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The Dress and Staves of the Oxford University Bedels

By Alex Kerr

The six Oxford University bedels wear a plain black stuff gown, with square-ended closed sleeves, inverted-T armholes and a flap collar. This is a lay gown, identified by the code [d4] in the Groves classification. Their headdress is a round black bonnet, also in stuff, with a black silk ribbon between the crown and the brim tied in a bow on the left-hand side. In processions they walk in single file carrying ceremonial staves (Fig. 1).[1]

This article examines the history of the office and duties of the bedels, their gowns, bonnets, chains of office (which they no longer wear today), and the staves they carry. Parallels and contrasts with Cambridge dress and practice are mentioned where useful. Details of the staves and a note on the verger and the marshal are provided in appendices.

The office

The office of bedel is one of the oldest in European universities; the earliest universities all had at least one. It has been suggested that 'an allusion to a *bidellus* is in general (though not invariably) a sufficiently trustworthy indication that a school is really a university or *studium generale*.'[2]

At Oxford the office dates back at least to the thirteenth century, and by 1346 the University had a cohort of six bedels: three superior or esquire bedels and three inferior or yeoman bedels, one of each for the faculties of Theology, Law (Canon and Civil combined), and Arts. They were usually married laymen, with other occupations and often property in the town. In the medieval period they were elected annually by the University's Congregation, with possible re-election each year. From the late fifteenth

1 This article is based on a talk given on 11 October 2025 at the Burgon Society's Congregation at the Charterhouse, London.

Oxford uses the spelling *bedel*. At Cambridge it is *bedell*. Some other universities adopt one or other of these spellings. Various non-academic institutions, such as the City of London livery companies, use the more common spelling *beadle*. At a number of Scottish universities, ancient and modern, the term is *bedellus*.

See John Venables, *Academic Dress of the University of Oxford*, 9th edn (Oxford: Shepherd & Woodward, 2009), pp. 46–47; L. H. Dudley Buxton and Strickland Gibson, *Oxford University Ceremonies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 45–46; *Exhibition of Oxford University Regalia: Organized by the University Marshal, 10 January–28 February 1977*, an eight-page unpaginated descriptive catalogue, item 4 (copy in Oxford University Archives, OUA/PR 1/30/17). For the Groves classification visit <https://burgon.org.uk/academic-dress/classification> [online material cited in this article retrieved 31 May 2026].

2 Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, rev. edn, ed. by F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), Vol. I, p. 192.



Fig. 1. The bedels walking before the chancellor in procession.

century the esquire bedels were sometimes graduates and by the end of the sixteenth century they all were; the yeoman bedels were usually non-graduates. They were given 'privileged person' status, which exempted them from the town's jurisdiction. On appointment, however, if not members of the University, they were (and still are) matriculated, thereby bringing them under the institution's discipline. Bedels were present at inceptions (graduation ceremonies), feasts of inceptors (new masters and doctors), funerals and other ceremonies, and gave notice of disputations (formal debates that were an integral part of university education). They were caretakers of the University schools (teaching rooms). They assisted the proctors in collecting fees and fines and in entering the names of those admitted to the licence (permission to teach, leading to the MA). They read public proclamations, which had to be delivered in Latin, and sometimes acted as messengers.[3]

After the Reformation, under the code of Edward VI in 1549, there were to be three esquire bedels and one yeoman bedel, elected for life by Convocation. Although they must have taken part in processions previously, they were now explicitly charged

3 Strickland Gibson (ed.), *Statuta antiqua Universitatis Oxoniensis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), p. lxxvii; Carl I. Hammer, Jr, 'Oxford Town and Oxford University', in *History of the University of Oxford*, Vol. III, *The Collegiate University*, ed. by James McConica (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 69–116 (pp. 74–76); Alan B. Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities: Oxford and Cambridge to c. 1500* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988), pp. 90–92; L. W. B. Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 21.

with walking before officers of the University.[4] Despite this Edwardian statute, however, there are references to yeoman bedels in the plural in several decrees and statutes between 1551 and 1598, which suggests that the reduction in the number of yeoman bedels from three to one was not implemented, or was quickly reversed.[5]

University Chancellor William Laud's code of 1636 expressly restored the medieval six, with an esquire and a yeoman bedel each for Theology, Law, and Medicine combined with Arts, appointed for life by Convocation, subject to annual appraisal.[6]

In 1856, the distinction between esquire and yeoman bedels was abolished and the number reduced to four, representing Divinity (formerly Theology), Law, Medicine, and Arts. The vice-chancellor was empowered to appoint two more sub-bedels for special occasions.[7] In 2012 the extra two became a regular part of the team and are known as Quintus Bedel and Sextus Bedel. Since 1856 the University's administrative staff have taken over most of the former duties of the bedels, who are appointed by the vice-chancellor and whose remaining duties are now entirely ceremonial. They are contracted to serve in this role for a specific number of hours per year. Their day jobs, as it were, are generally in administrative posts in the University or its constituent colleges. They lead processions at University sermons, meetings of Convocation and Congregation (including degree ceremonies and Encaenia, the end-of-year academic celebration), admission of the proctors, and other state occasions.[8]

The dress

Gowns and bonnets

There seems to be little record of Oxford bedels' dress in the Middle Ages. There are numerous statutes and other regulatory documents at Oxford that refer to bedels, but they concern their duties and payments due to them. Just one mentions their dress. In 1358 an ordinance addressed to tailors stated that the dress of masters *and bedels* was not to be close-fitting or short, but loose and ankle-length, as had been customary in the past. 'For it is honourable and consistent with reason that those to whom God grants a prerogative beyond the laity in their inner marks of distinction should also be outwardly different from the laity in dress.'[9] Tailors were threatened with imprison-

4 Gibson, p. lxxviii.

5 Ibid., pp. 361, 375, 390–91, 397, 408, 442–43, 456–57.

6 Latin text in John Griffiths (ed.), *Statutes of the University of Oxford Codified in the Year 1636* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888), pp. 181, 184–85; English translation by G. R. M. Ward, *Oxford University Statutes*, 2 vols (London: Pickering, 1845–51), Vol. I, pp. 197, 201–02.

7 University of Oxford, Statute IX: Officers of the University, (11) Bedels, nos 36–38 <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/how-we-are-run/governance-finance/legislation/statutes >. For a view critical of the 1856 changes see G. V. Cox (the last esquire bedel), *Recollections of Oxford*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1870), pp. 419–24.

8 University of Oxford, Council Regulations 21 of 2002: Regulations for University Officers, Bedels, nos 29–37 <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/how-we-are-run/governance-finance/legislation/council-regulations-21-of-2002>; University of Oxford, University Officers, Bedels and Verger <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/our-people/university-officers>.

9 'honestum est enim et consonum racioni, quibus Deus vltra laicos in ornamentis intrinsecus tribuit prerogatiuam, eciam extrinsecus laicis in habitu sint difformes' (Gibson, p. 158, my translation).



Fig. 2. The chancellor's fourth seal, 1429.



Fig. 3. Bedells in late sixteenth-century Cambridge: detail from Cobbould's painting in the Old Schools of processions and meetings.

ment if they failed to comply. Obviously, tailors or their clients had been following the latest fashions and the University authorities were clamping down on it. Members of the University who were clerks were required to wear clerkly dress, but bedels in the fourteenth century were unlikely to be clerks like the academics. It is striking, therefore, that masters and bedels are here taken together for reproof and that their dress is seen to be of a similar character.

The Oxford chancellor's fourth seal (1429) has the chancellor flanked by representative MAs, perhaps the proctors, with two three-quarter-length figures above in niches (Fig. 2).[10] These are each wearing a tunic with close-fitting sleeves and over it a hood. Of course, we cannot see whether their tunics are ankle-length. They appear to be bareheaded. Each holds a plain stick or staff. These figures must be bedels.

The next images to note are in a remarkable late-sixteenth-century painting of Cambridge processions and meetings by John Cobbould, which hangs in the Old Schools at Cambridge, the surface sadly crackled. The scenes depicted include several pictures of the esquire bedells (Fig. 3).[11] They are wearing ankle-length gowns ornamented with braid and buttons with tassels. The sleeves are of the closed style with inverted-T armholes. The gown is worn with a round bonnet. It seems likely that at this period the Oxford bedels were also wearing gowns and bonnets similar to those in Cobbould's painting. In the following centuries the Cambridge esquire bedells appeared sometimes in this dress, but sometimes, perhaps on less formal occasions, in their 'common' gowns, presumably MA gowns, sometimes with a hood and even with a coif, the close-fitting linen cap covering the ears, associated especially with senior lawyers.[12] So far, I have

10 H. E. Salter (ed.), *The Oxford Deeds of Balliol College,* Oxford Historical Society, 64 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), plate facing p. 365, Fig. 1.

11 See the whole painting at <https://artuk.org/discover/artists/cobbould-john-active-late-16th-c>.

12 H. P. Stokes, *The Esquire Bedells of the University of Cambridge from the Thirteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge Antiquarian Society, Octavo Series, 45 (Cam-



Fig. 4. The bedels: detail from Edwards's engraving of a procession at Oxford, 1674.

found no evidence that the Oxford bedels in the sixteenth century or later ever wore different gowns on different occasions, or hoods or coifs for that matter.

In Laud's new code of statutes for Oxford, drafted in 1634 and ratified in 1636, the bedels were to go out in public 'wearing a suitable gown of the usual pattern, and the round cap'—not very helpful to us, although clearly nothing novel was being introduced and it was assumed readers would know what was meant.[13] In 1635 a paper on the University's gowns specified that certain office holders (university lecturers, the keeper of the archives, the public orator, and Bodley's Librarian), if not clergymen, might wear a Bachelor of Civil Law style gown—that is a lay gown with braid and button ornament—in place of their MA gown.[14] This lay gown, worn by graduates in lay faculties, clearly doubled as a gown of office. And something of the sort was no doubt what the Oxford bedels wore as well. In fact, no distinction seems to have existed between the form taken by academic dress and by this official dress.

The first surviving post-Laudian images that show Oxford bedels appear to be the meticulously drawn engravings of George Edwards and David Loggan in the 1670s.

bridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), pp. 34–38.

13 'habitu decenti et consueto togatos, et rotundis Pileis indutos ...' (Griffiths, p. 182; Ward, p. 199).

14 Alex Kerr, '"Different Forms of Gowns for All Sorts of Scholars in their Several Ranks": Academic Undress at Oxford in 1635', *TBS*, 20 (2020), pp. 14–50 (pp. 20, 23), doi .org/10.4148/2475-7799.1178.



Fig. 5. The bedels: detail from Loggan's *Oxonia illustrata*, 1675, Plate X. The esquire bedels are numbered 32 and the yeoman bedels 33.

One of Edwards's 1674 engravings shows the University verger followed by the six bedels, in procession before the vice-chancellor in a DD undress gown with an attendant. The three yeoman bedels precede the three esquire bedels (Fig. 4).[15] The bedels are all in lay gowns. The tufts on the yeoman bedels' gowns are rather small, compared with the larger tassels on the esquire bedels' gowns.

Loggan's 1675 panorama similarly has the bedels preceded by the verger and followed by the vice-chancellor with attendants.[16] Unlike Edwards, Loggan has his bedels walking in twos, rather than threes, and his engraving shows clearly that the esquire bedels' bonnet is fuller in the crown than the yeoman bedels' and has a richer texture, no doubt to distinguish it as being of velvet (Fig. 5). Again, the esquire bedels' tassels are larger than the yeoman bedels' tufts. The esquire bedel's dress is very like the lay doctor's undress except for the absence of velvet facings (Fig. 6). The yeoman bedel's small tufts are like those on some undergraduate gowns at the time and on the Bachelor of Music's gown, although there are six rows at the foot of the sleeve, unlike the musician's four (Fig. 7). Small differences thus reflect grades within the hierarchy and confirm that the same means of distinction are used in the official dress as in the academic dress. Indeed, they are each part of one and the same scheme.



Fig. 6 (left). Doctor of Civil Law in undress, Loggan, 1675.

Fig. 7 (right). Bachelor of Music, Loggan, 1675.

15 *Omnium ordinum habituumque academicorum exemplaria* (Oxford: the engraver, 1674), plate entitled 'Academiae procancellarius cum sex bedellys et virgifero praeeuntibus'. See the whole plate at <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1871-1209-2512>.

16 *Oxonia illustrata* (Oxford: the engraver, 1675), Plate X, nos 31–34. See the whole plate at <https://archive.org/details/gri_33125008536811/page/n51/mode/2up>.





Fig. 8 (far left). An esquire bedel and a yeoman bedel: detail from Agar's engraving of a procession after Uwins, in *History of the University of Oxford*, published by Ackermann, 1814.

Fig. 9 (near left). Bachelor of [Civil] Law in Agar's engraving after Uwins, 1814.

In the mid- or later eighteenth century at Oxford the braid with tufts and with tassels was replaced by box pleating and gimp lace on academic gowns. At this juncture the esquire bedel was given gimp on his gown, but the yeoman bedel lost ornament altogether, as shown by John Samuel Agar's aquatint of bedels of 1814 after Thomas Uwins. The esquire bedel's gimp lace was laid on the sleeves and skirt in the same pattern as on a lay bachelor's or doctor's undress gown (Figs 8 and 9).[17] The esquire bedels' gown was silk and their bonnet velvet, while the yeoman bedels' gown was stuff and their bonnet silk.[18]

At Cambridge in the later eighteenth century, braid and tassels on doctoral gowns were replaced by Cambridge lace, that is of the black cross and bead braiding type. At this time the Cambridge esquire bedells seem to have altogether given up the braided lay gown, referred to by contemporaries as a 'tufted' gown, and since then they have worn an MA gown and hood with a square cap. At the same time the Cambridge yeoman bedell gave up his braided lay gown, which had tufts only on the upper sleeve, and instead adopted a plain lay gown, which he wore until his office was abolished in 1858. The yeoman bedell had always worn an ordinary hat at Cambridge and continued to do so.[19]

17 William Combe, *History of the University of Oxford*, 2 vols (London: Ackermann, 1814), Vol. II, Plates V and XVII, reprinted in Nicholas Jackson (ed.), *Ackermann's Costumes of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge* (London: Burgon Society, 2016), pp. 20, 32. Jackson also reproduces (pp. xii–xiii) two unpublished coloured drawings of bedels by Uwins (London, British Museum, 1858,0626.30 and 31).

18 Combe, *Oxford*, p. 262, and Jackson, p. 15.

19 David Loggan, *Cantabrigia illustrata* (Cambridge: the engraver, 1690), Plate VII <https://archive.org/details/gri_33125008531564/page/n27/mode/2up>; William Combe, *History of the University of Cambridge*, 2 vols (London: Ackermann, 1815), Vol. II, p. 314 and Plate XV, reprinted in Jackson, pp. 49, 64; Stokes, pp. 38, 128.



Fig. 10. The last esquire bedel's chain of office, now in the Ashmolean Museum. It is of gilded copper, 772 cm long.

At Oxford, at the time of the changes in 1856, the esquire bedel's gown was dropped and the yeoman bedel's was retained. A plain lay gown and a bonnet, now in stuff like the gown rather than silk or velvet, are worn by all six bedels today (Fig. 1).[20] Until at least the 1970s, they were in Russell cord, but the gowns and bonnets acquired in recent years are in a smooth, uncorded fabric.

Chains

A curious feature of the former esquire bedel's dress was a gold neck chain. Edwards and Loggan show the three esquire bedels with chains made up of tiny links. Edwards's figures in 1674 have two rows of chain, which are caught up to a point on the chest (see Fig. 4). Loggan's in 1675 have four rows, caught up on the chest to a bow just to the left of the coat buttons (see Fig. 5). The two draughtsmen seem to have been careful to get details precisely right, and so it is intriguing to see the difference in the space of just one year.

Up to the early twentieth century, the senior esquire bedell at Cambridge received a gold chain as a personal gift from incoming chancellors of the University, and in three cases had several to wear at once having served under several chancellors.[21] Loggan's panorama engraving of Cambridge dress, published in 1690, has the esquire bedells (there were three at that time) in laced gowns and bonnets like those at Oxford but none of them wears a chain.[22] Was that because the Cambridge chains were gifts to the individuals and not simply standard issue?[23] A somewhat similar, but more ornate, chain is part of the lord mayor of York's regalia, bequeathed to the city by a former lord mayor in 1612.[24] I have found no evidence, however, that the chains at Oxford were such individual gifts. Indeed, all three esquire bedels had them and it seems they were supplied by the University as a symbol of office. The antiquary Anthony Wood records in his diaries that the procession when Charles II visited Oxford in 1663 included 'the squire bedels with their gold chaines about their necks' and again when James II visited in 1687.[25]

Chains appear in pictures of Oxford esquire bedels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with varying numbers of rows hanging loose and not caught up on the

20 Buxton and Gibson, pp. 45–46; *Exhibition*, item 4.

21 Stokes, pp. 31, 94, 116, 120–21.

22 *Cantabrigia illustrata*, Plate VII.

23 I owe this suggestion to Jake Humbles, junior esquire bedell at Cambridge.

24 See<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/city-of-york/pp544-546>; a close-up image can be seen at <https://www.mansionhouseyork.com/lord-mayors-sheriffs/lord-mayors-time>.

25 *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary of Oxford, 1632–1695, Described by Himself*, ed. by Andrew Clark, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891–1900), Vol. I, p. 494, Vol. III, p. 227.

chest (see Fig. 8).[26] Perhaps a final indication that the Oxford chains were not personal gifts but just part of the official dress is the fact that it was the University Chest (the finance office) that deposited the last esquire bedel's chain, dating from the 1850s, in the Ashmolean Museum in 1891 (AN1891.661). It is made of gilded copper. It is 772 cm long, continuous, with no clasp (Fig. 10). It must have been worn gathered up in several loops and put over the head. We can only assume that earlier chains were constructed and worn in the same way.

The staves

On the evidence of the chancellor's fourth seal, Oxford bedels were still making do with a plain big stick as their staff of office in the early fifteenth century, and it seems that medieval Cambridge bedells were doing the same. A figure in a calf-length tunic and a round pileus, carrying a simple staff is depicted on the seal of a Cambridge bedell, Walter of Oxford, in the later thirteenth century.[27] A historiated initial in a letter patent of Edward III in 1343 has the chancellor of Cambridge University kneeling before the king, with a bareheaded figure in tunic and hood standing behind him, holding a plain staff: this must be a bedell.[28] This contrasts starkly with what happened at other universities. Superb maces decorated with exquisite goldsmiths' work were commissioned in continental Europe: Heidelberg (1387), Cracow, Vienna, Leipzig, Basel (the 1400s). In Scotland, St Andrews obtained three extraordinarily detailed and beautiful maces made in France in the early fifteenth century, just after the University was founded. And Glasgow acquired a mace of similar workmanship, but perhaps Scottish, soon after its foundation in the mid-fifteenth century.[29] However, the ornate maces carried in processions at many universities are emblems of the standing and authority of the institution, bestowed by some external founding entity, and deriving ultimately from the medieval weapon of war. The Oxford staves, on the other hand, are symbols of a particular class of the University's servants and are the successors to the simple staff of the medieval bedel. It has been pointed out that 'they are staves and not maces, as the University of Oxford derives its authority from no external power, but is independent.'[30] Unlike the other ancient universities, Oxford has no founding or confirmatory document such as a charter or papal bull.

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26 James Roberts, 'Original Drawings in Colours of the Costumes of Members of the University of Oxford', 1792–94 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Top. Oxon. d. 58), fol. 84; Uwins in Combe, *Oxford*, Plate XVII, and Jackson, pp. xii, 32; *Shrimpton's Series of the Costumes of the Members of the University of Oxford*, 2nd version (Oxford: A. T. Shrimpton; and London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co. [*c.* 1885]).

27 Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, but now lost; Stokes, p. 52 and plate on facing page (a drawing); Günther W. Vorbrodt, Ingeburg Vorbrodt and Walter Paatz, *Die akademischen Szepter und Stäbe in Europa*, 2 vols in 3 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1971–79) [hereafter Vorbrodt], Vol. II, Table 1, Fig. 2 (a photograph).

28 Cambridge, University Archives, MS Luard, 33A, reproduced in Cobban, Plate J.

29 Vorbrodt, Vol. I.1, entries under universities by name, with cross-references to illustrations in Vol. I.2; Jürgen Miethke and Johann Michael Fritz, *Mittelalterliche Universitätsszepte*r (Heidelberg: Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, 1986), passim. For St Andrews see also <https://collections.st-andrews.ac.uk/collection/maces/1004051>; for Glasgow see <https://www.theglasgowstory.com/image/?inum=TGSD00549>.

30 Joseph Wells, *The Oxford Degree Ceremony* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 95.





Fig. 11 (far left). Three of the Elizabethan staves, on display in the Ashmolean Museum. Made of silver, their average length is 120 cm.

Fig. 12 (near left). The 1723 silver-gilt stave originally carried by the esquire bedel in the faculty of Theology, now carried by the Bedel of Divinity. It is 135 cm long.

Staves like the ones still carried at Oxford have been in use there since the late sixteenth century. Three are on display in the Ashmolean Museum (LI1043.1,2 and 3) (Fig. 11). The workmanship looks Elizabethan although there are no hallmarks. The Museum's label suggests that one stave may date from between 1450 and 1550, although it is generally thought all three may date from Elizabeth I's visit in 1566.[31] Six staves are depicted in the Edwards and Loggan engravings in the 1670s. It is uncertain whether these include images of the Elizabethan staves now in the Ashmolean or show a different set, of which we have no other record, made in the seventeenth century.

All the old staves were replaced in 1723. The shaft of the old ones was straight-sided, but on the new ones each of the five sections except the middle one swells slightly at one end like a baroque baluster. These six new staves, which the University commissioned from the London goldsmith Benjamin Pyne, are still in use today.[32] Three are silver-gilt and are now carried by the Bedels of Divinity, Law and Medicine, and three are silver and carried by the Bedel of Arts, Quintus Bedel and Sextus Bedel (see Fig. 12).

Each stave, old and new, bears a coat of arms in a roundel on the top and inscriptions round the head and, inverted, round the base, intended to be appropriate to the faculty or faculties it represented at the time it was made. See Appendix A for details.

The two bedels on the 1429 seal hold their staves upright with both hands, one with it up to the left shoulder, the other with it up to the right. Edwards's and Loggan's bedels in the 1670s use one hand to hold the stave, also with the upper part of the shaft

31 Ibid., p. 94; Vorbrodt, Vol. I.1, p. 181; *Exhibition*, item 8.

32 Wells, pp. 94–96, and plate facing p. 50; Vorbrodt, Vol. I.1, pp. 180–83; *Exhibition*, items 7 and 8.

against the shoulder but not, it seems, resting on it. It is intriguing that Edwards has all his bedels holding their staves on the right while Loggan, just the next year, has them all holding them on the left. This appears to be of no significance. Uwins's image of 1814 has the stave held in the right hand with the upper part of the shaft resting in the crook of the right arm, and this way of holding a stave has been customary since then. From the mid-twentieth century bedels have usually held their staves by the raised band halfway down the shaft, gripping it between two fingers rather than between fingers and thumb. At Cambridge, the maces are carried resting on the right shoulder outdoors; indoors they are carried vertically, held in the right hand.

It is the practice at Oxford to carry the staves inverted with the head downwards, except before royalty or the University chancellor, when they are carried with the head upwards. In processions at Cambridge the esquire bedells carry their maces with the head upwards, except in the presence of the monarch, when they are inverted, with the head downwards—so the opposite of the convention at Oxford.[33]

Conclusion

We have seen that the evolution of the Oxford bedels' gowns and bonnets has run in parallel with the University's scheme of academic dress, or indeed been part of it. Of course, the esquire bedels' chains and the staves are another matter: although they have parallels at Cambridge, their history and character are peculiar to Oxford.

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1. Photograph courtesy of Victoria Bentata Azaz, Oxford City Walks.
2. Author's collection.
3. Photograph courtesy of the Old Schools, University of Cambridge.
4–9. Author's collection.
10–11. Author's photographs reproduced with permission of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.
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33 I owe this last piece of information to Nicola Hardy, former senior esquire bedell at Cambridge.

Appendix A: Coats of arms and inscriptions on the staves

The table is based on Vorbrodt, Vol. I.1, pp. 181–83, and *Exhibition*, items 7 and 8, verified from an examination of the staves themselves.

	Faculty/ies	On roundel[1]	Inscription round head	Inscription round base
Elizabethan staves silver avg. length 120 cm	**Theol.**	The University's arms	EGO SVM VIA (I am the way)	VERITAS ET VITA (the truth and the life)
	Law	Tudor royal arms	AEQVVM ET BON[V]M (Equal and good)	IVSTITIAE COLVMN[A] (Stave of justice)
	Arts	The University's arms	SCIENTIAE ET MORES (Sciences and manners)	PHILOSOPHIAE COLVMNA (Stave of philosophy)
1723 staves silver-gilt avg. length 135 cm *Esquire bedels*	**Theol.**	Arms of Neville and Montagu quarterly[2]	EGO SUM VIA (I am the way)	VITA ET VERITAS (the life and the truth)[3]
	Law	Stuart royal arms	AEQVVM ET BONVM (Equal and good)	COLVMNAE IUSTITIAE (Stave of justice)[4]
	Medicine with Arts	The University's arms	EGO SUM VIA / VITA ET VERITAS (I am the way / the life and the truth)	COLUMNA PHILOSOPHIAE / SCIENTIAE ET MORES (Stave of philosophy / sciences and manners)
1723 staves silver avg. length 125 cm *Yeoman bedels*	**Theol.**	The University's arms	EGO SUM VIA (I am the way)	VITA ET VERITAS (the life and the truth)
	Law	Tudor royal arms	AEQVVM ET BONVM (Equal and good)	COLVMNA IUSTITIAE (Stave of justice)
	Medicine with Arts	The University's arms	SCIENTIAE ET MORES (Sciences and manners)	COLUMNA PHILOSOPHIAE (Stave of philosophy)

[1] The roundels on the tops of the 1723 staves appear to be seventeenth-century work and must have been transferred from elsewhere, perhaps a set of staves now lost.

[2] These are the arms of George Neville, lord chancellor and later archbishop of York, who was chancellor of the University 1453–57 and 1461–72.

[3] On the 1723 staves the phrase from John 14: 6, VERITAS ET VITA (the truth and the life) is misquoted as VITA ET VERITAS on the three occasions it appears.

[4] COLVMNAE here is a mistake for COLVMNA.

Appendix B: Note on the Oxford University verger and marshal

The other officers formerly called 'servants of the University' who have special dress for formal occasions are the verger and the marshal. The verger's dress, like the bedels', is part of the University's scheme of academic dress. The marshal's dress, on the other hand, is not part of that scheme, but rather has the character of a distinctive uniform or livery.[34]

Verger

In the seventeenth century the University stationer combined the role of verger with his other duties, principally ensuring the availability of copies of prescribed texts and controlling the book trade in the city. Laud's statutes required him to walk in front of the bedels in processions, suitably dressed and carrying his silver wand.[35] The verger now assists in the practical arrangements for University ceremonies and church services. From the seventeenth century or earlier until 1856 the verger's dress was the same as that of the yeoman bedels and thereafter the same as all the bedels. The current wand was made in the eighteenth century and is silver, its overall length 90 cm. It has no hallmarks. Like its predecessor, seen in Edwards and Loggan, it is surmounted by the figure of an angel with wings displayed, holding a shield bearing the University's arms. The angel and shield are gilded. It seems always to have been carried upright in one hand.[36]

Marshal

The Head of Security Services for the University is also the marshal. The post formerly included heading the University's private police force (constables, nicknamed 'bulldogs') until the force was disbanded in 2003.[37] In the past it also involved a varied range of duties such as ringing a handbell in the procession for an academic funeral, acting as the University's crier, looking after life-buoys on the river, supervising a workhouse, and keeping the University prison.[38] The following description of the dress from ninety years ago is still accurate:

> The costume to-day which he wears on formal occasions [...] is a relic of the seventeenth century. It consists of a long coat of broadcloth, buttoned in front, with a small cape of black velvet, 18 inches in depth and fastened under the broadcloth collar. [...] The coat has velvet cuffs, cut square with stuff-covered buttons. On the left arm is a silver badge with the arms of the University within an ornamental border. The present arm badge was made in 1910 and is an exact copy of an earlier one now in

34 See Academic Dress <https://www.ox.ac.uk/events/encaenia/academic-dress>. Scroll down to Academic Dress Guidance, then click Senior University Officers.

35 Griffiths, pp. 185–86; Ward, pp. 202–03.

36 For details of the wand see Vorbrodt, Vol. I.1, p. 184; *Exhibition*, item 9. For images of the dress in earlier times see Edwards; Loggan; Roberts, fol. 89; Uwins in Combe, *Oxford*, Plate XVII, and Jackson, p. 32; *Shrimpton's Series of Costumes*.

37 See <https://british-police-history.uk/f/oxford-university>. These constables were redesignated as proctors' officers. They provide additional assistance at University ceremonies and other events, when they wear bowler hats with ordinary dress, as the constables had done.

38 See Buxton and Gibson, p. 46.

> the Ashmolean Museum. The Marshal wears a round hat similar to that of the bedels, but [in velvet and] with a rosette in front. [...] The Marshal formerly conformed to the custom of the times in head-gear. During the nineteenth century he wore a top hat, until Sir Charles Oman invented his present hat in 1895.[39]

When leading a procession the marshal carries an ebony silver-mounted baton 27 cm in length. The present baton is engraved OXON 1738 UNIV, presumably recording the year it was made.[40]

39 Ibid., pp. 46–47.

40 For details of the baton and badge see Vorbrodt, Vol. I.1, pp. 183–84; *Exhibition*, item 3. For images of the dress in earlier times see Roberts, fol. 98; *Shrimpton's Series of Costumes*.