

## English judges to lose their wigs

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A centuries-old tradition is coming to end in the courts of England and Wales. Judges at all levels will no longer wear wigs whilst hearing civil court cases. Gone too will be a style of dress that dates back even further.

Court dress has traditionally been worn by judges when presiding in open court. Advocates appearing before a 'robed' judge are expected also to be 'robed' (and 'bewigged'). Current court dress is elaborate. For example, High Court judges have about five different styles of court dress, one of which dates back to the time of Edward III (1327-77) and was based on the correct dress for attending the royal court. Wigs, on the other hand, are a relatively recent arrival, only being fully adopted by the judiciary in about 1685 (at which time they were the height of fashion outside the court room as well). Although many TV shows and cartoons might give a different picture, the full bottomed wig has been reserved for ceremonial use only since the 1840s.

From 1st October this year, all civil court judges will wear a simple robe, designed by Betty Jackson, their rank distinguished only by the colour of the bands draped around the robe. This replaces the various colours of summer and winter gowns, some with fur, the tippet (sash) and the wing collars and white bands. No longer will the High Court judge be dressing according to the season or the saints day or the particular jurisdiction he or she is exercising that day.

Although the traditional horse hair wig will no longer be worn in the civil courts, the criminal court judges are keeping their wigs on, whilst adopting a simpler gown.

The changes come after a prolonged period of debate and consultation. Views remained polarised as to whether wigs and gowns added solemnity and anonymity or simply looked outdated and intimidating.

The head of the judiciary had expressed the wish that advocates in court should similarly de-wig. The Bar Council of England & Wales, which speaks for the majority of advocates, has declined to follow suit and barristers will still don their wigs wherever court dress is deemed appropriate.

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