, a sketch of which could be sent in when invited. All my designs are simple and follow mediaeval coats in practicability.

So far as academical dress is concerned my normal invitation is to submit a memorandum on the subject, and then later to give a demonstration of possible systems. The academical dress com'tee or sub-com'tee, then chooses one that it likes, and a full set of models is made. Having done this for so many decades, the technique is well-established. It seems as if you must have got a Council now able to act.

Kind regards, Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn

Once again, he was premature. Stone thanked him in a brief letter dated 23 February 1959, but pointed out that the Council had only just held its first meeting, and that matters other than academic dress would of necessity occupy it for the present. Franklyn then appears to have restrained himself for some months. The University College of Sussex came into legal existence on 20 May 1959, following the approval of the Charter and Statutes by the Privy Council. It had been anticipated that although an initial charter would allow it to become a University College, a second would be required to obtain University status.⁸ In fact, a decision by the University Grants Committee quickly allowed such foundations to apply immediately for such a transformation, while the need for this second document was removed by the addition of proposals in the charter designed to safeguard academic standards.⁹ By the summer, an application had been made by Sussex to the College of Arms (via Richmond Herald), for the grant of a coat of arms, but its draft was still under discussion.¹⁰

6 Formerly vice-chancellor of the University of Wales.

7 He must have meant Stone's letter of 28 April 1958; there is no record of correspondence dated 28 January 1959.

8 For a detailed resumé of these early years, see W. G. Stone, 'Steps Leading to the Foundation of the University', in Daiches, pp. 168–92.

9 The University of Sussex, SxUOS1/1/1/1-GB181. First Annual Report, 1959–60, p. 16. Without this ruling the new foundation would have been tied to the syllabuses of the University of London.

10 SxUOS1/1/1/1-GB181. First Annual Report, p. 17.

Joint scheme by Franklyn and Shaw

It is probable that Norman Hargreaves-Mawdsley¹¹ was already being considered as a designer for the University's academic dress, but no further relevant correspondence has been traced until February 1961, when George Shaw makes an unannounced entrance. Quite how he became involved has not been ascertained, but he had already submitted a proposed scheme based on a shade of claret, with sample hoods made up by Wippell & Co., all of which were rejected and appear to be lost.¹² Shaw therefore offered a modified system, featuring a colour he termed Sussex Blue, together with five sketches (Figs 1A–1E): 'I have used the pink shade for the Arts colour, as white (in a blue hood) would clash with several other University degrees ... Wippells have made up, at my request, BA, MA, BSc and MSc hoods according to this scheme ... I have also got an undergraduate gown in Sussex blue for you to see.'¹³ Despite Shaw being the sole signatory, this is evidently a collaborative effort, and later correspondence (see below) makes a strong case for Franklyn as designer of these hoods, with bachelors allotted Burgon hoods [s2], masters the London shape [f3], and doctors the full Oxford hood [f5], all of which were Franklyn's favoured choices.¹⁴

Shaw's proposal

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX PROPOSED SCHEME OF ACADEMIC DRESS

GOWNS

Undergraduates

A gown of Sussex Blue rayon with short bell-shaped sleeves of the Oxford Scholars' type, with a 6" slit in the forearm seam.

Bachelors

A black gown of Russell cord with open sleeves of the Oxford BA shape, reaching to the hem of the gown. The forearm seam to be slit 6" from the outer edge, and with a black silk covered button at the top of the slit.

Masters

A black gown of Russell cord, Poplin or Ribbed Rayon. The sleeve to be of the Oxford MA shape i.e. closed, but with the end of the sleeve to be cut at a right angle on the outer edge and at an acute angle on the inner edge. The arm hole to be of the inverted-T type, with a black silk covered button at the top of the slit.

Doctors' Undress Gowns

A black gown of Poplin, Ribbed Rayon or Corded silk of the same shape as for masters, with the addition of a square flap collar over the yoke.

¹¹ William Norman Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1921–80) was always known by his second name.

¹² Kerr and Shaw, p. 10.

¹³ The University of Sussex, SxUOS1/1/1/17/24 (1961–66). Letter from Shaw to Fulton, 18 February 1961.

¹⁴ Shaw specifically acknowledges himself as designer of the gowns in his letter of 8 December 1961 (see below). Groves also notes that the proposed MA hood almost exactly replicates the MA of Malaysia, designed by Franklyn in 1949, and that both Shaw and Franklyn tended to prefer the Oxford shape for doctors' robes, though the chosen design parallels the London PhD. For a succinct assessment of this projected scheme, see Groves, pp. 74–75.

For PhD—a row of Doctors’ lace (Cambridge style) round the edge of the collar and round the arm hole.

For other Doctors—the PhD gown with the addition of a row of lace down the facings of the gown.

FULL DRESS ROBES

PhD

A claret-coloured robe of the Cambridge Doctors’ shape, with facings and sleeve linings of the University Colour silk (Sussex Blue), with a cord and button of the faculty colour at the elbow, and with a border 1” wide of the faculty colour down the inner margin of the facings.

Other Doctors

A scarlet cloth robe of the Cambridge doctors’ shape, with facings and sleeve linings of the University colour silk, with a cord and button of the faculty colour at the elbow, and with a border 1” wide of the faculty colour down the inner margin of the facings.

HOODS

Bachelors.

A hood of Russell cord or ribbed rayon of the University colour, of the Oxford (Burgon) shape, lined with the faculty colour and edged with white fur. The neckband to be V-shaped and with a loop to hold it.

Masters

A hood of ribbed rayon of the University colour, of the Cambridge shape, with the corners of the cape rounded. The hood to be lined and edged ½” round the cape with the faculty colour.

The neckband as for bachelors.

Doctors

PhD—A claret cloth hood of the Oxford doctors’ shape, lined with the University silk and with a border ½” wide inside and outside the hood proper of the faculty colour.

Other Doctors—A scarlet cloth hood of the Oxford doctors’ shape lined with the University silk and with a border ½” wide inside and outside the hood proper of the faculty colour.

CAPS

Undergraduates, Bachelors and Masters—a black cloth Mortar board.

Doctors in Undress—a black velvet Mortar board.

Doctors in Full Dress—a round black velvet bonnet with cord and tassels of the faculty colour.

FACULTY COLOURS

Arts—Neyron Rose (B.C.C. 55)

Science—Deep Gold (B.C.C. 5)

This system would have resulted in a striking but not over-complicated set of robes, since the broad nature of the courses divided all the faculties into only two schools, thereby making them degree colours rather than faculty colours. Neyron Rose, a vivid

Figs 1A–1E.
Shaw's sketches
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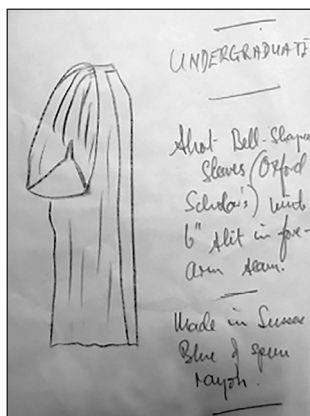


Fig. 1A. Undergraduates [u4], the Durham shape, in blue.

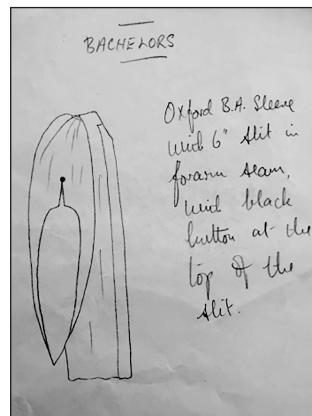


Fig. 1B. Bachelors [b7].

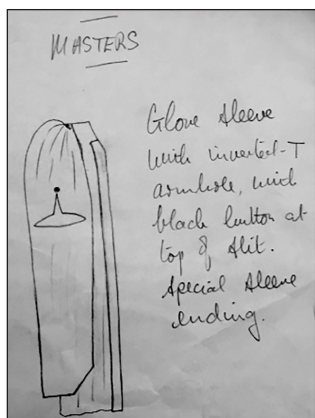


Fig. 1C. Masters [m16].



Fig. 1D. Doctors' undress gowns [d1].

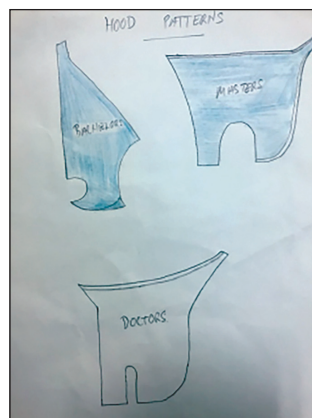


Fig. 1E. Shaw's sketch of hood patterns most probably designed by Franklyn.

pink or cerise (BCC 35, not 55) and Gold (BCC 6, not 5)¹⁵ are very close to those allocated to the same faculties at Southampton, the dress of which—lest we forget—Franklyn was also responsible.¹⁶

The colour of Sussex Blue was not specified, but the prototype BSc hood has since come to light: a rich azure, edged with white fur (recalling sea-spray, perhaps?) (Fig. 2). This colour seems to have particularly appealed to Franklyn but his appropriation of it for the shell of the bachelors' and masters' hoods, as well as the inclusion of fur, are

¹⁵ For an assessment of the BCC colours and their adoption by universities worldwide, see Scott.

¹⁶ Neyron rose also features in the DSc robes for Cranfield, also an institution with only two faculties; was there some influence here?

Fig. 2. The only known image of the prototype BSc hood (note the gold lining) for Sussex [s2], designed by Franklyn. The hood was gifted to John Baldson but its current whereabouts are not known.

features that appear almost nowhere else in his designs.¹⁷ They lend particular weight to the intimate connection he undoubtedly felt towards the university of his chosen county—as well, of course, to the intensity of his annoyance when his ‘appeal to all lovers of what is beautiful and picturesque in academical dress’¹⁸ was unequivocally rejected in favour of unorthodoxy.

The reply to Shaw has also not been traced. Did the authorities disapprove, were they urged to survey the field, or was there already a revolutionary streak in the upper hierarchy that was determined to depart from convention? In 1965, Shaw’s Sussex gowns were offered to Bath and immediately incorporated into its initial scheme (1966), although they were dropped in 1997 in favour of more generic designs, perhaps for reasons of costs.¹⁹



Escalating persistence

Judicious discretion might have advanced Franklyn further, but was unrealistic to expect. He thanked Stone for his letter of 23 February, reiterated that he had designed for four British universities and written for three encyclopaedias, advised that his usual procedure was a demonstration of robes, and confided, ‘I have one lovely silk up my sleeve for you. When do you expect your charter?’²⁰ The importance of this prized colour to Franklyn may be confirmed from his later oft-quoted lamentation: ‘The present system is a calamity because the writer could have given Sussex the most beautiful robes of all, reminiscent of the blue-green of the sea and the green of the Downs.’²¹ He referred to the sumptuous silk of peacock-blue shot green, designed in 1951 for The Australian National University, Canberra; its use there was prevented by import restrictions,²² but he had already considered it for the University of Hull in 1954.²³ Franklyn was fond of stating that he had something up his sleeve, and would employ almost identical terms and catchphrases when negotiating an equally unsuccessful approach to the University of Warwick in 1963.²⁴ In the meantime, Stone must have decided that embryonic ceremonial was occupying far too much of his time, and the

¹⁷ Franklyn’s only other known use of fur—and that probably imposed on him—was in 1949 for the bachelors’ hoods of the renegade Western Orthodox University: Groves, p. 54. In 1995, Shaw noted (p. 3) that none of the new universities had used fur in their hoods, ‘no doubt fearing the wrath of the so-called “animal rights” activists ...’.

¹⁸ Franklyn, p. 12.

¹⁹ For further information and additional sketches of these gowns, see Ripley.

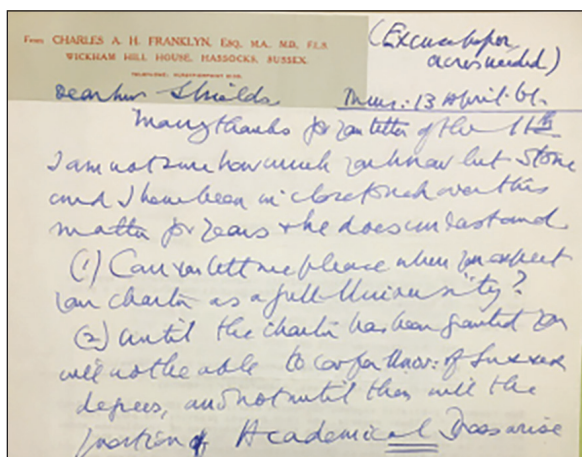
²⁰ SxUOS1/1/17/24. Letter from Franklyn to Stone, 8 March 1961.

²¹ Franklyn, p. 208. See also Groves, pp. 67–68.

²² Haycraft, pp. 62, 160.

²³ Baker, p. 35.

²⁴ Jackson, ‘Warwick’, p. 20. This later saga closely mirrored Franklyn’s tussles with Sussex and Essex, both in the phraseology of his own letters and the increasingly jaded responses of the exhausted recipients. See also Eggleston, p. 37.



University of Sussex Special Collections at The Keep

Fig. 3. Franklyn's letter of 13 April 1961, transcribed below.

(Fig. 3).²⁶ A printed heading from Franklyn's own letterhead notepaper was pasted at the top of this makeshift stationery, an untidy idiosyncrasy in which he would still be indulging over three years later.²⁷ The unbounded devotion to his life's work was once again negated by his dogmatic approach, encapsulated by a wearisomely emphatic insistence (fiercely underlined on each occasion) on the adjective 'academical', not for the last time.

(Excuse paper, acres needed)

Thurs 13 April 1961

Dear Mr Shields,

[...] I am not sure how much you know but Stone and I have been in close touch over this matter for years & he does understand.

(1) Can you tell me please when you expect your charter as a full University?

(2) Until the charter has been granted you will not be able to confer Univ. of Sussex degrees, and not until then will the position of Academical Dress arise.

(3) I have designed the complete systems of Academical and Official Dress for 4 British Universities, and have a truly beautiful possibility up my sleeve for you if you do me the honour and give me the pleasure of laying a system before you.

Believe me, Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn

Given Franklyn's proclivity in noting the exact time of arrival of his mail, his extreme rapidity in responding, and the all-too-regular and reliable postal service of the time, one may well imagine his correspondents dispatching what they fervently hoped were stalling replies, only to return home to find yet another self-aggrandizing epistle on the mat. There was simply no time for daily wrestling with such intractable and

²⁵ SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Shields to Franklyn, 11 April 1961.

²⁶ Now a discredited treatment, but then available on prescription for women wishing to lose weight. The author is grateful to Dr Jane Mackay for clarification of this matter.

²⁷ See report of his letter to the first vice-chancellor of the University of Warwick, in Groves, p. 5. Since Franklyn clearly had sufficient notepaper to prune and paste, it is impossible to fathom why he did not use it as intended, but his reasoning is now lost to posterity.

illegible obsessiveness, and Shields replied jadedly with an almost identical reiteration of his previous letter, advising that it was hoped the Charter would be granted before the first students arrived in October. Franklyn dispatched his next missive on receipt, pointing out the necessity of robes for inaugural ceremonies, of which fact the registrar was either unaware or chose to ignore.

Sat 15 April 1961

My dear Shields,

[...] May I tell you this (academical dress having been my special study and hobby since 1910, and being responsible for the articles on this subject in 'The Encyclopaedia Britannica' since 1941 June, & in 2 other encyclopaedias, as well as 'Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians', 5th edition)

I Immediately a charter has been issued the Senate has appointed a sub-committee on Academical Dress. All the older universities have done this.

II All Official Robes (Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, Registrar, Treasurer, Librarian, Esquire Bedell etc) have to have robes designed at once, for the Inaugural Ceremonies. Academical Dress also has to be designed because at the inaugural ceremony some degrees are conferred 'honoris causa' (doctorates) & the Chancellor is always created DCL or LLD 'jure dignitatis' or 'hon. causa' at once.

III I have a v. v. lovely colour up my sleeve for you and would give you a Demonstration of it. If you reject it another new university will have it.

With regards, Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn

Shields did not wait for Franklyn to run out of sleeves, but escalated the correspondence to the principal, whose tentative enquiries [unsigned on copy] betrayed matters proceeding apace elsewhere. The priority was surely to reject Franklyn quickly without official culpability; but the inch allowed Franklyn to take the mile.

31 May 1961

I have seen the triangular correspondence between you, Stone and the Registrar. We are now beginning to turn our minds to the question of robes and academic dress generally. You will not be surprised to hear that we have had approaches from other quarters as well. In order that we may be in a position to discuss the problem with as full a knowledge as possible, I would be very grateful if you would, quite informally, tell me under what conditions you would be prepared to submit designs to us. For example, would you be interested in doing so only on the condition that we approached no one else; or would you be willing to submit them in competition with the designs of another?

The University of Sussex: Academical and Official Dress

My Dear Principal, [...]

(1) It does not surprise to learn that approaches have been made from other quarters. My offer to help may have been the first as it was made as far back as 27 April 1958, and is very dear to my heart.

(2) It has never occurred to me to stipulate any conditions. I am entirely at your service and that of the Academical Dress or Sub-Committee of the Senate on Academical Dress, whatever it will be called. These Ac: Dress Committee are always perfectly free to see and to consider any proposals or suggestions laid before them.

(3) In designing the complete system of Academical Dress for 4 British Universities I have invariably been asked to give a full-dress Demonstration of the system suggested, and each Ac: Dress Committee has shown the very greatest interest

in these & has striven to obtain for each new University the most perfect and most distinct system—pride has been taken in this. In giving such Demonstrations a miscellaneous selection of other university robes and systems has been shown too so that comparisons may be made.

(4) My first requirements are

(a) a complete list of the degrees that the new University will be empowered to confer.

(b) any suggestions that you and your committee have in mind. These suggestions may be of vital importance e.g. Malaya told me at once that certain colours were barred in deference to Chinese customs. Black was completely barred, so were yellow, white, grey & crimson.

Hull decided to have all official robes in blue, not orthodox black.

Southampton decided to have all official robes in black damask as London.

Hull has begun BD, DD, BMus, DMus, (& theirs are the most beautiful in the world). Southampton has no degrees in Theology or Music. Neither grants any in Medicine. Malaya has degrees in Pharmacy & Engineering and these faculty colours I provided for them recently, adding to the 1949 system.

(c) To give an adequate Demonstration I need really for comfort 8 weeks notice.

(5) If the system I present were to be passed I would then draw up the complete Regulations for you to prevent abuses and degradation.

(6) Further, I would be very pleased at any time to study and consider with you any other suggestions made by anyone else, for (i) I might learn something or (ii) I might spot some defect or some infringement of some other institution.

(7) I do not fear competition. This has been my study since Sept: 1910 (51 years in Sept:) and I am confident that I can produce a system of which all would be continually proud. But in order to give you all that you wish to have it is essential that I should be advised if any wishes exist already that I should bear in mind.

[and 8 Yes, I follow Cambridge, our most accurate university where they insist upon Academical Dress like Ecclesiastical Dress! Please ask the typist to address envelopes as printed above!]²⁸

With kind regards, Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn.

‘My first requirements are ...’—before anything had been decided or offered. If the principal steeled himself to read on, the forcefulness of the closing paragraphs must have decided what little there was left to decide. On 5 June, his secretary sent a brief acknowledgment, whereupon Franklyn urged that a demonstration might be managed in six weeks rather than eight, and broached the subject of the College Arms for a third time, closing with the preposterous assertion: ‘The arms I designed for the University of Malaya is the best and simplest coat granted to any University since 1485.’²⁹ It is easy to imagine the vaunt doing the rounds of the Senior Common Room

28 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Franklyn to Fulton, 1 June 1961.

29 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Franklyn to the vice-chancellor’s secretary, 6 June 1961. At some point during this extended broadside, Franklyn might have been expected to draw attention to his two heraldic dissertations in *The Illustrated London News*, but evidently chose not to do so. The first, on 24 November 1934, expounded on ‘The Armorial Bearings of H.R.H. the Duke of Kent and H.R.H. Princess Marina of Greece and Denmark’, and is startling for his observations concerning blue eyes and Nordic heritage, curiously reminiscent of the contemporary cultural obsessions of Percy Grainger: ‘... so that racially and heraldically the match is perfect’. More recently, on 14 May 1960, a two-page essay in the same magazine disparaged the arms of Princess Margaret and Antony Armstrong-Jones in familiar phrases.

before the principal turned frostier, pointing out that new Arms were being designed by his former pupil, Dr Anthony Wagner, already Richmond Herald and shortly to become Garter King of Arms. Wagner's impeccable credentials would have floored most, but distracted Franklyn not at all.

My dear Principal, [...]

(1) May I take it that my original reply was perfectly satisfactory? (June 1st)

(2) Arms. I am sorry that you are already somewhat involved in this for 2 reasons.

(a) I have a very fine simple design quite mediaeval in style for consideration.

(b) If you apply for a Patent through Wagner, it will cost £100, and he is likely to ask £40 more for a certificate on vellum. If you ask for supporters too the cost might be £300. You would not know it but Arms COULD be [illegible] to the new University without cost. The E.M.³⁰ is able to GIVE you a warrant, as his father did for W. Sussex in 1889 and I have recently asked the E.M. about this and the idea attracted him. Until you have [illegible] Wagner's designs you are not committed.

Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn³¹

That afternoon Franklyn visited Shaw at Lancing College for a council of war, following which they took up cudgels jointly; but it is painfully apparent that open alliance with Franklyn now sealed Shaw's own fate as well. Both were swiftly informed that the overall position was quite clear and only awaited the committee's decision; but while Shaw then had the sense to hold his peace, Franklyn saw no reason to do anything of the kind.

My Dear Principal, [...]

(1) ARMS: if a proposed design has been duly signed and approved nothing more need be said. But it has been understood since time immemorial that until the Memorial (Petition) and the fees have been lodged, AND the proposed design approved and signed by the applicant, the Petitioner is committed to nothing. Wagner CAN design good arms but also he has designed some very bad ones (and even worse crests). Were you to see my design no harm would be done. Wagner cannot confer arms on anybody but can do no more than submit designs for consideration. And, if the University wishes to spend £200 it is fortunate that funds are available; but the E.M. COULD bestow arms upon the new university by Warrant as did his late father upon W. Sussex in 1889.

Surely a great honour to derive arms from the E.M. himself? [I tried to be helpful]

(2) Academical Dress: Yes, I have known George W. Shaw six years and have helped him as much as possible and he is acquiring a mastery of the subject. He telephoned me at 8.30 a.m. on Saturday, told me that he was very interested, knew, and had seen you, and he suggested that we should cooperate and endeavour to do the best possible. To this I assented very readily and with pleasure. He asked me over to Lancing and we spent some 4 hours on Saturday going over the ground & looking at models. He has some very good ideas.

³⁰ Earl Marshal, being a hereditary title of the Dukes of Norfolk. As Head of the College of Arms, the fifteenth Duke, Henry Fitzalan-Howard, did indeed pay for most of the cost of having the County Council's arms approved in 1889 (one of the first following the Local Government Act that year). These were superseded in 1974, but all had, in fact, been used and attributed long before official recognition. It must be presumed that Franklyn had discussed the matter with the sixteenth Duke when visiting the College.

³¹ SxUOS1/1/17/24. Letter from Franklyn to Fulton, 10 June 1961.

We would like, therefore, to give you and your Committee a joint Demonstration. This would be comprehensive and should give your Committee the greatest help. It would also effect economies in several ways. I understand that you are not keen on the standard black hoods for bachelors and masters, and it is true that something much more beautiful can be devised.

With kind regards, Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn³²

A comparable browbeating lecture was posted to the chancellor-elect, Viscount Monckton, who consulted with Fulton as how best to reply: 'We shall no doubt hear from him again. These troubles we must bear with patience.'³³ On 11 August he reiterated to Franklyn that the Committee was considering the matter, which merely gifted his opponent two targets rather than one. The following day, Franklyn reminded Monckton that he was awaiting an invitation for a demonstration of robes—none such had been promised³⁴—and recalled his proposed cooperation with Shaw: 'Together we could help greatly.' The haranguing of Fulton then resumed.

My dear Vice-Chancellor,
Academical Dress

[...] Referring to your kind letter of June 12th now that you have had your charter some 5 weeks, I am hoping that you have set up, or will do so shortly, your sub-committee of the Senate (or Council) on academical dress. From 50 years study of the subject, I believe that a committee would have the best chance of adopting the finest proposals if a full-scale Demonstration were given, so that they could study various suggestions in the flesh, actually seeing them in real life, and not mere paper suggestions. Usually I show some £500 worth of robes, existing systems and suggested systems.

It would help greatly if you have any ideas ('pro' or 'contra') if you would be so good as to tell me what they are, e.g. if you are dead against any shot silk being used or, if you are opposed to bachelors & masters having standard orthodox hoods, black outside. If you prefer coloured hoods this would help—as I mentioned, there is one most lovely silk available, adopted by a university in a great Dominion, then stopped because of ex pat restrictions, & a horrible heavy blue wool cloth was adopted instead.³⁵ If you are not opposed to a lovely shot silk this (unique) is available still, but York, Norwich, or one of the others might seize it if they got the chance.³⁶

George Shaw and I are anxious to collaborate.

With kind regards, Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn³⁷

Initial decisions

The Royal Charter creating the University of Sussex was received in August 1961, and the institution opened in October of that year, occupying temporary premises in Pres-

³² SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Franklyn to Fulton, 13 June 1961.

³³ SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Monckton to Fulton, 10 August 1961. Monckton had previously been president of the University College.

³⁴ As shown in his correspondence with Oxford twenty years earlier, it was entirely characteristic of Franklyn to suggest a certain course, and then immediately act as if this had already been adopted.

³⁵ Confirmation of Franklyn's intention to give Sussex the shot silk originally designed for ANU.

³⁶ They did not, of course, get the chance, because Franklyn did not design for them, or for any further foundations.

³⁷ SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Franklyn to Fulton, 17 September 1961.

ton Road, Brighton, until the main campus was complete.³⁸ Matters elsewhere were already advanced, as the Annual Report noted.

Designs for the remaining items of academic dress (bachelors' and masters' gowns and hoods) were finally approved during the year by the Senate Committee appointed for that purpose, in consultation with Dr W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley. Considerable discussion went on during the year between representatives of the Union and representatives of the Senate as to the occasions when academic dress should be worn. It was generally agreed that students would not be expected to wear their gowns on any but formal academic occasions, and it was left to the Senate, in consultation with the Union, to prescribe what occasions should be regarded academic for this purpose.³⁹

The reference to 'remaining items' indicates that designs of robes for officials, doctors and undergraduates had been agreed, although not produced: a report of the first meeting of the Court of Sussex University noted that Lord Monckton, the new chancellor, was 'as yet unrobed'.⁴⁰ On 22 November, the news of Hargreaves-Mawdsley's appointment was broken to Franklyn, whose scorching rejoinder emphasized his inevitable and intractable refusal to admit defeat.

Dear Vice-Chancellor,
Academical Dress

Your letter of yesterday has given me a shock. I have had the University of Sussex very much in mind for 3½ years, and now it seems I am turned down flat and barred out!⁴¹

I know the name Hargreaves Mawdsly but what he has to do with academical dress I do not know: I do not know of him as an established authority on the subject.⁴² Do you know whether he is responsible for articles on the subject in

38 Gray, p. 9. The early years of the foundation, including details of its unconventional course structures, comprising a central core subject with additional papers setting the main study in context, are documented in Daiches. The innovative curriculum drew on such Oxford courses as PPE and was delivered very much on traditional Oxbridge lines, with voluntary attendance at lectures and a tutorial system requiring weekly essays for discussion. The system gradually fell by the wayside as funding declined, although it was partly the reason for the tag 'Balliol by the Sea' coined on the very day that the Royal Charter was incorporated (*The Times*, 16 August 1961). It would also be termed 'The Pink Brick University' and as well as 'the best thing that has happened to Brighton since the wicked Prince Regent chose the town for his orages' (*Sunday Times*, 14 July 1963).

39 SxUOS1/1/1-GB181. Second Annual Report, 1961, p. 39. At the Second Meeting of Senate on 10 October 1961, it had also been agreed that faculty members should wear gowns when lecturing during the session 1961-62, although this requirement was rescinded at the Ninth Meeting, 19 June 1962.

40 *The Times*, 11 November 1961.

41 A paragraph that would resurface just over two years later in Franklyn's lament to the vice-chancellor of Essex on being rejected as designer for that university also; see Groves, p. 78.

42 This is entirely implausible. It seems the two men did not meet until 1962, but Hargreaves-Mawdsley began his postgraduate research in 1955, and was awarded his DPhil on academic and legal dress in 1958. The thesis was embargoed in perpetuity at Hargreaves-Mawdsley's own request, so still cannot be consulted, but most of it appeared in the two volumes subsequently published by Clarendon Press, in which Franklyn is cited as one having given exceptional assistance. This endeavour apparently ended Franklyn's own doctoral aspirations at a stroke, and his lofty condescension not only betrayed his fragility but undermined his credibility,

any Encyclopaedia or other ref. works?⁴³ I believe that if he is a genial, kindly and broad-minded man anxious to get the best result, he would welcome collaboration with me (and with Dr George W. Shaw too, also turned down I suppose.)

We have been at work on your problem a long time and many models have been made up. I have asked you to be so good as to let me know when your Sub-Committee on Academical Dress has been appointed and then, IF I may give them a full-scale Demonstration, showing existing systems, possible systems, and a suggested system.⁴⁴ It can hardly be beneficial to a new university and her future graduates if two experts are barred out and are not even allowed to show or suggest anything. I know of no reason why you should not coopt Shaw and me to your sub-committee, for we are highly qualified university graduates and are experts. We would, too, have a chance to see & criticize H-M's suggested plan on paper.

Kind regards, Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn⁴⁵

The above letter is addressed to the vice-chancellor; but, in another example of triangular correspondence, it must have been forwarded to Viscount Monckton—who, in a letter from his private secretary to Fulton, sought advice before replying. In a subsequent tactful apology to Franklyn, he pointed out that as the decision had been made by the proper bodies, he was unable, as chancellor, to interfere in matters appropriate to committees. His salutation to 'Mr Franklyn' evidently elicited a typically irascible rebuke,⁴⁶ since Monckton passed it to Fulton on 12 December, remarking helplessly, 'I will excuse myself about the nomenclature, but I thought from the printed heading that he preferred to be called Esq. As for the rest, what would you have me say?'

I am sorry that you have been further troubled by Franklyn. He has been on the telephone at length with me and with Stone. His letter, I fear, bears out all the warnings that we received in advance. What is abundantly clear—and I have checked the records very closely—is that at no time has he been given any encouragement to suppose that he would be asked to design our academic dress. Others beside Dr Franklyn wrote and offered their services. The decision has gone in favour of a younger man, Hargreaves-Mawdsley, who is writing the history of academic dress for the Oxford University Press and to whom we propose to pay a fee of 100 guineas (just as we are paying a fee to the Garter King of Arms for designing our coat of arms). My feeling is that it is no use taking up his points one by one and answering them in a letter. He is prepared to spend all his time in this argument and we should be absorbed to a quite unjustifiable extent in an unprofitable correspondence. So my feeling is that you should reply that you are very sorry there is nothing you could add to what you said in your previous letter. I am so sorry that you are being troubled in this way.⁴⁷

since it is surely impossible to imagine him encountering Hargreaves-Mawdsley in any other field. Both he and Shaw often misspelled the name.

43 A typically double-edged enquiry, since Franklyn himself had composed the relevant entry for *Encyclopaedia Britannica* since 1941, and was about to assume responsibility for *Chambers's* as well.

44 Two more typical turns of phrase: a breezy reference to a hypothetical committee before its establishment was even agreed or reported, let alone imminent; and the implication that he and Shaw had been working on the scheme in some official capacity, when (as far as is known) even Shaw had not been so engaged.

45 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Franklyn to Monckton, 23 November 1961.

46 This has not survived.

47 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Fulton to Monckton, 22 December 1961.

A very possible source of the warnings is the then vice-chancellor of the University of Southampton, David James. In 1964, he would advise John Butterworth (first vice-chancellor of the University of Warwick) to exercise strong caution when dealing with Franklyn, and it seems that the latter's greatly self-lauded scheme for Southampton, featuring swathes of appropriately named peacock-blue, was dearly bought in terms of relationships.⁴⁸ For an inexperienced committee pressed for time, the choice of a designer must have been a foregone conclusion. Hargreaves-Mawdsley was simply the least troublesome, his pedigree (after Oxford, he had just begun a research fellowship at the University of Edinburgh) and publication contract almost irrelevant. George Shaw was also bitter: 'I felt sure that ... you were at least in favour of the black gowns which I designed'⁴⁹—a remark that strengthens earlier speculation that the hoods were Franklyn's proposals. Shaw also asked to see Hargreaves-Mawdsley's scheme, but it is apparent that he did not receive a reply. The details were circulated at the fifth Meeting of Senate (23 January 1962).

Hargreaves-Mawdsley's initial scheme

ACADEMICAL DRESS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Undergraduates

No headdress.

A black cloth gown without sleeves, simply holes for the passage of the arms. Knee-length. Cut away at the collar with a broad square piece of stuff (edged with the faculty colour (Arts: ultramarine (PhD.: navy blue), Science: gamboge, Laws: buff, Music: grey, Medicine: lavender, Divinity: violet) let in between the shoulders, the gown being gathered into small folds round this square. Open in front without facings.

Bachelors of Arts

Headdress, a square cap (mortar board) with a button, and with a border of black alpaca round the bottom edge of the head-piece.

A black cloth gown with a cut away collar and a yoke rounded at the bottom, the gown being pleated round this yoke. The sleeves to be bell-sleeves of moderate length with very sharply pointed ends, with a wide but not long vertical opening halfway down their length for the passage of the arms. Decorated on each sleeve above the arm-holes with a piece of twisted silk cord looped in the shape of the decoration on a bandsman's sleeve—this last indicating the BA.⁵⁰

Hood, black cloth lined and edged with light grey fur in squares. Medium length with narrow square-ended liripipe.

Bachelors of Science

The same except the sleeves are to be decorated with a horizontal piece of black silk with three black buttons spaced out on the line of black silk; and the hood to be lined and edged with tawny fur in squares.

⁴⁸ Jackson, 'Warwick', p. 15. This was not new: a warning about Franklyn's proclivity for tireless and persistent correspondence had been dispatched in 1953 from the registrar of Southampton to the registrar of University College, Hull: see Baker, pp. 32–33; also, Groves, pp. 16–17.

⁴⁹ SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Shaw to Fulton, 8 December 1961.

⁵⁰ Hargreaves-Mawdsley meant the faculties, not the level of degree, since the MA and MSc gowns have the same decorations as those for the equivalent bachelors. Note that the distinctive pointed ends of the Sussex bachelors' robes were present from the earliest stages of the design.

Masters of Arts

A black cloth gown with cut-away collar and yoke in the form of a double bracket e.g.  gathered below and at the shoulders. Black silk facings in front. The gown to be ankle-length (or thereabouts). Sleeves to be as long as the gown, panelled in type (i.e. square and sewn up below the arms), with broad square flat ends, with a broad but not long vertical opening half-way down for the passage of the arms. Decoration on the sleeve the same as BA.

Hood, black alpaca lined (but not edged) with ultramarine white striped (vertically) ribbed silk. Headdress, a black square cap with button and tassel.

Masters of Science

As above. Decoration on the sleeves as Bachelor of Science.

Hood, black alpaca, lined with gamboge ribbed silk.

Doctors of Philosophy

For special occasions: hard black domed biretta with ultramarine button on top. The biretta to be made of silk mohair gummed on to paste-board. For ordinary occasions the ordinary black mortar board with button and tassel, the button being navy blue, but the tassel black.

For ordinary occasions a black silk gown like that of MA., except that (1) the bottom edges of the sleeves are to be serrated, and (2) instead of the sleeve decoration of MA. is to be substituted one horizontal line of navy blue silk with three navy blue buttons and with a small navy blue tassel hanging from each of the three navy blue buttons.

For important occasions, together with the biretta, a silk robe of exactly the same shape as the undress gown, but the whole to be navy blue in colour, and instead of a cut-away collar to have a collar high and upstanding at the back and coming down to join the facings in front. On the right shoulder a thin band of scarlet silk fastened on the top of the shoulder by means of a scarlet button, the ends hanging down back and front. No decorations on sleeves and no hood.

Doctors of Laws

As above, but the button on the biretta and on the square cap to be buff. The undress gown to be decorated on the sleeves with a horizontal line of buff silk with buff buttons and tassels. The full dress gown as of the Doctor of Philosophy shape, but of buff silk.

Doctors of Science

The same except that the button on the biretta and on the square cap, the decorations on the sleeves, and the colour of the full dress robe to be gamboge.

Doctors of Letters

The same except that the button on the biretta and on the square cap, the decorations on the sleeves of the undress gown, and the colour of the full dress robe to be dark green with blue lights.

The Vice-Chancellor

On ordinary occasions, whatever degree he happens to have. On very formal occasions, a robe in shape exactly like the full dress robe of Doctors, but without the button and scarlet band on the shoulder. The robe to be plum-coloured silk with a scarlet cape over shoulders. Black biretta with black button.

The Chancellor

A black silk gown like that of the Doctors' undress gown decorated round the lower edge of the yoke, on the sleeves above the arm-holes (where the decorations

is [*sic*] to consist of three horizontal strips of silk each with three buttons and three tassels), below the arm-holes, and at the bottom of the sleeves, and the facings, with gold braid. On the right shoulder of his robe a gold and enamel brooch of the University arms. His biretta is to be like that of a doctor, but it is to have a thick band of gold braid surrounding its base, and its button is to be gold.

REMARKS

May I suggest that it is to be insisted on that the dress of the highest degree which the wearer possesses is always worn?

May I also suggest that when someone from outside enters a post in the University of Sussex he should begin to wear the dress of the degree of the University of Sussex equivalent to that which he holds at another university? The bad habit is growing up in the provincial universities of wearing at their ceremonies the dress of their original university, so spoiling the uniformity.

In my opinion it would be a good idea if the University of Sussex became as exclusive in this way as Oxford and Cambridge.

I suggest that with full dress a long white tie with a white collar should be worn. This to me seems the best modern compromise. Ordinary ties of various colours are ugly and clash with robes.

W. N. H-M.

The inventiveness of this vivid proposal raises as many questions as it answers. The school colours anticipated some faculties not then established, such as Music and Medicine, but other choices are eccentric: buff for Law, ultramarine stripes for the MA, plum and scarlet for the vice-chancellor, and a green doctors' robe with its 'blue lights'.⁵¹ The reasoning behind such flamboyancy will be considered, although it says much for the resilience of Senate that general approval was granted.⁵² Eight university representatives, few with any especial expertise in the subject, then convened as a sub-committee to debate everything further. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, in attendance as the nominal consultant, must have felt as if he were undergoing a viva, particularly as he was not acknowledged as the designer, but merely as one who 'had been invited to suggest designs'. A later meeting, in 1964, decreed that both BA and BSc hoods should be the same; so although it is remarkable to learn of the proposed BSc with squares of tawny fur, the item was probably never made.

Sub-Committee re Academic Dress

Minutes of a meeting held at the Old Ship Hotel at 7:30 p.m. on 6th February 1962

1. The Vice-Chancellor (Chairman), Professor Asa Briggs, Professor J. P. Corbett, Professor D. Daiches, Dr A.M. Ross, Dr A K Thorlby, Professor M Wight and the Registrar. Dr W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, who had been invited to suggest designs for the academic dress of the University, also attended the meeting.
2. Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley explained his proposed designs, and said that he had attempted to get away from the conventional 19th century pattern adopted by most other British Universities, and had suggested designs based on mediaeval European practice. During the discussion, the following points were made: —

⁵¹ It is curious that the colours for Letters were different to those of the Arts faculty, but unclear whether they comprised a variety of shot silk, or some additional decoration.

⁵² SxUOS1/1/2/27/3/1-14. Fifth Meeting of Senate, 23 January 1962.

- (1) Caps
 - (a) It is essential to ensure that all caps, especially the birettas, can be raised from the head without difficulty.
 - (b) It was suggested that women undergraduates should have soft hats rather than mortar-boards; it was agreed that the views of women members of Council, staff (if any), and students should be obtained on this point.
 - (c) It was agreed that undergraduates should not have any form of head-dress.
 - (d) The tassels of the caps worn by bachelors and masters should be coloured to represent their Schools of Study.
 - (2) Gowns

The edging of undergraduate gowns should be braided from the School colour, together with the Faculty colour. It was suggested that the undergraduates' views might be obtained on these gowns.
 - (3) Hoods

The hoods for bachelors and masters should be edged with the School colour.
 - (4) Colours

Some doubt was expressed about the suitability of buff as the Law Faculty colour, the LL.D. gown being the one most likely to be seen at honorary degree ceremonies. It was suggested that a stronger colour be selected for Law; e.g. the Law colour might be gamboge and the Science colour tawny (instead of buff and gamboge respectively).
 - (5) Vice-Chancellor's Dress

It was noted that the Vice-Chancellor had already had a gown made up, and therefore the dress proposed by Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley could not be adopted. It was, however, suggested that the existing gown might be used for functions outside the University, and another type of dress might be prescribed for internal functions; however, the Vice-Chancellor stated that in that case he would probably want Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley to modify his proposals for the 'internal' dress.
 - (6) Chancellor's Dress

It was agreed that the Chancellor himself should be consulted about Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley's proposals.

Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley agreed to consider all the above points and modify his proposals, where necessary, in accordance therewith.
 4. It was agreed that Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley should arrange with Messrs. Ede & Ravenscroft to make up one hood and gown of each type, and to obtain samples of the colours proposed for the others. The sub-committee would then inspect these before further action was taken.
- In the meantime, the registrar should explain what had been done to the local firms which had indicated an interest in this matter and discuss with them the possibility of stocking undergraduate gowns only.
5. In the course of the discussions, the following points arose also: -
 - (1) The sub-committee was not in favour of Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley's suggestion that members of the faculty of the University of Sussex should

wear the University's own academic dress, and not the dress of the University at which they graduated, and Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley withdrew this suggestion.

- (2) It was agreed to recommend that on formal occasions, a white collar and white bow-tie should be worn with academic dress.
- (3) It was suggested that undergraduates be not allowed to wear a gown until they have passed the preliminary Examination, and that gowns be formally presented by the University at the end of the second term to those passing the examination.

Battering rams

In the midst of these fraught analyses, the indefatigable Franklyn elected to redouble (for at least the fifteenth time) his vigorous assaults on topics that had long been resolved, while simultaneously berating the principal's distinguished former pupil.

Wednesday 14 February 1962

My dear Vice-Chancellor,

(1) ARMS: I understand that although the Letters Patent have not been issued yet that the final design of the arms is just about settled.⁵³ May I see the proposed design please, before the design has been embodied and blazoned in the Patent. I trust that a shield of Arms only will be granted, which is the correct practice for a university, college, school, diocese etc? Anthony Wagner has designed some 'shockers' (e.g. look in 'Debrett' at the hopeless & characterless arms granted to Lord Attlee). Recently I have designed arms for Lord [illegible], the Queen's gynaecologist, the Prime Minister & physician Lord Brain and others. [T.S., Canford School, St Peter's Hall, Oxford, Borough of Bridgnorth, R. Dental Hosp. etc etc.] All fees are going up on April 1st.

(2) Academical Dress. Mr W. Hargreaves-Mawdesley has been appointed, commissioned, employed (=paid) to draw up and submit a suggested system of Academical & Official dress, presumably this has been typed or even printed for your sub-committee to consider, adopt, adopt in part, modify or reject, may I please see the proposed system?

I shall be over in Hove one day before February is out, so could I fit this in with a call on you and do two calls on the same journey? The difficulty of providing a beautiful system that does not infringe existing robes is great: shapes too need to be considered, and I hope that you have not considered any doctors' full dress robes of the wrong shape (sleeves) forbidden [at] the Hampton Court conference of 1603?⁵⁴

Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn

Fulton's secretary responded on 16 February, regretting that the vice-chancellor was unable to meet as he was in London for the next few weeks. At this entirely reasonable excuse, Franklyn—doubtless envisaging the long-pursued quarry slipping through his fingers—unleashed a splenetic scrawl at the very borders of legibility, recalling Clive James's immortal phrase, 'Even in moments of tranquillity, [he] sounds like a man whose trousers are on fire.'

⁵³ The arms of the University of Sussex can be seen at <www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/60928> [retrieved 17 December 2023].

⁵⁴ In fact, 1604, since the schedule for the previous November was postponed by an outbreak of bubonic plague.

Saturday 17 February 1962

Dear Miss Whitbourne,

[...] I expect that your V-C will be returning to Hove to sleep each night. I am anxious to make a definite appointment to see him as soon as possible, when convenient. To make it easy to arrange, may I suggest that you phone me any morning between 10:00 to 10:30 a.m. when I can answer the ring at once. I have not yet found an elusive V-C nor any V-C who refused to see me & in fact I have lunched, dined & had tea with V-Cs and have found them all charming and accessible. As a member of four universities & a graduate of three of them (one 'hon. causa') I would expect pleasure & interests in a meeting.⁵⁵ Please do not wait until we are told that he has gone abroad for the month's vacation. And in the meantime, please tell me about the suggested design of the arms & the suggested academical dress [four illegible words]⁵⁶

Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn

A pencilled note on the card states: 'Rang and said it would not be possible to arrange an appointment within the next few weeks. 23/2/62.'

Sunday 1 April 1962

Dear Miss Whitbourne,

May I remind you of your letter of Feb. 16th? I am waiting still for you to be so good as to tell me when the V-C would be pleased to see me. I am at his disposal at any time (except Monday 9th when I am entertaining real Sussex Saxons from Edinburgh. I will have to be most informal, so that if the V-C cared to ask me over to Hove, so near for me, to lunch or even tea on a Saturday, I would be available. I am quite used to having lunch, tea & dinner with V-Cs, Pro-Cs etc. There is sure to be plenty of time in April and I have heard from two other men holding important educational posts that he does wish to see me. [...]

Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn

Two weeks elapsed before space was found in the vice-chancellor's diary to propose an appointment for 19 April. After all the effortful months, this would have been Franklyn's first meeting with Fulton, but it was insufficient. His own timetable was paramount.

Friday 13 April 1962

Dear Miss Whitbourne [...]

Now pray do not think that I am awkward. I am not, but am very freely available. To get over to you by 11:30 a.m. would mean my laying aside the whole of my work for a day, for the morning is as precious as food. From lunchtime onwards I can be free almost at any time, up to 11.p.m.

To get to you by 11:30 a.m. would mean the expense of a taxi, 9/6d at least, and then I could get myself back somehow. If I am to have a normal lunch here at 1:15, the ideal time to get over to you would be 3.0—4.0 p.m. if you would be so good as to tell me how to get to & to find Stanmer House. Do please try to find me an afternoon appt.

Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn

Tea with the V-C would be the ideal arrangement.

⁵⁵ Franklyn was a member of Exeter College, Oxford (1940), a graduate of London and Lausanne, and holder of a degree *honoris causa* from Malaya.

⁵⁶ Wagner's design had long been finalized and would be officially granted on 15 March, but once again Franklyn dismissed everything as 'suggested', persuading himself that matters which only he could resolve were still at an elementary stage.

On 17 April, the secretary advised that it would not be possible to arrange an afternoon appointment ‘for a little time, but I will try to arrange something as soon as possible. Please do not trouble to reply to this letter; I will write again when an opportunity occurs.’

In the meantime, Arthur Knott, director of Wippell & Co., had contacted Fulton on 14 April, offering to quote against Hargreaves-Mawdsley’s scheme, no doubt with a view to his firm being appointed official robemakers. The unsigned reply (19 April) remarked that the scheme was being considered, and the preparation of prototype robes with another firm⁵⁷ was already being arranged. An update soon appeared.

The Council commissioned Dr W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, of Oxford, an authority on academic dress, to design a series of gowns, hoods, etc. for the University. A design for an undergraduate gown, proposed by Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley, was accepted and the Senate decided that this gown should be worn on official occasions, such as graduation ceremonies, examinations, leave-takings, University Church services, and such other occasions as might be prescribed.⁵⁸

Shaw viewed the samples—presumably at Ede & Ravenscroft in Cambridge—and ensured that Fulton had no doubt as to the extent of his indignation.

Dear Mr Fulton,

I have now seen the academical robes designed for you by Hargreaves-Mawdsley, and feel that I must make some comment on them.

The undergraduate gown is much too simple and completely lacking in dignity. Students will, of course, make their own gowns rather than pay 50/- or so for such a garment, with the result that all sorts of variations will be introduced.⁵⁹

Why is the bachelors’ gown not correctly pleated at the back? You have adopted a new and specific type of yoke for masters and doctors, why not have the same for bachelors?

Doctors robes—should have the correct shape of sleeve for a doctor as laid down at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604, and not the masters’ sleeve.⁶⁰ And why have the small red ribbon on the shoulder? If you want to follow the French system, then why not give doctors a decent sized *époge* [*sic*] showing the faculty colour, and which could be worn with the undress gown? I cannot help feeling that your graduates, if and when they proceed to a doctorate will be rather angry to find

⁵⁷ Ede & Ravenscroft.

⁵⁸ SxUOS1/1/1-GB181. Third Annual Report, 1961–62, p. 20. This had been passed at the Sixth Meeting of Senate (20 February 1962), with a reinforced directive at the Seventh Meeting (27 March 1962): ‘No candidate will be admitted to the examination room unless he is wearing a gown.’ At the Ninth Meeting (19 June 1962) it was further agreed that present undergraduates must obtain their gowns before 16 October, and that future students should do so at the commencement of their first term.

⁵⁹ The skimpy design [u6] certainly cannot hold a candle to Shaw’s original proposal and its later unpopularity is unsurprising. Lacking even such enlivening features as the streamers of an Oxford commoner’s gown, it is more reminiscent of a nineteenth-century Cambridge sizar’s garb, sleeveless and without the pensioners’ velvet on the facings. See in Jackson, *Ackermann*, Cambridge, Plate XIV.

⁶⁰ Shaw and Franklyn had evidently discussed this point, but the present author has not sourced it. The Conference touched on surplices, square caps and ‘men in turkey gowns’ (i.e., four Puritans), but no prescriptive directions concerning sleeves have yet come to light. See Humbert.

no dignified scarlet cloth robe, but only a yellow or green silk pantomime outfit. I am relieved to hear that you have decided to eliminate the four jesters' points from the bottom of the masters and doctors' sleeves, and to abolish the bowler hat for doctors.

The most ludicrous part of the whole scheme of course is the 'system' (if one can call it such) of hoods. These grey squares of nylon fur and the ladies' dress material of navy blue with white stripes might be costumes from the *Micado*! What is the connection between BA (grey fur), MA (navy blue with white stripes) and DLitt (dark green)? The whole thing is a jumble of disconnected bits and pieces. Your committee should have had several alternative schemes to see instead of being foisted off with this stuff. Already people in Cambridge—where these things are actually made—are laughing about it all. But I for one do not find it amusing, and can only hope that the other new universities will not make the same dreadful mistakes.

Yours sincerely, Geo. W. Shaw⁶¹

In the most regrettable absence of any written elucidations from the designer himself, what indeed is the connection? What reasoning may be deduced, what scheme estimated, to explain the apparent hodgepodge?

Heraldry and stained glass

During the revival of interest in medieval Oxford in the second half of the eighteenth century, Merton College attracted particular attention for its antiquity and fabric.⁶² In his standard work on academic dress, at the very beginning of his chapter on Great Britain and Ireland, Hargreaves-Mawdsley draws attention to the twenty-four stained-glass windows (twenty-one now survive) in the College chapel, commemorating the donor Henry Mansfield,⁶³ each showing a scholar dressed in a 'wide-sleeved supertunica' and an almuce or amess, a garment usually made of squares of grey squirrel fur or marten's fur.⁶⁴ These thirteenth-century depictions of academic dress are some of the oldest to be found anywhere; but, to begin with dissent, his descriptions do not, in fact, bear detailed inspection, and recent scholarship has taken issue with them. Each image shows a *cappa clausa* with a hood, sometimes lined with fur, but nothing resembling an almuce as now understood.⁶⁵ Equally slender is Hargreaves-Mawdsley's contention that these images depict robes of the chancellor, a theory which arose long before the date of the glass could be established with certainty, or even confirmation that the chancellor had any distinguishing attire at the time.⁶⁶ A much closer representation of such is a manuscript initial from the Chancellor's Book in the Archives of Oxford University (1375), showing the chancellor, William de Wilton, receiving a charter from Edward III, wearing what is clear-

⁶¹ SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Shaw to Fulton, 14 August 1962.

⁶² Ayers, Part 1, p. cxxx.

⁶³ The windows are older than he states. Each bears the declaration *Magister Henricus de Mamesfeld me fecit*.

⁶⁴ Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 60.

⁶⁵ Ayers, p. 53—although Ayers was unaware that some points in his reappraisal of the Merton glass had already been addressed: see Kerr, p. 112. For a recent depiction of almuces, see the photograph of them worn by the Chapter of SS. John Baptist & John Evangelist, Regensburg, Bavaria (c. 2000) at <www.newliturgicalmovement.org> [retrieved 13 July 2023].

⁶⁶ Ayers, p. lxxxix.

ly an almuce⁶⁷—which Hargreaves-Mawdsley there attributes to his ‘ecclesiastical standing.’⁶⁸ This odd confusion does not seem to have perplexed Hargreaves-Mawdsley at all when citing very similar examples elsewhere (he even includes a perfectly clear illustration of the *cappa clausa*),⁶⁹ but does not diminish his work in identifying distinctions between different degrees or scholastic hierarchy.

Whatever the cause of this uncertainty, it seems highly likely—as Bruce Christianson has perceptively speculated⁷⁰—that the almuce in this form was the origin of the grey nylon squares appearing on the hoods of Sussex bachelors; moreover, the intention to evoke miniver of some description is given additional credence by Hargreaves-Mawdsley’s proposed use of tawny fur as well as grey. The use of fur on academic dress generally may also be put into context:

... the rule both at Oxford and Cambridge was that a bachelor’s hood must be lined with the fur of some animal indigenous to the British Isles unless he was a nobleman, when the lining might be of silk.⁷¹

This ordinance is sourced by Franklyn to a statute of Henry VIII;⁷² which (as Noel Cox suggests) is an indication that, by the sixteenth century, furs were most probably prominent features of graduate hoods, ‘a sign of degree status ... those of graduates were furred or lined with fur or other material, such as stuff.’⁷³ In referring to the quires of collegiate and cathedral churches, Franklyn also quotes: ‘...in the fourteenth and following centuries, canons of the upper grade used the grey amess, made of grey squirrel outside and lined with miniver.’⁷⁴

Different furs were therefore signifiers of social status. Atchley’s remarks on the dress of Cardinal College, Oxford (now Christ Church), must also be noted, even though he refers to ecclesiastical dress, since it is already quite evident that historical fidelity mattered less to Hargreaves-Mawdsley than appearance:

The dean and superior canons wore surplices and grey amesses; the minor canons surplices and hoods of blue-coloured cloth *fashioned in semblance of amesses* [italics mine] and fringed along the lower border with sky blue or grey fur.⁷⁵

It is a firm supposition of this article that Hargreaves-Mawdsley’s scheme combined a tribute to the iconography of Merton, with the incorporation of furs in heraldic rep-



Burgon Society Archive
WBS-174

Fig. 4. Sussex's bachelors' hood.

⁶⁷ Ayers, p. 55.

⁶⁸ Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 60.

⁶⁹ Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 191.

⁷⁰ Christianson, ‘The Sussex BA and the Grey Amess’, p. 4. He adds: ‘The original Sussex BA hood was itself suppressed in 2004, but the fur of the small grey nylon squirrel remains very much in demand’—to which the present writer would append the admonition of Dame Edna Everage: ‘The acrylic is a protected animal.’

⁷¹ Buxton and Gibson, p. 25.

⁷² Henry VIII, An Acte for Reformacyon of Excesse in Apparayle (Statutes of the Realm), reprinted in Franklyn, p. 213. For a modernized translation and further commentary, see Cox.

⁷³ Cox, p. 42.

⁷⁴ Atchley, p. 317; reprinted in Franklyn, pp. 138–39.

⁷⁵ Atchley, p. 321; reprinted in Franklyn, p. 141.

resentation or allusion—not only for Sussex bachelors, but as the basis of his entire system. If this is accepted, then a further premise logically follows Prof. Christianson's hypothesis, one that precisely explains the otherwise eccentric blue and white striped MA hood derided by Shaw: this was an evocation of vair, a form of squirrel fur, not only much used to line cloaks, but always represented in heraldry as repeated tessellated patterns of Azure and Argent. Hargreaves-Mawdsley's simplified design of vertical stripes (one no doubt far easier to acquire in silk than the more familiar cup-shapes) nonetheless also has heraldic parallels, being especially prominent in arms of the German-Czech House of Schwarzenburg.

The animal was bluey-grey upon the back and white underneath, and the whole skin was used. It will be readily seen that by sewing a number of these skins together a result is obtained of a series of cup-shaped figures, alternating bluey-grey and white.⁷⁶

Not all the medieval glass at the College remains where it was sited initially, and some panels were later transferred to the great west window. Among them is the fragment of a scholar (almost certainly part of the original sequence in the transept) wearing a fur-lined hood, a blue tippet with white fur edging and a blue gown (Fig. 5). Blue was a frequent substitute in medieval glazing for black, the latter being non-translucent. Nonetheless, the fur and the contrasting colours as they appear must make the image a strong contender for additional influence—especially as the gown is believed to be the *cappa nigra*, meaning that the figure is indeed arrayed as a Master of Arts, the degree for which Hargreaves-Mawdsley's striped hood was intended.⁷⁷

There is, of course, no reason to suppose that Hargreaves-Mawdsley's first thoughts were of fur squares. It seems much more likely that his system developed downwards from doctoral colours, or outwards from the idea of referencing vair. The arms of Merton College were also in gestation during the foundation's early years: the ground (background colour) would be gold, but was formerly silver. In this variant, as shown in stained glass from the Warden's Lodging (Argent three chevrons party per pale, the first and third Azure and Gules, the second Gules and Azure), Argent is represented by white glass: another familiar juxtaposition of adjacent blue (and red) 'stripes' and white. Most tellingly, the arms of the University of Sussex, designed by Franklyn's nemesis Anthony Wagner, combine West Sussex blue and East Sussex red (along with elements from the arms of Brighton) as an identical blue and red chevron—Azure and Gules, divided into two by a line down the middle—placed on a silver ground. We may therefore confidently assume that Hargreaves-Mawdsley had shared his interpretations with Wagner, thus verifying the conjectured associations drawn from Merton's glass. The windows also have other strong elements, as noted by Ayers:

Heraldry also played a role in shaping contemporary expectations, perceptions and interpretations of colour, establishing a limited number of tinctures, including gold and silver, and two furs ... The Merton scheme included heraldry in the tracery and the recorded main lights of the east window, as well as in the pseudo-heraldic

⁷⁶ Fox-Davies, p. 62. The smaller size of vair was known as Menu-vair, hence 'miniver'. The heraldic depiction of vair may take several forms, but Hargreaves-Mawdsley indicated his stripes were vertical, which is certainly the commonest orientation.

⁷⁷ Ayers, Part 2, p. 343, pl. 26.



Gordon Plumb / © Corpus Vitrearum (Great Britain)

Fig. 5. Scholar in blue gown and fur-trimmed tip-pet, Merton College, Oxford (c. 1413–25).



© Historic England Archive

Fig. 6. Evangelist in green robe, Merton College, Oxford (c. 1305–12).



© Historic England Archive

Fig. 7. St James the Great, Merton College, Oxford (c. 1305–12).

borders of the side windows ... The increasing popularity of heraldic representation within sacred settings has been explored not only as evidence for the increasing assertiveness of the secular elite, but also as an appropriation of this code by the clerical order for its own purposes. At Merton, the heraldic analogy is revealing of potential meaning on several levels ... The brightly-coloured and fur-lined gowns of the scholars perhaps also invite comparison with the clothes of the armigerous ...⁷⁸

Hargreaves-Mawdsley would have been fully aware of this history and symbolism, and his alighting on green or gamboge as doctoral colours may be seen in their contiguity on the principal Merton figures. For example, in the seventh window on the south side in the eastern arm of the Chapel, sited prominently between two portraits of scholars in sober *cappa clausa*, is an image of a learned Evangelist in a yellow robe and striking green (Vert) mantle (Fig. 6)⁷⁹, presented as an intimate part of the community, in hierarchical collegiality. On the north side, a figure thought to be St Matthias is dressed identically, while St Thomas on the south side is garbed in similar fashion, but in gold mantle and blue-green tunic—perhaps the ‘blue lights’ referred to above. St Laurence has a yellow dalmatic, St Stephen a green one, and St James the Great wears a ruby tunic with a yellow mantle, as well as a broad-brimmed green ‘bowler’ hat—actually, a pilgrim’s *galeno*, green denoting a bishop—the most likely source of the headgear scorned by Shaw. None of the kneeling supplicants are arrayed in these two colours: in addition to white and blue, they are most frequently clothed in scarlet and murrey, possible inspirations for the initial design for the vice-chancellor or the other doctorates. Yellow or gold evokes Venetian tradition, as well as heraldic Erminois (gold field with black spots). In closing these theories, it must be noted that the colours of the one original heraldic fur now remaining to Hargreaves-Mawdsley—white and black of ermine in various forms—would explain his second choice for the vice-chancellor: an off-white robe and black velvet cape (see below). This may recall the heavily-trimmed cope descended from the *cappa clausa* worn by the vice-chancellor at Cambridge when conferring degrees—or, a little less splendidly, the white furred hood of Oxford proctors. The chancellor was allocated a traditional black robe trimmed with gold braid; but, within the present parameters, even this might be construed as a nod to the ermine variant Pean (Or spots on a field Sable).

The very occasional use of green for genuine academic dress has also been noted by Prof. Christianson.⁸⁰ In the course of his investigation, he identifies several documents that mention it, particularly the will of one Richard Browne/Broune of Oxford, dated 8 October 1452, of which he quotes the translation: ‘I bequeath to Master John Beke, Professor of Divinity, [...] a long green dress robe, together with a habit and hood of the same colour, lined with “miniver”’. Hargreaves-Mawdsley makes no specific allusion to Browne’s will in his volume, but he lists Robinson’s paper in the bibliography, as well as citing it when referring to the colours of the Faculty of Canon Law at Salamanca

⁷⁸ Ayers, p. 28.

⁷⁹ A larger image showing the three figures is available at <docbrown.info/docspics/southwest/OxfordTrip/swspage09d.htm> [retrieved 19 July 2023].

⁸⁰ Christianson, ‘Doctors’ Greens’. In modern times the colour is largely confined to the University of Leeds; however, St Andrews and Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, both prescribe green robes for certain doctorates (determined by faculty colour rather than title of degree) and the MBA of Henley Business School is awarded a green gown with facings piped in old gold.

as red or crimson and green.⁸¹ This is also noted by Edwin Clark, who comments, ‘The green Gown is odd, and may throw some light on one or two curious costumes on our East Anglian screens’.⁸² Green was a comparatively rare colour in medieval heraldry because the requisite ingredients, such as verdigris, did not produce long-lasting dyes.

In summary, Hargreaves-Mawdsley’s initial scheme for Sussex, together with its posited associations, was as it appears in Table 1.

If this was indeed the basis of Hargreaves-Mawdsley’s system, it possessed a piquant air of antiquity, in delightful contrast to the contemporary nature of the foundation for which it was designed. It must be admitted that some of the above associations are a little tenuous: miniver is ‘a loose term ... Marten’s fur was often used’.⁸³ A certain progressive logic is nonetheless evident: it may be observed that bachelors were allocated either grey or tawny from the colours of miniver, while masters flourished both in a more sophisticated design. While a radical departure from traditional academic dress, this is certainly not as piecemeal as its critics considered.

Franklyn also regarded himself as an expert in heraldry,⁸⁴ but if he deduced any such connections here—there is no indication that he did—he would surely have scorned the whole notion as a highly questionable, not to say fantastical, peg on which to hang a system of dress. By autumn, he could contain himself no longer. Convinced that the long-awaited demonstration was overdue (though it had still not been promised in the first place), he scribbled his ultimate postcard to Fulton’s secretary.

24 September 1962

I have heard NIL from you since 17th April & the promised demonstration has not come! So you have kept me at bay for a whole year now! Since many of the items of so-called academical dress have been approved and are being made (I know where, by whom, and most of the facts, very great calamity, a disaster), would you please send me a typed copy or printed copy of the present regulations, or of the descriptions of these strange garments. Strange that you did not ask me to be present at the meeting next Monday, altho’ a morning is frequently impossible for a physician.

Yours sincerely, Charles Franklyn

Ipse dixit. It is scarcely surprising that no reply was forthcoming; and thus Franklyn’s turbulent communications with the University skidded to their ungracious expiration. He never forgave Sussex for the supposed slight; yet it is extraordinary how closely the whole futile saga would soon be resurrected with the universities of Essex and Warwick, as Franklyn’s repackaged phrases, recycled speeches and embittered situations replayed themselves, spiralling ineluctably towards his dazzling coveted prizes, as a moth circles a lamp.

Establishing identity

A service was held at St Peter’s Church, Brighton, on 21 October 1962 to inaugurate the University year. It had been proposed that full academic dress be worn by all who possessed it, although this was quickly amended to just those participating in the academ-

81 Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 26. The will is discussed in Robinson, p. 195.

82 Clark, p. 149; reprinted in Franklyn, p. 33. In the third part of his paper, Clark refers to the screen of Cawston Church, Norfolk, in this regard.

83 Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 193.

84 He revised Fox-Davies’s seminal volume (see References) for six of its reprints from 1949.

Table 1. Speculative heraldic influences on Hargreaves-Mawdsley's scheme of academic dress for Sussex

Degree or official	Colours	Heraldic parallel	
Chancellor	Black and gold	Ermine / Pean	
Vice-Chancellor	White / Black (originally proposed as murrey and scarlet)	Ermine	
Higher (?) doctors	Yellow / Gamboge / Gold	Or, possibly Erminois	
Doctors	Green or blue	Vert or Azure	
Masters	Blue and white	Vair	
Bachelors	Grey or tawny (depending on faculty)	'Miniver', possibly marten or squirrel	

ic procession, i.e., the staff.⁸⁵ In the meantime, many Sussex undergraduates were keen to learn of the new proposals for their own gowns, and requested sight of materials and drawings.⁸⁶ Their enthusiasm was by no means universal. At the very first meeting of the Junior Common Room, before any academic dress for them had been decided, the students voted against wearing gowns, terming them 'archaic status symbols'.⁸⁷

Monckton was also in discussion regarding his chancellor's robe, uncertain about the ecclesiastical connotations of a 'biretta' as approved by Ede & Ravenscroft, and rather preferring a square cap, an option that Hargreaves-Mawdsley was most anxious to avoid. The tall *pileus rotundus* would eventually be chosen, becoming one of the most characteristic features of the University's academic dress. Hargreaves-Mawdsley glosses 'biretta' as referring to both the 'horned and rigid variety of *pileus*;⁸⁸ and *pileus* as 'used of the round cap in its various stages of development before its squareness appeared in the sixteenth century'.⁸⁹ At some point, he evidently modified this into the 'hard black domed biretta' referred to above, although the cap with a small stalk, which would become the sign of the doctorate, is worn by all the kneeling Merton scholars.

Discussions now broadened. Following the rejection of Wippell & Co., the advice of other firms was sought, including Cobleys, a leading outfitter of the time, who had several branches in the area. West Cumberland Silk Mills stated that their own silks

⁸⁵ SxUOS1/2/31. Memos from A. E. Shields to invitees, 4 October 1962, 17 October 1962.

⁸⁶ SxUOS1/1/17/24. Letter from Corbett to Fulton, 2 November 1962.

⁸⁷ *Observer*, 8 October 1961.

⁸⁸ Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 190.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

were unsuitable for robes, but George Copley announced a range of hand-woven silks from Thailand and a prototype robe 'in the Marigold shade ... which should demonstrate how much more effectively the colours are highlighted by comparison with a small pattern of material ... From an aesthetic point of view the advice of a well-known artist would be helpful but only if combined with a practical knowledge of materials.'⁹⁰

John Piper and the University

Hargreaves-Mawdsley, already fractious from committee interference, would certainly not have welcomed this suggestion or any further filtering of his ideas. Whatever discussion was held, the obvious first choice of creative mentor was approached at once, since 'anybody who hadn't heard of [John Piper] was a complete fool.'⁹¹ One of the most versatile, innovative, and accomplished craftsmen of his time, Piper worked with great skill and beauty across nearly all media: painting, screen-printing, ceramics, fabrics, stained glass, photography, fireworks, and theatre design, including the premieres of most of Britten's operas. In conjunction with Patrick Reyntiens, he had just completed the magnificent Baptistry window for the new Coventry Cathedral, together with sets of vestments. A request was swift: 'Dr W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley ... has produced designs for the robes, and we are now at the stage of working out details of the colours and materials which are to be used. Mr Sekers, of West Cumberland Silk Mills, has promised his co-operation as far as materials are concerned, and we should very much appreciate it if you were willing (of course with an appropriate fee) to work in conjunction with him, and Dr Hargreaves-Mawdsley in the selection of the colours.'⁹² A working lunch on 12 December at the Athenaeum was speedily arranged, once a further letter had clarified matters: 'Hargreaves-Mawdsley ... whom we invited nearly a year ago to think about *designs* of our robes ... is very anxious to break away from some of the nineteenth century English traditions (the mortarboard, for example). He has produced sketches for us based instead upon the Venetian tradition of academic dress. He also made suggestions about colours, but we have made little or no progress on colour. It is at this stage, when colour becomes an important issue, that I hoped that you would give us some help and advice, i.e., primarily on colours, though the line between design and colour must be somewhat flexible and by no means all the decisions on design have been irrevocably taken ... But it seems to me of paramount importance that *good* colours should be chosen. This is not only intrinsically important but also we have to bear in mind that we are leaving a legacy of colour (in such matters it is practically unchangeable) for an exceedingly long time ahead.'⁹³

This is the first-known declaration of Venetian influence in connection with Sussex, but the basis for such a precise assertion has not been explored until now. Hargreaves-Mawdsley makes scant direct reference to the city in his volume, but does allude to the upright collar of the fifteenth-century robes of Doctors of Law and Medicine, as illustrated in the woodcuts of Francesco Vecellio (c. 1475–1560), a de-

90 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Copley to Fulton, 5 November 1962.

91 Stained-glass artist Patrick Reyntiens, interviewed in *An Empty Stage: John Piper's Romantic Vision of Spirit, Place and Time*. Goldmark Films, 2010.

92 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Fulton to Piper (unsigned carbon copy), 16 November 1962.

93 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Fulton to Piper (unsigned carbon copy), 30 November 1962.

sign reflected in the high collars of doctors and officials at Sussex. Wide-open sleeves were also reserved especially for Venetian doctors of medicine (along with the doge and procurators), and although this style was not, of course, confined to Venice alone, Hargreaves-Mawdsley continued his unorthodoxy by choosing the sleeves of a master's gown for his doctors instead. The doctoral ribbons would appear to derive from the (usually scarlet) *becho* ('bird's beak'), a badge of office worn by Venetian gentlemen and citizens, defined as 'a long band of material, usually about 25 centimetres wide, worn, almost invariably, over the left shoulder.'⁹⁴ As with the epitoge, its derivation from what was essentially the liripipe of a large rolled hood, from which it had become detached over the years, would explain the absence of a doctoral hood in Hargreaves-Mawdsley's scheme. A similar decoration adorns the modern-day rector's gown at the University College of Economics and Commerce, Venice: 'From the left shoulder there hangs down, back and front, a red scarf embroidered with a design in gold thread and the lion of St. Mark—emblem of the city of Venice—and ending in two gold tassels.'⁹⁵ In addition, the rector wears an ermine cape, very similar to an almuce. Further influence may be traced to 'the most sumptuous of all the fabrics allowed to Venetians ... cloth of gold, often in the form of *restagno d'oro*, a patterned brocade woven entirely with a gold weft, though a plain unpatterned cloth of gold was worn too.'⁹⁶

Piper replied by return, having been worried about too much involvement with too little time—I found the vestments at Coventry involved so many difficult side-questions (and are still doing so) that I was not really competent to deal with the whole affair single handed⁹⁷—but was now agreeable to his lighter role. Unfortunately, the registrar's invitation to Hargreaves-Mawdsley did not reach him until after the meeting had taken place. This was quite possibly the first time the designer had been informed of Piper's co-opting, and proved to be the last straw: 'I never expected—nor, no doubt, did you expect—that this affair would drag on so long. Frankly, I have been most irritated by the attitude of the committee who have interfered with my proposals. I have given up enough of my time already. If the matter had been left in the hands of Mr Cobley and myself the whole system would have been drawn up and the robes made up long ago, but nowadays there must be committees for everything!'⁹⁸ Shields' reply was earnestly cordial, but his report of the lunch that had taken place without the designer, plus his proposals of yet further consulting and quibbling, must have done nothing to quell Hargreaves-Mawdsley's vexations. He was also unable to attend when Fulton, Piper and Sekers met for a second time at the Athenaeum on 7 January, during which Sekers' offer to provide fabrics for doctors' robes was gratefully accepted.⁹⁹ 'I think we are most

94 Newton, p. 12. There are also a few contemporary images showing the ribbon on the right shoulder, where Hargreaves-Mawdsley placed it. In the current system at Sussex, certain awards sport a ribbon on each shoulder.

95 Smith and Sheard, p. 1188.

96 Newton, p. 16.

97 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Piper to Fulton, 4 December 1962.

98 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Hargreaves-Mawdsley to Shields, 13 December 1962. It was ironic that the individual who had continually urged for the formation of a committee was, of course, Franklyn.

99 'Mr. N. Sekers presented a considerable quantity of shantung silk for the purpose of making up the academic robes worn by the Vice-Chancellor and the honorary graduates at the Installation of the Chancellor. Cobleys Ltd. made up the above-mentioned academic robes free

fortunate to have guidance from John Piper and from yourself,' Fulton remarked sanguinely, 'and I am sure that the upshot will be something very splendid and memorable.'¹⁰⁰ These arrangements were reported twice in the *Sunday Telegraph*:

Brighton Belles

John Piper, I hear, is helping to choose the colours of academic robes for the new university of Brighton. He hopes it will be his most spectacular display since he designed the décor and costumes for Britten's opera *Gloriana*.¹⁰¹ Mr Norman Hargreaves-Mawdsley, an authority on academic dress, will be responsible for the robes themselves. And Mr Miki Sekers, the silk manufacturer, has offered to weave those worn by the honorary graduands at the installation of the Chancellor in June. Lord Monckton, first holder of the office, is, I am assured, delighted by all this interest and generosity—but is said to jib at an academic cap resembling a biretta.¹⁰²

Brighton Line

Academic robes designed specially for the University of Sussex by Dr Norman Hargreaves-Mawdsley, with advice on dyes from John Piper, will be worn for the first time when Lord Monckton is installed as Chancellor on June 11 ... [Hargreaves-Mawdsley's] designs make a break with the tradition of most modern universities, which is to copy the dress of Oxford and Cambridge. Many of his ideas come from Europe—particularly Italy and France. Doctoral scarlet has been abandoned. This colour was adopted by Oxford and Cambridge after 1538 and was originally granted by papal authority to Bologna and Paris in the 14th century. Lord Monckton's Chancellor's robe and cap are more or less traditional, but the Vice-Chancellor, Mr J. S. Fulton, will wear white.¹⁰³

Notwithstanding these accounts, Piper's involvement continued to be misinterpreted, but may now be fully assessed, and misconceptions corrected. It was not until 5 October 1963 that he was approached, rather apologetically, about the question of a fee; but, in fact, there was little Paying of the Piper. No further correspondence from the artist has been traced, nor does his name appear on the various committees convened to debate academic dress. This has not prevented some red herrings thriving in muddied waters, such as John Birch's visit to Piper's studio, where he allegedly saw 'some pieces of silk, samples for the new Doctors Robes he was designing for the University of Sussex.'¹⁰⁴ Piper's involvement ended before the silks in question had been procured by Cobleys, so if he did receive samples afterwards, it would have been for approval or interest only. Clarissa Lewis, Piper's daughter, is also adamant: 'I have no recollection of John doing any academic dress for Sussex. He did of course design vestments for Coventry and Chichester Cathedrals and I think others; so maybe John Birch might

of charge.' SxUOS1/1/1/1-GB181. Fourth Annual Report, 1962–63, p. 35.

100 SxUOS1/1/1/17/24. Letter from Fulton to Sekers, 9 January 1963.

101 First performed at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 8 June 1953.

102 *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 February 1963.

103 *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 May 1963. The mention of 1538 is perhaps a reference to a ruling of a few years earlier: 'Henry VIII's Act for the Reformation of Excess of Apparel (1533), which, while forcing all people of private standing to adopt a more sober dress, allowed those of position to use such a colour as scarlet, no doubt gave a stimulus to its use on the festal robe which Doctors of Divinity and other doctors were beginning to wear.' Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 66.

104 Birch, p. 13. He does not specify the date of his visit, but the context seems to point to the early 1960s.

have seen silk samples for them.’¹⁰⁵ It may therefore be confidently deduced that although Piper had been perfectly amenable to discourse colours over two pleasant lunches at a London club, that was the extent of his contribution.

As the mantles, dalmatics and copes for Coventry resembled brilliantly jewelled panels of stained glass in equally intense yellow silks sourced from West Cumberland Silk Mills, it is easy to see how confusion arose, and continued to arise. In 1964, John Butterworth, vice-chancellor of Warwick, was in correspondence with the Council of Industrial Design about the proposed scheme of his own new University, remarking, ‘I know well, of course, the gowns which John Piper has designed for the Cathedral here ... might it be a possibility to commission someone who had experience in theatrical designing, but one would obviously have to be very careful not to become too flamboyant, as in my view are the robes at Sussex University.’¹⁰⁶ On 5 May, in a similarly-themed letter to Elizabeth Deighton of the Bear Lane Gallery in Oxford, Butterworth persisted in confusing and conflating the facts: ‘I am a bit doubtful about John Piper who did the robes for Coventry Cathedral and the gowns for Sussex. I think they are tremendous as sketches but somehow to me don’t quite come off when translated into material.’¹⁰⁷ If Butterworth had seen drawings by Piper, they too were most probably designs for Coventry; in any case, Piper was scrupulously careful across all his wide-ranging work to ensure that designs translated to other media would match his intentions accurately.

On 16 July 1974, the University conferred an honorary DLitt on Piper (his third such honour, five more would follow), from which occasion the precise nature of his assistance may also be confirmed. The programme stated that he would be presented by Quentin Bell, Professor of History and Theory of Art; but for some reason the duty was delegated to Donald Mitchell, founding Professor of Music and for many years the dominant force of the inner circle around Britten. His tribute to Piper, afterwards published in a limited-edition Festschrift, included a courtesy quote from Bell, then drew attention to the artist’s long collaboration with the composer—most recently his designs for *Death in Venice*¹⁰⁸—and after referring also to his work at Coventry, continued:

... and to turn for a moment from the sublime to the domestic, it was from Mr Piper that this University sought advice when considering how its graduands should be robed. We cannot in fact quite claim that Mr Piper stands before us on this happy occasion wearing, as it were invisibly, a caption associated with a familiar if somewhat different category of artist: ‘all my own work.’ None the less there can be no doubt that the radiance and richness of the robes’ colours reflect his influence and glowing imagination.¹⁰⁹

Piper’s definitive biography makes no mention of Sussex, other than to record the awarding of his honorary doctorate;¹¹⁰ but soon afterwards he was commissioned to design a tapestry for its new interdenominational Chapel—known as the Meeting House, or, colloquially, the Beehive—interpreting scenes from Psalm 46, from which

105 Clarissa Lewis, email to author, 8 November 2022.

106 Quoted in Jackson, ‘Warwick’, p. 17.

107 Jackson, ‘Warwick’, pp. 18, 36.

108 First performed at Snape Maltings Concert Hall, Suffolk, 16 June 1973.

109 Elborn, pp. 76–77.

110 Spalding.

came the University's motto, Be still and know.¹¹¹ This building, where John Birch was the first Organist from 1967 to 1994, was dedicated at a brief service of thanksgiving on 15 December 1978, preceding the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of Court.

Similar myths, quickly established and long enduring, concerned Hardy Amies. An article in the *Daily Telegraph* on the scheme for the University of Essex, announced quite plainly that 'Mr Hardy Amies, the Queen's couturier, is designing the robes for the officers and graduates of the University of Essex. It is the first time he has designed academic dress of this kind'¹¹²—but his name was frequently cited incorrectly:

How far we are from adapting our educational system to the demands of a technological century was reflected in a singular ceremony which recently took place in Brighton. The occasion was the ceremony of conferring degrees at the university on recipients, who included Mr. Wilson, garbed in furred, saffron-yellow academic dress designed by Hardy Amies, and looking like a male chorus from Gilbert and Sullivan ... if indeed so new and mini-skirted an institution still clings to the academic mumbo-jumbo of the past ... where indeed are we to look for salvation?¹¹³

... and—

This tension for Plateglass between the pulls of a historic past and a beckoning future can be illustrated in a number of ways ... They use gowns for their ceremonies, but have them designed by Cecil Beaton (the blue cape and tricorne hat of East Anglia) or Hardy Amies (Sussex and Essex), a peculiar mixture of high culture and haute couture.¹¹⁴

The lingering misattribution would not be easily shed. Len Brown, of Joshua Taylor, is also reported as having worked with Amies on the Sussex robes¹¹⁵ but this cannot now be substantiated; it is most probable that either Brown's contact was Hargreaves-Mawdsley, or he meant to refer to the University of Essex. Even by 2008, an enquiry by Alex Kerr to the Sussex archives¹¹⁶ elicited an informal reply about designs 'which I think were for the Officers gowns where Sir Hardy Amies had been involved.'¹¹⁷ No further response was received from Dr Kerr's source, and no evidence has been unearthed to confirm any contribution whatsoever by Amies. The legend that he was responsible for the bizarre scheme adopted by the University of Kent has also now been disproved.¹¹⁸ In settling these claims, it is amusing to note a similarly prevalent but equally erroneous belief among Sussex alumni that Basil Spence,¹¹⁹ in an uncharacteristic display of

111 The tapestry, incorporating Piper's favoured 'foliate head', has 'proved to be an enduringly imaginative and striking piece of art.' Gavin Ashenden, 'The Meeting House' in Gray, p. 65.

112 *Daily Telegraph*, 7 January 1964

113 Beloff (p. 160) quotes this from Goronwy Rees (1909–79) in *Encounter* (Sept. 1966), p. 43, but erroneously ascribes it to the July issue. The description of a 'furred' gown is, in any case, entirely fictional.

114 Beloff, p. 186.

115 Goff, p. 12.

116 In connection with his article published later that year.

117 Email from Phyllis Hicks to Alex Kerr, 7 May 2008. The author is grateful to Dr Kerr for providing a copy of this communication.

118 Brewer, p. 12. Ede & Ravenscroft claimed authorship of the Kent scheme: Campbell, p. 108.

119 The architect of Sussex University, whose striking conception placed it among the

Voysey-esque comprehensiveness, had also designed the University's cutlery—resulting in quantities of relatively cheap kitchenware being hungrily purloined under false assumptions.¹²⁰ Many more misunderstandings and debates would occur before the academic dress of Sussex reached its final form.

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The author is grateful to the late Dr Groves for supplying the image in Figure 2; photographer unascertained. Chris Williams took the photograph from the Burgon Society Archive. Many thanks to Historic England for Figures 6 and 7.

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All attempts to contact the copyright holder of Charles Franklyn have been unsuccessful.

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This file includes most of the quoted correspondence by Franklyn and Shaw, including the images reproduced as Figs 1A and 1E. Other sources held at The Keep that have been consulted are:

finest examples of modern university architecture. In 1970 the designs were considered for inclusion in a set of commemorative postage stamps. Unfortunately, the designs of the artist eventually chosen (Nicholas Jenkins) had not encompassed Sussex, so the set comprised representations of Southampton (for which Spence had also been partly responsible), Aberystwyth, Essex, and Leicester.

¹²⁰ Spence also designed much of the furniture for the University Library and elsewhere, but his contribution to the cutlery was confined to the mere recommendation of a design by Gerald Benney for Viners of Sheffield. See Ann Eatwell, 'Early University Dining Culture' in Gray, pp. 137–38.

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