Welcome to Linacre
Michaelmas 2020
Dear Linacrites,

Welcome to Linacre, and the first ever fresher's/alumni edition of Linacre Lines. Linacre Lines is a termly-publication devoted to representing the voices of Linacre members. This specially-crafted edition is for you, newcomers of Linacre.

Within this publication, you will find rich stories from Linacre Alumni about their experiences at the college, fond memories created during their time at Oxford, and some advice that they would give their fresher-selves.

Given the current situation we find ourselves in, your recent move and adjustment to life at Linacre may be different from what you had imagined when you received your acceptance earlier in the year. I hope that you enjoy this publication, and find solace in the stories of those who came before you.

I wish you nothing but the best for your first term as a Linacrite, and do hope that you will consider contributing to Linacre Lines in Hilary ’21. In the meantime, please get in touch if you have any ideas/thoughts/work that you would like to share with the Linacre community.

Welcome to Linacre!

Danielle Perro
Editor, Linacre Lines
I came to Linacre in October 1976 to do a DPhil in the Nuclear Physics Laboratory in experimental nuclear structure. I did my undergraduate degree in Physics at Durham University, which was considered to be in ‘the deep south’ by our neighbours in my Northumbrian home village, so it was with some trepidation that I came another 245 miles south to Oxford!

When I was offered the DPhil studentship in Nuclear Physics, the Director of Graduate Studies mentioned that I needed a College place as he drove me to the station after the interview. He said he would make the application for me, and I would hear from a College. I did not realise that I HAD to have a College place to come to Oxford, as I had found a bedsit for £6/week up near the northern ring road and I had got the studentship funding. Thus I did not worry too much when I received 5 rejection letters from the all-male Colleges to which the DoG had somehow made applications for me…

Linacre (then down on St Aldates) was 6th on the list and I was summoned for an interview 4 weeks before I was supposed to start in the lab. Only in the interview ante room did I finally understand that I HAD to talk my way in, which much to my relief, I managed to do (I hope not just because I was already a rower and Linacre Men’s 1st eight had always had a female member up till then!).

My fondest memories are of the great friendship and companionship I found in Linacre from students from all over the world (I had done VSO in Africa in 1973 giving me a lifelong interest in/love of Africa), and above all the chance to meet some other women, since my lab situation was 100% male.
Strong and long lasting wonderful friendships were made: I am still in touch with 4 members of the very first Linacre Ladies rowing crew that I started in January 1977 who are now living in Canada, Wales and Australia. Without these friends and the ‘non-stuffy’ relaxed atmosphere of Linacre, navigating the alien landscape of Oxford would have been rather perplexing.

My experiences at Linacre shaped my entire life, as when my landlady suddenly increased the rent to £8/week because ‘I was a bad girl being out all night’ (I was doing night shift work 3 times a week on the accelerator based experiments in the lab), after a fortnight sleeping in the Nuclear Physics tea room, I moved into a room in a house off the Abingdon Road. It belonged to an ex-Linacre student and JRF, Dr John J. Barnett, an atmospheric physicist who was away at MIT for a year.

We met when he returned and were married in St Cross Church in January 1979, with our wedding reception being the first ever held at Cherwell Edge Linacre. I thus ended up staying in Oxford after my DPhil, firstly as a Research Officer in nuclear physics, then as a physics tutor variously in 6 different Colleges, and then in 1987 I changed fields completely to become a protein crystallographer. I am now in the Biochemistry Department, although I had never studied biology in my life!

My advice to my Fresher self is ‘don’t be so overawed by being at Oxford, realise that the other people here are really just like me but are covering up their lack of confidence more effectively’.

I hope you will settle happily at Linacre and be able to make the most of the amazing opportunities for friendship and research here.
I studied for an MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice at Linacre from 2013-2014. My fondest memories of being a Linacre Postgraduate Student were my flat mates with whom I had established a long lasting friendship, the view from my Bamborough Building apartment and the short walk to the Faculty of Law/Manor Road Building, and last but not least, running to the College Dining Hall in my shorts and T-Shirt for meals during winter. First, dining and chatting with my flat mates were often my favorite pastime in Linacre. I also learnt about Japanese, American/Korean and Mexican culture through my interaction with them. Most often than not, my flat mates were also people who I turned to when I needed support.

Second, my room faced New College meadow, New College and the Faculty of Law. The view was picture perfect and provided a calm environment during my studies.

Third, as someone who studied more than 10 hours a day, I rarely had time to cook (except for instant food) and therefore, the College Dining Hall was my source of nutrition and proper food (this was also the reason why I donated to have my wife’s name to be engraved on one of the dining tables). My favorite food would be the dessert especially those that had vanilla sauce and I will highly recommend all new students to try the dessert.

My flat mate was also a lawyer/law student (I requested to have flat mates in the same faculty or course during my flat application) and she often lent me her counsel when I was pondering over a difficult legal point.

Likewise, my other flat mates often made time for me when I just wanted to test how easy my legal arguments could be understood by lay people. To reiterate, having flat mates whom you can count as your good friends shaped my time positively in Oxford.

I felt confident in myself after leaving Oxford/Linacre especially when my intelligent Oxon peers and professors recognized my capability and intellectual level. This provided a steely assurance as I kind of lost track of my direction after encountering some of the worst people within my two-year stint as a lawyer in Singapore. The constant demeaning remarks and mental abuse made me question my self-worth. However, I returned to the legal industry with a newly-gained poise. Indeed, I had flourished in every endeavor since my graduation. Now I am a successful senior privacy and cyber security counsel in one of the biggest tech giants in the world, and also currently an adjunct professor and adjunct lecturer with the Singapore National University and Singapore Management University respectively.

When thinking about what advice I would give my Fresher-self, I would encourage you, if you can, to stay in the College accommodation, make friends, study hard but play hard, go punting, visit other colleges, attend as many college formal dinners and balls as possible. The connections you build in Oxford will last forever.
"Don’t be so overawed by being at Oxford, realise that the other people here are really just like me but are covering up their lack of confidence more effectively"

-Elspath Garman
I studied Nature, Society and Environmental Policy (now Governance) in 2012-13, inspired by my work with the late Earth Lawyer Polly Higgins on the environmental, legal initiative Stop Ecocide (recently endorsed by Greta Thunberg). One of the best bits of being at Linacre was The Last Tutorial, a play I put on with friends from the college and other folks from around the university. A murder-mystery comedy starring Esther Jones: psychology student, crime fiction fanatic and part-time detective. We had so much fun putting it on at the Burton Taylor Studio and loads of people from the college came to support, including the wonderful Marsaleete Anderson, the former Alumni Relations Officer. A few years later some of the team would reunite and we’d put The Wellington Boot Club on at the BT, Esther Jones’ second case (she’s also appeared at the Arcola in London in The Cluedo Club Killings...yup, I love murder mysteries).

These experiences were deeply formative because it was halfway through my MSc in geography that I realised I didn’t want to return to the environmental sector but wanted to be a writer. I’ve been working hard ever since and this year my script Dumbledore Is So Gay was performed as part of the VAULT Festival in London. However, if I could go back in time I wouldn’t swap my MSc for a Masters in Creative Writing (even though I have thought about it) because NSEP prepared me for my career as a Narrative Coach, which involves running workshops in storytelling and communication skills, predominantly for academics and researchers, helping people ensure their work is understood by broader and more diverse audiences.

Advice I would give my younger self would be to speak truth to power. We live in a time of #MeToo, Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion, to name but a few important initiatives, and no person or institution is beyond reproach. Whether it would be calling out my fellow course mates or behaviour within the department I hope if I did it again I would do it with more confidence, using both my white and male privilege to enact positive change. Incidentally, Esther Jones spends a lot of time calling out sexism and patriarchy in The Wellington Boot Club and became a raging queer by the time she got to The Cluedo Club Killings – sometimes my writing has been ahead of me!

I’ve been working with a lot of Oxford University departments this year and will be working with NSEG as well, and I am heartened by the hard work people are putting in to ensuring students and staff feel connected and supported during this incredibly tough time of COVID-19. While things will be very different I know the spirit of Linacre will live on, which is one I remember to be friendly, unpretentious and kind. And, if I pushed my imagination, I reckon Esther could crack a case via Zoom.
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-Lanx Goh
I did my M.Phil in English between 1972 and 1975. Linacre then was a youngish college, trying hard to fit into the ancient establishment and, at the same time, project itself as a temple of modernity.

I had arrived from Uganda, once a British colony. The first Asians had been transported there from India in the late 19th century. They were indentured labourers, workers without rights, paid a pittance. Other Indians migrated and thrived. In 1972, we were exiled en masse by the African dictator Idi Amin, once a good friend of Britain. So I was feeling the loss of my country but also joyful that I had got into Oxford, beautiful Oxford with its long history. I was in the place that had churned out great PMs, writers, thinkers, and scientists for centuries! It didn't take long for that joy to dissipate and self-doubt and alienation to sweep in.

The country was overtly racist. My department was racist. Dons could not accept this little brown woman who loved English lit, who had a first from Makerere University in Uganda, who consumed books and wanted to learn. Linacre was my sanctuary from all that wretchedness. It was cosmopolitan, informal, inclusive, encouraging, a globalised hub. I still have friends I met first at Linacre. My ex-husband was already there when I arrived. We had little money but, we were, says an old mate, 'a golden couple, the best dancers, great company'.

It was an odd existence: going into lectures and tutorials feeling inadequate, and feeling completely at ease and confident in the college.

I drifted after graduation, did jobs that required no post-grad qualifications, tried to rebuild my intellectual confidence. It took many years. Life delivered many blows, divorce, job insecurity, more self-doubt. Through much of that time, my close Linacre friends were there for me, as my unpaid therapists and boosters. I woke up one morning in 1988 and wrote a column. I was 37. It was published in the Guardian. I became a journalist, the first ever columnist of colour in national newspapers and, later, an author. At Linacre I could discuss world affairs and learn from diverse men and women. It was a reservoir from which I could extract stories and ideas. Still do. As the situation in Hong Kong worsens I recall students from there and conversations we had. We were passionate anti-colonialists. Those memories are flooding in as we in Britain try to understand the legacy of empire.

To young freshers I say, make friends, network, go visit your Linacre pals. Whatever your discipline, those will serve you well forever. As they do me.
"Advice I would give my younger self would be to speak truth to power."

-Robert Holtom
When I was asked to contribute to Linacre Lines, as the first member of what was then Linacre House, an experimental part of the University, I thought of recounting funny anecdotes such as I am collecting for Linacre Legends. Like meeting and befriending world-famous people without knowing who they were. For example, inviting an inkling from Merton for lunch, or asking B.F. Skinner (our first visitor) and M. Bowra what their subjects were. There were 100 members, 10 of them women, 3 of those nuns in the nunnery which is now Linacre College. One of them invited me to meet Lionel Trilling, as she said we had a lot in common, and the Mother Superior served us tea in what is now our Common Room. So Linacre for me was an international mixture, with saints and sinners (several Me Too experiences), diplomats, a rock star, the oldest student in Britain, and lots of scientists. There was no separation between members and fellows — a good illustration of the first ten years of Linacre is found in the book “John Bamborough’s Linacre”. We had to start from scratch, chose furniture, books, sports equipment (our first was a table tennis table), bravely investing in art works, writing a constitution, starting a United Nations Society, the Linacre Lectures (the first was given by Robert Graves on “The State of Grace”, about taking the newly discovered mushroom drugs), and the Linacre Seminars, which put us on the map.

More personally, I arranged a meeting between Sir Isaiah Berlin, one of the founder fellows, and Bernhard Fagg, as they were both planning institutions: Wolfson College and a new Pitt Rivers Museum. They showed me and each other their plans, then one raised the funds, but the other one sadly did not.
More seriously: after a post-World War European childhood and adolescence, mostly studying humanities and the arts, I was for the first time confronted by international wars and atrocities, experienced by Linacre members: witnessing shocking descriptions and discussions between an Indian and a Pakistani, who then became friends.

Then there were the (at times very disruptive) demonstrations and “causes”: Vietnam, Nuclear Arms, Anti-Apartheid, 1968 Anti-Authority (I stopped the occupation of Linacre by the then Polytechnic, now Brookes, who wanted it as a general students’ union), Animal Rights, Gay Rights, Women’s Rights, and eventually and gratifyingly The Environment.

I am really proud of Linacre having been in the forefront of Green Energy, and being involved in initial climate change research. For a long time, before digital information took over, the junior dean and I rolled up the old scientific journals of the CR and mailed them to the Institute for Scientific Research of the Biological Problems of the North, in Magadan in Siberia.

In this spirit of international cooperation, I want to congratulate our Freshers and reassure them in these troubled times: Linacre gives you the opportunity to become the potential problem solvers, healers, and leaders of the world!
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-Eva Wagner