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Primary Source: Examining Official Dress in Universities in Aotearoa New Zealand

Cover Page Footnote

University officers' robes change over time, but finding reasons for their evolution from university sources proves difficult. This article looks at official robes in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Examining Official Dress in Universities in Aotearoa New Zealand

Officers' robes change over time, but finding reasons for their evolution from university sources proves difficult, Scott Pilkington writes

While collecting data on doctoral academic dress in New Zealand universities which formed the basis of my Burgon Society Fellowship submission, I also became aware of how the academic dress of university officials changed over time. The biggest question, of course, was why change the dress—surely once robes have been purchased for the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor (excepting drastic changes in size), that is that? The ‘what’ was apparent—after all, it is listed in the university calendars. The ‘how’ and ‘why’ less so. The

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*Wherein a Fellow's
expertise and the
outside world meet*

need to visit the various university archives and explore minutes and memoranda to determine the reason and mechanism for change became clear.

Unfortunately, this is not as easy as it first seemed. When the universities were emailed, the replies varied from ‘we don’t know what you’re talking about’ to ‘sorry, don’t think we ever wrote any of that down, and if we did, it’s already thrown out’ to ‘there might be something in the former registrar’s papers but there are 1000 boxes’. Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns further complicated efforts.

A further, proper, and detailed analysis and comment on the history of change in the dress of officials in New Zealand universities will be undertaken and submitted to this journal for consideration once I have visited the archives of the extant eight universities and the national government archives for the former University of New Zealand. This article, then, is a brief look at some of the items found in the University of Auckland Administrative Archive. A magnitude of thanks goes to the University Archivist Dr Libby Nichol for her *mahi* (work) helping me wade through these items and signing off that the items in these records could be shared with the public.

Founded in 1883 as the Auckland College of the University of New Zealand, the University of Auckland first specified the dress of officials in the 1963 University Calendar.¹ At the time, all graduands and graduates of the university wore trenchers (as graduates of the University of New Zealand had done from 1884), but from 1973 doctors from University of Auckland (the constituent colleges became separate universities in 1963) wore Tudor-style bonnets. However, this change was not applied to the official party who still wear trenchers.² The dress for university officials at this university have not changed (other

¹ University of Auckland, *The University of Auckland Calendar 1963* (Auckland: The University of Auckland, 1963), pp. 41–42, 504.

² Noel Cox, ‘Academical Dress in New Zealand,’ *Burgon Society Annual 2001*, pp. 15–24, at <newprairiepress.org/burgonsociety> <https://doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1003>; University of Auckland, *The University of Auckland Calendar 1961* (Auckland: The University of Auckland, 1961), p. 36; University of Auckland, *The University of Auckland Calendar 1973* (Auckland: The University of

than the occasional requirement for different sizes) since then, although new officials have since been added: Kaumatua and Kuia (Māori elders) in 2000 and for graduation officials (marshals) in 2007, summarised below in Table 1.³

Table 1: Prescribed academic dress for university officials at University of Auckland

Position	Description	Year set
Chancellor	The robe for the Chancellor of the University is a blue damask gown with facings of gold lace, bearing on each shoulder the coat of arms of the University. The cap is a black velvet trencher with gold lace and tassel.	1963
Pro-Chancellor	The robe for the Pro-Chancellor is a black silk gown with facings of blue silk and gold lace, bearing on each shoulder the coat of arms. The cap is a black velvet trencher with gold tassel.	1963
Vice-Chancellor	The robe for the Vice-Chancellor is a blue silk gown with facings of silver lace, bearing on each shoulder the coat of arms. The cap is a black velvet trencher with silver lace and tassel.	1963
Registrar	The robe for the Registrar is a gown of black silk with facings of blue silk, bearing on each shoulder the coat of arms. The cap is a black velvet trencher with black silk tassel.	1963
Kuia and Kaumatua	The robe for the Kaumatua and the Kuia is the Fellow's gown of the colour University blue to be worn with a black scarf lined with the colour University blue bearing on each lapel the coat of arms. The cap is a black velvet trencher with a black silk tassel.	2000
Officials	The academic dress for Graduation Officials shall be the costume appropriate to their degree. In addition, the gown shall bear on each shoulder the coat of arms of the University, and the trencher shall have a blue tassel. Graduation Officials who are not graduates shall wear an undergraduate gown bearing the coat of arms of the University on each shoulder.	2007

As the Auckland University College became the fully fledged University of Auckland in the early 1960s, a great flurry of activity took place as it set to distinguish itself from the other former University of New Zealand colleges, now also independent universities. 1961 saw the meeting of a Heraldry Committee, formed of the Pro-Chancellor and Chair (Sir Douglass Robb, MD), the Chancellor (William Hollis Cocker), Vice-Chancellor (Kenneth Maidment), and Professor Paul Beadle (sculptor and Dean of Elam School of Fine Arts who joined the university that year), who were entrusted by the university Council to carry

Auckland, 1972), pp. 50-52, 828; University of New Zealand, *The New Zealand University Calendar 1884* (Wellington: The University of New Zealand, 1884), p. 55.

³ University of Auckland, *The University of Auckland Calendar 2000* (Auckland: The University of Auckland, 2000); University of Auckland, *The University of Auckland Calendar 2007* (Auckland: The University of Auckland, 2007). Prior to these changes, these staff wore their own academic dress if they were entitled to them, or a plain black bachelor's gown and no cap, making them difficult to find when in a crowd of graduands!

out recommendations for ceremonial robes and a coat of arms. Professor Beadle submitted coloured sketches for robes for the university officials, taking into consideration feedback received from the Committee.⁴ The resolution is provided below.

It was resolved —

That the sketches of the four robes be approved, and that a badge of the university's coat-of-arms be worn on the right shoulder of all four, and that the blue to be used be as near as possible to heraldic blue.

That the sketches be now forwarded to Messrs Ede & Ravenscroft with a request for an estimate of time and cost, all robes to be made for 6ft figure and in as lightweight material as possible.

That the firm be also requested to send samples of materials when it is supplying its quotation.

That the respective head sizes be forwarded in respect of the mortarboards.

Later that same month—in what must be a world record for university speed on an issue—the University Registrar, James Andrew Stanley Kirkness JP, exchanged with London (UK) robemakers Ede and Ravenscroft Ltd. The university had previously bought academic dress for graduating students in December 1955 from AG Almond Ltd of Cambridge (UK).⁵ Ede & Ravenscroft provided a list of prices and recommended design changes following their receipt of Beadle's coloured sketches.⁶ Their recommendations included adding lace to the back of the chancellor's gown, placing the university crest on both shoulders (Beadle had suggested only the right shoulder), and tapering the width of the lace on the sleeves and cap. Records do not survive in the university archives of Beadle's sketches, but a written description is provided by Ede & Ravenscroft, along with their suggested changes are available in Table 2.

The Registrar and the Heraldry Committee agreed, and the dress was accordingly made.

Shortly after this in 1963–64 Professor Hugh Smith wrote from Rhodes University (specifically mentioning official dress) to update his files on academic dress around the world.⁷ This was followed in 1965 with letters exchanged between the Assistant Registrar, Victoria University of Wellington (VUW, another former University of New Zealand college) on behalf of the Deputy Vice Chancellor and Kirkness at University of Auckland, as VUW began the process of designing their own dress for university officials (which has never been specified in the university calendar).⁸

4 Report of Meeting of Heraldry Committee 6.6.1961 (adopted by Council 19 June 1961), 6 June 1961, University of Auckland Archives, Admin Collection (henceforth Auckland Archives)—Heraldry, 304, 1960–1961.

5 Registrar University Auckland, and A. G. Almond (Ltd) Cambridge, multiple telegrams, 17–18 December 1955, Kirkness Files, Auckland Archives—Academic Dress, 299, Academic Dress 1954–1955.

6 Ede and Ravenscroft Ltd to University of Auckland Registrar, Letter, 26 June 1961, Heraldry Folder, Kirkness Files, Auckland Archives—Academic Dress, 304, 1960–1961.

7 Professor Hugh Smith and University of Auckland Registrar, multiple letters, 29 May 1963, 24 Jan 1964, 10 April 1964, Kirkness Files, Auckland Archives, 310, 184, 195, 1962–1963, 1964–1965, 1966–1967. This information went into Hugh Smith and Kevin Sheard, *Academic Dress and Insignia of the World*, 3 vols (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema 1970).

8 D. G. Edwards (Assistant Registrar Victoria University of Wellington) to Kirkness, letter, 14 April 1965, Kirkness Files, Auckland Archives—Academic Dress, 184, 1964–1965.

Table 2: Written descriptions of dress recommended by University of Auckland (following the design of Professor Beadle) and the suggested modifications by Ede & Ravenscroft, 1961
Modern prices in Pounds sterling and New Zealand Dollar in square brackets.

Robes as illustrations

Chancellor's Robe, of blue damask with 2½" gold oakleaf lace, and 2½" lace on the sleeve slits and one badge ... 123 guineas [£2348/\$4607].

Pro-Chancellor's Robe, as above, but with black damask and blue silk facings ... 127 guineas [£2425/\$4757].

OR as above, but using black corded silk and blue facings ... 119 guineas [£2272/\$4458].

Vice-Chancellor's Robe, of black corded silk, with 2" silver oakleaf lace and blue facings and one badge ... 97 guineas [£1852/\$3634].

Registrar's Robe, of black corded silk with 2½" blue facings and one badge 57 guineas [£1088/\$2135].

Hats as illustrations

Chancellor's Hat – Black velvet mortar board with gold bullion tassel. 7½ guineas [£143/\$281]

Pro-Chancellor's Hat – Black velvet mortar board with silver bullion tassel. 7½ guineas [£143/\$281]

Vice-Chancellor's Hat – Black velvet mortar board with silver bullion tassel. 7½ guineas [£143/\$281]

Registrar's Hat – Black velvet mortar board with black silk tassel ... 6 guineas [£115/\$225].

Suggested modifications

Chancellor's Robe, of blue damask with 2½" gold oakleaf lace, and 1¾" gold lace on the sleeve slits and one extra badge ... 116 guineas [£2215/\$4345].

Extra for lace on the back slit ... 18 guineas [£344/\$674].

Pro-Chancellor's Robe, as above, but of black damask and blue silk facings. 120 guineas [£2291/\$4495].

OR as above, but using blue corded silk and therefore no extra for blue facings ... 110 guineas [£2100/\$4121].

Vice-Chancellor's Robe, of black corded silk, with 2" silver lace and ¼" lace on the sleeve cuts and one extra badge ... 97 guineas [£1852/\$3634].

Suggested modification

Chancellor's Hat – Black velvet mortar board, with gold lace on the skull and gold bullion tassel 9 guineas [£172/\$337]

In 1974 the university encountered a problem which occurs when all the university officials change office, and the replacement appointments did not have 'a fixed head size', requiring the university to order new trenchers for them all.⁹ Of note, D. W. Pullar, the new University Registrar, has also scribbled Smith & Caughey (a local large department store whose tailors formerly also made gowns for graduating students) and a phone number on the bottom of the letter. It is unclear who eventually prepared the new trenchers, although the reader does hope the Pro-Chancellor did get to wear his before his term was up!

22 July 1974

Messrs Ede & Ravenscroft Ltd,
Robe Makers & Tailors
93 & 94 Chancery Lane,
London, W.C.2,
ENGLAND.

Dear Sirs,

University of Auckland – Ceremonial Robes

It would be appreciated if you would supply four new mortar boards—we have had a change in office for all four officials and unfortunately we did not make one of the terms of appointment 'a fixed head size'. The robes were supplied by your firm in 1961.

The requirements are:

- Chancellor: One black velvet mortar board with gold lace on skull and gold bullion tassel. Size: 7 3/8ths.
- Vice-Chancellor: One black velvet mortar board with silver lace on skull and silver bullion tassel. Size: 7".
- Pro-Chancellor: One black velvet mortar board with gold bullion tassel. Size: 7¼.
- Registrar: One black velvet mortar board with black silk tassel. Size: 7 1/8th.

I hope you are able to fill the order without undue delay. Under our new arrangements the Pro-Chancellor holds office for one year only—it would be a great pity if during his term of office he never had a hat to fit.

Yours faithfully,
D.W. Pullar
REGISTRAR

This short article serves to illustrate the origin of the dress of university officials at the University of Auckland in the early 1960s. There are eight more universities to examine (which may or may not have information about academic dress in their archives), and once they have been visited, explored, and examined, a follow-up article will be presented examining the history and changes in New Zealand universities.

⁹ Pullar to Ede & Ravenscroft, letter, 22 Jul 1974, Pullar Files, Auckland Archives, 380, 1972–1979.