

Remembering Margery Ord

Margery Ord was a distinctive, even redoubtable figure in the Biochemistry department and Lady Margaret Hall for more than half a century. She came to Oxford in October 1951 when she was 24 years old to do postdoctoral research with Lloyd Stocken on the biological effects of X-irradiation. The following year she was scooped up by LMH to be Tutor in Biochemistry (even though as yet it had no students reading for the new Biochemistry degree) and soon after an Official Fellow. On the departmental side she was appointed Demonstrator in 1953, and then in 1959 a University Lecturer – the first woman to hold a lecturership in Biochemistry and a full College Fellowship. Her successful research collaboration with Lloyd Stocken lasted through to their retirement. Garry Brown will be speaking about her research later in this service. At LMH Margery taught generations of students and at various times held the offices of Dean, Dean of Graduates, and Treasurer. She continued to lunch in College on weekdays until just a few years ago, when she was nearing 90. Several people have remarked to me that Margery's death seems like the end of an era.

This is how some of her former students have described her in spontaneous tributes:

'I was in awe of her intellect but she always encouraged her students to put forward their own ideas and never dominated the discussion. I am very grateful for all the time and attention she devoted to me and all her students.'

'She was a remarkable and nurturing tutor without whose influence I might not have pursued a career in research.'

'I would like to record my thanks to her as an inspiring teacher but also a kind and supportive mentor.'

'She was a wonderful lady and a great example of what a family community the College is for those who are privileged to have called it home.'

'She was amazing but scary to a 19 year old who had never been away from home. I used to quake waiting for tutorials in that little lobby below her rooms in Talbot. She was very patient with me especially when I realised I had chosen the wrong degree and wanted to change to medicine. She, Alison Brading and Margaret Matthews were so helpful.'

These student voices do not lie. Margery was a genuine educator, always exploring new ideas and opening them up to others. And Margery has now become a major benefactor of this College, generously supporting its work in education and research well into the future.

Margery was born on 11 March 1927 in Southsea. She was the only child of Emma Grace, formerly a nurse, and Arthur Gordon, a surgeon at Royal Portsmouth Hospital, where he continued until his retirement. Margery always insisted that the family was not very well off, but this may have been a matter of social perspective. It was certainly comfortable, with two live-in maids, a residential nanny for Margery when she was small, and 'a man' who lived over the garage and 'looked after the car and did the coals and the fireplaces'.

[Margery Ord, *Memories of a Female Academic* p.11]. Margery was only 6 years old when she was sent to boarding school about 12 miles away in Wickham. In retrospect she was matter-of-fact about this, as about so much else, and never held it against her parents. She had many happy childhood memories of school and family events, and particularly enjoyed annual holidays with her parents and friends in the Scilly Isles, walking, swimming, taking boat trips between the islands and beginning an interest in bird-watching that lasted her whole life. In 1939 Margery won a scholarship to St. Swithun's school, in Winchester, again as a boarder. Difficult wartime experiences included evacuation from Winchester, and many frightening air-raids both at school and at home. She excelled academically at St. Swithun's.

In October 1944 Margery went up to University College London – for the first months still actually located in Bangor, because of wartime

evacuation - to read Chemistry. Once properly back in Gower Street, London, Margery worked very hard, as she continued to do throughout her undergraduate course, in which she achieved a first, and her postgraduate studies at Guy's Hospital Medical School, where her parents had first met. She also thoroughly enjoyed exploring London. With friends she saw Margot Fonteyn at Covent Garden, Laurence Olivier and Sybil Thorndyke at the Old Vic, and Kathleen Ferrier in the Messiah at Southwark Cathedral. By the time she gained her Ph.D in Biochemistry in 1951 she had already published research results jointly with her supervisor, and was set on what became a very productive career in scientific research. And so to Oxford, and one of the best commutes in the world, walking across the University Parks from LMH to the Biochemistry labs every weekday, and again on Saturday mornings to review scientific papers.

Margery was loyal to institutions, though impatient of their bureaucracies. She kept in touch with St. Swithun's and friends she made there, all her life. With Lloyd Stocken she wrote a history of the Biochemistry department in Oxford. And Margery also served the wider university. She was one of seven members of the very influential Franks Commission of 1964-66 into the governance and structure of Oxford, appointed, in her opinion, 'to fill the slot young/woman/scientist' [Ord p59]. She served on the General Board

of Faculties from 1978 - 1982 and with some reluctance chaired the University's Staff Committee. In the mid-80s she was appointed to the Roberts Committee into graduate student provision. She certainly did her stint and more in University and College administration.

In her memoirs, Margery dedicated 69 pages to her early life and entire career, and 130 pages to travel. She was a great traveller, sometimes organised around scientific conferences or lecture tours, often not. She travelled everywhere – the Americas, Africa, South and East Asia, Australia and New Zealand, Europe - and a round-the-world trip in 1967. She was a keen photographer and kept copious photographic journals. She often travelled with Lloyd and Noreen Stocken, later with Anne and Eddie Hazel, sometimes with other colleagues, sometimes alone. I shared part of one of her several trips to India. She enjoyed visiting temples, synagogues, and mosques, palaces and pyramids, forts and ancient cities. She had an infectious curiosity and appetite for new places and cultural experiences, which is why at the start of the travel section of her memoirs she quoted the words of James Elroy Fletcher we have put on the service sheet, 'We are the Pilgrims, Master. We shall go always a little further'. Most of all Margery liked seeing wild animals and birds in their natural habitat, and especially in deserts and the great savannah tracts of Africa. In her memoirs I counted at least 20 photos of

different birds and animals, including oryx, warthog, fiscal shrike, lions, tigers, great anteater, anaconda, goshawk and wild dogs. She cared deeply about wildlife, and about scientific approaches to its conservation. David Macdonald will tell us about Margery's role in the foundation of the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit at Oxford, and its association with Lady Margaret Hall.

Margery was kind and hospitable, not least to new arrivals in Oxford. As I think everyone here will recognise, she could also be imperious. For thirty years after her retirement, living at Norham End, just round the corner from this Chapel, she assumed that if she needed anything, or something in her flat needed fixing, she had only to ring LMH to summon help, and preferably immediate help – now! Fortunately people were very fond of Margery, and rather shared her view that her interests and those of the College were quite inseparable. She was immensely grateful for the enduring kindness and effective assistance of LMH staff in the bursary and housekeeping, accounts, treasury, lodge, catering, maintenance and gardens, who never let her down. Her neighbours in Norham End were also supportive. Over the last three years Margery was grateful to Gillian Peele for looking after her affairs, and to everyone at PLL Care, especially her main live-in carer, Jo Ngosa Goodwin, for their professionalism and thoughtfulness. Between everyone, Margery was able to live in her own flat right to the end, as she wanted.

Margery was not an introspective person. She looked outwards and forwards. She was energetic, positive, and adventurous. 'We are the Pilgrims, Master. We shall go always a little further'. As Margery herself so often said, and would say to us all now: 'Go well'.

Frances Lannon