

# GREEN LEAVES

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society

Vol 2, No 1, March 1995

## Annual Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society, 1994

The first Annual Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society was held at St. Hilda's College on Sunday 14th August 1994. 4.

1. Mrs Hilary Walton welcomed all present to the meeting.

### 2. Progress & Financial Report

Eileen Roberts reported that the Society now had 158 members which included 14 life memberships. Mrs Hilary Walton, Mrs Hazel Holt, The Revd Prebendary Gerard Irving, Mr Henry Harvey, Professor Peter Lloyd, Miss Muriel Maby and Professor Robert Smith had all agreed to be honorary life members. The balance of the Barbara Pym Society account on 10 August 1994 was £2526.12. The only expense to date had been £175.27 for the printing and mailing of the newsletter. An Inaugural Dinner had been held on 15th April 1994 for Founder Members.

### 3. Constitution & Elections

It was decided to adopt a formal constitution as recommended by the Charities Commission stating the aims of the society, the election procedure and the terms of office of the managing committee. The aims of the Society would be: to foster the appreciation and wider knowledge of Barbara Pym; to secure the preservation of the manuscripts, letters and memorabilia of Barbara Pym in conjunction with the Bodleian Library; to provide a programme of literary events and regular communications concerning the work of Barbara Pym; to encourage and support publications and theses on Barbara Pym, her life and work. A number of members had offered to serve on the first Committee and they were so elected: Jean Harker, Secretary; Eileen Roberts, Membership Secretary; Devon Alison, Antonia Balazs, Anthony Earl Williams, Gareth Griffiths and Peggy Hawthorne as ordinary committee members. Elizabeth Proud was elected as the first Chair. All members of the Committee would serve for three years, the retirement of the ordinary members would be so arranged that two new members were elected each year. [Sadly, shortly after the meeting Gareth died, his place was taken by Kate Charles (see page 3).

### 4. Editor's Report

It had been decided to call the newsletter *Green Leaves*, the Journal of the Barbara Pym Society. The membership were happy with the choice. Jean Harker asked for contributions and suggestions for future *Green Leaves*.

### 5. Events & Activities

The consensus of the meeting was that the Annual Meeting and Dinner should be held in late August or September and should be accompanied by a programme. At least one other meeting would be held each year, maybe only a half-day and inexpensive. Programmes centred on Pym/food or Pym/clothes were suggested and study days.

### 6. Questions from Members

There was concern among members about future publication of the Pym novels, especially in hardback. Since Macmillan had declined to publish the proceedings of the two Pym conferences, the Committee would look into a limited publication. Members were encouraged to write to Macmillans on both these issues.

## Barbara Pym as I knew her



I always looked forward to a meeting with Barbara Pym. If I was the visitor Barbara and her sister were all that one hoped one's hostesses would be. If I was the hostess Barbara was always a welcome visitor.

We met during the Second World War when we were both doing war work. She was single-minded about eventually being a successful writer but I do not remember any in-depth conversations about authorship.

At the time her relationships with the several other people with whom she shared a large house were mainly to the forefront of her mind.

After the war our friendship continued and I read the books which Jonathan Cape published for her. She was modest about her success and it was some time before I learned about her fan mail.

Then came the disappointment which, in spite of all her efforts, lasted incredibly for sixteen years. It was with great pleasure that I opened my 'Times' one morning to find her name on the front page. She, too, was of course delighted but sanguine: 'I don't expect anything will come of this but it has made me happy.' (postcard 4.2.77.)

However, in a letter dated 11th April 1977 she says 'Since I was last in touch things have been going rather well for me ... the main thing is that Macmillan have accepted the novel I had sent them and are publishing it in September! ... How one thing leads to another and I was beginning to think I never should be published again ... the new one is called *Quartet in Autumn*.'

A card dated 29.9.77: 'We went to Bristol on the wettest day ever to record talk! (*Excellent Women*) ... Today I go to London for the Book Programme film. I'll let you know when it comes on - I'm very much enjoying all this - Lots of letters...'

Letter dated 5th November 1977: 'I'm so glad you enjoyed the T.V. Programme - we thought it went quite well too with Minerva [the cat] stealing the show ... one friend complained that we provided a somewhat inadequate tea, but there wasn't really much room ... I am going to stay in London some time, don't know exactly when, but *Quartet in Autumn* has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize and I have been invited to the dinner on the 23rd so I expect I shall go to that! ... I can honestly say that I don't really want to win it - all I wanted was to be published again.'

A card dated 18th November 1977: 'Booker is next week. I hope to go with my publisher. It should be interesting!'

A postcard dated 17.7.78: 'Am going to London on Wednesday to record my d[esert] island discs!'

Letter dated 13th August 1979: 'I haven't been very well lately but am now recovering ...'

This was the beginning of the end. My last communication from her was a Christmas card in December 1979. 'I have been in and out of hospital so we shan't be making much of Christmas this year.'

Her handwriting may have wavered. Her interest in writing never did.

Muriel Maby

## THE 1994 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND DINNER



Sunday 14 August 1994 was the occasion of the First Annual General Meeting and the First Annual Dinner of the *Barbara Pym Society*. We were most fortunate in the weather and the gardens at St Hilda's were enticing in their mid-summer profusion.

First on the agenda was an excellent buffet lunch served in the Dining Hall Barbara knew so well. Then on to the Annual General Meeting in the Vernon Harcourt Room, which brought back many memories for those who attended the 1993 Barbara Pym Literary Weekend. Hilary Walton welcomed the 60-plus members present for the first AGM which was a lively, and very useful meeting. Many ideas for meetings and activities were suggested to the newly-elected committee and these will be used to set the pattern and agenda for the future.

Those members who stayed on for the First Annual Dinner enjoyed a very special event. Sioned Wiliam and Elizabeth Proud treated us to an inside look at the world of broadcast dramatisation. Their after-dinner presentation on their dramatisation of the Pym novels was fascinating - and for most of 'us lay-people' so completely different from what we expected.

Sioned related her lengthy crusade to persuade Radio 4 to broadcast Pym novels in dramatic form; and then, having succeeded, to have to work hard to persuade Elizabeth that she was the only person to do the dramatisation. (Elizabeth admits that prior to being made to sit down and actually read Pym by Sioned she was not a Pym aficionado!).

Elizabeth took us from start to finish of the dramatisation process, the writing of the script, the choosing of the actors and then wonderful anecdotes of the actual recording sessions. She illustrated her talk with the most appropriate snippets from the recordings and readings from the novels and at the end left us with a deep appreciation of the tremendous amount of work and effort that goes into one of these productions.

No self-resecting Pym article can appear without a report of the food. The dinner menu was as follows: Cream of Leek & Potato Soup; Breast of Duck en Croute with Potatoes Boulangere, Broccoli and Baton of Carrots; Chocolate Mousse with Blackcurrant Sauce, Coffee and Petits Fours and it was delicious. Lunch had been grilled salmon, new potatoes and salad followed by strawberries and cream. (I have a suspicion that the St Hilda's culinary offerings are somewhat responsible for the publication and I hope successful sales of the Barbara Pym Cookery Book!)

One of the advantages of a meeting at this time of year at St Hilda's is that members are able to stay at College since the students are on vacation. Many members took advantage of this to prolong their stay to enjoy the delights of Oxford and some stayed until the following weekend for the first Mystery and Crime Conference at St Hilda's.

The 1995 AGM & Dinner will be held 23 September, a little later in the year to avoid conflict with other literary societies' meetings.

Eileen Roberts

## SOCIETY NEWS

### A Pym Thesis

We are very pleased to report that Founder member, Nicole Léorat, has successfully defended her Docteur ès Lettres thesis.

Mrs Léorat writes: 'the thesis *Les Romans de Barbara Pym; Une peinture minimaliste du quotidien* based on the novels of Barbara Pym focuses on what makes up the gist of Miss Pym's work: the description of the everyday life of a micro society (that of the English, Anglican middle-class) observed from a distance, which leads to both a humorous point of view and to a minimalist approach.

The first part of the thesis centres on the minimalism of her material: spatial limitation, repetitive time, the mundane details of everyday working and domestic life which are enhanced by the author's humorous and sympathetic approach.

The techniques used to highlight the deliberately ordinary nature of the material are studied: e.g. external focalisation by means of 'observer' characters, the use of material details, commonplace dialogues, different attenuating devices (understatements, oblique approach...).

A third part deals with the attempts to escape the routine, banal existence through the power of imagination or by actual travels. It then shows how these attempts always end in failure or derision, so accentuating the impact and hold of the 'everyday' on the characters' lives.

The last part of the thesis aims to place the author within a trend by pointing to the presence of the quotidian associated with a minimalist approach, within the contemporary artistic panorama. It also accounts for the favourable reception of this material and point of view by a horizon of expectations rooted in tradition and enduring, which coexists with the other trends, either experimental or displaying a very different point of view and material.'

*A copy of Nicole's thesis has been donated to the Bodleian Library. She has written a series of articles from the thesis which we will publish in future Green Leaves.*

### Some Tame Gazelle

Elizabeth Proud's adaptation of *Some Tame Gazelle* is scheduled to be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in six 30-minute episodes on Thursdays at 10.02 a.m. between 27 July and 31 August this year. The director is once again Sioned Wiliam, and this time hymns feature as the incidental music. Miriam Margolyes and Harriet Gordon play Harriet and Belinda. The cast also includes Joanna David, Elizabeth Proud, Peter Jeffrey, Benjamin Whitrow and Clive Merrison.

## The Prehistory Connection

I was introduced to *Excellent Women* as a young archaeology graduate by a postgraduate friend. Both members of the Prehistoric Society, we were delighted with the reference to Everard Bone attending a meeting of the Society, and with his timely 'escape' from Helena Napier by means of a Prehistoric Society conference in Derbyshire.

Reading other Pym novels, I subsequently came across further references to archaeology, which led me to speculate on the nature of Barbara's connection, if any, with the discipline. In her work at the International African Institute she would of course have come into contact with a number of anthropologists, some of whom are likely to have had a secondary interest in archaeology. Some may even have been members of the Prehistoric Society themselves. That this was regarded by the anthropologists as a subsidiary and possibly less worthwhile interest, is supported by the somewhat deprecatory references to archaeology and its practitioners throughout Barbara Pym's works. While anthropologists play major roles in many of her books (for example Everard Bone and Helena Napier in *Excellent Women*; Tom Mallow in *Less Than Angels*), archaeologists are secondary characters, often portrayed as drily academic (Professor Root in *A Glass of Blessings*), bumbling and ineffectual (Tom Dagnall in *A Few Green Leaves*, obsessed with the deserted medieval village in the woods) or downright ineligible ('Lady Dancy's nephew was too small and apparently interested in nothing but archaeology... even Miss Doggett could see that there was little future in dry bones and fragments of pottery' *So, Some Tempestuous Morn*). It would be interesting to know whether Barbara had any contact with academics who were archaeologists in their own right, and whether these characters were suggested by her own acquaintance.

The Barbara Pym cult eventually came to the notice of some of our academic colleagues, one of whom, Dr Robert Chapman, was at that time Secretary to the Prehistoric Society. The Society celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1985, and the Secretary took as the introductory quote for his speech to the Society's annual conference the telephone conversation between Mildred and Mrs Bone, culminating in the classic line: 'Everard Bone was at a meeting of the Prehistoric Society. It sounded like a joke' (Chapman 1985,15). The reference was much appreciated by the membership. After thirty-three years, the Prehistoric Society had acknowledged Barbara's tribute.

Lorraine Mephram

### Reference

Chapman, R., 1985 'The Prehistoric Society, Prehistory and Society', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* Vol. 51, 15-30

## GARETH GRIFFITHS



### An Appreciation

Some members may not know that Gareth Griffiths, founder member and newly-elected committee member, died suddenly on 28 August 1994, just a fortnight after the Society AGM.

With his boundless enthusiasm and energy, Gareth was a great asset to the Society. His is mourned by his aunt Jean [Graham Hall] and a vast network of friends, of whom I count myself as one. His loss is a severe one for the Church as well; at the age of 40, Gareth was about to embark on a new life, training for the Anglican priesthood. He would have made a splendid priest: he was kind and caring, interested in people, and had a marvellous sense of humour. Such men are all too rare.

If a man's span of life is measured not by years but by achievement and by the number of people whom he has touched, then Gareth Griffiths lived enough for several lifetimes. Nonetheless, he will be greatly missed.

Kate Charles

It is with deep regret that we report the death of Gareth Griffiths, a Founder Member of the Barbara Pym Society, and a great friend of St Hilda's.

Gareth died suddenly and quite unexpectedly at his home in Penarth, South Wales, on Sunday 28th August 1994. He was 40.

It is hard to believe that such a vital and delightful person is no longer with us. My last memory is of his roaring with laughter in a conversation about defamation of real persons in fiction, as he announced, 'I'd slap a writ on them!'— and then he went off to organise a party.

Gareth Lloyd Griffiths was born in 1954 in the Rhondda and brought up in Penarth, the older son of the late Curwen Lloyd Griffiths, a lecturer at the South Glamorgan Institute, and his wife Doris, a nurse. Gareth was educated at Penarth Grammar School and then at Jesus College, Oxford, where he read Modern History.

After graduating he took up journalism, and trained with Thomson Regional Newspapers in South Wales, later moving to the *Liverpool Daily Post* and the *Financial Times*. He left the *FT* in 1984, having been for a time its youngest reporter, and took a postgraduate law degree at the City University. He was called to the Bar by Gray's Inn in 1986, and, on the point of

commencing pupillage in chambers, switched instead to public relations following a summer job in PR.

He worked for various PR firms in London and then set up his own consultancy in Penarth. He was responsible for PR for the Booker Prize, the Crimewriters' Association's Silver Dagger Award and Swansea's successful bid to be designated 'City of Literature'. He was on the Bodleian Library's Appeal Committee, and worked for the Labour Party in Wales as press officer at every general election since 1979.

He was chairman of the current fund-raising appeal for his beloved St Augustine's Church in Penarth, and it was to the Church that his thoughts turned most recently when he decided to seek ordination into the Church in Wales. At the time of his death he was due to begin reading for holy orders at St Michael's College, Llandaff.

Gareth's funeral took place at St Augustine's Church on 6th September, with a Requiem Mass led by the Rector of Penarth, followed by interment at Penarth Cemetery.

We extend our deepest sympathies to Gareth's aunt, Jean Graham Hall. Donations in his memory may be sent to the Parish of Penarth with Lavernock Fund, c/o Rev. Canon N. H. Collins, 13 Hickman Road, Penarth.

Jean Harker

## THE PYM SOCIETY

### NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the new members who have joined since the last newsletter was received.

#### Honorary Life Member Miss Honor Wyatt

Mrs Fran Arthur  
Mrs D. Bryan-Brown  
Mrs J.A. Buckley  
Mrs Annie Carter  
Dr Rosamund Cleal  
Mrs Pamela Colman  
Ms Miriam Curtis  
Mrs P. M. Davidson  
Dr Stephen Derry  
Mrs Nest Entwistle  
Dr Jan Fergus  
Miss Francesca M. Flynn  
Mrs Enid Hardy  
Mr Robert Houston  
Miss Imelda Houston  
Miss Helen J. Howie  
Mr B.W. Jenner  
Mrs Mary Joice  
Mrs Stephanie Kay  
Ms Diane E. Lane  
Mrs Marion Liebson  
Miss Linda Litchfield  
Miss Miriam Margolyes  
Ms Frances McKinnon  
Dr Susan L. Peters  
Professor Anne Pilgrim  
Ms Celia M. Potts  
Ms Patricia Potts  
M. Schumacher  
A. Stratton  
Miss Joyce Sugg  
Mrs Annie Toon  
Mrs Muriel Watson

### Marriage is in the Air!

During the last six months two of our Founder Members, Dr Alison Shell and Dr Dora Thornton celebrated their weddings. Alison was married to Arnold Hunt on 29th October and Dora married Jeremy Warren on January 14th. In both cases this really is a family affair for Alison's parents, Jean and Stephen Shell, are also Founder Members, as is Dora's mother, Mrs Ann Thornton. Our warmest congratulations go to both families and every happiness to the newlyweds. (Dora and Alison were co-organisers of the 1993 Literary Weekend with editors, Jean Harker and Eileen Roberts.) Mrs Shell is also acting secretary of the new Charlotte M. Yonge society which will be holding its Inaugural Meeting 18 November at Friends House, London (please phone her at 081 203 4353 for information).

### GREEN LEAVES

Editors: Jean Harker  
Eileen Roberts  
All correspondence and queries to:  
The Barbara Pym Society  
The Development & Alumnae Office  
St Hilda's College, Oxford  
OX4 1DY  
Telephone: (01865) 276828  
Fax: (01865) 276820

## BARBARA PYM: The Beginning ---

It was in 1950 and I was the Librarian for the Manchester branch of the Times Book Club. Among some new books which arrived one morning was one by an author whom I did not know. I opened it and began to read:



"The new curate seemed quite a nice young man, but what a pity it was that his combinations showed, tucked carelessly into his socks, when he sat down. Belinda had noticed it when they had met him for the first time at the vicarage last week and had felt quite embarrassed. Perhaps Harriet could say something to him about it".

I read to the end of the page and was completely hooked. The author, of course, was Barbara Pym and the book was *Some Tame Gazelle*.

Thereafter the wonderful world of Barbara Pym opened - Mildred Lathbury, Rockingham Napier, Prudence Bates and dear Jane, Wilmet, Father Thames, Miss Clovis and Miss Lydgate, Deirdre and Catherine, and of course wonderful Miss Doggett. So many more major and minor characters all individual and brilliantly portrayed. The books came out at about two-yearly intervals. I relished their publication and read slowly to make them last, but finding it difficult to do so as I could not put them down. And so it went on.

*No Fond Return of Love* was published in 1961 and that became my favourite. How I would have loved to go with Dulcie to the Literary Conference - and later to have accompanied her to Mrs Williton's Bazaar and subsequently to the West Country (with Viola) to discover the Hotel home of Neville and Aylwyn Forbes (with its moulting eagle!) to encounter their delightful mother.

After the publication of *No Fond Return of Love* there was nothing. A long silence. What had happened? Was Barbara Pym ill? Was she no longer able to continue with her writing?

Some years later, and I remember the occasion very well, I decided, one afternoon, to telephone her publishers, Jonathan Cape, to ask if there was the possibility of the publication of another Barbara Pym novel. By this time I had

worked with a publishing company and so knew which department to contact. Now if you work in that department you know which books are going to be published and can give an immediate reply.

There was no immediate response to my enquiry - I was asked to "hold the line". After a while I was asked if I would give my telephone number and they would call me back. They did, after a few days. "We have no plans to publish a novel by Barbara Pym". Phone down - no time for me to ask why. So that was that.

But then in 1977 *The Times Literary Supplement* asked noted critics to nominate the most underrated writers of this century. Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin nominated Barbara Pym - and the rest is history .....

A few years ago, while staying with friends in Somerset, the name Hazel Holt was mentioned at a little party. "Hazel Holt" I immediately exclaimed, "but she was the friend of Barbara Pym, another Literary Executor". "Of course" said a friend "you are a Barbara Pym enthusiast, we must arrange for you to meet". And so I did have the pleasure of meeting Hazel Holt one morning. I remember she said she had just dispatched the final manuscript of her excellent biography of Barbara Pym *A Lot to Ask* to the publishers. Of course I much enjoyed our long conversation about Barbara Pym and at the end I said "I very much regret never having written to her, I often wanted to." "She would have been pleased," was the reply.

Peggy Hawthorne

### Don't give up!

How I enjoyed the first annual meeting of the Society. It was worth coming down from Leicestershire and I am so pleased I did.

It had a very happy and unusual outcome for me which I must tell. I have written a short book about my travels on the Inland Waterways. Sixteen times I sent it to a publisher and sixteen times it thumped back through my letterbox, so I set it aside. After the meeting I thought of Barbara Pym's years in the wilderness and decided to try again with my manuscript. This time, instead of the expected return by post, the day before my holiday I had a telephone call from a publisher who said the work was 'charming and idiosyncratic' and it is to be published: we hope in time for Christmas [1994]. A fairy story, is it not?

Thank you Barbara Pym and the Barbara Pym Society. Kindest regards and best wishes to you all.

Jean Matthey