

**ST HILDA'S COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD**

In Memoriam

BARBARA LEVICK

Fellow and Tutor in Ancient History

1931-2023

Sunday, 5 May 2024

2 p.m.

Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, St Hilda's College

DR BARBARA LEVICK

A MEMORIAL CELEBRATION



Dr Barbara Levick, 1931-2023

Lecturer in Classics 1957-1959, Fellow and Tutor in Lit. Hum. 1959-1998
College Librarian 1956-1974, Library Fellow 1974-1991, Emeritus Fellow 1998-2023

Lecturer, St Hugh's College, Trinity College and University College

Vice-President of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries

Welcome from the Principal, Professor Dame Sarah Springman

May I welcome you all most warmly to this memorial event for our late and most distinguished Fellow, Dr Barbara Levick.

Jane Cursham's insightful portrait of Barbara overlooks the heart of the College's administrative floor in the South Building. Hand resting lightly on her book about Emperor Claudius, her ability to steer the future of her students equally lightly over almost 40 years as Fellow/Tutor, between 1959-1998, and to challenge them perceptively and supportively, was legendary. She reached the hearts of her former students, including many of those here today and she left many memories as an incomparable and inspirational tutor. Indeed, one of her first group of students, who graduated in 1960, is here today to pay her respects.

Sixty years of literary output, ranging from books about the Roman Colonies, through the Emperors Claudius, Vespasian and Augustus pay lasting tribute to the brilliant scholar that she was. Many others are far better placed to tell us about this very special person. She truly lived up to the College's motto *Non Frustra Vixi*.

BARBARA AS COLLEGE FELLOW

Dr Sarah Watkinson (Emeritus Fellow, St Hilda's College)

Barbara was an immensely impressive and productive scholar, as you are about to hear. She was a great asset to St Hilda's in that way.

But I have been invited to speak about her as a college fellow, having known her throughout the 55 years since I joined St Hilda's as a junior research fellow in 1969, and later, throughout the years we both sat on the college's Governing Body.

She embodied the ideal of academic fellowship and collegiality, the college as a household of scholars across all disciplines.

Wholeheartedly supportive of St Hilda's, Barbara took on the important but (at that time) unrewarded tasks that sit behind an Oxford college's public face, for example she was librarian from 1956-59 and library fellow for many years thereafter.

She also took a major share in creating this Music Building we are in, subsequently serving on the board of management. With its international reach and facilities, this building has had a transformative effect - but it took vision and determination to pursue the plan at a time of austerity for the college.

She was, I've heard, a demanding tutor, holding her pupils to the highest standards they could achieve; an exemplar of serious scholarship. But she was also extremely kind, and with a dry sense of humour.

At that time of austerity I mentioned, the catering budget was a target for cuts – which were particularly felt by fellows living in college, as Barbara did. I remember her discreetly noting at lunch – ‘ah - centipede chicken again!’ (*all legs*).

Lunch was where I most often had conversations with Barbara, when I joined her at the common table. We had almost nothing in common, she a scholar of ancient Rome, and I a fungal biologist; and there was no need for her to speak to me. But she did, and I always enjoyed our conversations.

When the possibility of my election to a tutorial fellowship was under discussion by the Governing Body, Barbara was very kind and supportive, showing interest in my scientific field of plant sciences, then generally regarded in Oxford as intellectually inferior to zoology.

She took the trouble to find a fascinating bridge between our two disciplines: Romans used a plant called *Parietaria* as toothpaste – did I know why? I didn't know the plant then, but I do now. *Parietaria* grows everywhere on old walls, and now wherever I see it, I think of her and hear her voice, and point it out to whoever I am with.

After we had both retired Anthony and I were honoured to enjoy the garden parties Barbara and Karen held every summer; such a pleasure, so well-arranged, and with such good conversations. Barbara combined a sense of fun, conviviality and good fellowship with an underlying seriousness. I miss her very much.

BARBARA AS TUTOR

Professor Rhiannon Ash (Tutor in Classics, Merton College, Oxford)

It is an honour to be here to share some memories with you about being taught by Barbara as an undergraduate. The opportunity today to step back from the pressures of daily life and to reflect on such a formative and happy time for me personally and intellectually is also something which I really appreciate, despite the large Barbara-shaped hole that has been left in all of our lives.

It is also wonderful to be back again in St Hilda's, where thanks completely to Barbara's intervention, I also spent a year as a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow back in 1996-97 when I had the chance to get to know Barbara better as a colleague. The other day I came across an expressive quote from the librarian, and later principal, of Somerville, Margery Fry (who, like Barbara, came originally from Brighton). What she said made me think of Barbara: 'I think the feeling of having belonged, and in a way always belonging to a college, and of sharing common aims and responsibilities and a common pride in it...is bound to make a difference to all one's life, besides all the more personal influence of one's immediate friends'. As well as teaching me Ancient History, Barbara also showed me what it meant to belong to a college. It is lovely to see some familiar faces in the audience from that time, even if the loss of Barbara makes this occasion for me a bittersweet pleasure (or *misera laetitia*, to borrow a phrase from Tacitus, an author whom Barbara knew intimately).

I was an undergraduate at Univ and I was lucky enough to be taught by Barbara for the Tacitus and Tiberius Special Subject in Trinity Term 1987 at the end of my first year. This was followed later on by a whole year of tutorials for Roman History and various revision sessions. This meant that for me, Barbara was a substantial and almost constant presence in my undergraduate life, as I'm sure she was for many people here today.

The arrangement whereby Barbara taught Univ students for Roman History was (I think) at that time relatively recent. As newly arrived undergraduates at Univ, we had heard students in the years above talk enthusiastically about this sharp, stylish, warm, and friendly tutor across the bridge at St Hilda's. As

newcomers, we were intrigued. They also mentioned that she even had an MG – the reported colour of which changed depending on which of your fellow-students you were chatting with. The car could be purple, yellow, orange... all colours of the rainbow! Before even meeting Barbara, therefore, she already had stature and interest for us. She simply didn't sound like other tutors. It is fair to say that before heading to St Hilda's for our first tutorials, we had the impression that we were going to be taught by some kind of latterday version of Emma Peel from the Avengers.

That walk across the bridge from Univ to St Hilda's with my cheerful tutorial partner Simon Taylor was always a prelude to something special and scintillating. We never knew where the next tutorial would take us, but it was always fun, always memorable, always illuminating.

We were enchanted and slightly in awe of the idea that our Ancient History tutor lived where she taught, in her beautiful rooms overlooking the river, with the comfortable chairs and the click-clack of the parquet flooring which I also associate with Barbara's rooms. The setting of that *locus amoenus* only added to the mystique as we imagined Barbara after-hours immersed in learned journals and Classical texts (and perhaps too with a glass of something to hand from her extraordinary cabinet of multi-coloured liquors from around the globe which various students and friends had given her).

The tutorials were an amazing experience. Despite appearances to the contrary sometimes, Barbara would always listen to our essays with a sharp ear and the occasional wry glance or smile. She had a legendary ability to quote back pretty much verbatim a sentence from our essays where one or other of us had cut a corner – sometimes at precisely the point where, on the walk across the bridge from Univ, I or my tutorial partner had told the other one: 'Gosh, I slightly ran out of time with the reading. I hope that she doesn't push me on that'. Almost invariably, Barbara would gently ask for clarification about what precisely was meant at that point of the essay, tacitly reminding us in so doing that our arguments needed to be based on proper evidence – but the guidance which she offered was always elegant and friendly, and often accompanied by Barbara's gentle and infectious gurgling laugh (which was always ready to surface at a moment's notice). The famous green pen with which she wrote on our essays in her distinctive handwriting was another element uniquely evocative of Barbara from that time.

One of my favourite memories was a tutorial about the development of Gaul from Caesar to Nero. I had been talking about the revolt of Florus and Sacrovir and Druidic practices when Barbara jumped up in a state of great excitement (as if stung by a bee) and said with a degree of urgency that was impressive: 'Do you know about the eques and the egg?'. She went to her shelf and pulled down a volume of Pliny the Elder's Natural History and she drew our attention to an amazing description from Book 29 of a mysterious object known as a snake's egg, created from the saliva and the bodily substances of intertwined serpents. This strange creation could form part of Druidic rituals, and as Pliny's anecdote went on to say, one reckless Roman knight even kept a serpent's egg in his clothing during a lawsuit, which led Claudius to have him executed.

Finding out about such things was just one of many magical moments in those tutorials which awaited us when we crossed the bridge to St Hilda's. Quite simply, Barbara changed my life in unimaginable ways. She will be very much missed by generations of students from St Hilda's, Univ, and beyond. Thank you, Barbara, for your wit and your wisdom, and for your boundless energy and devotion to your students over many, many years. Rhiannon Ash (1986-90)

Beethoven, *Piano Sonata in A-flat Op.110 1st Movement*
Played by Jennifer (St Hilda's College)

BARBARA'S LATTER YEARS

Mary Bennett (friend)

I wish to pay Tribute to Barbara and to highlight her enduring intellectual curiosity, her immense zest for life and her courage and stoicism in her latter years.

Although I am not an alumni of St Hilda's I do have a tenuous connection with the college in that I share my name with one of your previous Principals. I was at St Hugh's where Barbara was both an undergraduate and a graduate. I came to know Barbara after she retired when she asked me to host a Roman History Scholar from Japan, Professor Satoshi Urano. He is sad not to be here today but took part in a ceremony to scatter Barbara's ashes last week.

After retirement Barbara remained intellectually active. She continued to write, edit and update her books and she had recently worked with Fusa McLynn to translate her work on Augustus into Japanese. She continued to read widely and maintained a passion for crime novels. She kept up with current affairs and was always keen to elicit ones views on topical issues. She had an excellent memory to the end and would ask for news of friends and family.

Her zest for life remained undiminished. She welcomed us all to glorious summer parties in her garden in June where she held court and we drank fizz and ate strawberries. There are some photos of these on the photo board which you may want to look at later.

When her mobility became limited Barbara still wanted to go out and we had a list of places she wanted to visit. So we would drive out into the country and have a picnic in the car overlooking her favourite views which included Beckley, Brill and Rousham. The picnic always included a much appreciated good glass of wine! We also managed a trip to the Botanical gardens and gastro pubs were not neglected as Barbara still had an excellent appetite. St Hugh's summer garden parties were duly attended.

Barbara tried to keep fit in her latter years belonging to a Sunday walking group, many of whom are here today, and she could often be seen jogging down Morrell avenue.

However, Barbara had many health challenges in her latter years. She had sudden frontal lobe inflammation which left her 90% blind in one eye, she had cancer and also had a permanent severe non Parkinson tremor which made all fine movement difficult. She became increasingly deaf so found it hard to take part in group conversations. Towards the end she had many ambulance journeys (often uncoordinated) to and from hospital and visits by a myriad of carers some of whom she became friendly with. But throughout her ordeals she showed remarkable courage and stoicism and I never heard her complain about her ailments. Instead she would focus on her visitors and offer hospitality and has left a remarkable example for us all.

She was good friend to many people and will be sorely missed

BARBARA'S RESEARCH

Professor Gregory Rowe (University of Victoria, Victoria BC)

Katherine Clarke has invited me to summarize Barbara Levick's research—eight monographs, two volumes of *Monumenta Asiae Minōris Antiqua*, two edited collections, two sourcebooks, and a constant stream of articles over more than six decades—in five to six minutes. Actually: Barbara's research *and* its impact. Here goes.

Barbara's initial research focus was Anatolia and its epigraphy, starting in the 1950s with her doctorate under Ronald Syme. Unlike Syme's later supervisees, who were largely cloistered in Oxford libraries, Barbara made two solo expeditions to Pisidia in pursuit of inscriptions. In 1967, she published *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor*, a work that remains fresh in its focus on the encounter between Roman state power and local populations. Later, working collaboratively, above all with the much-lamented Stephen Mitchell, Barbara produced *MAMA IX* and *X* in 1988 and 1993, presenting 1,100 new inscriptions. Next came biographies of emperors and others, too often slighted by "serious scholars"—who however would never dare say anything about Tiberius without first consulting Barbara's work. Beginning with *Tiberius* (1976), Barbara reconstructed worlds—their cultures and values, politics and political institutions—and then followed her protagonists as they negotiated their contradictions. Tiberius took "refuge in his conscious virtue, in the sense of superiority that set him apart even from the men he chose to regard as his equals." *Claudius* (1990) spent his reign trying to overcome his installation by the praetorian guard and prove his legitimacy. *Catiline* (2015), "Cicero and Pompey were all victims of a militaristic slave-state which saw its subjects too as slaves" and punished "any individual" threatening "to win special credit by bringing measures in favour" of the underprivileged. Barbara's biographies anticipated, or made possible, work by Edward Champlin, Josiah Osgood, Olivier Hekster, with their emphasis on performance, self-presentation and self-mythologizing.

Third, articles on a range of topics. My favourite is "Propaganda and the Imperial Coinage" (1982), where Barbara confronted hoary questions of whether emperors chose coin types, and what their audience was, and argued that the types were chosen by young, barely post-adolescent moneyers, and that the emperor was their audience. From here it was a short step to the reconceptualization of coins as monuments in miniature in the work of Ada Cheung, Andy Meadows, and Jonathan Williams.

Fourth, women's history. Starting in the 1990s with her seminar series with Richard Hawley and subsequent edited volume *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments* (1995), and continuing in her biographies of Julia Domna (2007) and the two Faustinas (2014), Barbara sought to take the true measure of women's power and agency. In women's history, I'm not sure that we've yet caught up with Barbara. Witness her last published essay, "The Murder of Apronia" (2021), arguing that the grande dame Urgulania controlled Livia's hand, not the other way round.

Finally, Barbara's surveys of new work in Roman history, appearing bi-annually in *Greece & Rome* from 1999 to 2014. Barbara delighted in the work of then-emerging scholars like Clifford Ando, whose *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty* (2000) she praised for "extraordinary insights" and said deserved a place on the shelf beside Millar's *Emperor in the Roman World*. Delight tempered by shrewdness: "readers conditioned against imperialism may rejoice that Ando's thesis 'cannot be proved' for a millennium of countless ethnic identities, let alone individuals, when the articulate among them were Greeks, practised diplomats, and Romans, practised hypocrites, and both self-deceivers too. But it was time for a reconsideration, and this is a fine and profound one."

Barbara memorialized her beloved tutor C.E. “Tom Brown” Stevens for his ability to “come up with a picture that is at once fresh and convincing, because three dimensional. That is, as all good theories should, it allows the spectator to go through and beyond it to the solution of other problems.” This captures the essence of Barbara’s own research: capacious, welcoming, invigorating, and an enduring legacy.

Debussy, *Reflet dans l’eau*
Played by Jennifer (St Hilda’s College)

BARBARA’S LEGACY AT ST HILDA’S

Professor Katherine Clarke FBA (Tutor in Ancient History, St Hilda’s College)

There is, by definition, no overlap between predecessor and successor in a tutorial fellowship, and Barbara always conspicuously refrained from looming over the shoulder of the next in line. I therefore didn’t have the privilege of knowing Barbara as well as many in this room. I was, however, introduced to people for at least the first decade of my appointment here as ‘Barbara’s successor’ and between us, if I fill out my allotted span, we will cover over eighty years of Ancient History in the college. So, still tiptoeing into those impossibly big shoes almost twenty-six years later, I shall try to do justice to the creator of this role, the shaper of Ancient History in St Hilda’s, the utterly inimitable figure whose name I have taken countless times in vain, referring as I do with pride and admiration pretty much daily in tutorials and lectures to ‘my predecessor at St Hilda’s, the extraordinary Barbara Levick’.

The first time I met Barbara was as a new graduate. Having spent four undergraduate years in central Oxford, I had been invited to make my first foray over Magdalen bridge to enter the enchanting world of Barbara’s riverside pad in Milham Ford for an uplifting chat with her as DGS. The meeting was helped along by a small glass of something at what seemed to me a surprisingly early hour of the day! Barbara was warm, encouraging, thought-provoking and razor sharp – the perfect guide to a new doctoral student. Little did I suspect that four years later I would be back, bumping into Barbara on the stairs in South building as I headed up to my interview for her coveted position. As Barbara wrote in her typically generous letter of congratulation a few days later ‘it must be a fine omen to meet one’s predecessor on the way to a job interview, especially if it turns out to *be* one’s predecessor’.

I’ve already mentioned that basking in Barbara’s reflected glory has remained an irresistible temptation long after others allowed me a name of my own. These constant references to Barbara are motivated not by mere vanity, but by the absolute centrality of Barbara’s work to everything one wants to say when teaching core periods of Roman history. Whether it be distinctive or provocative propositions - Claudius as imitator of Julius Caesar, the descendants of Augustus’ marriage to Scribonia being systematically bumped off by his later wife Livia, or unforgettable phrases – ‘Buggins turn’ to explain the Republican principle of the rotation of power, ‘an heir and a spare’ perfectly summing up the succession planning of the Julio-Claudian

emperors, Barbara wrote quite brilliantly for all constituencies. Her article in which she allowed the emperor Domitian's wife to tell her own story in the first-person singular, which I had the privilege to edit for *Greece and Rome* over twenty years ago, was a masterpiece of historical insight and captivating imagination. The classic virtues of piercing clarity and punchy memorability gave her books and articles both their immediate *and* lasting impact, but also of course underpinned her effectiveness as a tutor. And for Barbara there *was* an unusually close connection between many of her publications and the life of the tutorial fellow. In such important volumes as *Tiberius the Politician* or *Augustus Image and Substance* you can simply see the tutorial plan for the term, rolling out chapter by chapter. Forget research-led teaching; Barbara epitomised the value of teaching-led research.

In spite of our official lack of overlap, I was treated to occasional glimpses into Barbara's approach to the tutorial role which I'd inherited. Almost a decade into my appointment, I needed to take a few weeks' sick leave. I tentatively approached Barbara as the perfect solution, able to step effortlessly back into the role for as long as needed. 'I could manage that, just like old times', she immediately replied. 'Just tell me the names.' Although the heroic age of colossal tutorial burdens had by then been left behind, the teaching load of a tutorial fellow in the 2000s was still quite hefty even in the relatively light Hilary term and there were twenty-six students on the list, sixteen of them taking a single paper! Nevertheless, on my return I received from Barbara the most acute and detailed thumbnail sketch of each one – she had in a mere three weeks with her exceptionally experienced tutorial eye got the perfect measure of them all. Let no one think they could party in my absence!

The following year Barbara was back again – we don't allow people to retire, after all – to co-mark the most popular Roman History finals paper with me ten years after she'd officially hung up the towel. Again, her sharp eye was much in evidence. Barbara gently rebuked me whenever she thought I'd been hoodwinked by an over-confident bluffer – 'he's got you there' – and she was no doubt right. Sharing both pupils and scripts with Barbara made clear not only how discerning she was, but also how much fun it would have been to work with her more often. The glint in her eye as she delivered another piercing insight made one always wonder what mischief was coming next.

As a complement to these memorable in-person encounters stands Barbara's vast and surely unrivalled library, which she has left as a lavish resource for the teaching of Ancient History in college – 'planning for the future' just like the emperors she understood so well. And this offers further insights into the life of an extraordinary scholar, teacher, and individual.

First, the prize-books – from Brighton and Hove High School and then St Hugh's college – their numbers permit no other conclusion than that there must have been not a single prize left for anyone else. Barbara was clearly stellar from the start.

Then, the early research trips. Barbara's extensive collection of travel books, maps, and guides serves as a memorial to her bold and pioneering nature. For her doctoral research in the mid-50s on Roman colonies in South Asia Minor, Barbara made two solo trips to Turkey, placing herself in a largely male tradition of epigraphers travelling in Anatolia. Typically, Barbara ventured off the beaten track in even this challenging and vast region, focusing on Pisidia; typically again, she was the only one of the travellers to publish a distinguished monograph as a result of her research expeditions. Barbara's intrepid travels in the pursuit of first-class scholarship epitomised much that characterised the spirit of the former women's colleges. She

belonged to a generation of formidable female academics, disgracefully under-celebrated within the wider university and beyond, though exceptional in their impact.

Beyond the prizes and the travel-books, Barbara's library is peppered with traces of her own illustrious academic mentors. Her historical education took place under the guidance of C E Stevens, many of whose books ended up in Barbara's own collection, and Sir Ronald Syme, her doctoral supervisor. The former, Stevens, was the epitome of an Oxford tutor of the aforementioned heroic age (averaging 50 hours teaching per week, sometimes as many as 70+, around conversations with C S Lewis and Tolkien); the latter, Syme, unquestionably one of most influential Roman historians in the whole of British scholarship. Barbara combined the best of both in a potent, even explosive cocktail (to pick up Rhiannon's undergraduate imaginings) of devoted teaching and powerful scholarship.

Barbara's book collection is, fittingly, both a stunning and bang-up-to-date teaching resource for the college and an outstanding research library, betraying an exceptional scholarly depth and breadth. Volumes which most of us might expect to consult in a specialist library just once in a lifetime for a recondite footnote sat on her private shelves. And this was true not only for the core periods of Roman history, but also for prehistory, anthropology, numismatics, epigraphy, late antiquity, gender studies etc. Many of Barbara's polymathic interests translated into critical support for university posts (in Numismatics) and research centres (Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents). Still more miraculous than their sheer range and number, Barbara's books show signs of actually having been read – all of them are well-worn and many annotated with running summaries in texts, tiny hand-drawn sketches of maps and battle-formations, witty, playful, sometimes cutting criticisms of scholarly views. Barbara's constantly lively engagement with everything she read, in sum her intellectual life, is literally inscribed in the margins of the books in this collection, just as the collection as a whole tells the story of her life chapter by chapter, making it an irreplaceable and precious monument to a towering figure in the history of scholarship as well as a treasure trove in its own right.

One of the kind colleagues who wrote to congratulate me on my appointment to St Hilda's wisely advised that 'replacing Barbara, our best-loved colleague, is an impossible task.' The red sports car, the exotic drinks cabinet, the retirement do in the form of a Roman triumph – these were just the most visible manifestations of a spectacular and dazzling personality, constantly energetic and sparkling with fun, a warm, demanding and insightful tutor, and impressively serious scholar who could only ever be a one-off! Barbara set the bar for the Ancient History fellow at St Hilda's dauntingly high. She could of course never be replaced – that is, indeed, an impossible task - but simply being known as 'Barbara's successor' is an honour and a privilege that I shall always be proud to enjoy.

CONCLUDING WORDS

Dr Hannah Smith (Vice-Principal, Tutor in History, St Hilda's College)

Barbara has left a remarkable impact. We have heard from Sarah Watkinson about Barbara's steadfast service as a College Fellow, in particular her work in helping to create the Jacqueline du Pre building, in which we are today, and the many decades that she committed to the College Library, among her other College roles.

Rhiannon Ash has spoken of Barbara as an inspiring and dedicated tutor, who illuminated her students' understanding of the ancient world. Mary Bennett, meanwhile, has shared with us another aspect - Barbara the friend, who retained her zest for life and interest in other people, and her courage. Greg Rowe has highlighted the power of Barbara's research, her erudite and pioneering scholarship that resulted in highly influential works that shaped, and shape, the field. Lastly, Katherine Clarke has spoken of Barbara's legacy at St Hilda's in the continuation of Ancient History as a subject.

I would like to thank them, and Karen, for all their contributions to this event. I would also like to thank Jennifer, a St Hilda's 2nd year MPhil student in music performance, for her superb rendition. Thank you to the St Hilda's teams. And thank *you* too for travelling - some of you very many miles - to be here today, to be part of this act of acclamation.

We all have memories of Barbara, and I would very much welcome you to contribute to an archive of memories of Barbara to be held in the College Archives, and honour her memory that way too.

From the outset, this event was intended to be more than an event of giving thanks for Barbara's life. It seemed clear that it was vital that this also had to be a celebration of Barbara, and for her friends to enjoy being together - and in this spirit, I invite you now to join the next part of this day in the Pavilion.

All are warmly invited to a reception in the Riverside Pavilion after the event.

Recollections of Barbara can be sent to the College Archivist (archives@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk) to be held in the College Archives in her memory.





Selection of images from the event







