

## The Robes and Insignia of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem

By Noel Cox

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The Augustinian canons, whose rule the Hospitaller Knights of St John followed, historically wore a black mantle or cowl (the *cucullus* or *cuculla*)<sup>53</sup> and hood, and a black fur-lined cassock or *pellicea*. They also wore a white full-sleeved tunic (a surplice or rochet), square cap, and leather girdle. A black surcoat was worn after 1248. To provide for the rigours of war-like campaigns, from 1259 the Knights of St John were allowed a red surcoat, a loose knee-length woollen outer coat without sleeves, split to the waist at front and back, and bearing a white cross, in thirteenth century. A red pall, a loose woollen outer coat without sleeves, was worn in place of the black mantle. In peacetime they resumed their black habits.

After the revival of the English tongue of the Order from 1831, new robes and insignia were designed. By and large these copied the mediaeval vesture of the Order. The principal items now are:

The Badge, an eight pointed, or Maltese Cross, is of white enamel embellished between each of the four arms of the cross with a lion and a unicorn alternately, wrought in gold<sup>54</sup>. The lion and unicorns were dropped from the badge 1871, but restored, and added to the star, in 1888.

For outdoor use there is a flat black velvet hat of Tudor shape, but this is rarely used today. Clerical members of the Order may wear a square black cap<sup>55</sup> with red edging and buttons.



The mantle is a long, loose, sleeveless outer garment. The mantle is in the form of a cloak with organ pleating at the neck, fastened in front at the neck by a large hook and eye and a cord. Cords and laces are at the neck, and from 1930 a single stand Collar<sup>56</sup>. This is derived from the black mantle or cowl (the *cucullus* or *cuculla*), worn by members of the Order in ancient times.

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<sup>53</sup> A plain large loosely hanging garment with a small hood attached to it, and hanging sleeves; Clinch, *English Costume from Prehistoric Times to the end of the Eighteenth Century* (1909) 244.

<sup>54</sup> This cross is said to be derived from the arms of the Republic of Amalfi, whose citizens restored the Hospital in 1023.

<sup>55</sup> It is not clear when the black cap (or biretta) was introduced, though the earliest recorded donning was in the trial of Samuel Fife in 1742. However, they were certainly in use for much longer; Joseph, *Wigs and Weepers* (1980) 7-8, citing Harford, *The Noose and the Doomed* (1908).

<sup>56</sup> Approved patterns of these, and of the sopra-vest, are kept in the chancery of the Order.

It appears, like the chasuble, to have developed from the *casula*, which is derived from the *planeta* or *paenula*, a cloak worn by all classes and both sexes in the Graeco-Roman world. The *paenula*, a cloak akin to the poncho, was an over-dress originally worn only by slaves, soldiers, and others of low degree. Because of its convenience, it was adopted by fashion in the third century as a travelling cloak. The sumptuary laws of Theodosius (382) prescribed it as the proper everyday dress of senators instead of the military *χηλαμψο* (*chlamys*), the *toga* being reserved for state occasions<sup>57</sup>.

If this supposition is correct, a mantle may be made as for a chasuble of conical, bell-shaped style. This is a semi-circular piece of material, 60" radius, 120" diameter, with a piece cut from the straight length 120" long. The straight edges form the front seam of the chasuble. This piece measures 30" long, and is curved, 2"-2½" deep, and forms the neck piece. If the material is only 48" deep, it is joined towards the outside of the radius. Some 4½ yards of material is needed.



The Sovereign Head's mantle has a train, and is of silk velvet<sup>58</sup>, lined with white silk. The Badge, a 12" diameter eight pointed, or Maltese Cross on the left breast, is embellished with gold, and surmounted with an Imperial Crown<sup>59</sup>.

The Grand Prior's mantle is similar, but has no train, and no crown. The Grand Prior's Star is surmounted by an imperial crown.

Bailiffs Grand Cross (and Knights of Justice prior to 1926) formerly wore black silk robes, lined with black silk. These are now made, like those of Knights, of black merino<sup>60</sup>. They are faced with black silk, and bear a 12" white linen<sup>61</sup> Badge of the Order on the left breast, embellished with gold coloured silk, and with the tongues in red.

<sup>57</sup>The *χηλαμψο*, a cloak doubled or pinned over the shoulder, or the larger *ημιμαπιον*, worn in winter, was toga-like, but much larger. It consisted of a woollen cloth oval three times the length of the wearer, worn halved along its length and draped in complicated folds. In the west it dwindled and became the stole. The *χηλαμψο*, derived from the *sagum* or *paludamentum*, differed from the ancient pallium only in size and in the way it was worn. This was by bringing together two corners of an oblong piece of cloth over the right shoulder and fastening them there by means of a clasp pin. It was a military cloak, but by the sixth century was accepted as Byzantine court dress.

<sup>58</sup>The silk of course today is usually ribbed rayon rather than the real corded Ottoman silk used in the past.

<sup>59</sup>This cross is said to be derived from the arms of the Republic of Amalfi, whose citizens restored the Hospital in 1023.

<sup>60</sup>A fine quality wool fabric, first produced in Britain by Garnett of Bradford in c.1826; Beck, *The Draper's Dictionary* (1886) 220.

<sup>61</sup>A fabric woven from the fibres of flax. Cotton, or a cotton mix is now more usual.

Members of the Order of the Grades I and II wear black merino<sup>62</sup> mantles, faced with black silk, and bearing a 12" white linen<sup>63</sup> Badge of the Order on the left breast. The Badges of the Knights of Justice are embellished with gold coloured silk, those of Knights of Grace, or Associate Knights, with white silk embellishments.

Commanders, and Officers in the Chapter-General, also wear black merino mantles faced with black silk. Their Badges however are smaller, 9" and 6" respectively, of white linen, embellished in white silk.

A white enamelled Star of eight points without embellishment, worn on the left breast. Unicorn and lion embellishments from 1888.

The Secretary of the Order, and of the priories and commanderies, wear mantles similar to those of Officers, with the Badge superimposed upon two goose quill pens embroidered saltire-wise in white silk. The Medical Officer of the St John Ophthalmic Hospital, Jerusalem, may wear a mantle of special pattern. Women have worn mantles since 1974. Esquires wear the mantle of an Officer. In New Zealand the mantle is worn by Bailiffs and Dames Grand Cross, Knights and Dames, Commanders, and Officers in the Priory Chapter.

A riband of black watered silk, worn over the right shoulder, carries the Badge of Bailiffs and Dames Grand Cross on the left hip. A similar, narrower riband carries the Badge of Knights and Dames of Justice and of Grace round the neck. Commanders wear the Badge round the neck, but women Commanders wear it from a bow on the left breast. Officers wear the Badge on the left breast, and Serving Brothers and Sisters wear a circular medal bearing the cross of the Order in white enamel on a black enamel background. The embellishment of the Badge for the third, fourth and fifth class members is silver<sup>64</sup>.

Beneath the mantle, in 1248 the knights were allowed a surcoat of black, with a white cross, and worn over armour. In 1259 this was changed to a red surcoat. By the fourteenth century surcoats had become shorter, more tight-fitting, and were called a jupon.

The modern sopra (or supra)-vest, formerly called a surcoat or under mantle, is a long coat of thin black cloth buttoning close down the neck and down one side, falling to the ankles. It is cut so as to entirely cover the tie, shirt, waistcoat and trousers. It is similar to a cassock, though it is a survival of the surcoat worn of the Order in ancient times (the *supra vestis*), rather than of the black fur-lined cassock or *pellicea*.



In the centre of the sopra-vest worn by Bailiffs Grand Cross is a plain eight-pointed cross of white cloth 12" in diameter.

Knights, Chaplains, or Commanders wear the sopra-vest plain, but the Badge is suspended from its riband so that it hangs about 6" below the Collar of the sopra-vest.

The sopra-vest is rarely worn in Australia or New Zealand.

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ed in Britain by Garnett of Bradford in c.1826; Beck,

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y be worn with Privy Counsellors' Levée Dress (knee-  
urt coat, waistcoat, and knee-breeches), full evening  
or Blues for Army, No 1 Dress for the Royal Navy or

The Prelate wears the Cope of the Order. Chaplains may wear a black silk full-sleeved robe bearing a 6" linen cross on the left breast, of gold embellished silk.

Clerical members of the Order may, when officiating, wear a tippet of black stuff<sup>65</sup> with red lining and edging and with red buttons. A 3" Badge is carried on the left breast. The tippet is worn over their cassock and surplice, or their non-conformist equivalent. Over the tippet a chaplain's Badge is worn around the neck.

A square black velvet cap with red edges and buttons may also be worn.

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<sup>65</sup>Gowns are generally made from cloth stuff, which today usually means polyester or viscose or one of the many other artificial fibres, rather than the traditional Russel cord. Russel cord is a combination wool, cotton fabric, and is a rep fabric much used for academic gowns and the like, and stands up to hard wear. Polyester, meaning any fabric made of ethylene glycol and terephthalic acid and shrink proof, retains its shape and is wrinkle and moth-resistant, as well as water repellent. Wool was the dominant fabric material till the improvement of the cotton-spinning industry in the late eighteenth century. Wool has the advantage of good absorption, warmth, and good affinity for dyes. However, it has a tendency to shrink, and no resistance to moth unless treated. Blended with polyester it makes a fabric more crease resistant.