

At Cambridge, ceremony is not just about graduation – it's rooted in the fabric of University life. Meet Timothy Milner, who has made it his mission to study the ins and outs of the ceremonies that punctuate the University year

All things great and ceremonial

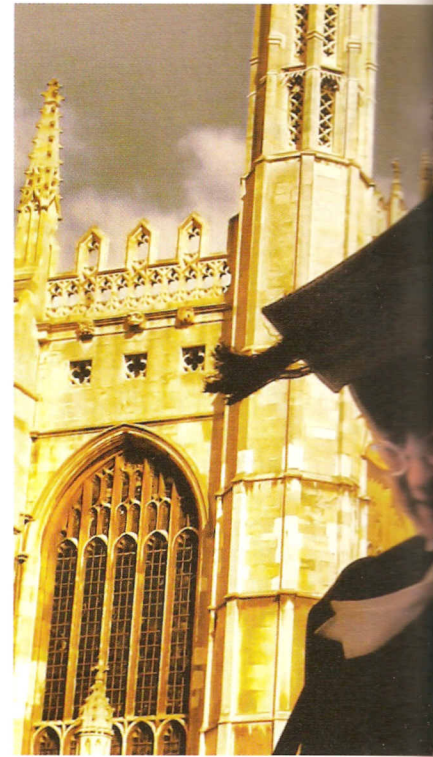
ON A NORMAL working day, the University's Ceremonial Officer and Additional Pro-Proctor for Ceremonial Occasions is likely to be found in a dark suit, its sombreness offset nicely when paired with bright red socks, highly polished shoes and a dapper tie. On ceremonial duty, however, his dress is strictly a black and white affair – black gown, cassock and square cap with white wing-collar and bands – and

most definitely no red socks.

The ceremonial kit-wearing stage only comes as a final step after weeks or months of preparation however, which in turn follows years of studying the details of University protocol.

Tim Milner became the University's Ceremonial Officer, a part-time position based in the Vice-Chancellor's Office, in November 2005. He works behind the scenes to help ensure that everything

Above right, Tim Milner. Below, the Vice-Chancellor, accompanied by the Esquire Bedells and the University Marshall, walks to her 1 October address in 2007.



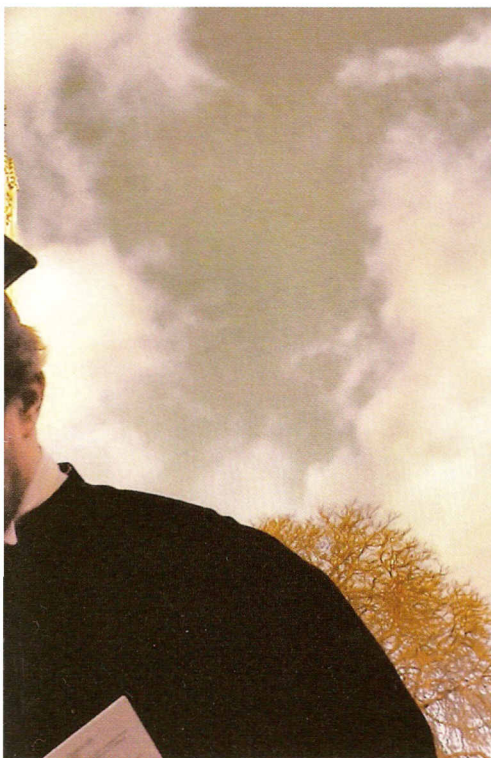
from VIP visits to the University and the Honorary Degree Congregation to the formal reading out of the results in Parts II and III of the Maths Tripos go smoothly. He is Secretary to both the Senate-House Syndicate and the Select Preachers Syndicate, which is responsible for nominating preachers for the six University Sermons each year.

In many cases, his job boils down to knowing or researching the answers to basic questions like who should wear what and why, where they should stand or sit, and when they ought to be saying whatever it is they might want or need to say. His is usually a backstage job, whether quickly whispering guidance on cap-doffing etiquette to a new Deputy Vice-Chancellor about to preside at a Discussion or working, over a period of months, to ensure that everyone from the Orator to the florist and the local police are kept briefed and co-ordinated for their roles at a major occasion such as the Honorary Degree Ceremony.

"I spend quite a lot of time providing information and giving assistance to University officers and members, partnership organisations and even to the general public," Milner says. Some contacts 'out of the blue' can be quite touching, such as when an Australian lady arranged to bring her late father's doctoral robes back to the UK on a recent visit, wanting to find a suitable



NIGEL LUCKHURST



STUART LEE

London, he went on to train as a painter at the University of Wales School of Art, Aberystwyth, and at Reigate School of Art and Design in Surrey. He comes from quite a long line of artists of one sort or another, a tradition he has carried on, now specialising in painting of coats of arms and in other work influenced by heraldry. When Peterhouse wanted to put up the armorial shield of the Master above High Table in Hall, it was an obvious 'in-house' job.

His interests extend beyond purely academic ceremonial. In addition to teaching occasional courses about heraldry, he is currently running a 10-week class for the University's Institute of Continuing Education on various aspects of ceremonial dress.

Before becoming Ceremonial Officer, Milner had served two terms as a Proctor, first on the nomination of King's College in 2002-2003, and then again nominated by Peterhouse in 2004-2005. It was good preparation for the work he does today, and as an Additional Pro-Proctor he can still act as a stand-in.

Milner's job involves him, to a greater or lesser extent, in all the regular ceremonial milestones within each year – the Vice-Chancellor's Address, the Election of the Proctors and the Swearing In of the Constabulary on 1 October; the Degree Congregations that take place in 9 months of the year; Honorary Degrees in June, when distinguished individuals from around the world are honoured by the University;

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Remembrance Sunday; the Sermon before the University at King's; Mere's Commemoration; and the twice-termly University Sermons in Great St Mary's.

Even during Cambridge's 2009 Anniversary year, it is business as usual. "I don't think the 800th will make a tremendous difference to my work as such, and as part of a continuous tradition, it probably shouldn't," he says. "There will, of course, be important special events going on to mark the 800th, but our routine ceremonial such as Degree Congregations must go on as usual too."

In October 2008, Milner was delighted to be admitted to Honorary Fellowship of the Burgon Society, the national society established for the study and appreciation of academical dress. "It was gratifying to discover that members of the Society look to Cambridge not only as one of the best examples of the routine use of academical dress, but also of ceremonial that is still in some respects connected to the year-round life of the University," he says.

Think of that the next time you see the two Esquire Bedells leading the way with their silver maces at the front of the Vice-Chancellor's procession as it goes into or out of the Senate House or Great St Mary's. They are fulfilling a role that has been carried out since the earliest days of the University. And chances are that you might sometimes see another gowned figure – note the highly polished shoes – keeping watch from further back down the line.

place for them to be kept and used in his memory.

He is quick to point out that he has a lot of help from others. "Although as far as I know I am the first specifically designated Ceremonial Officer based in the Old Schools, it should be stressed that in addition to my colleagues in the Vice-Chancellor's Office and in the Old Schools more generally, there are many others whose duties are traditionally concerned with ceremonial to a greater or lesser extent" he says. "My post is a co-ordinating role and much of what I do had earlier been done by the Vice-Chancellor's Private Secretary."

It's the kind of role that, in a sense, has evolved from other aspects of his life.

"I've always had a strong interest in costume and ceremonial dress," he says. Even as a child, robes began to interest him, something perhaps inherited from his artist grandmother, who amassed a collection of costume plates.

He first arrived at the University in 1985, to read theology and then art history at Peterhouse. "Whenever I join an institution, I am always interested to discover how it works and to know something of its traditions and how it got to be how it is, so I started to read Statutes and Ordinances and the Reporter as an undergraduate," he says.

After a brief period working full-time as Estates Officer for the Middle Temple, one of the Inns of Court in

CEREMONIAL GLOSSARY

Proctors Two officials who are elected annually on the nomination of the Colleges in rotation as the representatives of the Regent House in formal and disciplinary matters. They have ceremonial duties at Congregations and elsewhere, and are responsible for maintaining public order and freedom of speech in the University. A person nominated usually serves first for one year as Pro-Proctor, then for a year as Proctor and finally for a further year as Deputy Proctor. There is a permanent Special Pro-Proctor for Motor Vehicles and extra Pro-Proctors can be appointed for particular purposes.

Orator The Orator composes and presents speeches in Latin, primarily to honour recipients of honorary degrees, but also as addresses for presentation to other universities and institutions.

Esquire Bedells Two officials who have important responsibilities at Congregations, University Sermons and other ceremonial events. Amongst other duties they carry the University Maces before the Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor, order University processions and call forward each graduand at a Degree Congregation.

University Constables Part-time officers, usually employees of the University or Colleges, who are sworn as constables under the 1825 Universities Act to assist the Proctors in their disciplinary and ceremonial functions. They were popularly known, in former days when the Proctors prowled the streets on the watch for unruly undergraduates, as 'bulldogs'.