



Lambeth Palace Library
Research Guide
Clerical Dress





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Sources for Clerical Dress

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1 Introduction

This brief survey covers Lambeth sources for the costume of both pre-Reformation English clergy and post-Reformation Anglican clergy. Lambeth also holds some material relating to the dress of clergy of other denominations and countries.

Clerical dress varied according to the occasion. The nature and use of outdoor, lay, convocation, court, choir, and liturgical dress were all different in principle, though not always in practice. The ordinary in and outdoor dress of the clergy often followed the fashions of the laity. Dress also varied of course according to the ecclesiastical rank of the wearer, and for other reasons such as the university attended, high or low church inclination, wealth, and personal preference. Contemporary writers did not normally bother to describe what clergymen were wearing because their readers were already likely to know. This often makes it difficult to say what a particular cleric would have been wearing on a particular occasion unless there is a surviving contemporary picture of the event.

The dress of the clergy was subject to canon or church law. The canon law in force at any time specified to some extent what the clergy should wear, but it did not cover all usages and was not always observed. The interpretation of canon law regarding dress was sometimes a source of dispute in the Church of England. For example, the mitre never ceased to be legal headwear for Anglican bishops but its use lapsed after the Reformation until the end of the 19th century. On the other hand the wigs worn by the clergy from the late 17th to the early 19th century were not based on canon law but were adhered to tenaciously.

This guide is not intended to be exhaustive. It aims only at providing an overview of the kinds of material at Lambeth relevant to enquiries about clerical dress. Any



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researcher interested in a specific subject relating to clerical dress is very welcome to write to contact the Library for further information.

2 Reference Sources on Clerical Dress

This is the most useful starting point for research into clerical costume. Lambeth holdings are extensive but not exhaustive. The range of published material is quite broad, but no one reference book covers all topics. Many concentrate in a scholarly fashion on the historical development of vestments to the exclusion of other clerical dress. Some are 19th century publications and rarely include coloured illustrations. It is useful to supplement the books which follow with some of the other kinds of resources such as Pictorial Sources.

The most useful reference works are probably:-

J. Mayo, *A history of ecclesiastical dress*, (London, 1984).

The standard work on the subject, which concentrates on what was actually worn. It includes a good bibliography for further study and many informative illustrations.

The ornaments of the Church and its ministers ... report of the sub-committee appointed February 1907, to draw up a historical memorandum on the ornaments of the Church and its ministers (Canterbury Convocation report 416).

The growth of ritualistic practices in the 19th century led to this scholarly report to the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury. It concentrates on what was legally permissible.

The following is a selection of some other useful illustrated works on clerical dress:-

H.J. Clayton, *The ornaments of the ministers as shown on English monumental brasses*, (London, 1919)

P. Dearmer, *The ornaments of the ministers*, (London, 1920)

P. Dearmer, *The parson's handbook*, (Any edition)

A. Dolby, *Church vestments: their origin, use and ornament practically illustrated*, (London, 1868). Pre-Reformation period.

R.A.S. Macalister, *Ecclesiastical vestments: their development and history*, (London, 1896). Pre-Reformation period.

H. Norris, *Church vestments: their origin and development*, (London, 1949).

G.S. Tyack, *Historic dress of the clergy*, (London, 1897)

There are also works on more specific topics. For example:-

H.J. Clayton, *Cassock and gown*, (Oxford, 1929)

P. Dearmer, *St. Paul's cloke: the story of the chasuble*, (London, 1917)

B.F. Harvey, *Monastic dress in the middle ages*, (Canterbury, 1988)

W.H.S. Hope and E.G.C.F. Atchley, *English liturgical colours*, (London, 1918)

O.S. Reichel, *English liturgical vestments in the thirteenth century*, (London, 1895)



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L. Spiller, *Stoles and scarves*, (London, 1957)

Of course there are also less specialised publications on the history of costume in general and these may include examples of ecclesiastical dress. Lambeth has very few general works of this kind and you would probably find a better selection in your local public reference library.

N.B. Court dress for the clergy was laid down in considerable detail by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Lambeth has little relevant material, but more should be held in the official papers at the National Archives.

For dress relating to Lambeth degrees, see: [*The History of Lambeth Degrees: Sources and Studies*, ed. William Gibson \(Burgon Society, 2019\).](#)

3 Liturgical and Other Ecclesiastical Reference Sources

There is a vast range of works on liturgy in general and on the services and ceremonies of the different denominations. Many include information on clerical dress in church, as do the standard reference books on the Christian Church. There are too many to attempt even a selective list but a good starting point would be:-

F.L. Cross, *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn, edited by E.A. Livingstone (Oxford, 2005).

An excellent reference work, though unfortunately not illustrated. There are many articles on individual items of clerical dress, sometimes with bibliographies for further study.

The Catholic encyclopaedia: an international work of reference on the constitution, doctrine, discipline and history of the Catholic Church, edited by C.G. Herbermann, etc. (17 vols., London, 1907-1922). Despite the title, this includes much of relevance to the English Church. Limited illustration.

J.G Davies, *A new dictionary of liturgy and worship*, (London, 1986). In particular this has a good illustrated article on Vestments.

Publications of the Alcuin Club, the Henry Bradshaw Society, and the Society of SS. Peter & Paul.

4 Historical Sources

Lambeth has very substantial holdings on the history of the English Church. This is of interest for background material, but as a method of research into clerical dress would be very time-consuming and not very productive.

There are some topics which relate more closely to the historical significance of clerical dress eg the Reformation, Puritanism, Ritualism, Anglo-Catholicism, the parish clergy, bishops, religious orders, etc. However books on these topics are still better used for background information rather than starting points for research on clerical dress.



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The exception would be any controversy on some important aspect of clerical dress, that generated contemporary publications and secondary literature, for example the vestments controversy in England during the 16th century:-

J.H. Primus, *The vestments controversy: an historical study of the earliest tensions within the Church of England in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth ...* (Kampen, 1960).

Detailed history of the controversy.

Advertisements partly for due order in the publique administration of common prayers and usinge the holy sacramentes, and partly for the apparrell of all persons ecclesiasticall, by vertue of the Queenes maiesties letters commaunding the same ... (London, 1567?).

Reprint of Archbishop Parker's 1565 Advertisements. Rules on liturgy and clerical dress which were the source of considerable dispute.

Examples of contemporary controversial responses:-

An answer for the tyme, to the examination put in print ... pretending to mayntayne the apparrell prescribed against the declaration of the mynisters of London, (Rouen?, 1566).

R. Crowley, *A briefe discourse against the outwards apparell and ministring garmentes of the popishe church*, (1578).

A. Gilby, *To my lovyng brethren that ar troubyld abowt the popishe aparrel two short and comfortable epistels ...* (Emden, 1566).

See also Introduction and Legal basis bibliography for the legal background and general publications.

For researchers studying some aspect of clerical dress in depth there may well be relevant material in the Lambeth manuscript and archive sequences. An overview of these holdings is available online, or contact the Library for advice.

5 Biographical Sources

Biographies of the clergy may describe particular events in detail and may even refer to such specific points as a clergyman's preference in clothing, for example a dislike of the dog collar or the use of a cassock.

However clerical biographies are more often useful on clerical dress because they frequently include portraits of the subjects of the biographies. These can also be used as examples of clerical costume for other clergy of the period. Lambeth has a very large collection of biographies of English clergy, and there is no point in singling out individual biographies as examples.



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There are various searches which can be performed in the online catalogue that will identify suitable biographies.

See also Portraits and research guides to Biographical Sources for Archbishops of Canterbury.

6 Pictorial Sources

These are the most useful sources for actually reproducing clerical costume. They are often as informative from this point of view as the most detailed written descriptions, though of course many works combine written descriptions with illustrations.

Pictorial reproductions may be taken from a variety of sources:-

Memorial brasses and tombs, representations on seals, stained glass, illuminated manuscripts, contemporary illustrations in books and newspapers, and unexpected sources such as illustrated advertisements in church publications. Portraits, including prints and photographs are covered below.

It is important to remember that non-contemporary representations of an individual (for example in illuminated manuscripts) will not provide reliable pictures of the cleric himself or of his clothing. However such representations may be very useful as examples of clerical dress at the time when they were produced. Some of this material (such as tomb sculptures and seals) is likely to have suffered damage over the course of the centuries, and may not reproduce well in photographic illustration.

Lambeth has very substantial, though far from exhaustive, holdings of books on this kind of material, including lists, gazetteers, histories, and detailed accounts of local areas and individual churches and cathedrals. There are too many to attempt even a selective list.

There is a large collection of colour photographs available in the Reading Room of pictures from the Lambeth medieval manuscripts. It includes some illustrations of clerical dress, contemporary with the dates when the manuscripts were written. Please see the information on our reprographics services if you are interested in reproductions of these images.

7 Portraits

This is probably the most important of the Pictorial Sources. It includes contemporary paintings, prints and photographs.

The National Portrait gallery has a search function where you can limit the search by the sitter's profession: www.npg.org.uk



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The following are some of the standard reference sources:-

Dictionary of British portraiture, (4 vols., London, 1979-81). Produced in association with the National Portrait Gallery.

J. Ingamells, *The English episcopal portrait 1559-1835: a catalogue*, (New Haven, 1981)

Examples of more specific collections:-

G.M. Bevan, editor, *Portraits of the archbishops of Canterbury*, (London, 1908). For more information on the archbishops please see guides to Biographical Sources for the Archbishops of Canterbury.

O.R. Rowley, *The House of Bishops: portraits of the living archbishops and bishops of the Church of England in Canada ...* (Montreal, 1907)

The House of Bishops: the latest portraits of the living bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States ... (New York, 1904)

Unexpected sources include ecclesiastical portrait journals and series. There was a surprising vogue for this kind of publication in the 19th century. For example:- *The Church portrait journal: a monthly paper for church people*, (London, 1876-89)

Dignitaries of the Church: high class ecclesiastical periodical and portrait album (London, 1889-1990)

Portraits of bishops, (Cheltenham, 1872-73)

It is worth noting that editions of a clergyman's works often include a picture of the author.

Lambeth has a large collection of mainly black and white prints of the Anglican clergy dating from the 16th to the 19th century, and some photographs of Anglican clergy from the 19th century to the present day. They are indexed in the Prints Index in the online catalogue.

There are also very substantial holdings of photographs of clergymen, both of the Church of England and of the other provinces of the Anglican Communion, in the Lambeth Manuscripts and in various archival collections, such as the papers of the Lambeth Conferences. They are noted in the indexes to the relevant collections. An overview of these holdings is available online, or contact the Library for advice.

Please see the information on our reprographics services if you are interested in reproductions of these images.



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8 Appendix One: Ecclesiastical Heraldry

The Library is not expert in ecclesiastical heraldry but does hold a reasonable selection of printed material relating mainly to the heraldry of Anglican bishops, including the standard works:-

W.K.R. Bedford, *The blazon of episcopacy, being the arms borne by or attributed to the archbishops and bishops of England and Wales*, 2nd edn, (Oxford, 1897)

A.C. Fox-Davies, *A complete guide to heraldry*, (London, 1949 reprint).
Chapter on ecclesiastical heraldry.

J. Woodward, *A treatise on ecclesiastical heraldry*, (Edinburgh and London, 1894)

9 Appendix Two: The Legal Basis – A Short Bibliography

The primary and secondary legal material is very extensive with only scattered references to clerical dress. It is definitely **not** the best or easiest way to research clerical costume but is included as the legal basis on which clerical costume was established.

The following are useful starting points for canon law texts:-

Constitutions and canons ecclesiastical, first produced in 1603 and published in 1604, and all later editions up to *The canons of the Church of England*, 6th edn, 2000.

The Anglican canons 1529-1947, edited by Gerald Bray (Church of England Record Society, vol. 6, 1998)

Codex iuris ecclesiastici anglicani, edited by Edmund Gibson (2nd edition, 2 vols., 1761).

Still the most complete collection of texts.

Lyndwood's Provinciale: the text of the canons therein contained, reprinted from the translation made in 1534, edited by J.V. Bullard and H.C. Bell (London, 1929).

A standard authority on the texts of English medieval canon law.

Canon law was not superseded in England at the Reformation but it was subordinated to parliamentary or statute law, for example the Acts of Uniformity of 1549, 1552, 1559, and 1662.

The following are useful modern summaries and handbooks:-

The canon law of the Church of England, being the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Canon Law ... (London, 1947).

A good summary



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E.G. Moore, *Moore's Introduction to English canon law*. 3rd edn, by T. Briden and B. Hanson (London, 1992). A good summary.

N. Doe, *The legal framework of the Church of England: a critical study in a comparative context*, (Oxford, 1996)
Very detailed and scholarly handbook.

M. Hill, *Ecclesiastical law*, 2nd edition (London, 2001).
Detailed and scholarly handbook.

L. Leeder, *Ecclesiastical law handbook*, (London, 1997).
Detailed and scholarly handbook.

For examples of the application of canon law in practice, particularly at diocesan level, the following collections are particularly useful examples:-
Visitation articles and injunctions of the period of the Reformation, edited by W.H. Frere and W.M. Kennedy (3 vols., Alcuin Club Collections 14-16, 1910).
Visitation articles and injunctions of the early Stuart Church, edited by K. Fincham (2 vols., Church of England Record Society, 1,5, 1994-98).