

**‘So that the Fellows of our College may persevere to be of one mind inwardly and to be more closely united in mutual charity . . .’:
The Annual Liveries of Fellows and Scholars of Medieval New College¹**

The sight of college porters in uniform, some with bowler hats, and images of staff with clothes bearing heraldic and other symbols, attesting to membership of a specific college, are still common in Oxford and Cambridge. Public interest in the two ancient universities and their academic dress is also piqued each summer by processions to the Sheldonian or the Senate House, at Oxford and Cambridge respectively. On display in these events are colourful arrays of hoods, as well as black gowns and scarlet doctoral robes. However, it has not always been thus. The medieval University of Oxford had rules on academic dress, but these were, more often than not, concerned with prohibiting the use of specific colours of cloth or furs, especially amongst the undergraduate communities of the medieval halls and hostels.² As students held minor clerical status, the university statutes tend to highlight the need for appropriately sober dress.³ There were some notable exceptions where, in certain circumstances, some or all the academics of specific medieval colleges would have been seen wearing a common livery. New College is one of a small group of medieval colleges in both Oxford and Cambridge which prescribed a common livery for its academic community, by statute.⁴ The college possesses some of the most extensive and detailed accounts of any medieval collegiate foundation in Oxford and Cambridge. Amongst the 58 account rolls made by early wardens or bursars between 1376 and 1529, we find regular allocations of cloth, and sometimes furs, given as annual livery to the academic community established by Bishop William of Wykeham.

So, what was the purpose or reasoning behind William of Wykeham’s ruling that all the scholars of his college should wear a common livery? There was certainly the idea of common dress as a uniform to identify its wearers as members of his foundation. However, Wykeham’s statutes suggest his reasons went deeper than just a common, identifying dress code. He hoped that a common outward appearance would promote common thinking and bind the wearers together in brotherly love. As it says in rubric 22 of his statutes:

Item, ut Socii dicti nostri collegii unanimes interius perseverant et in caritate mutua fortius copulentur, quo ipsi pariter uno signo exterius conspexerint se signatos, ad idem quoque nostrum collegium affectionem majorem obtineant.⁵

Also, that the Fellows of our said College may persevere inwardly to be of one mind and be more strongly united in mutual charity, so that they may see themselves outwardly marked by one appearance and may obtain a greater affection for the same in every way for our College.⁶

¹ Author’s translation of the opening of Wykeham’s Rubric 22: *De communi annua vestium liberata*. The accepted printed authority for the statutes of New College can be found in volume one of the *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford; with Royal Patents of Foundation Injunctions of Visitors, and Catalogues of Documents Relating to the University*, 3 vols (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1853): ‘Statutes of St. Mary’s College of Winchester in Oxford: or, New College’. The rubrics which deal with clothing are Rubrics 22 and 23, pp. 44–6. Rubric 22 is ‘Of the handing out of common annual clothing’, whilst 23 is ‘Of the dress of fellows and scholars, and of not carrying arms’.

² The accepted authority on the history of academic dress in the medieval University of Oxford remains W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress in Europe Until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); see therein ‘Great Britain and Ireland—i. Oxford’, pp. 60–106. See also Alan Cobban, *English University Life in the Middle Ages* (London: UCL Press, 1999) pp. 48–9.

³ Charles Henry Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, 5 vols (Cambridge: Warwick and Co., 1842), I, 94–5. *Statuta Antiqua Universitatis Oxoniensis*, ed. Strickland Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931) pp. 239–40.

⁴ In Oxford: The Queen’s College, New College, All Souls College, and Magdalen College. At Cambridge: Trinity Hall, Gonville Hall, King’s Hall, and King’s College.

⁵ Rb. 22, ‘*De communi annua vestium liberta*’, in *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford*, I, 44–5.

⁶ I translate *uno signo* as one appearance, rather than ‘one sign’.



New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 9431, f. 15r [detail]—showing Rubric 22

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The annual livery to be distributed at New College was not the first time an Oxford or Cambridge college had rules concerning the dress of the fellows and scholars. The earliest reference to the wearing of a common form of dress occur in the 1264 statutes made for Merton College, and these were repeated in 1272, by which time the college had settled in Oxford.⁷ However, these statutes offer no details about the designs, colours, costs, or any other practical elements of a common dress; there was no specific rubric which dealt with livery for academics at Merton. At Cambridge, the earliest surviving college statutes are those for Michaelhouse. These statutes from 1324 also mention dress but only insofar as fellows are required to wear appropriately clerical attire.⁸ The first time we find a statute defining specific clothing for academics at a secular

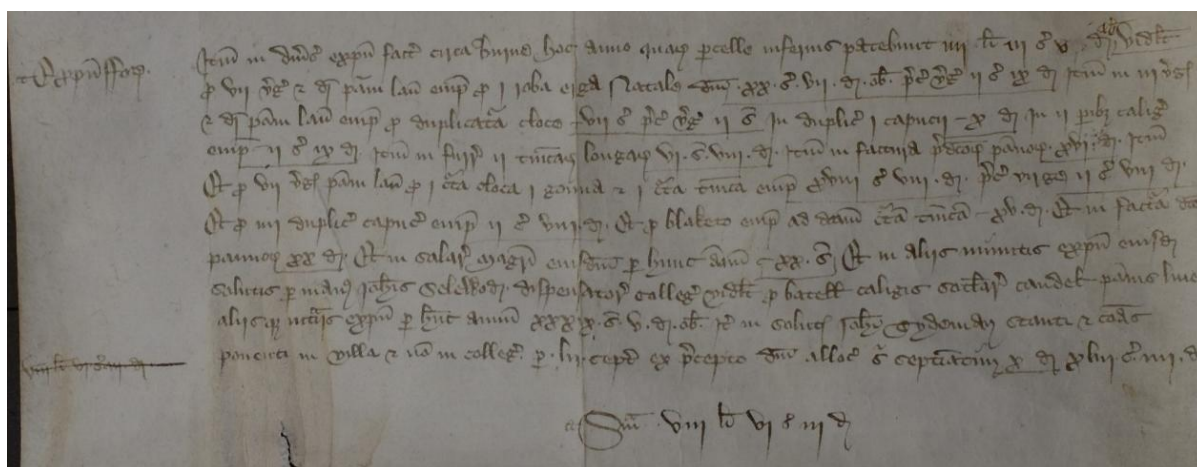
⁷ P. S. Allen and H. W. Garrod (eds.), *Merton Muniments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), p. 15 for the 1264 statutes, p. 22 for the 1274 statutes.

⁸ See the statutes given to Michaelhouse by its founder, Hervey de Stanton, in A. E. Stamp, *Michaelhouse: Notes on the History of Michaelhouse published on the 600th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Society by Hervey de Stanton* (Cambridge: Printed Privately, 1924), p. 42.

college in Oxford, is in the statutes of The Queen’s College, given by its founder Robert Eglesfield in 1341. In his statutes, Eglesfield required the doctors of theology and of canon law to wear a purple livery whilst eating in Hall, ‘in memory of the blood of Christ’. The other fellows were instructed to wear sleeveless gowns over the *supertunica* (*pallii*) of simple but unspecified colours.⁹

The nature and order of entries recorded in the New College bursars’ accounts appear to be fairly fixed by 1400, with the incomes from the college estates listed first, followed by the weekly ‘commons’, in other words, the weekly expenses on food and necessities which enumerate the numbers of fellows in college each week along with chaplains, choristers, and servants. After the commons come expenses for the chapel, hall, pantry and buttery, library, kitchens, and cleaners. To the modern accountant’s eyes, these would be described as departmental expenses. Then follow the expenses of any new graduates, the warden, costs of special services for the founder and others, obits, costs of the college priests and chaplains, stipends of the college servants, and then the livery expenses of the fellows and servants. It is the last of these, the livery expenses, which provide the bulk of the available information on the clothes and furs allocated to the warden, fellows, scholars, and other members of New College.

Even before the founder developed statutes for his college and before much of the physical building began, we can trace early expenses for cloth and furs for fellows.¹⁰ In the second surviving set of warden’s accounts we can read that, amongst various ‘Market Expenses’ for the year 1381–2, when there were up to 41 fellows in residence in academic halls around Oxford, there were expenses for robes, furs, hoods, long tunics, as well as blankets and shoes.¹¹ This account also refers to the purchase of cloth at Christmas, which was later codified in rubric 22 of the final statutes set by Wykeham. The vendor in this case is not mentioned by name but, presumably out of necessity and convenience, they were most likely from Oxford.

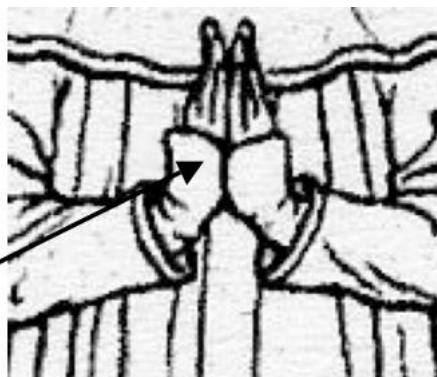


New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 7330 [detail]
Warden’s Account Roll, 1381–2

⁹ See *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford*, I, 14, 16 (Queen’s).

¹⁰ The foundation stone of the college was laid on 5 March 1380. See R. L. Storey, ‘The Foundation and the Medieval College, 1379–1530’, in *New College Oxford 1379–1979*, ed. John Buxton and Penry Williams (Oxford: The Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford, 1979), pp. 3–43. Storey mentions the livery given to fellows, scholars, and servants of the college on pp. 11–12.

¹¹ New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 7330, Warden’s Account Roll, 1381–82, where livery cloth, furs, and other items came to a total cost of £8 6s 3d, as recorded by Master Nicholas Wykeham.



Undertunic (*subtunica*)



Overtunic (*supertunica*)



Hood (*caputium*)



Closed cloak (*cappa clausa*)—with one slit, used by doctors of theology or canon law; with two slits, used by doctors of civil law



Tabard (*tabardum*), used by bachelors¹²

Wykeham's statutes allowed for the warden and each fellow who was 'in the kingdom of England at Christmas', to have an annual clothing allocation. Each fellow was to be given 24 yards or so of cloth, enough to make an undertunic or *subtunica*, an overtunic or *supertunica*, a long gown or *tabardam* or a *cappam*, plus hood or *caputium*. The three fellows in charge of clothing distribution were to make sure that cloth had been handed out before the feast of All Saints, and that it had

¹² These illustrations are reproduced from: Alex Kerr, 'Layer upon Layer: The Evolution of Cassock, Gown, Habits and Hood as Academic Dress', *Transactions of the Burgon Society* 5 (2005), 42–58, at pp. 43, 44, and 45.

been washed, dried, and cut appropriately. These academic clothes were to be *de una et eadem secta*, in other words, a common livery and the amount of material was to be given to scholars based on their academic degrees and *etiam staturas*, possibly their physical stature. Allocations were not meant to be divided in strictly equal portions between fellows. Each allocation was to cost the college no more than 42 shillings in total, and the warden was to have a separate allowance of a further 12 yards of cloth. Fellows were to have furs provided annually at the expense of the college, and were allotted 6s 8d to cover these costs. Further conditions laid down by Wykeham included an annual gift of five yards of livery cloth to each college priest, and rules that no fellow should pawn or give away their annual livery clothes or cloth within a period of five years, on pain of being deprived of future livery themselves. It is quite clear from some of the accounts that the number of cloth liveries distributed did not always match the number of fellows who got fur allocations. For example, in the roll for 1470, we see that livery furs for hoods were given to 69 fellows and scholars, at a cost of £19 13s 4d. However, when we look at the commons expenses, we can see that several fellows may have been absent during the week of Christmas when the cloth livery would have been handed out. In week 13, when Christmas fell, 17 fellows and scholars were present, whilst 28 were present the following week. This helps explain why three shillings less was spent in the Christmas week than the previous week, where 28 fellows and scholars were present.

High-quality cloth and furs then, as now, did not come cheaply. In his article on the medieval college, Storey identified a paper account roll from the years 1396–9 which shows a sum of £273 5s 6d spent on livery cloth and furs.¹³ In these early years, this comprised a significant proportion of the money available to the college bursars. Through the 15th century, an average of around £90 was annually spent on cloth for livery. The New College Archives contain 38 full or partial account rolls from the 15th century. The fur allocation of 6s 8d for each fellow can be compared with the recorded numbers of fellows in the account entries. When done, we can see that Wykeham's statutory allocation made in 1400 was largely adhered to across the subsequent century. For example, in 1434–5, Henry Otys of Winchester was paid £20 13s 4d for furs for the 62 fellows who were given livery that year.

Many but not all of the Bursars' Account Rolls specify the vendors whose cloth was purchased by the college. Where this is the case, the majority of references name drapers from Winchester. At least 15 separate drapers from Winchester sold cloth to New College between 1392 and 1488/9. Several names appear multiple times, suggesting some sort of trust or close business relationship developed between the vendors and the college. For example, Henry Otys sold cloth to the college in five accounting years between 1423/4 and 1448/9, whilst Peter Hyll of Winchester sold cloth and furs to the college in three accounting years: 1454/5, 1460/1, and 1488/9. In the entry for 1488/9, he provided cloth for the warden and 53 fellows, as well as various vicars in college parishes and college servants referred to as *garçiones*, all of which totalled £107 9s 4.5d. In 1408/9, the college purchased cloth from John Forest of Salisbury, and it would be fair to point out that Wiltshire and Hampshire had much better reputations for cloth production in the 14th and 15th centuries than either medieval Oxford or Cambridge. There are also references in the livery entries to cloth being bought at the Stourbridge Fair, annually held in Cambridge in September. This fair had an international reputation, with buyers and vendors coming from far and wide.¹⁴ The vendors to the college are very rarely called drapers or clothiers in the Bursars' Accounts but the table below shows the named vendors who sold cloth to New College and the numbers of fellows who received a livery of cloth in given years. Unless otherwise stated, the

¹³ New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 7397A, box 25. Mentioned by Storey, 'The Foundation and the Medieval College', p. 13, where he rounds it down to £273. Using the Bank of England inflation checker, £273 5s 6d in 1396 equates to approximately £288,321 in March 2025: <www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator> (Accessed: 17 May 2025)

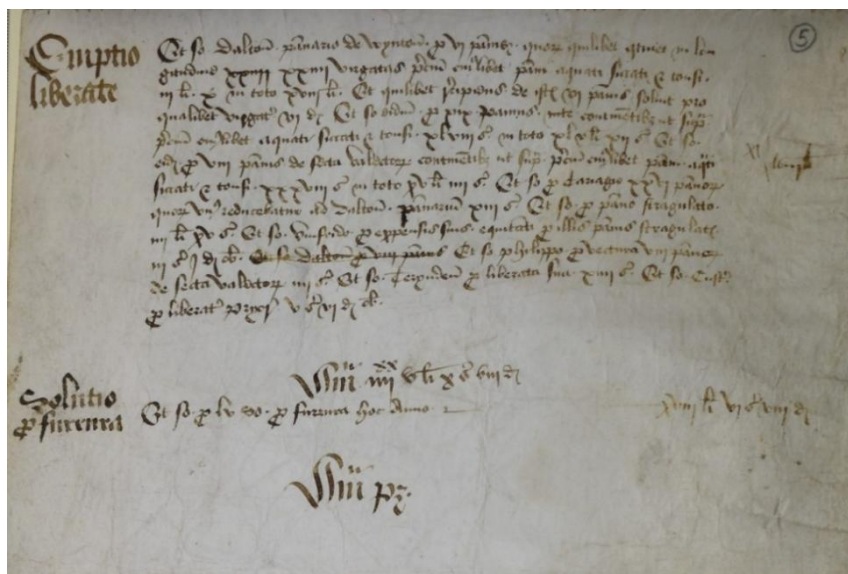
¹⁴ See John S. Lee, *Cambridge and its Economic Region, 1450–1560* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2005). See New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 7453, Bursars' Account Roll, 1494, also NCA 7471, Bursars' Account Roll, 1505–6.

vendors all came from Winchester. There is little indication of the colour of the cloth bought for the fellows and scholars, although there are frequent references to coloured cloth for college servants, along with the purchase of bed linen.

Accounting year	Vendor	Livery cloth expenses in l.s.d.	No. of fellows given livery	Livery fur entry expenses in l.s.d.
1394–95	Marc le Dyer	49.14.4	N/A	N/A
<i>1396–99</i> ¹⁵		273.5.6		
1398–99	Thomas Smyth	38.0.0	39	13.0.0
1406–1407	William Wigg	85.17.13/4	56	N/A
1408–1409	John Forest of Salisbury	86.9.6	51	17.3.4, <i>inc 3s 4d special allocation</i>
1409–1410	John Lob	88.16.2	57	19.7.5
1410–11	Thomas Smyth	<i>unclear</i>	62	20.13.4
1411–12	Agnes Purye	43.15.0	61	<i>Not listed</i>
1412–13	Agnes Purye	93.19.9	58	19.6.8
1414–15	Agnes Purye	90.2.1	52	17.6.8
1417–18	Agnes Purye	96.7.6	58	19.6.8
1420–21	William Huwe	87.17.6	51	17.0.0
1423–24	Henry Otys	96.13.11	57	19.0.0
1424–25	Henry Otys	95.9.0	58	19.6.8
1425–26	Henry Otys	90.13.61/2	51	17.0.0
1427–28	Walter Hoore	94.15.81/2	52	17.6.8
1428–29	Walter Hoore	94.8.81/2	54	18.0.0
1434–35	Henry Otys	101.5.11	62	20.13.4
1436–37	Richard Gater	100.6.0	55	18.6.8
1440–41	Richard Gater	88.10.4	51	17.0.0
1448–49	Henry Otys	96.2.6	52	17.6.8
1449–50	John Burgess & William Heeth	89.10.0	51	17.0.0
1452–53	Thomas Madhurste	110.0.8	50	16.13.4
1454–55	Peter Hyll	107.9.41/2	53	17.13.4
1460–61	Peter Hyll	103.7.7	68	18.13.4
1469–70	Richard? Dalton	102.0.4	68	18.13.4
1470	Richard Dalton	101.10.4	59	19.13.4
1476	Richard? Dalton	96.6.6	50	16.13.4
1479–80	Richard? Dalton	85.10.8	55	18.6.8
1483–84	Richard Dalton	60.0.0	57	19.0.0
1484–85	Bolom?	88.8.0	51	17.0.0
1487–88	John Halton	74.13.11/5	48	16.0.0
1488–89	Peter Hyll also John Baker	107.9.41/2	53	17.13.4
1494	Bought 'at Stourbridge'	74.0.201/2	49	16.6.8
1496–97	Hugh Faringdon, John Hyeefeld of Witney, plus vendors 'at Stourbridge'	90.6.0	53	17.13.4
1500–1501	Bartholomew of London & Richard de Halton	87.15.11	53	17.13.4
1505–1506	Bought 'at Stourbridge'	78.3.3	55	18.6.8

Until 1480, separate headed entries in the rolls for livery furs did not exist. Instead, expenses for furs were given in the same entry as livery as a whole. The livery entries are often complex and show various amounts of cloth purchased for the college, possibly at different times across the year. In the accounts for 1406/7, for example, there is not a single tally for livery furs but rather a detailed allocation list of fellows and scholars. However, from the 1479–80 accounting year, costs for furs often had their own entry in the rolls, usually placed after the livery cloth.

¹⁵ This is the paper roll identified by Storey, 'The Foundation and the Medieval College'.



New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 7722 [detail]
 First ‘Expenses for Furs’ entry in the Bursar’s Account Roll, 1479–80

Turning to what these academic liveries looked like, New College is very fortunate to have in its library and archives, as well as in the form of some brasses in its chapel, several medieval images of its fellows and scholars wearing academic dress. Using these sources and articles from the *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, a learned society dedicated to the history of academic dress past and present, we can see how the livery cloth and furs which abound in the Bursars’ accounts were worn.¹⁶ The best pictorial evidence is New College Library’s MS 288, the so-called ‘Chaundler Manuscript’ dating from 1462–64, which shows the fully assembled academic community of the college, with the warden of the day, Thomas Chaundler. As well as this splendid picture of the full academic community of New College in dress, we can identify specific elements of medieval dress to help the modern reader make more sense of the statutes and accounts when they refer to cloth and furs.

Wykeham’s statutes were equally concerned with what the fellows and scholars of his Oxford college should not wear, as what they should. He was not alone in this concern, and several college, university, and ecclesiastical authorities attempted to rein in the perceived excesses of medieval dress amongst younger students



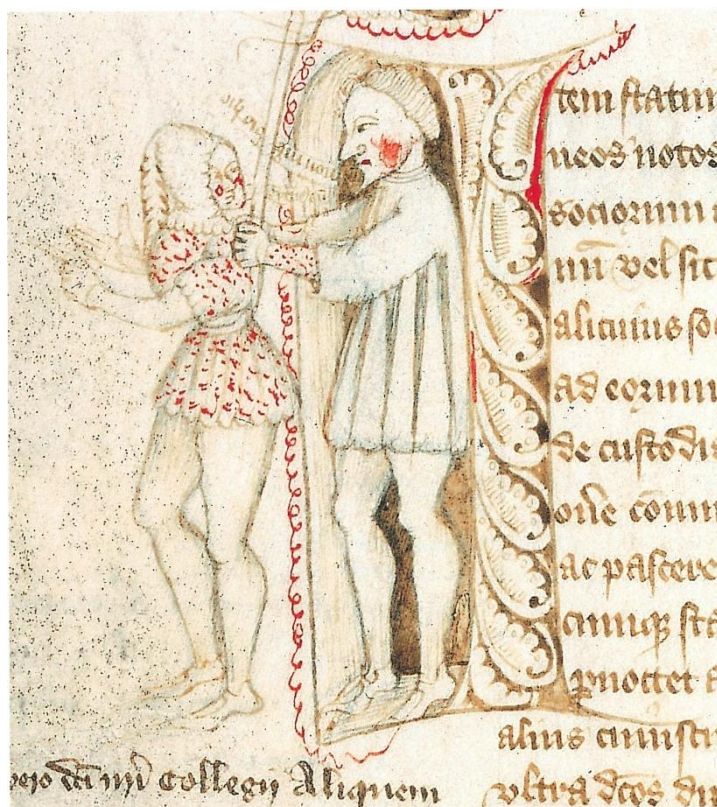
New College Library, Oxford, MS 288, f. 3v

¹⁶ For a concise explanation of how academic dress developed in the medieval to modern ages, see Kerr, ‘Layer upon Layer’.

at both Oxford and Cambridge. Over 50 years before Wykeham gave his statutes to New College, Archbishop John de Stratford issued a constitution in 1342 which ruled that university students should not dress in unclerical attire, such as cloaks with furred edges, shoes of chequered red and green, tippets of unusual length, or wear costly, gilded girdles with knives attached to them.¹⁷ These very same rules found expression in rubric 23 of Wykeham's statutes, entitled 'Of the dress of fellows and scholars of the college, and of not carrying arms'. As a point of interest, the 'alien' student who is portrayed in the draft statutes of c. 1396, would fall foul of the constitutions of 1343 which were repeated by Wykeham.

In this pen portrait of brown and red ink, we see the college porter ejecting a youth who is not a member of the college. The unfortunate young man, possibly a student from an academic hall or simply a local youth, is shown in distinctly unclerical garb. We cannot tell if he is tonsured, as all students at New College were required to be, because he has a hood over his head. A cursory reading of rubric 23 of the founder's statutes suggests he is wearing clothes banned by Wykeham and, if not by Wykeham, by Archbishop Stratford. He has been drawn wearing shoes with pointed toes, though they are not in prohibited colours of red or green. He has a fancy hood with a very long liripipe,¹⁸ and he may be wearing some sort of belt, or *zona*. His tunic is very short and does not appear to even cover his elbows.

Whether or not Wykeham achieved his aim of using common academic livery to produce a sense of mutual charity and oneness of mind is a matter for other research; however, his provision of common livery was to be repeated in future collegiate foundations at Oxford, in particular at All Souls, Magdalen, and Corpus Christi colleges, and also at King's College, Cambridge, the sister college of New College, where an equally impressive set of college accounts testifies to the use of distinct, academic livery, usually blue in colour. In this regard, the Bursars' Account Rolls at New College, Oxford and their records of livery attest to the spirit of concord which was established between the two colleges, and which formed the basis of Michael Stansfield's article in an earlier issue of this journal.¹⁹



New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 3584 [detail]
Draft statutes of c. 1396

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¹⁷ Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, I, 94–5.

¹⁸ A liripipe is the long piece of material at the end of the hood, originally used to pull it off the head. Many modern academic hoods have residual liripipes, although they are more obvious in 'full' shape hoods such as those used by Oxford doctors, than in 'simple' shape designs such as the Oxford MA hood.

¹⁹ Michael Stansfield, '[Amicabilis Concordia 1444–2024](#)', *New College Notes* 21 (2024), no. 1.