

Green Leaves

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society

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"A few green leaves can make such a difference." — Miss Grundy, *A Few Green Leaves*

North American Conference of the Barbara Pym Society (15–17 March 2013)

by Chris Rutherford

We began with Choral Evensong in the Church of the Advent. For those who had seen the pictures in Tom Sopko's 2012 talk 'Lady Farmer's Lilies', it was a treat to see the towering reality of the church itself and hear the space filled with the wonderful, soaring voices of the choir. It was a most fitting beginning to the conference, with Psalm 145 telling us that the Lord '[gives] them their meat in due season', as we all know that men need meat. The specially commissioned setting of Barbara's favourite hymn 'God moves in a mysterious way' was quite beautiful. Afterwards, we descended into the vaults for the lavish supper we'd been promised and it justified the term. No greyish caterpillars in the cauliflower cheese here. The sidewalks, much disturbed by tree roots, made the walk to a cab quite interesting even if one had not drunk any wine.

The conference began properly on Saturday morning with Tom welcoming old and new delegates, including 20 first-time attenders. Seven of these had come as a direct result of the pull-out supplement, all about Our Author, in the *Boston Globe* a week previously. This described Pym's work as 'characterized by wry humor and sharply observed, eccentric characters ...' (full text available online).

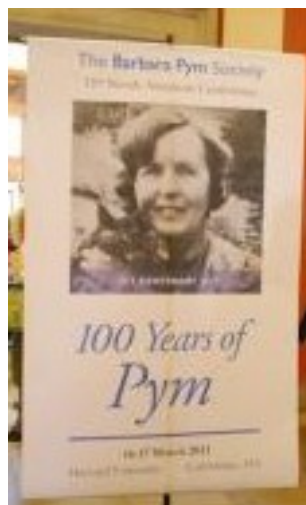
Sandra Goldstein drew our attention to the peripheral characters in the novels, and demonstrated that although we may think of the world of Barbara Pym as quite small, it is rather busy with people. Irena Pym's advice to her daughter was to 'See what you can find out without asking', and the field notes Barbara took as she went around enriched her work. The string bag with the fish's tail is Mildred's observation, but it was originally the author's awareness of the comic incongruity of the situation. Lady Clara is a typical 'name' as she opens the fête, but later she is seen 'putting a small *vol-au-vent* whole in her mouth' and this adds depth to her character.

These 'extras' affect the mood and sometimes the action of the central figures. An old clergyman in the Bodleian inspires Adam to go to Budapest after his wife in *Civil to Strangers*; Wilmet, wishing she'd had a drink before the parish hall event, sees women apparently murmuring together against the clergy, and something sinister in nuns with steel-rimmed spectacles. Some characters never appear, such as John Akenside and the Vicar of Crampton Hodnet, but they shape the characters who mention them. Mr Strong is a pervasive presence in Marcia's life but only appears in

the novel at the very end. Central characters become peripheral when we catch up with their lives in later works, so we hear of poor Mildred with the flu being attended to by her eccentric mother-in-law Mrs Bone. These old friends draw us back into the world Pym created for us.

Laura Shapiro came to the defence of British food. Boiled chicken with a white sauce was really poached chicken with a lemon sauce. In describing everyday life, Pym's novels create a culinary history. She was very conscious of what people bought, ate and said about food, especially the poor quality of food in vicarages. Wine flows unceasingly throughout the books, and Pym sighs for and celebrates good coffee. *À la Pym: The Barbara Pym Cookbook* is not a tested recipe manual, but more of a historical document and commentary which links recipes to the books. This whetted our appetites nicely for lunch, which arrived in individual boxes, rather like but more tasteful in both senses than Happy Meals.

We digested the lunch, the wine, etc., to the film of *Tea with Miss Pym*. Because it was much copied, it was, as Tom



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warned us, rather like watching an ancient home movie of old friends – in this case Hilary and Barbara taking tea with Lord David Cecil in their miniature garden in Finstock. The cat trying to eat the cake on the table was a bit distracting, but the best bit was Barbara’s response to the question ‘Where do you get your ideas for stories from?’ ‘Oh, I get them all the time. Like now!’ and she raised her eyebrows and gave a tiny, meaningful glance at Lord David.



Robin Joyce pointed out to us that all biographers present a view of their subjects and these views are usually different. Is Barbara a daughter-of-the-vicarage or frivolous and complex or both of these and more? It depends how you interpret events. Barbara was a Gemini, making it even more difficult to pin her down. As a spinster herself, she depicts single women in the novels with such a variety of independent lives and thoughts that they undermine the stereotype.

Tim Burnett’s talk centred on the names Barbara chose for her characters, and they ranged from historic intellectuals such as the Venerable Bede, Piers Plowman, and Thomas Hoccleve (c.1367–1462) to the prosaic road name for Mildred Lathbury. Barbara’s notebooks show that she spent a considerable time thinking up names for characters that would fit them; the cemetery was always a good place for inspiration. She was careful to match names to characters in a convincing and revealing way.

Tea-time was a celebration of Barbara’s 100th birthday with modern cupcakes, and the launch of Yvonne’s book, *Barbara at the Bodleian*. Speeches were made and cheering was heard. Great fun, and I am sure Barbara would have relished it.



Bruce Wasserstein made a \$25 million donation to Harvard Law School and has a building named in his honour. It was in this shining new place that we had another truly excellent meal, with wine, of course, and indulged in more Pymmish chatter.

On Sunday morning, Yvonne explored Barbara’s poetry. Her fondness for Victorian and 18th-century poetry showed in her undergraduate verse, but it also showed her inexperience in handling this style. ‘Frivolous lines inspired

by looking up at the Randolph Hotel’ was a rather nice poem on her wistful love for Julian Amery. Yvonne also noted that Robert Liddell, while showing considerable skill as a parodist, nevertheless manifested insensitivity in versifying upon such topics as the death of a Head of House in a plane crash.

Tom Sopko steps down for a year from his role as North American Organizer for a year. Warm thanks and praise from BPS Chairman Clemence Schultze for the smooth running of this conference and for all the hard work he has put into the Society were greeted with a well-deserved standing ovation; Kathy Ackley takes over from now on.



The dramatized reading followed. *Across a Crowded Room* is a short story and Barbara acknowledged that she struggled with this format. It describes an evening of potential relationships that don’t come to anything, so for a modern audience it was perhaps unsatisfying. However, it revealed a wealth of detailed observations we expect of Barbara Pym and was read beautifully by the Pym Players.



‘Finding a Voice’ was read by Sandra Goldstein. It is available in text form on the web: www.barbara-pym.org/Finding_A_Voice.pdf but sadly it is not available in audio form.

The conference ended with congratulations all round, and some waving about of champagne, closing with the singing of Tom’s parody ‘Unsuitable Things’, and the sensation that it had, actually, all been very suitable indeed.



Nancy Macmillan and Betty Zausner

Walk-Ons and Noises Off: Peripheral Characters in Barbara Pym's World

by Sandra Goldstein

Law today a woman with bright purple hair, her expression under it all understandably surprised; two well-dressed upper-class women, chinless ...' Barbara Pym jotted down in her notebook in 1955. Three years later Wilmet Forsyth in *A Glass of Blessings* notices 'two well-dressed middle-aged women with a young girl ... All three were chinless ... Near them stood a thin woman with purple hair and a surprised expression, as if she had not expected that it would turn out to be quite that colour.' The chinless ladies are later identified, but the lady with purple hair remains nameless, never to be seen again, and yet she is a great comic creation, especially since Barbara now offers a reason for her surprised expression.



The four women are like walk-ons in a stage play, with small roles and few or no lines. Barbara Pym created innumerable characters of this kind; some do not even appear but are merely talked about, remaining behind the scenes as 'noises off' – sounds created offstage to be heard during a play's performance. Pym provides fleeting glimpses into the lives of a vast array of people spanning all segments of society. Their appearance serves several different purposes: they fill in the background of a scene, add humor, poignancy and mystery, and often reflect the moods or throw light on the personalities of the main characters. Sometimes the reader has the additional pleasure of encountering old friends when principal and supporting players from earlier novels reappear as walk-ons or noises off.

They can appear as crowds, like the cross-section of Oxford's people in *Crampton Hodnet* taking a spring walk in the Parks, or the nuns waving handkerchiefs at the airport in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, or the men in bowler hats with flat dispatch cases and neatly rolled umbrellas in Mildred's description of the rush hour in *Excellent Women*.

Individual peripheral characters contain brief character sketches. Lady Clara Boulding in *Some Tame Gazelle* greedily puts a small *vol-au-vent* whole into her mouth, and Mrs Ryan in *Excellent Women* is a 'stout Irishwoman, a Roman Catholic incidentally, who was always in the front of the queue for our sales'. In *Less Than Angels* Mr Ephraim Olo, an African student, 'liked to drink Ovaltine while he composed articles of a seditious tone for his African newspaper'. Pym contrasts the soothing bedtime drink with

the riot and rebellion of Mr Olo's writings (though he later abandons his Bolshie tendencies to go back home and become a cabinet minister).

Some of those portrayed are obnoxious, like the manageress of the Anchorage in *No Fond Return of Love*, who looks more like a dentist's receptionist, and, in *A Few Green Leaves*, Jason Dyer, a young man of unprepossessing appearance who trades in 'deceased effects' and hovers like a vulture when old Miss Lickerish dies, 'waiting hopefully to pounce on whatever "effects" [she] had left.'

Pym also created entire scenes of broad comedy focused on peripheral characters. Wilmet's first experience as a blood donor is unforgettable because of the mad-looking Miss Gaunt boasting of her 'precious blood'. The dining room of the Anchorage Hotel is the setting for another comic scene, focusing on an odd group of people. The diners include a 15-year-old boy 'who glared resentfully around the room', a 'fierce-looking, white-haired woman, extremely thin and surprisingly sunburnt', and a clergyman who breaks the 'unnerving silence' with the fatuous remark that 'This must be a change from Uganda, Miss Fell.' But other walk-ons are near-tragic: in *Excellent Women*, a little gray woman heats a saucepan of coffee on a Primus stove in a bombed-out church, and in *Jane and Prudence* a young woman timidly approaches a poet at the meeting of the literary society but ends up standing alone 'rather hopelessly at a request bus stop'.

Some are merely seen through windows. Visiting Prudence in London, Jane looks into houses from the top of a bus and sees 'a group of men and women ... sitting round a large table covered by a dark green cloth' – a séance, or a committee meeting? At times the curiosity seems intrusive, almost voyeuristic, as when Dulcie observes in a hotel dining room a middle-aged couple being served with fish, '[i]ts white flesh ... exposed before them. How near to the heart of things it seemed!'

Peripheral characters can influence events. In *Civil to Strangers*, a chance encounter in the Bodleian Library with an old man causes Adam Marsh-Gibbon to travel to Budapest to find his wife Cassandra. And the offstage Wren officers who cluster admiringly around Rocky in *Excellent Women* carry a cautionary message for Mildred. Whenever she fears she may be falling in love with Rocky, she mentally transports herself to the terrace of the Admiral's villa and takes her place among the little group.

The reappearance of characters from previous books is an endearing feature of Barbara Pym's novels, especially for many of her friends and readers who simply want to know what happened next to their favorite characters. In January 1961 Philip Larkin wrote that 'it was nice to meet Wilmet and Keith again' but cautioned Pym about bringing back characters from previous books, saying 'it's a device needing very sharp control'. Pym's response was: 'With me it's sometimes laziness – if I need a casual clergyman or anthropologist I just take one from an earlier book.'

A hundred years after Barbara Pym's birth, the characters she created remain vivid. As Hazel Holt notes in *A Very Private Eye*, '[i]t is now possible to describe a place, a situation or a person as "very Barbara Pym"'. She is one of that small band of writers who have created a self-contained

world, one within which her characters move freely.’ It should be no surprise that her characters keep returning to her books. After all, we her readers do the same. A few years after Barbara Pym’s death, the novelist Anne Tyler commented: ‘Whom do people turn to when they’ve finished Barbara Pym? The answer is easy: they turn back to Barbara Pym.’

Sandra Goldstein was born in Solihull in the West Midlands and educated at Bedford College, University of London, studying Russian and German. She moved to the United States, and had a career working for the US government. She has always enjoyed travel and reading, but came only relatively recently to the works of Barbara Pym. Since then, she has spoken several times at BPS conferences, and has a particular interest in the social settings and backgrounds of the novels, including the clothes worn by Pym’s characters.



Rita Phillips, Emma Forrest, Sheila Kane



Sales of Pym merchandise



Donna Safreed and Louise Smith



Dan DiPietro, Eileen Kennedy, and Ann DiPietro



A comment by Thomas Otto



Robin Joyce and Chris Rutherford



Pat Cowan, Josephine Wolfe, and Perri Klass



Harvey Greenberg and Mary Knox



Deirdre Bryan-Brown and Linda McDougall

Smoked Salmon and a Perfectly Ripe Peach: How Pym's Work Challenges the Soggy-Tinned- Peas Version of British Culinary History

by Laura Shapiro

part from the occasional kind word for breakfast or afternoon tea, most food-lovers commenting on English cuisine have long shared Julia Child's attitude: that it's inedible, that it has little significant history apart from being inedible, and that a more sensible English population would simply take its meals in France. But Barbara Pym, one of the most English of all English writers, placed fine cooks and delicious food in her novels throughout her career. There's Belinda, who makes ravioli by hand in *Some Tame Gazelle*; there's Catherine, who turns out a classic *boeuf à la mode* in *Less Than Angels*; there's Leonora, who serves perfectly roasted beef and Yorkshire pudding in *The Sweet Dove Died*; there's even Mervyn Cantrell, in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, who brings his own French dressing and a special goat cheese to the library for lunch. Character after character, meal after meal, Pym rewrote the culinary history of mid-century England. Her novels amount to a powerful argument for a fine, resilient tradition of good English food – powerful precisely because she wasn't arguing.



Pym had no agenda; she wasn't trying to persuade us to change our minds about a widely reviled cuisine. She was simply doing what she always did – describing everyday life. As a culinary historian, I'm constantly aware that the main thing we write about is the very thing we don't know – what people eat. Yes, we have cookbooks, menus, market surveys and statistics on commodities: but to find out what a middle-class homemaker put together for dinner on a Tuesday night in 1955 is incredibly difficult. Barbara Pym's novels constitute one of the most revealing culinary sources I've ever seen. Not only are they full of food, but they're backed up by her notebooks, in which she often wrote down what she ate, as well as her recipes, shopping lists and menus. If you put all that together with cookbooks of the time – and most important, if you include the way she approached writing fiction – you get a genuine challenge to the stereotype of English food.

Pym worked close to home. She did not spend her career wrapped in theory, or evoking fantastic worlds. She evoked worlds that she knew very well. Early in the very first of her literary notebooks, which she habitually carried so she could jot down observations and ideas for the novels, she wrote, 'Two women at my table in D H Evans Help Yourself. Talking about somebody who has died. Hushed voices.' (D H Evans was an Oxford Street department store, and the Help Yourself would have been the store cafeteria.) In other words, the important place for her, as a writer, was the place

where you go to eat. That's where all the doors to the imagination would open. It wasn't about standing on Westminster Bridge or gazing at a country churchyard, as our greater English poets did for their inspiration. Her material would come from the Help Yourself.

Strikingly, much of the good food she records in both the notes and the novels is well ahead of the time assigned to it by the usual chronology of English cooking. Prudence's simple, seasonal lunch in *Jane and Prudence* – marked by her thoughtful insistence on 'a really ripe, yellow-fleshed peach' – appears in 1953, yet it would be at home in 1980s California cuisine. By contrast, there's a certain timeless quality to the pallid meals that so often show up on vicarage tables in Pym's novels. Cold mutton and beetroot, semolina pudding – it's the clergy who most often experience English cooking at its most dismal.

But whether she was evoking a dreary supper of baked beans, or a perfect roast duckling and a splendid wine, what Pym was really trying to capture when she wrote about food wasn't the quality, it was the Englishness. In her notebooks and novels alike, it's clear on every page that she loved Englishness, in whatever form it appeared. One of her favorite images, written in an early notebook and transferred to *Excellent Women*, was that of the English spinster sitting outdoors in a cafe in Europe, happy to be in the sun with a glass of wine on the table – and secretly wishing she could have a cup of tea.

Laura Shapiro is a professional food writer and culinary historian, whose essays, reviews and features on women's issues and the arts have appeared in numerous journals. Her books range widely over the socio-economic aspects of food and cooking in the twentieth century, and her biography of Julia Child won an award for literary food writing. She has a long-term association with the New York Public Library, having been a Fellow at its Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers. Last year she co-curated a highly-praised exhibition there called 'Lunch Hour NYC'.



Friday night dinner dessert



Breakfast in the Barker Center cafeteria

Another Barbara: New Insights into Barbara Pym

by Robin Joyce

✿ If biographies are interpretative. Some biographers see romantic liaison as Pym's eternal quest. Anne Wyatt-Brown developed a psychological account in her 1992 work. My insights join, rather than dismiss, earlier biographies.

Hilary Pym referred to Barbara as complicated, and her novels attest to this. Pym's belief that people do not necessarily show their true character is crucial to my argument that until the 1960s Pym adopted an approach to her writing that amounted to self-censorship. The comforting village images she used enabled her to engage with the contest of ideas such as her overarching theme, the relative value of scientific thought and imagination. Women characters also grapple with social issues. This Pym has not been written about.



Factual information is only the start of biography. The subject's, friends' and family's commentary add flavour. Hilary described Barbara as 'observant and rarely forgetting a foible'. Hazel Holt's long friendship created her version of Pym in *A Lot to Ask*. Pym's diaries include candid comments about events, relationships and tracking young men, fictionalized in *No Fond Return of Love*.

Pym's intellectual approach to writing is apparent in her use of Isherwood's phrase 'I am a camera' to describe the selective process used by novelists. She also suggested that a writer's fiction could be used to interpret her character.

Pym was foremost a writer. Her commitment to literary technique is apparent in changes she made to the draft for Belinda's character (*STG*). She took the sharper character from the draft and softened it. The sisters became visibly dissimilar, following the template established by Miss Doggett and Miss Morrow, in turn establishing a pattern for further novels.

Vital to Pym's writing was the relationship between women and men. Pym's parents combined the traditional role of father as breadwinner with Irena Pym's unconventionality. Pym's acceptance of non-traditional ways of looking at partnerships is apparent in much of her work. Her techniques provide a cosy cover for representations of women and men that disturbed conventional pieties about marriage and women's social role. Her characters continually undermine the notion of

patriarchal power in the institutions with which she is familiar. In particular, women characters challenge the difference in power between women and men. Pym said of the publisher's proposed title for *No Fond Return of Love* 'My novels are not about love – not *that* kind of love'. She uses anti-romantic techniques to challenge claims of romanticism. Although *Some Tame Gazelle* ends with a marriage, its portrayal is unromantic and spinsterhood is valorized.

Pym depicts women in the workforce. The dual authorial voice is apparent in her treatment of women's voluntary work for men. Although there is a lot of talk, there is no instance of a woman observed proofreading, making an index or typing for a man. Stereotypical spinsters are few; they have a variety of aspirations, qualities and appearance.

Pym rarely includes children in her work. However, it is hard to determine from this that she disliked them. After all, that prolific writer of children's stories, Enid Blyton, is renowned as an unsatisfactory parent! Pym observed children well, in a few short scenes in novels such as *A Glass of Blessings* and *An Academic Question*. As in most adult novels, they help examine an adult's place in society. Rowena's responsibility for children emphasizes her unequal status in a traditional marriage. She drives them in the small, secondary car, while Harry drives the large luxurious car; she cares for them while Wilmet, unencumbered by children, joins Harry (also unencumbered by *his* children) in a cosy bar for several gins. Caro is remote because she is pondering her future in the 1970s where she is expected to move beyond biology.

As is known, Barbara met Henry Harvey and Robert Liddell at Oxford. I suggest that they were instrumental in creating some of Pym's complexities which manifested themselves in this period. Harvey's comment 'Oh you're common property' is a sexual attack. Pym's self-confidence and belief in the legitimacy of her feelings and behaviour seem to falter. She presented racy images of herself simultaneously with trying to appear conventional. In turn, she resented conforming. She felt intellectually inferior to Harvey, in particular. In 'defiance' she exaggerated her interest in modern music, films and dance. They have their fictional expression in Morrow. The blows to Pym's self-image also resulted in personal and literary self-censorship. This led to the familiar and cosy images that conceal the authentic nature of Pym's novels and herself.

© Robin Joyce

Robin Joyce was born in Perth, Western Australia. She was educated at the University of WA and the Australian National University. Her studies (so far) have culminated in the awarding of her PhD, entitled 'The Troublesome Woman: A Study in Barbara Pym's Novels and Short Stories'. Robin began her academic life as an historian, covering the period in Australia's history where women were early activists in the Australian Labor Party and trade unions. She is a long-standing member of the BPS, and has spoken at previous conferences

We would like to thank Sherrie Saint John for her photographs in this edition of Green Leaves.

Barbara Pym and the Naming of Names

by Tim Burnett

Barbara Pym drew inspiration for the names of her characters and their surroundings from different sources at different times in her career. Early on she found names among the annals of English literature, later on from streets, shops, names that she had come across that appealed to her. With her anthropological flair she was always noticing and filing away details of her surroundings, listening to other people's conversations. Or she simply made the names up. Novelists should be given some credit for having an imagination, though in Barbara's case observation and experience were almost as important. Sometimes she compiled lists of possible forenames, sometimes she came up with both forename and family name together. However she did it, she always took immense care to match the name to the character in a convincing and revealing way. Not one of her names jars: with her acute ear for the nuances of social class she chose Wilf or Keith or Norman for her humbler characters, Edwin or Rodney or Piers for her upper-middle-class characters. Names are important, and Barbara Pym got them exactly right.



Most authors have felt the need to attach names to the characters in their novels. These names tend to fall into two groups: the Dickensian fantastical or symbolical, and the realistic, such as the names Jane Austen chooses. Barbara Pym steered a course between the two. Her names are realistic, but many derive from figures in the history of English literature or actual persons or places. The eponym of Catherine Oliphant in *Less than Angels* was a Victorian novelist while Catherine herself is a novelist. Some names in that novel, such as Tulliver, Lydgate, Gemini or Mallow, are taken from the works of George Eliot, Henry James and other writers.

Barbara seems to have enjoyed choosing forenames, and took a lot of trouble to ensure what she judged to be their suitability. One of the notebooks she used when planning *Less than Angels* contains the names Gervase, Martin, Felix, Cyril for the men and Primrose, Vanessa, Deirdre, Deborah for the women. When choosing a name for Miss Mainwaring in *No Fond Return of Love* she wrote out: 'Muriel, Elspeth, Sophie, Hester, Joan, Janet, Dulcie', the last being underlined twice and followed by the note '(the best)'. Dulcie's friend is thought out as follows: 'Vanessa [deleted]. Viola (who had been christened Violet). A violet by a mossy stone.' Barbara then goes into Viola's background in surprising detail, as follows: 'Her father had

been enthusiastic, sentimental and confused – fond of mountains – a Wordsworthian scholar, well, perhaps not a scholar. The lover would call her Vi.' Barbara then goes on to consider another of the characters: 'Monica for the worrying one who is interested in the little protégée.' Aylwin Forbes' first name is, of course, the title of a once well-known novel by Theodore Watts-Dunton, himself now chiefly remembered, if at all, as the friend and guardian of the poet Swinburne.

The naming of the heroine of *A Few Green Leaves* begins with yet another list: Etty, Effie, Emily or Emma (interesting that they all begin with a short 'e'). In the novel itself the final choice is explained thus: 'Emma's mother Beatrix ... was a tutor in English literature ... This may have accounted for Emma's Christian name, for it had seemed to Beatrix unfair to call her daughter Emily, a name associated with her grandmother's servants rather than the author of *Wuthering Heights*, so Emma had been chosen ...' Barbara writes in a note: 'My heroine, Emma – her name suggests not only Jane Austen's Emma, but Thomas Hardy's first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford.'

In an early draft of *Quartet in Autumn* the names are not yet established, and Barbara jots down alternatives: Letty / Rose; Norman / Neville; and Edward / Eric / Edgar. Curiously enough, yet again the alternatives for the character who became Edwin all begin with a short 'e'. Barbara's final choice is impeccable, especially since she wanted to establish the different characters' personality and class from the outset. Letty (short for Lettice) is far more ladylike than Rose, which is a name that Beatrix would no doubt have associated with one of Emma's grandmother's servants. Norman goes far better with that character's stiff, ungovernable hair and rebarbative personality than does Neville, rather a wet sort of name. Edwin is a brilliant choice. It conveys his wispy personality in a way that the warlike names of Edward, Eric and Edgar would not. Marcia does not appear in the list.

When it came to family names Barbara cast her net pretty wide, sometimes using names with the same rhythm as people who had played a part in her own life, and who perhaps shared the same personality. Fabian Driver, for instance, has the same rhythm as Gordon Glover, and is based on him. When writing *Some Tame Gazelle* Barbara seems to have drawn for her family names on clerics and writers: Bede, Plowman, Donne, Hoccleve. In her latest novel, *A Few Green Leaves*, the uncommon name Shrubsole is used. Shrubsole's was a very old-established silver dealer's shop in Museum Street, not far from where Barbara used to work. It has long since moved on from there, but still exists in New York.

Tim Burnett is a long-standing member of the BPS. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, he went on to serve in the Coldstream Guards. He worked in the Department of Manuscripts of the British Museum and British Library until retirement in 1997. His interests lie in the field of nineteenth-century poetry, and he has made major contributions to scholarship on Browning and Swinburne, among others. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and a consultant to fine art agents Robert Holden Ltd.

Pym Poems

by Yvonne Cocking

My study of Barbara Pym's papers in the Bodleian Library has been neither sequential nor complete. In recent years, both in the USA and in Oxford, our conferences have always had a theme – either a subject or a single novel. So I have only delved into those parts of the archive pertaining to the relevant conference theme.

However, even while pursuing a given train of thought, certain serendipitous items obtrude themselves on the attention and could not be ignored. Right from the start I was struck by the number of poems there are by Barbara and her friends, especially in the correspondence section of the archives.



It would appear that the art of versifying was quite prevalent in the early years of the 20th century. Students of various disciplines seem to have understood the rules of classical poetry and to have enjoyed imitating them.

So far I have found 33 poems, 17 by Barbara herself, six by Robert Liddell, four by Rupert Gleadow, and the rest by five or six others.

Among the earliest are two inspired by Barbara's admiration for a bank clerk, perhaps her first crush, while she was only 17 and still at school. As we know, Barbara, always romantic in her youth, was disposed to fall in love with young men with whom she was sometimes unacquainted. This one she must have noticed often in the Oswestry branch of the Midland Bank (now HSBC). The theme is of a superior being trapped among lower forms of life, and heroically overcoming adversity.

At Oxford Barbara continued to laud her heroes in verse. In December 1931 she was again 'in love', this time with one of the Moderators who set and invigilated Pass Moderations, an examination which all students had to sit in their first term. She wrote two poems about him.

Barbara encountered others at Oxford who were as eager as she to express themselves in verse, often in a somewhat malicious way. Robert Liddell, who had an obvious talent for parody, as well as knowing the basic rules of form, rhyme and metre, sent her his first recorded piece along with the gift of a copy of Rochester's poems. This is also the only poem I know of that has appeared in print – in Chapter 1 of Liddell's *A Mind at Ease* (1989).

Mock elegies seem to have been a favourite topic. Robert sent Barbara a rather unkind elegy 'On the death of Burnett Hillman Streeter, Provost of the Queen's College, and of Irene his wife'. Burnett Hillman Streeter was a New Testament scholar, and a Canon of Hereford Cathedral as well as Provost of The Queen's College. He and his wife

were, I'm afraid, killed in an air crash in Switzerland in September 1937.

Robert Liddell to my mind wrote the most clever, amusing and polished verses of all Barbara's friends. I very much admired another elegy which, for lack of other evidence, I first thought fictional, on the suicide of one Roderick McKenzie. However, Tom and I did some research and found that Roderick McKenzie was, in fact, a Greek scholar at Oxford, editor of the edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon which was eventually published in 1940. McKenzie did commit suicide in 1937 at the age of 50, though details are not known. These two 'elegies' have somewhat changed our attitude to Robert Liddell, who we feel took 'poetic licence' much too far, and displayed a mean and heartless side to his character.

Another of Barbara's friends sent her a similarly scandalous elegy. In a letter to Barbara, dated 20 October 1934, Rupert Gleadow wrote '... it has occurred to me that you might like to read my epitaph on Professor Griffith. It is unkind but true. In general I don't write verse, and if I do it is not for publication – this isn't!' Professor F Llewellyn Griffith was an eminent Egyptologist, especially noted for his translations of hieroglyphics, but clearly Rupert though him a bore, and a poor teacher.

Barbara's brief romance with Julian Amery prompted her to verse again and to write what she describes as 'Frisivolous lines inspired by looking up at the Randolph Hotel, Oxford, with Julian Amery on a fine sunny afternoon, it being early closing day, 3 March 1938'. A few weeks later Barbara composed 'Lines written to a Dear Young Friend on his Nineteenth Birthday'. Barbara wrote one more poem for Julian Amery, 'Sonnet written to a Dear Friend on the Third Day of December 1938, it being the First Anniversary of our Meeting'. Thereafter she wrote little more in this form.

Another of Barbara's special friends, Richard Roberts, was a frequent visitor to Brooksville Avenue in the 1960s. He did not share Barbara's love of cats. In particular he did not like Minerva, the reigning queen at the time, who, he thought, received more attention from Barbara (called Ianthe in his poem) than he did.

Yvonne Cocking is a founding member of the Barbara Pym Society and now serves as its archivist and historian. A retired librarian who now lives in Oxfordshire, she worked for more than two years in the early 1960s at the International African Institute in London, where she made the acquaintance of Barbara Pym and Hazel Holt. The fruit of the many hours she has spent delving into the Pym archives at the Bodleian library has now been published by the BPS as Barbara at the Bodleian (see Chris Rutherford's conference report in this issue).



Yvonne's conference best-seller



Gloria Nakamura and Charles Gilbert



The Revd Allan Warren and Sarah Saville Shaffer



Beverly Bell, Yvonne Cocking, and Jutta Schiller



Centenary tote bag



Tom Sopko

Composing and Preparing a New Choral Work for the Pym Society

by *Barbara Boles*

As part of the Festal Evensong on Friday, March 15, the choir sang a new anthem based on Barbara Pym's favorite hymn, 'God Moves in a Mysterious Way'. Rodney Lister, long-time parishioner of the Church of the Advent and well-known local composer, was asked to undertake the commission. He had been first introduced to the work of Barbara Pym by a former rector of the Advent, the Revd Richard Holloway (1980–84), who suggested to Rodney that he would find her writing filled with many of the classic instances of church worker interactions he saw (and privately chuckled at) around the Advent. So, already a Pym fan, Rodney was happy to accept the commission.



Rodney was educated at New England Conservatory of Music and holds a PhD in composition from Brandeis University; he teaches composition at the New England Conservatory Prep School and Boston University. I asked him how he approached the commission; he said that he wasn't given any strictures, but wanted William Cowper's text to be presented in its entirety, as presumably that was what caught Barbara's imagination. He decided in favor of keeping the traditional tune as well, since it is so strong and familiar to many. Deciding on the general format of chorale and variations, he deviated from his usual practice of working from the straightforward work toward increasingly complex settings, in order to end with a strong re-statement of the original tune and harmony on the final verse.

It's always great fun for the choir to have a piece new to everyone, and working through the new harmonies and placing them against the accompaniment was a good workout. The organ part, played so wonderfully by Ross Wood, the Associate Organist and Choirmaster at the Church of the Advent, was very difficult, and the somewhat archaic hymn tune was beautifully surrounded by complex adornments from the organ. Putting the whole piece together in the context of the solemnity of Evensong was a thrill. Having so many Pym fans in attendance was particularly nice for those of us singers who are also BPS members.

Barbara Boles, a member of the BPS North American Board, works as PhD Administrator for the Committee on the Study of Religion at Harvard. She was educated at Connecticut College and at the Longy School of Music, and has sung in the choir of the Church of the Advent for a number of years.

A Pym Reading Circle in Ontario

by Judy Pollard Smith

For the past two years, a Barbara Pym Reading Circle has been meeting a couple of times yearly to discuss a Pym novel at the Westdale Library in Hamilton, Ontario. This arose out of a most successful 'Evening with Barbara Pym' on 25 May 2011, co-sponsored by Librarian Caitlin Fralick and BPS member Judy Pollard Smith. Thirteen people braved lightning and pouring rain to enjoy a short talk, a Pym titles quiz and a discussion. A raffle was drawn, the prizes most appropriately being a jar of Ovaltine and a CD of the Pym-Larkin letters. There were quotes from the Daily Pym website around the table for guests to take home for bookmarks, and also issues of Green Leaves. The right mood was set by a 'Pym vignette' on the table: a china teapot, a box of Twinings tea, two cups and saucers, a tea-strainer, a small vase of bleeding hearts, napkins with green leaves, a copy of Hymns Ancient and Modern, and all of her novels. Judy Pollard Smith delivered the following talk, introducing Pym to those not yet familiar with her works.

Several years ago a good friend quizzed me as to how I could enjoy 'those Pym novels where nothing happens'. In my dismay I remember replying 'but everything happens in a Pym novel! Real life happens!' Nevertheless, her comment has made me think. As I was preparing for this evening I did ask myself exactly why I do enjoy her novels.

Recently I heard a lecture concerning T S Eliot's 'Four Quartets'. He talks about 'the still point of the turning world' but a further line provided my Eureka moment, my final answer as it were. 'At the still point, there the dance is.' So, yes, her novels smooth the way for at least one of the places in my life where I can locate the still point. Her novels slow me down, unwind me, shelter me from the treadmill, remind me where the dance is. They are at once gentle and genteel, gracious and kind, quiet and civil. There is humour of the British variety that has prickly undertones but leaves you smiling just the same.

Her characters are satisfied, not through material gain, but with their ability to embrace the life around them and accept people for whom they are. Their understanding of classical poetry and their ability to apply it to the task-at-hand helps to sort out the wrinkles. Pym infuses the common round, the daily grind with meaning and delight. Watering plants, sharing a pot of tea, knitting socks for the Rector; they all have a place in the cycle of life. No task goes without meaning.

Barbara Pym's people teach us how to suck the marrow out of our everydayness. She imbues her female characters with the gift of productive brainpower. She was ahead of herself on that one, given the time frame in which she wrote. She praises the value of the single life as well as that of the married state.

A British reviewer has compared a Pym novel to wine, commenting that it had 'more body than you might expect from its lightness.' And her following is deservedly growing. Her work is being viewed through the prism of our envy, of what we wish could be regained for this present time.

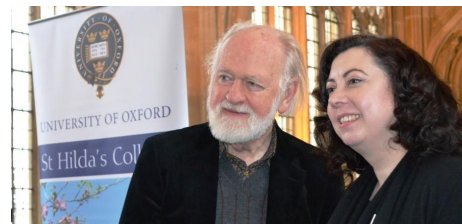
The group is holding a celebratory birthday tea at the library at the end of May, with cake, iced tea, bouquets from the garden and pretty napkins, a toast will be drunk (see back page). Future plans include a jumble or bring-and-buy sale, and a 'Pym Potluck' with food from the novels.

The Odd Couple

by Deb Fisher

Barbara Pym and Philip Larkin have always struck me as very unlikely friends. Larkin's popular image, that of a cynical, womanising misanthrope, makes him seem the last person in the world likely to appreciate the delicate comic novels with a romantic flavour that Pym produced in the 1950s and early 1960s. Yet his letters to her reveal a quite different man – a man not only capable of reading and enjoying Pym, but with the sensitivity required to volunteer constructive criticism without offending the recipient: 'What this adds up to,' he wrote kindly, after reading the rejected manuscript of *An Unsuitable Attachment*, 'is perhaps a sense of coasting – which doesn't bother me at all, but which might strike a critical publisher's reader – unsympathetic I mean rather than acute – as constituting "the mixture as before".'

I have heard the letters read twice previously, once on radio and once on stage, and enjoyed both renditions, but I can honestly say that I have never appreciated them more than at the Oxford Literary Festival on 17 March, when they were read by Oliver Ford Davies and our very own Triona Adams. Whether this had anything to do with the magical setting – the Bodleian's Divinity School with its stunning fan-vaulted ceiling, in golden Cotswold stone, its contours highlighted by subtle lighting as snow fell outside the high windows – I cannot be sure. The speakers' mellifluous voices drew attention more effectively to the wit and wisdom exchanged by Pym and Larkin over a period of around fifteen years. Oliver Ford Davies successfully brought out Larkin's urbane charm as well as his dark humour, while Triona Adams showed true empathy with Barbara's character.



Triona Adams and Oliver Ford Davies.

Photo by Bronwyn Travers / St Hilda's College

The letters tell a story, and only very occasionally was there any need for a few words of narration to fill us in on the background events. It is the inspiring story of Barbara Pym's return to the pinnacle of literary achievement, coincidentally contrasting with Philip Larkin's gradual withdrawal from creative writing, as evinced by the repeated expression of his envious yearning for 'proofs to correct'. It is also, sadly but not depressingly, the story of Barbara Pym's declining health and eventual passing, mourned by no one more than by this apparently unemotional man, who had met her only twice in person (and who would outlive her by only five years). The moving conclusion, in the form of Ford Davies's reading of Larkin's poem 'An Arundel Tomb', was a theatrical masterpiece no dramatist could have bettered:

What will survive of us is love.

The audience simply lapped it up. It was a full house, and the final applause came close to a standing ovation as people who had previously known little of either writer, enchanted by both content and performance, proved unwilling to let the event draw to a close. If this doesn't bring more people to an appreciation of Barbara Pym, nothing ever will.

Barbara Pym Reading Week (1–8 June 2013)

by Thomas Otto

In June, book bloggers from around the world will celebrate Barbara Pym's centenary with a reading week in her honor. This special online event will be available to anyone with access to the Internet and will feature a wide variety of perspectives on Pym's life and work. In addition to providing fodder for tried and true fans, the reading week will introduce Pym to a whole new audience of book lovers who have never read one of her novels or even heard of her before.



But what exactly is a reading week? From time to time, a book blogger will decide to focus his or her attention on a specific author, genre, time period, publisher, or other literary predilection over the course of a week. Given the web-like nature of the Internet, the reading week activities are not limited to the blog that is hosting the event. Other bloggers who have an interest in the subject or who want to try something new will also post items during the reading week. The result is dozens (sometimes hundreds) of web posts related to the theme of the week. Like a literary conference, the items posted can focus on any aspect related to the topic at hand. Unlike a literary conference, reading weeks tend to be non-academic, informal, and include lots of personal observations. In fact, sometimes they can get downright silly. For International Anita Brookner Day, there was even a photo contest of pets 'reading' a Brookner novel.

For those who don't have a blog, there is still plenty to do. You can follow the links on the host blog to see all the items posted on the various blogs that are participating, sign up to win prizes (yes, prizes!), and join the conversation in the comment section.

The Barbara Pym Reading Week will start on Saturday 1 June, and run until 8 June 2013, and will be co-hosted by Thomas Otto on his blog *My Porch* (myporchblog.blogspot.com), and by Amanda on her blog *Fig and Thistle* (figandthistle.blogspot.com). The two host blogs will have new content daily, and over the course of the week will link to other blogs who are participating in the reading week. If you have questions you can email Thomas at onmyporch@hotmail.com.

Amanda, a library assistant, 'lives on coffee, snark, and capacious Victorian novels. She has an aversion to telephones and communicates by owl exclusively' (ipsa dixit). Thomas Otto has been reading Pym for over a decade and is a BPS member; the fact that he made time actually to attend the recent Cambridge conference is amazing, given the number of books he blogs about. By going to his blog and searching on 'Pym' you will find his account of the conference and much other Pym-related material.

A Tree for Barbara

by Kate Charles

In a crisp day in early April, with snow still on the ground, a small group gathered at Cae Glas Park in Oswestry to commemorate Barbara Pym in her centenary year with a newly-planted cherry tree. The ceremony was performed by the High Sheriff of Shropshire, John Abram, as the final act of his year in office. After a pause for the local press to take photographs, the Vicar of St Oswald's, The Revd Simon Thorburn, led a prayer of thanksgiving for Barbara's life. Kate Charles, representing the Barbara Pym Society, read a passage of scripture from the prophet Isaiah, then a reception was held at the Guildhall.

Also present for the ceremony was the Mayor of Oswestry, Councillor Martin Bennett, as well as representatives of the Civic Society and the Oswestry Town Council, and Bishop Lawrence Garner. The latter pointed out in his speech that Barbara Pym was 'Oswestry through and through', and that Morda Lodge was her home for the first thirty years of her life. As a true Oswestrian she would have hated a lot of fuss, he continued, but she would almost certainly have liked the idea of a tree planted in the park that she had visited countless times.

Bishop Garner, a long-time Oswestry resident who has steadfastly championed the memory of Barbara Pym in her home town, had petitioned the town council for this living memorial. He was also responsible for the blue plaque at the site of her birthplace, which was dedicated and unveiled last year. Bishop Garner has written a booklet about Barbara, *Oswestry Girl*, published by the Oswestry and District Civic Society, and was a speaker at the Society's 2009 meeting in Oswestry. The Society owes him a debt of gratitude for his ceaseless advocacy of Barbara's memory in Oswestry; none of this would have happened without him.

The tree, a cherry, was fittingly displaying a few tiny green leaves at the time of its planting, and will grace a park where Barbara used to walk as it grows through the years. Its dedication will be marked with a plaque in due course.


Kate Charles is a former Chairman of the Barbara Pym Society and of the Crime Writers' Association. Her mystery novels are set against Church of England backgrounds: one series features David Middleton-Brown and another the Revd Callie Anson. Pym has been a great influence upon Kate's work, and a reviewer described one book as a 'bloodstained version of the world of Barbara Pym'. Kate will chair the judging panel for the BP Centenary Short Story competition.



Knitting and discussion

Gleanings

by Yvonne Cocking

 Christine Shuttleworth came across this passage in a review by Holly Brubach in the *New York Times* of *Gossip: The Untrivial Pursuit* by Joseph Epstein (2011):

Reading Crampton Hodnet, a Barbara Pym novel set in North Oxford, Epstein gets the sense that 'gossip traditionally has worked best in a small, one might even say tight community.' I can't help wondering how many citizens of small communities whose destinies are not in Barbara Pym's benevolent hands would agree.

Some months later she found a piece by Epstein himself, reviewing books on boredom, which, as she says, 'does not need to be read in context in order to be taken as a perplexing insult to a writer whom the author claims to admire (pity he gets the title of one of her books wrong!)

No one longs to be bored, but, if I am a useful example, as one grows older, one often finds oneself more patient with boredom. I recently read two very well written but extremely boring novels by Barbara Pym – A Glassful of Blessings and A Few Green Leaves. She is a writer I much admire, and I found myself quietly amused by how little happens in these novels. A Few Green Leaves contains the following sentence: 'It is an art all too seldom met with,' Adam declared, 'the correct slicing of cucumber.'

Norma Munson said she 'came across a marvelous book for all bibliophiles while browsing our public library shelves: *Howards End is on the Landing: A Year of Reading from Home*, by Susan Hill (2009). It's a delightful journey through the Hills' personal library of books read and unread, reread and never to be read, books in every room, on the shelves, on the floor, on the stairs, on tables.' Hill writes:

It [Madame Claire by Susan Ertz (1923)] sounds a dull book but although its confines are limited, it has as much human interest as the novels of Barbara Pym, who worked on a similar miniature canvas to considerable effect.

The sum of these women's novels is almost always greater than their parts, as was discovered when Lord David Cecil presented Barbara Pym to the world all over again in a Times Literary Supplement article about unjustly neglected writers. The poet Philip Larkin championed her in the same place and, as a result, she had a late flowering into bestsellerdom in the 1970s. They were precisely the kind of books my mother would have borrowed and better than many that she did. Pym's world of stuttering curates, wistful spinsters and awkward bachelors, of North Oxford and small country parishes, is superficially bland and narrow. What makes it of greater importance is her trenchant eye, her detached and sometimes mordant vision of these well-meaning, fumbling people at odds with so much of life. She is good on petty jealousy, hidden sorrow, unvoiced love, genteel regret, middle-class poverty. And on curates. I have her novels on the paperback shelves in the sitting room, for once set neatly together under P.

Oxfordshire Limited Edition (The Oxford Times's monthly colour supplement), February 2013, launched 'a

new series of literary rambles, by Maggie Hartford, with a walk in the footsteps of Barbara Pym'. This is loosely based on the Low Sunday walk taken by characters in *A Few Green Leaves*. Maggie's text is online at her site groundhogwalking.co.uk, under 'Literary walks'. In addition, Charlbury circular walk details, with maps, are available at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk (search on 'Charlbury circular walks'; Finstock features in Route 1).

Michael Wilson, who regularly scans *The Daily Telegraph* for us, noted that Barbara Pym's name cropped up in *The Daily Telegraph* on 23 March in an article on playwright Amy Rosenthal.

It's tempting to diagnose an 'epidemic' of singleness among my generation; to blame social networking for stopping us from actually socialising and to accuse our male counterparts of being 'commitment-phobes'. But I suspect it's always been like this. Read Jane Austen, Barbara Pym, Anita Brookner, Doris Lessing; the single woman isn't a modern phenomenon.

The *Boston Globe* did the Society, and its annual US conference, proud in an article by Linda Matchan. It appeared on 12 March 2013, and can be found online by googling 'Barbara Pym fans converge on Boston'. A fine photo of Nancy Macmillan with a magnificent ginger cat echoes the Mayotte Magnus picture of Barbara.

Barbara Pym would no doubt have been amused by the goings on in Cambridge this weekend: A crowd of grown-up people, most of them middle-aged or even elderly, collected together for the purpose of discussing ... the works of Barbara Pym ... but this year's meeting is special as ... 2013 is the Barbara Pym centenary ... Characterized by wry humour and sharply observed, eccentric characters, her novels have much to say about mousy spinsters, jumble sales, and clergymen ...

Matchan interviewed several members of the Society in an attempt to discover the lure of Pym. As a result of this article, the Society received a number of enquiries from readers whose appetite was whetted and wanted to learn more. Thank you, Linda!


In the *New York Times* on 28 March Elizabeth Strout, 'the author of *The Burgess Boys* and *Olive Kitteridge*, thinks the president should read Barbara Pym to give him "a few minutes to completely relax".' She would 'require' him to read *Some Tame Gazelle*!

Finally, another snippet from Norma. 'It's a silly poem,' she says, 'by Janet Walton-Page in *This England* magazine, Spring 2013, entitled *My England*. I rather cringe to include it, but there it is for your entertainment' (one of eight stanzas):

Good King Arthur, Bertie Wooster,
Barbara Pym and the Venerable Bede,
Rosa Mundi, roast on Sunday,
Somerset scrumpy and Cornish mead.

Gloria Jerman 1931–2012

Anne and Fred Holman

loria Jerman died from cancer on 4 November 2012.

She was a loyal devotee of Barbara Pym, her favourite author, who gave amusing, detached and penetrating expression in her novels to a world, and especially to an outlook on that world and its inhabitants, that so nearly reflected Gloria's own. Gloria's bookcase has a long shelf devoted to Barbara's works and related books. She had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the characters and plots of the novels. Shy and modest, Gloria did not speak out at general gatherings of the Barbara Pym Society, but those of us who were privileged to sit with her at meal- and other times at St Hilda's and elsewhere, were soon astonished by how much she knew about the novels and Barbara's life and could bring so easily and readily to mind. She would have been a great asset to any team in the quizzes that have latterly become a feature at our St Hilda's gatherings, had she not been too ill to attend.


Born in 1931, by 1943 Gloria was at a girl's grammar school in Portsmouth, subject to German bombing. Gloria wrote: '... the government decreed that less dangerous areas such as Winchester should offer the hospitality of their high school to us. This they did, obviously seeing it as their contribution to the war effort. However, in all human beings there is a limit to generosity and although the classrooms and laboratories were put at our disposal in the mornings their magnanimity did not stretch to the availability of playing fields or the swimming pool ... I find Philip Larkin's poem evocative of [this] time in my life when I used trains frequently travelling between Portsmouth and Winchester.'

After leaving school, by 1958, Gloria was working in London for the National Bank of India, in its branch in St James's Square. It was there that she met John Jerman, her husband to be. 'It was not love at first sight,' said John, 'but we did not have enough work to do, so we got chatting.' John's ambition was to go overseas and as he could not do that with the Bank of India he resigned and joined the Bank of West Africa. 'Once separated, I discovered that I would like to see more of her, so we started dating,' continued John. The bank required John to be single on his first tour of duty in Lagos, but Gloria and John became engaged before he left. They were married in January 1961 and went out to Lagos together for his second tour.

When they returned to England they had two children, Mark and Emma. Gloria was not fortunate in her health. There was multiple sclerosis in her family. Emma died from it in 2004. Gloria's own condition had been gradually growing worse over the years and five years ago she was confined to a wheelchair, which she hated, and was unable to attend the annual gatherings of the Barbara Pym Society at St Hilda's, which she had so much looked forward to every year. She continued to re-read Barbara's novels to the end.


Diary of a Provincial Pymmite

by Clemence Schultze

 suppose it must have been the shock of hearing the telephone ring, apparently in the cathedral ... it sounded shrill and particularly urgent against the silence that marks the entry of the clergy for early service (Book of Common Prayer). Groped guiltily for handbag, but own mobile was duly switched off, so turned my head to look for the party responsible. Amazed to see the Dean, that morning's celebrant, hoisting up his surplice and reaching for cassock pocket to turn off his mobile. After-effects of this shock preclude writing any more at present.



Call for Papers North American Conference, 22–23 March 2014

he 16th annual North American conference will be held in Harvard University's Barker Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts, on 22–23 March 2014. The organizing committee is seeking speakers for the conference. Preference will be given to proposals on the featured novel, *Excellent Women*, but proposals on any topic relevant to Pym studies will be considered. The audience will be mostly non-academics who are very familiar with the novels of Barbara Pym.

Speakers receive an honorarium of \$400, a waiver of the conference registration fee, and complimentary conference meals.

Please send an abstract of 150–250 words, accompanied by brief biographical details, by **November 25, 2013**, to Dr Kathy Ackley, North American Organizer, at barbarapymsociety@gmail.com with the subject heading '2014 Conference Proposal'.

For more information about the Barbara Pym Society, including examples of previous conference papers, see www.barbara-pym.org



Singing 'Unsuitable Things'

UCLAN Pym Conference (Friday 12 July)

Sixteen speakers will take part in the one-day international conference on Barbara Pym to be held at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, organised by Dr Nick Turner. The keynote address will be given by Paul Binding. More information on venue and booking at:

http://www.uclan.ac.uk/conference_events/barbara_pym_centenary_conference.php

Robert Mack: 'Suitable Women, Incomprehensible Men': A Closer Look at Representations of Homosexuality in the Novels of Barbara Pym

Joseph Kennedy: 'Blessings and Dying Doves': The Queer Miss Pym and the Bliss of Cultural Failure

Michael Farrell: Reading by this distinguished Australian poet from *The Fêtes*, his unpublished novel based on Pym's fiction

Kym Brindle: 'A Carefully Worded Postcard': Epistolary Economy in the Novels of Barbara Pym

Martha Rapp Sayles: 'The Wasteland Gives Pause': Gentlewomen and Modernity in Barbara Pym's Early Novels

Kerry Sinanan: 'Most Delightfully Incongruous': Desire, Plot and Realism in the Novels of Barbara Pym

Julia Courtney, 'Uneventful Lives'? Links between Charlotte M Yonge, Ivy Compton Burnett and Barbara Pym

Christine Rutherford and Colin Oxenforth: Missions and Missionaries in Barbara Pym

Bethany Thompson: Kind Hearts and Curried Whale: Food and Eating in the Novels of Barbara Pym

Frances White: Barbara, Jane and Frances: Reflections on Pym's Portrayal of the Clergy Wife from a Twenty-first Century Perspective

Ryan Murphy: Something Else Very Barbara Pym: Cultural Criticism in *Quartet in Autumn* and *A Few Green Leaves*

Jacqueline Johnson: Opposing Peaceful Coexistence and Change in Barbara Pym's *A Few Green Leaves*

Joanna Dixon: Singularly Single? Ambiguous Representations of Single Femininity and the 'Spinster' in Barbara Pym's *Excellent Women*

Pamela Osborn: 'The Priest and the Doctor': Medical Mystique as a Substitute for Religious Authority in the Work of Barbara Pym and Philip Larkin



Richard Wolf and Sarah Saville Shaffer



Nancy Macmillan



Clemence Schultze, Martin Rush, and Jutta Schiller



Friday dinner conversation



Ann Mason and Tim Burnett



Joyce Wasson and Linda McDougall



Barbara's birthday party

Coming Events

Please visit www.barbara-pym.org for details.

Alliance of Literary Societies on Barbara's Birthday

On 1–2 June 2013, the Barbara Pym Society hosts the AGM of the ALS (an umbrella organisation for literary societies) in the Jacqueline Du Pré Building at St Hilda's, with Larkin scholar, Professor James Booth, as main speaker. All welcome!

Barbara Pym Birthday Reading Week

For further details of this event running 1–8 June 2013, organised by blogger and BPS member Thomas Otto, please see item on page 11 of this issue.

Pym Birthday Event in NYC

Barbara's birthday will be celebrated in New York on 2 June, 3 pm to 5 pm, at the Cock & Bull British Pub & Eatery.

Finstock Local History Society

In Finstock Village Hall at 8 pm on Friday 21 June 2013, Clemence Schultze will talk on 'Green Leaves versus Golden Pavements: Town and Country in the Novels of Barbara Pym', with readings by Yvonne Cocking and Martin Rush. Open to all; tickets (£2.50) available at the door.

Pym Conference at UCLAN

For details of the one-day conference on Friday 12 July 2013 at the University of Central Lancashire, please see the announcement on page 14 of this issue.

2013 AGM and Centenary Conference

The BPS Annual General Meeting and Centenary Conference will be held at St Hilda's College, Oxford on 30 August–1 September 2013, on the theme 'Remembering Barbara'. Booking information will be circulated in early June.

St Hilda's Gaudy

On the afternoon of Saturday 21 September in the course of the College Gaudy, St Hilda's will celebrate its alumna Barbara Pym by a book display and readings in the St Hilda's Library, followed by a Pym-themed tea.

'An Excellent Woman': Pym at the Manchester Literature Festival

The MLF opens with a celebration of Pym's centenary in Manchester's Portico Library at 6.30 pm on Monday 7 October. Speaking at the event will be Louis de Bernières, acclaimed author of *Birds Without Wings* and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. An admirer of Pym's work for many years, he has written the introduction to the new Virago edition of *Crampton Hodnet* which he describes as 'funny, poignant, observant and truthful'. Another speaker will be the novelist and critic Paul Binding. Through Lord David Cecil, Paul became friends with Barbara and Hilary, and has now provided the introduction to Virago's *No Fond Return of Love*. Yvonne Cocking's dramatisation of 'A Sister's Love' will be performed. More info at <http://www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk>.

Library of Birmingham

A Pym event (part of the celebrations surrounding the opening of the new Library of Birmingham) will include a dramatised reading of *An Unsuitable Attachment*, devised by Yvonne Cocking and Maggie Parsons. The date is likely to be a Sunday afternoon in November.

Afternoon Tea in Boston, Massachusetts

See BPS website towards autumn for further details of this.

World Book Night 2014

It is hoped that Barbara Pym will feature as a WBN author in April 2014. Virago is keen to promote this, with *Excellent Women* as their first choice; more information will be available in summer 2013. For the event in general see: <http://www.worldbooknight.org/> and <http://www.us.worldbooknight.org/>.

2014 North American Conference

The sixteenth annual North American conference will be held on 22–23 March 2014. The theme is *Excellent Women*. Please see the Call for Papers on page 13 of this issue.

The Barbara Pym Society 2013-2014

Website: www.barbara-pym.org

E-mail: barbarapymsociety@gmail.com

On Facebook: search for 'Barbara Pym Society'

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Secretary: Lorraine Mepham

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Treasurer: Jordan Bach

Membership Secretary: Judy Horn

Board: Barbara Boles, Denise Marois-Wolf, Donna Safreed, Sarah Saville Shaffer, Tom Sopko, Isabel Stanley

Reputations Revisited

Extract from The Times Literary Supplement (London, England), Friday 21 January 1977; issue 3906; pp. 66-68

'The first issue of the *TLS* appeared on January 17, 1902. To mark our 75th anniversary we asked a number of writers, scholars and artists to nominate the most underrated and overrated books (or authors) of the past seventy-five years.

Philip Larkin [p. 66]

Underrated: the six novels of Barbara Pym published between 1950 and 1961 which give an unrivalled picture of a small section of middle-class post-war England. She has a unique eye and ear for the small poignancies and comedies of everyday life. Overrated: D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. This is not intended to mean that I think Miss Pym a better novelist than Mr Lawrence, but *Women in Love* has always seemed to me the least readable of his novels: boring, turgid, mechanical, ugly, and dominated by the kind of deathly will-power that elsewhere Lawrence always attacked. I seem to remember that Middleton Murry felt the same way about it.

Lord David Cecil [p. 67]

Underrated: Barbara Pym, whose unpretentious, subtle, accomplished novels, especially *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings*, are for me the finest examples of high comedy to have appeared in England during the past seventy-five years. [No overrated.]

A Toast to Barbara Pym

by Judy Pollard Smith

Here's to you, Barbara Pym, on your 100th birthday and to your wonderful world:

- ◆ of potted ham and cauliflower cheese
- ◆ of Vicars and church jumble sales
- ◆ of metaphysical poets and librarians
- ◆ of North Oxford sitting rooms on soggy Sunday afternoons
- ◆ of dripping monkey puzzle trees
- ◆ of Miss Morrow and Miss Doggett
- ◆ of hand-knitted socks and High Church
- ◆ of tweed suits and Low Church
- ◆ of sensible shoes and well-worn copies of *Hymns Ancient And Modern*
- ◆ of Harvest Sundays and Altar Guild Ladies
- ◆ of anthropologists and learned societies
- ◆ of boiled potatoes and 'greens'
- ◆ and of a good old cup of tea.

Here's to you, Barbara, and to the worlds of pleasure you continue to give us.

Wishing you were here with us!

Happy Birthday, Barbara!

Judy suggests that this toast could be used worldwide on Barbara's birthday. See page 10 for an account of Judy's Pym reading group in an Ontario library.

Reputations Reflected Upon

A poet from Hull said: 'It's grim
To study or even to skim
The novels of Lawrence
Which are my abhorrence.
But I love those of Barbara Pym.'
Anon.

Through bright Elysian fields strolled Mistress Pym,
Musing of cats and chats. A figure grim
With ginger beard a-wag, and hand that shook,
Accosted her, with wild and frantic look.
Aloft he waved a torn and ragged script
Whose masthead showed 'twas from some journal ripped.
This hirsute ranter, with demeanour rough,
Bespoke her thus, in accents rude and gruff
Scarce ever in those peaceful purlieus heard.
'What woman's work to mine has been preferred?
Unjustly praised, she; but I, reviled.
Style, content, art - all these have been defiled
In scathing terms by this disdainful bard.
For my male heart to bear such scorn 'tis hard.
With words this coward poetaster brawls,
But real men hew and batter, till one calls
"Stay: I admit thy mastery and yield,"
Leaving the better man to rule the field.
Her champion's distant - vain 'tis to harass him.
So in his absence I must turn 'pon Pym.'
Fearless she stood, and turned unruffled look
Upon the paper which the poor wretch shook.
The mystic blazon *TLS* she cried
And so bethought her, why it was he cried
And ranted thus. With manner soft and mild
She sought to calm his frenzied temper wild.
'Hold now your peace: let discord not be dared
'Twill those who never thought to be compared.
Your right of title *Wom'n in Love* I own.
But truly I, how women love, have shown.'

Anon. (18th century)



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