

## Joy Manners

President, Master, Distinguished Governors, Graduates and Graduands, Guests, and Colleagues,

Today it is my great honour to welcome Joy Manners to a Fellowship at Birkbeck.

If you want to get to know another person, speak to their friends and colleagues. In all my time researching people for these fellowships, I have never heard such sincere and fulsome praise for anyone's intelligence, energy, and warmth as I have for Joy Manners. I heard phrases like "the most wonderful woman.... A powerhouse..... her energy and commitment is incredible..... such a quick intellect..... she instinctively knows the strengths of others and sets about ensuring that they fulfill their potential.... Is willing to help at any time.... An unusual sense for people management..... tremendous skills" and so on. After a stellar career in Shell International Petroleum Company, she turned to encouraging the arts and education. We are incredibly fortunate to have her support here at Birkbeck.

Who is Joy Edith Roberta Manners? Her unmarried name was Turner and her early education took place in Woodford County High School for Girls, in Essex. This distinguished school, built in 1768 as the manor of the Highams with grand gardens designed by Humphrey Repton, was formerly a hospital in which Florence Nightingale worked and then, during the Second World War, a retreat for Winston Churchill. For the young Joy Turner, though, its small classrooms and eager teachers cultivated a lifelong love of geography, as well as physics and mathematics.

It was no wonder that, after sitting her A-levels, she chose to pursue geography at University College London. It was a good choice. UCL has the honour of being the first College in the UK to appoint (in 1833) a Professor of Geography – the venerable Captain Alexander Maconochie – veteran of the Napoleonic wars who went on to become the first secretary of the Royal Geographical Society and then, after leaving UCL, a major prison reformer in Australia.

In the early 1960s, though, when Manners was at UCL, it was a lively, although relatively small (fewer than 20 geographers) department with a growing reputation in human and economic geography. Nevertheless, for true intellectual stimulation, Manners would come to Birkbeck, where the then-young Peter Hall had been given his first job. Hall – later to become Sir Peter – went on to become the greatest British urbanist of this century. Sadly, he died last year, but was a Fellow of Birkbeck and remained a supporter his entire life.

Thinking back on it now, Manners says that she always assumed that she would end up in Town Planning or as a teacher. The feminist movement was making its mark and, she says, she began to “stretch her feminist wings”. She joined Shell International Petroleum Company and began a stellar rise.

In all truth, multinational companies in those days did not have a good record of recruiting women. Manners was one of only a couple female graduates recruited by Shell that year. She relished the challenge – working in Group Planning and then in Group Public Affairs. She administered The Shell Grants Committee, chaired by the Shell Chairman himself. The responsibility was incredible. Manners needed to ensure that strong projects were put forward and then developed; given the vast sums of money involved, accuracy, precision, and accountability were essential.

Her talents were quickly recognized. She was asked to support John Blair, distinguished International Law Consultant for Shell and responsible for dealing with Shell's external policy and relationships with intergovernmental institutions, industrial representatives, and pressure groups. This was a period where there were debates about a voluntary code of conduct for multinationals, transfer pricing, and off shore tax havens. Climate change jumped to the top of the agenda, as did ethical questions about responses to apartheid in South Africa. Her skills came to the fore: she was brilliant at communicating controversial issues, smoothing passions, and making things happen. John Blair and her made a great team. Neither stopped working; both were passionate about learning; both wanted to make a difference.

After thirty years of working at this frantic pace, Manners decided to leave Shell. She was only 51 but her husband – the distinguished economic geographer Professor Gerald Manners who she had married in 1982 – was gravely ill. They also had a young son – Nicholas Robert Manners – whose childhood she felt was slipping away without her being able to really enjoy it. She retired. She recalls that, one day, at the school gates, her son said in a very loud voice: “Mummy, you used to be very important in Shell, with a chauffer to take you to the airport; it must be funny not being important anymore!” To which she replied: “I think this is very important”.

Of course, given all I have said, it will come as no surprise that retirement did not mean idleness. Manners threw herself into improving education, including St Paul's Cathedral School, with its extraordinary mission to train talented children, but also the universities. Our own Drummond Leslie, Fellow of the College, former governor, and great Birkbeck supporter, first suggested that she get involved with the University of London. Initially, it was the University of London Convocation and then the Council of the University of London, where she was one of nine independent members. While there, she served on the Audit Committee, the External Degrees Committee, and the University of London Careers Board.

During this period, she met our distinguished Master, David Latchman. Immediately impressed by her experience in industry, her ideas, energy, and communication skills, he invited her to become an independent Governor of Birkbeck, where she has served for the last decade in a wide range of posts. One, though, deserves special mention. In 2008, she became a member of the Audit Committee and was elected its Chair in 2012. As our Master will tell you, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Audit Committee, especially during periods when University funding is in crisis. We owe Manners an immense debt of gratitude.

I fear I am painting a portrait of Manners as a workaholic. Well, I hope I may be excused to saying that I think she is. But there is a fun, artistic side to her that we should also celebrate. With her first husband, as well as her much loved second one (Ian Wybrew-Bond, a retired Director of Shell Expro) she loves theatre and the arts. She possesses an exquisite artistic sensibility.

She has been active in the Westminster Decorative and Fine Arts Society, and, as is usual, never just sat on the sidelines but has served as visits secretary, membership secretary, vice-Chair and then Chairman. In this later role she oversaw its move to the National Portrait Gallery. She was also Chair of the Greater London Area of the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies, which meant overseeing the activities of 21 London societies with some 5,000 members. She remains their Area Trainer.

When asked about her passions, she mentions her family (her husband, son, step-children, and step-grandchildren). She is a voracious reader, a lover of walking, and “everything geographical” interests her. She excels in creating what William Morris called, those three great qualities: “beauty, imagination, and order”.

When I was thinking about Joy Manners, my mind kept returning to a lecture presented by William Morris on the 10 December 1884. The occasion was a meeting at the Working Men's College, established 30 years after Birkbeck, and inspired by us. Morris' lecture has the rather uninspiring title "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing". But, in it, he extolled

stories that tell of men's aspirations for more than material life can give them, their struggles for the future welfare of their race, their unselfish love, their unrequited service.

This summarizes Manners' life. She gives everything for what she believes in. She nurtures other people's talents, enabling them to thrive. William Morris insisted that "delight in skill lies at the root of all art", and Manners takes delights not only in her own skills but also in those of others. She is also a great supporter of Birkbeck – our mission, students, and staff.

For these reasons, and many more, we are honored that she is now a Fellow of Birkbeck.