

Lambeth Degree Academic Dress

by Noel Cox

In the United Kingdom the right of universities and other institutions to confer degrees is strictly controlled by legislation.¹ Lambeth degrees, also occasionally and perhaps misleadingly called Canterbury degrees (as in ‘DMus Cantuar’)² are still awarded by the archbishop of Canterbury under the general authority of the Ecclesiastical Licences Act 1533–1534,³ although he is not a university nor an educational institution per se. The continued specific authority for the archbishop to grant degrees can however be found in the Education Reform Act 1988,⁴ and the Education (Recognised Bodies) (England) Order 2003.⁵ But unlike other degree-granting bodies, the archbishop of Canterbury does not prescribe a distinct set of academic dress for the recipient of his degrees. Instead the academic dress is either that Oxford or Cambridge. This is due, at least in part, to the history and nature of the degrees which he confers.

Lambeth degrees are not honorary degrees,⁶ though the candidates do not, in general, sit any examinations.⁷ Indeed, to require examinations as a regular course

¹ Only those universities, colleges or other bodies authorized by royal charter or Act of Parliament can confer degrees; Education Reform Act 1988 s 214 (2) (a) and (b). Polytechnics, which have now become universities, and the various degree-awarding colleges are provided for in separate legislation. Any award may by Order in Council be designated a recognized award. These include the Degree of the Utter Bar (Inns of Court), Degree of Barrister-at-Law (Inns of Court of Northern Ireland), and the Degree of Master of Horticulture of the Royal Horticultural Society.

² Letter to the author from the Rt Revd Frank Sargeant, bishop at Lambeth, 8 December 1995.

³ 25 Hen VIII c 21 (1533–1534) s 3.

⁴ s 216(1).

⁵ SI 2003/1865. The older universities, the archbishop of Canterbury, the now defunct Council for National Academic Awards, Union Theological College, Royal College of Music, and the Royal College of Art are listed in the Education (Recognised Bodies) Order (England) 2003 (SI 2003/1865) and later regulations.

⁶ The faculty awarding the degree states ‘PROVIDED ALWAYS that these Presents do not avail you anything unless duly registered by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery.’ The wording of the Faculty expressly states that the Faculty is to ‘create you an actual MASTER OF ARTS. And we do also admit you into the Number of the Master of Arts of

for these degrees would have been contrary to the idea of a dispensation (which Lambeth degrees have been said to represent), though its use was not altogether inconsistent with this notion, since the archbishop was empowered to use the privilege of conferring degrees or degree status for the good of the Church, or the benefit of an individual.⁸ Some assessment of academic ability or education would therefore often have been appropriate.

The modern practice followed by the archbishop of Canterbury now requires that the recipients must be presumed to have the potential to have studied for the degree in question and to have been awarded it.⁹ In many cases it is recognized that someone's service to the Church has precluded further academic study, and a Lambeth degree is recognition of this, as well as a sign of gratitude from the Church at large for someone's distinguished work and service. It is thus in these cases a combination of an honour and the recognition of academic standing—though perhaps rather more recognition of the latter than is usually the case for a degree awarded *honoris causa*. At the same time the Lambeth Master of Arts degrees by thesis—dating from 1990—and the Diploma of Student in Theology—dating from 1905—both reflect academic standing alone, since they are awarded purely on the basis of examination.¹⁰

In historical terms Lambeth degrees are a mixture of privilege and dispensation,¹¹ though now conferred on statutory authority. They are of the nature of positive privileges, though, like the Oxford MA by special resolution, they may potentially be conferred to meet some statutory requirement for office.¹² Indeed Archbishop Lang appears to have accurately described the true nature of Lambeth

this Realm' [from Faculty creating the author an MA, dated 3 May 2005, registered at the Crown Office of the House of Lords 18 July 2005].

⁷ Examinations were conducted regularly for the MA from the 1860s until after the First World War. A limited number of candidates with good theology qualifications, who would otherwise register for the Diploma of Student in Theology, may still register for a Lambeth MA by thesis. The award of the degree is still subject to rigorous scrutiny: (1933) 87 HL Official Report, pp. 838–39; Peter Beesley, *The Lambeth Degrees* (London: Faculty Office, 1992).

⁸ See Noel Cox, 'Dispensation, Privileges, and the Conferment of Graduate Status: With Special Reference to Lambeth Degrees' *Journal of Law and Religion*, 18.1 (2002–03), pp. 249–74; available online at:

⁹ For the mode of exercise under Archbishop Lang, see (1933) 87 HL Official Report pp. 838–41.

¹⁰ See Marjorie Thresher, *A Venture of Faith: History of the Lambeth Diploma, 1905–1984* (London: S. Th. Association, 1989); Cox, 'Dispensation, Privileges, and the Conferment of Graduate Status'.

¹¹ See Cox, 'Dispensation, Privileges, and the Conferment of Graduate Status'.

¹² Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, ed. by E. Christian (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), Vol. III, p. 381.

degrees when he called himself a ‘one-man University’.¹³ This dichotomy has had its influence upon the academical dress worn by the recipients of these degrees.

Lambeth academical dress

It would seem—subject to the absence of any systematic survey of records—that the recipients of the Lambeth degrees customarily wore robes of the same style as those of the ancient university (Oxford or Cambridge as the case may be) attended by the archbishop conferring the degree.¹⁴ During the appointment of Dr Carey, who had not attended either university,¹⁵ new Lambeth graduates continued the practice of the last archbishop (Dr Runcie), who was an Oxford graduate, and wore Oxford academical dress of the appropriate degree.¹⁶ Under Dr Rowan Williams this practice has continued, though whether this is because of a desire for consistency or because Dr Williams’s senior degree was from Oxford (he has degrees from Cambridge also) is unclear.

Degrees awarded by the archbishop are not those of the University of Oxford, or indeed those of Cambridge—so far as the regulations of these universities are concerned. But it is now the rule that recipients will wear the academical dress of the appropriate Oxford degree.¹⁷ Since the degrees are awarded by the archbishop it would appear to be within his unrestricted authority to regulate academical dress. But let us set aside for a moment the variant rule established by Dr Carey, and look at the possible alternatives.

The choice may be influenced by a determination of what precisely is the legal nature of a Lambeth degree. Possibilities are (and these may not necessarily be exclusive):

¹³ (1933) 87 HL Official Report, p. 838. The Education (Recognised Bodies) Order (England) 2003 (SI 2003/1865) lists the Archbishop of Canterbury amid a list of universities and colleges.

¹⁴ Cecil Wall, ‘The Lambeth Degrees’, *British Medical Journal*, 2 (1935), pp. 854–55. The exact status of the dress is uncertain, and it has been said that this rule only applied to non-graduate recipients, graduates wearing the robes of the degree conferred by the archbishop appropriate to their own university; Charles Franklyn, *Academical Dress from the Middle Ages to the Present Day Including Lambeth Degrees* (Lewes: privately printed, 1970), Chapter 13 ‘Lambeth Degrees’. This latter interpretation has much to commend it, bearing in mind the nature of Lambeth degrees.

¹⁵ Dr Carey himself wore the academical dress of his highest earned degree, the University of London PhD, to preference to that of any of his several DD *honoris causa*.

¹⁶ Letter to the author from the Rt Revd Frank Sargeant, bishop at Lambeth, 8 December 1995. The current archbishop’s senior degree is from Oxford, but his first degree is from Cambridge.

¹⁷ Letter to the author from the Rt Revd Frank Sargeant, bishop at Lambeth, 8 December 1995. This has not always been the case, however.

- (1) a degree awarded by the archbishop as a university of himself
- (2) a 'generic' degree by dispensation or privilege (and not specific to any particular university)
- (3) a degree of Oxford or Cambridge by dispensation (irrespective of the absence of approval by the university authorities)¹⁸
- (4) a degree of the recipient's own university by dispensation (ditto)¹⁹

The origins of the Lambeth degree may lie in the ancient dispensatory powers of the papacy,²⁰ but the degrees conferred by the archbishops of Canterbury are clearly distinct degrees. This was certainly the view of Archbishop Lang,²¹ and can be seen reflected in the actual words of the fiat conferring the degree:

WHEREAS in School regularly instituted that laudable Usage and Custom hath long prevailed, and that with the Approbation as well of the pure Reformed Churches as of the most learned Men for many Ages past, That they who have with Proficiency and Applause exerted themselves in the Study of any Liberal Science, should be graced with some eminent Degree of Dignity: AND WHEREAS the Archbishops of Canterbury, enabled by the public Authority of the Law, do enjoy, and long have enjoyed, the Power of conferring Degrees and Titles of Honour upon those considered deserving of such recognition, as by an authentic Book of Taxations of Faculties confirmed by Authority of Parliament, doth more fully appear:

WE THEREFORE, being vested with the Authority aforesaid and following the Example of Our Predecessors have judged it expedient, that you whose Proficiency in the Study of Theology, Uprightness of Life, Sound Doctrine, and Purity of Morals, are manifest unto Us be dignified with the Degree of MASTER OF ARTS And We do by these presents, so far as in Us lies, and the Laws of this Realm do allow, accordingly create you an actual MASTER OF ARTS. And we do also admit you into the Number of the Master of Arts of this Realm: the Oath hereunder written having been by Us or Our Master of the Faculties first required of you, and by you duly taken and subscribed.²²

¹⁸ Beesley, *The Lambeth Degrees*.

¹⁹ Franklyn argued that the degrees were conferred by the Crown, as they were invalid without ratification (*Academical Dress*, Chapter 13). This argument is, however, untenable, since the wording of the faculty is explicit that the recipient is being created a MA or whatever by the archbishop. In ecclesiastical theory the dispensation or privilege is from the archbishop in his ecclesiastical capacity and not as an agent of the Crown.

²⁰ Cox, 'Dispensation, Privileges, and the Conferment of Graduate Status'.

²¹ (1933) 87 HL Official Report, p. 838.

²² Author's MA, 3 May 2005. See also the fiats reproduced in Franklyn, *Academical Dress*, which have virtually identical wording.

This is clearly a substantive degree, and not merely degree status (as ‘MA status’ at Cambridge). The key phrases include ‘the power of conferring degrees’, and ‘create you an actual Doctor in Civil Law’. Nor is the archbishop purporting to act ‘in prejudice of the universities’,²³ since he is acting so as to create a new doctor (master or bachelor), but not of either university (that is, Oxford or Cambridge).

The first option (a degree awarded by the archbishop as a university of himself) would appear to be the most correct, though the third may reflect its historical nature more precisely. The archbishop is dispensing the recipient from the requirements of residence at a particular university, but not necessarily from the requirements for examination. The first option is also supported by the notion of the recipient as being admitted ‘into the number of Doctors of Civil Laws of this Realm’, since the wording suggests that ‘Doctors of Civil Laws’ are generic rather than particular to individual universities. The second option is also possible, though it may be unwise to rely too much upon the precise wording of faculties.

The third option however finds support from the argument that when the authority to confer degrees was confirmed in 1533 the only universities which existed were Oxford and Cambridge. However these institutions did not purport to confer Oxford and Cambridge degrees respectively, but rather generic degrees. A Master of Arts of Oxford was equally an MA at Cambridge, which was why these universities recognized the equivalent degrees of each other. Indeed from the earliest times degrees awarded by recognized universities have enjoyed the mutual recognition of other institutions throughout Christendom—and now globally. For some centuries the faculty awarding the Lambeth degree has clearly purported to award a degree, and not merely dispense from the requirements of a particular university. The fourth option might appear logical, but there is little evidence to suggest that it reflects actual practice or underlying theory.

This still does not tell us which academical dress Lambeth degree holders should wear; indeed it widens the range of choices. These would have been proportionately narrowed had Lambeth degrees been degrees of Oxford or Cambridge (or any other designated university) by dispensation.

There are at least eight possible positions with respect to academical dress for Lambeth degree holders:

- (1) A unique academical dress, distinct from Oxford or any other university
- (2) Oxford academical dress
- (3) Oxford or Cambridge academical dress, depending upon which university the archbishop himself attended

²³ Blackstone, loc.cit.

- (4) For a non-graduate, Oxford or Cambridge academical dress depending upon which the archbishop attended
- (5) For a graduate, the appropriate robes of their own university
- (6) For an Oxford or Cambridge graduate, the appropriate robes of their own university
- (7) Academical dress of Oxford, Cambridge or any other university depending upon that which the archbishop attended
- (8) For a non-graduate, academical dress of Oxford, Cambridge or any other university depending upon which the archbishop attended²⁴

The first option, that of a unique costume, has much to commend it, and would clearly establish the uniqueness of these degrees. It has been advocated by a number of writers (as a change, rather than as reflecting contemporary practice).²⁵ But its institution would be a bold step, one which successive archbishops, mindful perhaps of the jealousy of the universities—and perhaps not wishing to attract undue attention to the archbishop’s privilege of conferring degrees—have hesitated to take.²⁶

The best argument for utilizing Oxford academical dress is that Oxford is the oldest university in the realm, and indeed one of the original *studia generalia*.²⁷ It also has the advantage of offering a degree of certainty—though it is perhaps to be regretted that the academical dress of Oxford has fallen into chaos, not having been properly revised since 1770.²⁸

Where a candidate—or the archbishop—is a graduate of more than one university the senior degree would presumably determine the choice of academical dress.²⁹ There is some evidence, however, to suggest that it is the first degree which is important. The argument in favour of wearing the academical dress of Oxford or Cambridge, depending upon which university the archbishop himself attended, would appear rather curious. There seems to be little logical reason why this rule should ever have achieved currency, except convenience or expediency (for long

²⁴ Other options include the combinations 4 and 5; 4 and 6; 5 and 8; 6 and 8; 5 and 2 (for non-graduates) and so on.

²⁵ e.g. Franklyn, *Academical Dress*, Chapter 13.

²⁶ See however note 33 below about the hybrid Oxford/Cambridge academical dress of Dr Edmund Turpin.

²⁷ See Cox, ‘Dispensation, Privileges, and the Conferment of Graduate Status’.

²⁸ *Oxford University Statutes*, ed. by G. R. M. Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1845–51), Vol. II, 1767–1850, pp. 9–10.

²⁹ Where the same degree is held in two or more universities, the senior is the first awarded. If the senior degree held is a Lambeth degree then we speculate on the alternatives.

the archbishops were graduates of one or the other, and indeed for much of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century successive archbishops were Oxford men), unless indeed these degrees are dispensations from Oxford or Cambridge degree regulations. Nor is it especially helpful to observe that only these universities existed in 1533, since the Lambeth degree is but a continuation of a much older practice,³⁰ and not based upon any particular university.

The position of Lambeth degree academical dress is also complicated by the need for Lambeth degree recipients to utilize the academical dress of contemporary Oxford (or Cambridge)—and thus be affected by any changes in university regulations.³¹ It does however appear to have the support of long practice.³² It should also be remembered that prior to the seventeenth century the differences in the academical dress of the two old universities was less pronounced than it later became, and the importance of the choice was proportionately less. Moreover, it would seem that, in one instance at least, a hybrid Oxford/Cambridge academical dress was used.³³ This may well have been a deliberate attempt to return to the practice prevalent at a time that the academical dress of Oxford and Cambridge was in many particulars the same—though the dress of the DD of Oxford and Cambridge differed in the colours of the silk lining from at least the fourteenth century,³⁴ as did the MA.

For a graduate recipient of a Lambeth degree it might be appropriate to wear the robes of their own university—at least if the degree is seen as some form of dispensation or privilege. In the view of Franklyn, this was preferable as it approximated to a promotion theory, whereby the archbishop promoted a recipient within the recipients' own university.³⁵ But this could risk exciting the jealousy of

³⁰ And it could be argued that this means that the academical dress should be that of Oxford or Cambridge as it was in 1533, unreformed.

³¹ When the archbishop introduced the MLitt he adopted not merely the degree title but also the academical dress of a new Oxford degree.

³² W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 137, citing Wall, 'The Lambeth Degrees', p. 855. This view is also supported by Hugh Smith and Kevin Sheard, *Academic Dress and Insignia of the World* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1970), Vol. I, p. 802.

³³ For Dr Edmund Turpin's Lambeth DMus in the 1890s see: Nicholas Groves, *Theological Colleges: Their Hoods and Histories* (The Burgon Society, 2004), Section 7; Nicholas Groves and John Kersey, *Academical Dress of Music Colleges and Societies of Musicians in the United Kingdom* (The Burgon Society, 2002), Plate 3. This appears to have the sleeves of the Cambridge doctors other than those of music. See photographs on p. 64, above.

³⁴ See Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress*, Chapters 3 and 4.

³⁵ Franklyn, *Academical Dress*, p. 217.

their own alma mater,³⁶ which might give the impression that the archbishop is interfering in their internal affairs. It is also at odds with the fact that the archbishops themselves normally ascribed to their degrees a rather firmer character than that of a mere dispensation.³⁷ It also does not appear to have been the customary practice.

A compromise would be to for a non-graduate to wear the robes of Oxford or Cambridge depending upon which university the archbishop attended, and for a graduate to wear the appropriate robes of their own university. This view is supported by several writers as the practice actually followed,³⁸ but is it unclear whether this is so. Certainly it was not consistently followed. It also involves two additional complications. The graduates would appear as though they were the recipient of a dispensation from the regulations of their own universities (which suggests an authority which the archbishops did not claim to possess); and not all archbishops can be presumed to be graduates of Oxford or Cambridge. Given that the majority of recipients of Lambeth degrees have been graduates, this usage would suggest that the degree is by way of dispensation from university regulations, which it is not (at least, not principally now).

Rather than resenting the use of their own robes by Lambeth degree holders,³⁹ the universities might welcome the use of their robes. It might be possible to allow the recipients to wear the academical dress of Oxford, Cambridge or any other university attended by the archbishop, or for graduates, the dress of the recipient's own university, if there is a dress for the applicable degree. This would assuage the understandable jealousy of the University of London, which missed the opportunity to see its own academical dress utilized, when Dr Carey, a London graduate, chose Oxford for his model.⁴⁰ However, some universities might resent what they might easily see as the usurpation of their academical dress by the archbishop. Nor is

³⁶ Where there is no equivalent degree, then presumably recourse would have to be had to Oxford.

³⁷ See the wording of the fiat, above.

³⁸ Frank Haycraft, *The Degrees and Hoods of the World's Universities and Colleges*, second edition (London: The Cheshunt Press, 1924), p. 18; Revd Thomas Wood, *The Degrees, Gowns and Hoods of the British, etc., Universities* (London: Thomas Pratt and Son, 1882); and strongly supported by Strickland Gibson, according to Franklyn, *Academical Dress*, p. 217.

³⁹ Oxford's response to the use of Oxford DD dress by the newly appointed Bishop of Portsmouth, a Cambridge man, in 1941, was not favourable (Franklyn, *Academical Dress*, p. 217). See also note 44, below.

⁴⁰ Beesley, *The Lambeth Degrees*, argued that the degrees are linked with the universities of Oxford and Cambridge since these were the only universities extant in 1533, and therefore the archbishop would not be able to award a degree purporting to be of one of the newer universities (not that they purport to the degrees of Oxford or Cambridge in any case).

there any sound reason why the archbishop should purport to confer the degree of any particular university.

Options 5 and 6 have an advantage in that the dress worn by graduates would be that of their own universities, rather than determined by the archbishop's choice of university. But this would result in an unsatisfactory lack of consistency of dress—something which has in recent decades been avoided simply because prior to Dr Carey for centuries all archbishops of Canterbury were Oxford or Cambridge graduates. The argument that graduates wore the dress of their alma mater also appears unsatisfactory unless the conferring of the degree is seen as a promotion⁴¹—which again raises problems in respect of the apparent usurpation of authority over individual universities. Although in some respects these might be seen as an exercise in dispensation, such a theory bears little relation to the practice of recent centuries.

On the available evidence, it seems that the academical dress of the universities of Oxford or Cambridge was always used, and possibly for some cases at least, a hybrid of the two, and the determining factor was the university of which the archbishop was a graduate. It could follow that this rule is not limited to Oxford and Cambridge, since there is no inherent reason why the archbishop must have attended either, though the current archbishop is a graduate of both universities.⁴² Consequently, if the archbishop is a graduate of London, then any Lambeth degree recipients during that archbishop's episcopate should wear London academical dress.

However, there is a strong argument that the Act of 1533 does not confer any authority upon the archbishop to do what he could not do in 1533. Since only Oxford and Cambridge existed in that year, it would appear that he does not have the legal authority to confer London degrees, so the academical dress of London ought not to be worn.

The actual practice adopted appears to be entirely at the discretion of the archbishop.⁴³ Long-standing custom justifies the use of Oxford and Cambridge academical dress, not least because that is the only academical dress which appears to have been used for nearly five hundred years. No such history of customary use would justify the assumption of London academical dress, for example—at least, not without the consent of the university.⁴⁴ As remarked earlier, the result of broadening the usage would be less clarity.

⁴¹ This would require research into what was worn by Lambeth graduates in the last century and earlier.

⁴² MA (Cambridge), DD, DPhil (Oxford).

⁴³ Letter to the author from the Rt Revd Frank Sargeant, bishop at Lambeth, 8 December 1995.

⁴⁴ To use academical dress without permission could raise legal questions, including possible liability for the tort of passing off, or for breach of copyright. The addition of, for instance, a purple or violet stripe, might not suffice to escape liability. But it must be said

With the introduction of the Lambeth diplomas by examination from 1905 there has been some new and distinctive academical dress developed, namely the hood and gown of the Diploma of Student in Theology (STh).⁴⁵ However, since this is a distinct qualification without a university counterpart—though the hood is of Cambridge shape—this provides little guidance with respect to the Lambeth degree. It also is uncertain whether the innovation, inconsistent as it is with practice with respect to the degrees, was desirable.

With respect to the Lambeth degrees, since the archbishop is not acting ‘in prejudice of the universities’,⁴⁶ he must be presumed to be conferring a generic degree, or one of his own creation. Since the archbishop of Canterbury is a ‘one-man university’, a distinct academical dress, presumably based upon that of Oxford (as the senior university), would perhaps be desirable. It would be unsatisfactory to encourage the use of the academical dress of recipients’ alma maters (even assuming such institutions approved what they might see as the usurpation of their academical dress), and far more sensible to emphasize the inherent unity of the degree.

In the absence of a truly generic pattern for academical dress that of Oxford must be preferred—despite the relatively confused state of Oxford academical dress, and the inherent difficulty involved in utilizing the academical dress of a university and the submission to its regulations which this would appear to require.

Franklyn’s suggestion of adding a one inch purple stripe to the cape of the hood would appear sensible,⁴⁷ though there is no particular reason why that particular distinction ought to be adopted. The principal objection which might be raised is that it would be an innovation, and as such contrary to the fundamental nature of the Lambeth degree. At least the adoption of any innovations in Oxford academical dress has the authority of custom (long-standing adherence to Oxford practice), however unsatisfactory it might otherwise be.⁴⁸

The principal difficulty remaining is the inherent dichotomy in the nature of the Lambeth degree. It is scarcely to be wondered if hybrids—such as Dr Turpin’s

that it would be extremely unlikely for a university to take legal action, even if they had an arguable cause of action.

⁴⁵ Groves, *Theological Colleges*, p. 49. See also the Archbishop’s Diploma in Church Music.

⁴⁶ Blackstone, loc. cit.

⁴⁷ Franklyn, *Academical Dress*, Chapter 13.

⁴⁸ Note also that the range of degrees which the archbishop may confer does not appeared to be limited, and in recent years the comparatively new degree of MLitt has been awarded. Cambridge adopted this degree in 1922, and Oxford in 1979 (the latter to replace the BLitt of 1895). It remains to be seen whether the archbishop will institute a degree which is not awarded by either Oxford or Cambridge, and what academical dress might be utilized in that case.

DMus gown—were not tried. But ultimately it might be desirable for an element of certainty to be achieved by an express statement of archiepiscopal policy.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ It need hardly be added that such a policy (though not unalterable) would need to be the product of full and careful consideration from historical, legal, practical, ecclesiological and æsthetic perspectives.