

# GREEN LEAVES

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society

Vol 2, No 2, February 1996

## A PARADE OF FASHIONS



*A trio of superb models from the Balazs Collection: Committee member, Antonia Balazs, is in the centre*

The first session of our Annual Meeting was the paper Excellent Fashions for Excellent Women presented by Triona Adams, one of St Hilda's own undergraduates reading English. Triona began with the reactions of her contemporaries who maintained that the only fashions likely to be found in the works of Barbara Pym were beige cardigans. They could not, of course, have been more wrong. Barbara Pym's interest in and devotion to clothes is evident both in her novels and in her private writings (special mention of the famous C & A blouse worn to the Booker Prize dinner). Triona examined the literary use which Barbara Pym made of clothes in her novels to depict and reinforce character. Triona's intellectual examination of Barbara Pym and clothes was later supplemented by practical experience as she took part as one of the models in a splendid Parade of Fashion from the 1920s to the 1960s presented by Mrs Lesley

Balazs, mother of former committee member Antonia Balazs. Mrs Balazs, who is a fashion and social historian, has an extensive collection of women's clothes and accessories, and uses them for presentations relating to women's roles and social history, with her own commentary.

She delighted her audience with a parade of glorious fashions, punctuated with references to Barbara Pym. Outfits were modelled from the sporty and lazy (aviatrix, clothes for skating and golfing, Women's League of Health and Beauty, beach pyjamas), to the dreamily romantic (teagowns in printed chiffon), to the stunningly elegant (long black evening dress with gold kid appliqué at the neck, black Dior dress and jacket and tiny black velvet hat with veil). Fashion is, after all, as Mrs Balazs reminded us, 'the business of making women look beautiful'. She took us from the time when a large and varied wardrobe was essential to cope with all aspects of a fashionable woman's life,

through wartime austerity and practicality (siren suit, Red Cross commandant's uniform), to the beginning of the clothes revolution of the 1960s (egg-yolk yellow Cardin miniskirt with crossed shoulder straps worn with a black Jean Muir body and black tights).

We are particularly grateful to Mrs Balazs for presenting this Parade of Fashion, as she made a special journey from the U.S., bringing items from her own collection with her. In the space of a week she enlisted the help of other fashion professionals (including the owner of the London clothes shop Cornucopia), chose the models (all friends and volunteers), allocated the fashions, and rehearsed and presented the show. Mrs Balazs is happy to advise on fashion and social history, and welcomes offers of additions to her collection. Her address is: Box 2271, Setauket, N.Y. 11733, U.S.A. (More pictures of the meeting on the back page.)

*Jean Harker*

**REPORT OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY, HELD IN THE DINING HALL OF ST HILDA'S COLLEGE, OXFORD, ON SATURDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 1995**

Approximately eighty members of the Barbara Pym Society attended the second Annual General Meeting of the Society. Committee members who attended were Mrs Hilary Walton, Ms Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary), Mrs Jean Harker (Secretary), Ms Kate Charles, Ms Antonia Balazs, and Ms Devon Allison. In the absence from the Chair of Ms Elizabeth Proud, who was unwell, Kate Charles took over the Chair pro tem. Miss Peggy Hawthorne was absent through illness, and Mr Anthony Earl Williams was also absent.

1. Hilary Walton welcomed members to the second AGM of the Barbara Pym Society. Kate Charles reminded members that her presence on the Committee was due to the sad death of Gareth Griffiths in August 1994. She gave out the good news that the Barbara Pym Society now had a membership of over two hundred.

**2. Progress & Financial Report**

Eileen Roberts reported that the balance of the Barbara Pym Society account as of 23 September 1995 was £3,513.43. The income for the year was £1655.57 and the expenditure £421.61, which represented £199.00 for the newsletter and £222.61 for the Spring Meeting.

**3. Constitution and Elections**

A draft constitution, based on St Hilda's constitution, was circulated for discussion.

(i) It was agreed to prepare a letter to the Bodleian Library asking them to approve or amend that part of the 'Aims of the Society' which refers to the Bodleian in regard to Barbara Pym scholarship.

(ii) Some opposition was voiced to the (ad hoc) use in previous correspondence and issues of *Green Leaves* of the term 'Chair'. Proposals were made for the use instead of the terms 'Chairman' or 'Chairwoman' or the Scottish non-gender-specific term 'Convener', and there were some supporters for 'Chair'. A vote was taken which by a small majority favoured 'Chairman' in preference to 'Chairwoman'.

(iii) The duration of terms of office of members of the Committee was discussed. It was agreed that the posts of Chairman and Secretary should not both end at the same time, nor should too many committee members be due for retirement at one time. The membership voted in favour of the following:-

(a) The office of Membership Secretary should remain—at the discretion of the membership, and 'except in cases of malfeasance'—with Eileen Roberts, who is also Alumnae Officer of St Hilda's College, for reasons of easy financial administration. The motion to retain Eileen Roberts as Membership Secretary was passed unanimously.

(b) The Chairman should serve for a five-year period after which s/he would not be immediately eligible for re-election, and there should in addition be a one-year period in which the previous Chairman serves in an ex-officio position to assist the incoming Chairman.

(c) The Secretary should serve for three years, and then be eligible for re-election for a further term of three years, after which s/he would not be eligible for re-election as Secretary.

(d) Ordinary members of the committee could serve two consecutive three-year terms but should then have a period of a minimum of two years off. The terms of the ordinary members should be staggered to keep continuity.

**4. Any Other Questions**

(i) Suggestions were made that the sentences of our constitution should be numbered, and that included in our constitution should be the mechanism to amend it.

(ii) It was suggested that it would be worth applying for Registered Charitable Status (if granted this would need to be included in our constitution). Eileen Roberts reminded the meeting that St Hilda's College, which is currently home to the Society, already has Registered Charitable Status. The committee undertook to review the position and report back at next year's AGM.

(iii) In regard to the constitution, it was proposed that any amendment to the constitution should have to be put to the vote at the AGM and should have to be passed by two-thirds of the membership. All information relating to any such amendment should have to be mailed to all members two months in advance of the AGM. The possibility of a postal ballot, to be distributed to members with the newsletter, was discussed. We were told that a model constitution may be obtained from the Church Commissioners.

There was also the question of provision for an extra-ordinary general meeting. It was suggested that this should be at the discretion of the committee, with a month's notice (to be decided). It was proposed to include a draft amended constitution with the next mailing of the newsletter. The proposed election procedure was voted acceptable.

**5. Elections**

There were vacancies as follows on the committee: one vacancy for one year (to complete the three-year term of Antonia Balazs, who has resigned because she is returning to the U.S.), two vacancies each of three years. Those proposed were elected: Yvonne Cocking (vacancy of one year), Louise Ross and Michael Wilson. Eileen Roberts asked for approval to appoint Ellen Miller our representative in the U.S.A. This was carried with applause (Ellen Miller was present).

**6. Editor's Report**

Jean Harker expressed the hope that members had enjoyed the previous two issues of *Green*

*Leaves*, reporting that an application had been made for an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number). The next issue of *Green Leaves* would cover the AGM and the Weekend's events, and contributions and suggestions would be welcomed.

**7. Events and Activities**

Suggestions were made for a London meeting to cover the topic 'Barbara Pym's London', with associated walks and talks. The problem of cost for those based outside London was raised, with the suggestion of an all-day Saturday meeting followed by an optional Sunday session. There were immediate offers of hospitality from members living in London. London University (outside term) was suggested as a venue/place of residence. A trip to the African Institute (in its new location - it has moved since Barbara Pym worked there) was suggested, and also a meal at one of Barbara Pym's favourite restaurants. Hilary Walton informed the membership that she will be speaking at a special service at St Gabriel's, Warwick Square, London SW1, on Wednesday 14 February. This church is featured in *A Glass of Blessings*. There was a call to hold a Spring Meeting in London, with a London theme. For the next AGM and Weekend at St Hilda's College, it was proposed to treat the subject 'Barbara Pym and Food'. (Perhaps the Spring Study Day, tying in with Hilary Walton's appointment on 14 February, could cover 'Barbara Pym and the Church of England', so that the events for 1996 would cover Barbara Pym and nourishment, spiritual and physical). Further suggestions for subjects for future study were:-

- (i) An in-depth look at a single work
- (ii) Barbara Pym's own reading and literary influences (Hilary Walton pointed out that she has made an index to Barbara Pym's books, which is kept in-house at the Bodleian)
- (iii) Barbara Pym's travels
- (iv) The influence of Barbara Pym on other writers.

**8. Publication of Proceedings**

Devon Allison reported on her attempt to interest Macmillan in publishing papers which have been given at the Barbara Pym Society and at the 1985 and 1993 Barbara Pym conferences. Macmillan showed no interest, but Devon will try other publishers. The proposal to publish these papers was generally approved. (The committee are looking into the possibility of publishing in-house at St Hilda's.)

**9. Questions from Members**

Interest was expressed in the provision of a plaque in St Hilda's to commemorate Barbara Pym. The questioner was referred to the College archivist, Ellie Clewlow. Antonia Balazs suggested that there should be an Internet presence relating to Barbara Pym and the Society.

Members were reminded that annual subscriptions would become due in April 1996.

Kate Charles closed the meeting and thanked retiring committee member Antonia Balazs.

## Maschler Pudding

John Bayley

Reprinted by kind permission of *London Review of Books* and John Bayley

On 23rd April 1977 Philip Larkin came to lunch at Barbara Pym's cottage in Finstock, near Oxford. She and her sister had only been living there a short while, after Pym's retirement from her post in Fetter Lane as assistant editor of *Africa*, and it was Larkin's first and, as it turned out, his only visit. After her years in the wilderness, Pym's novel *Quartet in Autumn* had at last been accepted for publication: Larkin and David Cecil had independently named her as their choice of 'most undervalued writer' in the 75th anniversary number of the *TLS*. As Pym's diary records, they had kipper pate to start, after sherry, and then 'veal done with peppers and tomatoes, Pommés Anna, and celery and cheese (he didn't eat any Brie and we thought perhaps he only likes plain food). He's shy but very responsive and jokey. He left about 3.30 in his large Rover car (pale tobacco colour).' The faded paint of the car looked just as she describes it; the car itself was not in fact a Rover but a very second-hand Austin, the largest model - Larkin being well over six feet tall - and was liable spontaneously to catch fire. Changing gears was not his thing, and he valued its automatic gearbox, unfortunately of an early and unreliable type. These matters are in Larkin's letters, which take the same pleasure in small fact as Pym's diaries. How common-place it would be if all we could read about in that diary entry was their current books and poems, and how each was getting on with them, and what they thought about literature today. The occasion would not have been memorable. As it is, it is. And largely because of the food.

I have wondered what Pommés Anna were, or are, since first reading Pym's diary, and culinary sources have not been helpful; *The Barbara Pym Cookbook* gives the answer. The potatoes are sliced thinly, dried in a cloth 'to remove excessive starch' (that sounds a bit odd) and layered in an oven dish with butter or margarine (Barbara learnt her cooking in the war years) and freshly ground black pepper. Cooking time (325°) for at least an hour and a half. I always thought those were called *pommés galette*, described, oddly enough, in A.S. Byatt's first (and to my mind best) novel, not in a culinary context but as a dashing simile for dead winter leaves, compacted in layers by the frost, *feuillée d'automne galette*, as one might

say. But, to return to our mutttons, it may well be that *pommés galette* are done in the same sort of way as these Pommés Anna, but with melted cheese.

Anything by Barbara Pym reminds us how much pleasure food in fiction, or at least in a literary context, can give; and it suggests that the experience of real eating can in some contexts be literary too. Hazlitt always remembered Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* because he read it at an inn while eating cold chicken and drinking particularly good coffee out of a silver pot. Toad, of *The Wind in the Willows*, would not be such a personality if he had not, at a very low point in his fortunes, responded to the wonderful smell of hot cabbage in the 'bubble and squeak between two plates' which the gaoler's daughter had left in his cell. He is much too miserable actually to eat it, but its aroma talks to him of freedom and 'deeds yet to be done'; and when the kindly girl later brings him tea and hot buttered toast he sips and nibbles, sits up and begins to feel better. Observe the cunning sequence in which Kenneth Grahame presents the effect of food on emotion: first an olfactory promise and suggestiveness, then the real thing, and in basic form. Hot buttered toast is surely what one would dream of on a desert island rather than caviar and Krug. After serving on a windjammer on one of the last of those three month sailing voyages to Australia, Eric Newby found he wanted to eat nothing so much as toast, which he pursued and devoured in prodigious quantity.

Being an invalid, even if a self-made one, Mr Woodhouse's interest in food in *Emma* is specially keen. One of his chief pleasures in life is recommending dishes to his friends, such as lightly boiled eggs, but only as they are done by his own housekeeper. Another of his pleasures is sending away from the dinner table dishes which he fears might give his guests indigestion. The reader may groan and salivate with disappointment when poor Mrs Bates and her daughter see the asparagus and the sweetbreads borne away because, just as they were about to eat, their host conceived that they were not quite done enough, not quite safe to eat. However, they valued Mr Woodhouse's kindness, and their free meals as guests, and so got over their disappointment as manfully as they could. (Mr Woodhouse

had a point, though. Asparagus should surely be thoroughly cooked until really tender and mouth-melting, whereas restaurants serve it nouvelle-cuisine fashion, practically raw: no doubt because the colour looks better).

It is true that food, like literature and sex, is in one sense a cerebral rather than a visceral experience. If the asparagus is bright green and looks good, then it is so: at least for most eaters. Restaurants work on this basis, making choice, description and context all important: the grub as grub would probably be far better at home, but the mind wants a change. In several of Ian Fleming's thrillers, James Bond (who is much more interested in food and drink than in sex and killing people) derides the lyric menus of the American eatery, promising flaky-fresh sole and dawn-tender steak: he never orders anything with his Bourbon but eggs benedict, or scrambled eggs and bacon. But there is also poetry in the genuinely exotic. Paul Levy once held out reverently to me between his finger and thumb a small object, of indeterminate colour, and urged me to bite it. It tasted of nothing at all, but when I pointed this out he brushed the objection away with tolerant disdain. 'That is smoked garlic from the Moscow market' he told me 'I flew home with it yesterday'. There was no more to be said.

With her other admirer, and accidental saviour, Pym did enjoy some literary chat, but she also noticed what there was to eat.

19 May. Tea with Lord David Cecil. A comfortable agreeable room with green walls and some nice portraits. They are so easy to talk to, the time flew. We had lapsang tea, brown toast, redcurrant jelly and ginger cake. He told me he had been inspired to write after reading Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (just as I had been inspired by *Crome Yellow*). He said that Anthony Powell and I were the only novelists he would buy without reading first. A.P. was his fag at Eton ... said he thought comedy was out of fashion now - not well thought of - we agreed on this.

20 May. Seeing a handsome Dorset woman at a petrol pump I thought a Hardy heroine of today might well follow such an occupation. Tess for instance.

Hardy is said to have modelled Tess on a waitress seen in a Weymouth tea shop, the sort of place that Pym herself loved to haunt, but neither Tess nor Hardy's other heroines do much in the way of eating and drinking. Food, like sex, would not have been appropriate for a female character at the time. Unlike food, however, sex can be most present in a novel when it is never directly mentioned: Pym's novels in this way are as full of sex as Hardy's. Sex is a little personal mystery which may or may not be taking place, as Jane finds out when she vainly interrogates Prudence about the exact nature of her relations with her admirer. What we do know is that when

poor Prudence is left high and dry she comforts herself by cooking a solitary meal in her flat - a poussin and a salad nicely dressed with garlic and olive oil - and then finds herself too miserable to eat it.

Steely Virginia Woolf used food ideologically in her books. The great boeuf en daube of *To the Lighthouse* embodies the texture of the life of a bourgeois family: cook has been two days making it; Mrs Ramsay presides over it; but it is tiresome Mr Ramsay, sulky and self important at the top of the table, for whom everything has been done, and little he cares. In *A Room of One's Own* a Cambridge college invites the author to a heavenly meal, a stately procession of dishes in which the potatoes are 'thin as coins but not so hard', the partridges in their béarnaise sauce are 'dappled like the flanks of a doe' and the final confection, not to be insulted by the word 'pudding', 'rises all sugar from the waves'. This masculine opulence is presented in sardonic contrast (the date was 1935) with the wholesome fare of a women's college, where Woolf had to be revived after a grim dinner with something strong out of a bottle.

Food fixes the memory: our own personal one and the one we keep for books. Those meals stood out in Virginia Woolf's mind, emphasising her awareness of the current state of sexual inequality. Equally pointed in its own way, and as memorable, is poor Becky Sharp's horrid experience at dinner with the Sedleys in *Vanity Fair*. The curry is so hot that her tears flow, and seeing this young Jos offers her chillies, which she gratefully accepts because they sound so cool. There is a roar of laughter at her ensuing distress, its heartlessness showing what the family are like, as well as making the little adventuress herself much more human. At one of Pym's memorable supper parties, in her last and most poignant novel, *A Few Green Leaves*, a *Good Food Guide* inspector who used to be a Church of England clergyman recalls a 'memorable sole nantua' eaten at a London clergy house, and prepared, as it happens, by the equally memorable gay housekeeper whom we met in the earlier novel, *A Glass of Blessings*. Pym's sense of the talk on these occasions is especially apt, indeed almost surrealistic. It is as if pots and pans and other domestic objects were flying awkwardly through the air, as a quiet matron in another novel once notices, some to be caught and returned, some not. On this occasion, the talk having turned to the restaurant inspector's need for exercise in the course of his exacting job, the rector's sister recommends long walks, and observes that she often sees fox's dung while walking in the woods. 'It's grey' she goes on to tell them, 'and pointed at both ends'.

In another novel some young male is made to remember with a shock 'how sharp the nicest women are'. The nearest Pym's diary comes to sharpness, in a culinary context, was christening a kind of milk jelly 'Maschler pudding'. This was because Tom Maschler, who had been her editor at Cape, turned down her latest novel at the end of the Sixties on the grounds that it was 'the kind of thing people no longer wanted to read'. Barbara had no malice, but sharp in her novels and diary she wonderfully was, and the editors have had the brilliant idea of placing suitable quotations between the recipes, to set the pots and pans flying. There we have Emma Howick's failed omelette - had she omitted to add the needful tablespoon of water? - but as she was making it just for herself and was hungry she didn't care. And Mrs Cleveland in *Crampton Hodnet*, who reflects that the young talk about divorce and remarriage 'as if it were nothing more complicated than mincing up the cold beef and making it into a shepherd's pie'.

Characters can be what they eat, as I have discovered when trying my own hand at comedy novels, for it helps the would-be novelist to know from the inside, as it were, what his people are up to. As John Francis more elegantly puts in his Introduction, 'you feel Pym knew more about her characters than is necessary for us to know, but that these reserves are expended only if essential for her art'. As Johnson observed to Boswell, you cannot know a person until you 'have eaten and drunk with him': and Boswell goes on to report just what he had to eat at the Doctor's house: 'a very good soup, a boiled leg of lamb and spinach, a veal pye, and a rice pudding'. What about the drink? Not mentioned, possibly because at that stage of his life Johnson had given up wine and drank dish after dish of tea instead.

Johnson's point, or its implication, can be as vital for the novelist as for the biographer. The novelist who knows his character's public and private being and habits is wiser not to reveal his knowledge directly, at least not all of it. In this way Jane Austen knew her Emma and Tolstoy came to know Anna. When the novelist's art has made the reader confident of that, he can do the rest for himself. Alain de Botton, a young writer of highly original intelligence, presents in his latest novel, *Kiss and Tell*, the stylised imaginary biography of an entirely ordinary young woman. Isabel is seen, naturally, in terms of her office, what she buys in the superstore, her fondness for chips and ketchup at Garfunkel's, and for cooking herself chicken paprika, and later, of 'the onset of a mild stomach flu, which sent her to bed and a bowl of clear soup shortly after her return home'. So far so good.

Here we have what Larkin called 'a real girl in a real place, in every sense empirically true'. But of course the author does not stop there. Cunningly, he avoids the bedroom though not the bathroom, and all we know of her possibly more intimate relations with her would-be biographer is that she 'woke up one morning and got tired of being understood'.

We know what she ate, however (including how she picked her nose, what she found there and what she did with it), and among other overkills her biographer cannot resist surveying her eating habits in terms of his knowledge of more celebrated biographees, and theirs. 'Sartre had a horror of shellfish ... Forster's biographers overlook his favourite foods (aubergines, spotted dick) because they choose to locate the essence of his identity in whom he slept with or voted for (young men, the liberals)'. 'But even within the appetitive realm', the author concludes with mock pomposity, 'meaningful ways of eating would have to be separated from purely contingent ones'. His book is delightful, but there is no romance in it, and eating - when, where, with whom? - is nothing if not romantic, which of course the whole point of Larkin's 'real girl in a real place' is that the poem makes of her a hauntingly and meticulously romantic figure. As much so as Miss Joan Hunter-Dunn, who was seen in terms of her warm-handled racquet, and her father's Euonymus. The true romantic eye needs only the accuracy of its own fascinations. 'It was by loving her that he knew her', remarks Henry James of Balzac's relation with one of his more pestilential characters, 'not by knowing her that he loved'.

Pym's characters are in their own way just as romantic, food and drink helping to make them so. She was fascinated by people in cafés and by what they were eating ('curry and tea at 4 pm. A late lunch or an early supper?'). She herself would have loved this book, compiled as it is by her sister and a close friend, and beautifully decorated by Frankie Pollak, a stained glass expert who has made a cover like a jewel, but a jewel composed of lemons and ripe tomatoes with their green stems attached. Ensclosed among them is a striped cat who might well be there in honour of Barbara's own Minerva, a sagacious animal whose preferred diet was 'custard and fried tomato skins'.

---

## 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

## Henry Harvey 1911-1995

I first met Henry Harvey just over two years before he died, at the Barbara Pym weekend at St Hilda's College in August 1993. He was one of the VIPs present, and I was deputed to look after him. At Sunday breakfast time, distressed that I seemed to be neglecting my own needs, he fetched a large plateful of congealing St Hilda's scrambled egg and stood over me while I ate every spoonful. Other, and nicer, meals were to confirm that despite this beginning, it was friendship at first sight.



Throughout his life, intimate and loyal friendship was Henry's particular gift. Born in 1911 as the youngest child and only son of a family of three, he was educated at Evesham Grammar School and Christ Church, Oxford. There he read English from 1929 to 1942 and met the friends who justify his inclusion in this newsletter, Robert Liddell, reading Classics at Corpus Christi, and Barbara Pym herself. These three - two novelists, one catalyst - had a triangular friendship, conspicuous for its closeness even within the Oxford coterie to which they belonged. This was a formidably amusing and observant group, including the writer Honor Tracy and Barbara's sister Hilary - later Walton - and it must have been the terror of outsiders. Following Auden and his fraternity, many inter-war undergraduates of both sexes had a high conception of friendship as a bond outside societal and legal ties; rightly or wrongly, they saw it even as being superior to marriage. Since it was an era where the telephone was used more to verify appointments than to engage in proper conversation, they wrote constantly to each other about each other. Henry, Barbara and Jock - as Robert Liddell was known - kept their friendship and their correspondence up until they died, and many of their letters survive in the Bodleian.

People who know about Barbara Pym know about Henry as well. He is the faddish Archdeacon Hoccleve in *Some Tame Gazelle*, quoting Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn-burial* on purpose to bemuse his rural congregation; and he is the undergraduate 'Lorenzo' in Barbara's undergraduate diaries, whom she languished for, fantasised about, and tracked around the Radcliffe Camera. Future literary critics may well see these diaries as a key text in the gender negotiations of twentieth-century women's writing. As in the Elizabethan sonnet-sequences that Barbara studied, the predicament of the protagonists conflates fact and fiction; and as usual for the genre, the writer decides that lost love is a good deal more prophetic. Barbara's quest was less for the real-life person of Henry than for a male muse who necessarily had to be cruel. Commentators will probably also determine how far Barbara's conception of Lorenzo permeated her later fictional objects of desire, Rocky Napier in *Excellent Women* or Aylwin Forbes in *No Fond Return of Love*. But this critic - for what it is worth - thinks it would be a great mistake to confuse false Lorenzo with loyal Henry.

Having said that, it is certainly true that Henry was well-suited to provide the original. To adapt the Sondheim lyric slightly, it was alarming how charming he was. This was a charm undiminished in his eighties, and enhanced by his good looks, his dash, and a voice like a theatrical knight's not taking himself too seriously, but it was nourished most of all by his immediate and genuine interest in people he met, and a humble desire to be invited into their lives. Very characteristic was his way of answering the telephone: 'Ah, there you are!', tremendously pleased and just a trifle impatient, implying that your call - although late - was the nicest thing to happen that day. One gets something of an idea from his brief appearance in the television film 'Miss Pym's Day Out', where he plays himself: and more still from the Radio 4 programme on the 1993 conference, 'A Very Suitable Occasion', in which he so fascinates the participants and presenters that it nearly turns into a documentary about him.

Modelling was not the only work that Henry did for English Literature. His B.Litt. on the seventeenth-century bibliographer Gerard Langbaine is probably the only dissertation for which the Bodleian card-index adds the name of the typist - Barbara herself - but it is still highly useful in its own right. All his working life was spent under the auspices of the British Council, mostly lecturing on

English authors in foreign universities. His first job at the University of Helsinki was interrupted when, in 1941, war forced him to flee to Sweden. Subsequently he was to get posted to Ghent, to Göttingen and to Salonika, finally achieving a professorship in Java. Periods in the British Council area offices at Oxford and Cambridge saw him - among other assignments - co-ordinating lectures for foreign students. A typical programme of his, compiled at the height of the Movement, includes writers like Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis.



His urge to make things available matured into a prose paraphrase of Shakespeare's sonnets, which he wrote in 1993 and 1994; beginning as a critical exercise, this became something beautiful in its own right when read by him on tape. For an unrepentant Leavisite, he also showed a dangerous degree of interest in works outside the great tradition. I remember some of the last books he read: Michael Drayton, Wallace Stevens, the biographies of Mary Renault and Madam Blavatsky, various pamphlets on liturgy, and Richard Dawkins' *River out of Eden*. And I think my husband Arnold Hunt and I must have been the last of the younger scholars he helped so affectionately. I'm grateful to him for all sorts of things: translating German articles, chauffeuring me to libraries, and emphasising how the common reader must never be forgotten.

This October he died very suddenly from a ruptured aorta, with his first wife Elsie at his bedside. His funeral was held in the parish church at Willersey, the Gloucestershire village not far from Finstock where he had lived throughout his retirement; and his grave lies under a handsome tree, with Cotswold hills on all sides. He leaves two daughters, two sons and many other people who will miss him terribly. I am so glad to have known him.

Dr Alison Shell

## A plateful of blessings

A la Pym - the Barbara Pym Cookbook

Barbara Pym has become so tamed over time in the public imagination that the impression most people - though I presume this excludes her constant readers - have of her is of Prim Pym, all WI sentiments and neat prose. Reading her again, in the snippets from her novels that are interlaced with the recipes reproduced in this book, one is reminded of the skilful savagery of her writing - knife in and swiftly out, without any blood spilt.

Lifting passages from her novels devoted just to food, its preparation or consumption, could seem a specious exercise; it isn't. John Francis claims, in his gratifyingly camp introduction, part Wallace Arnold, part giggly vicar -

for Lo! I was asked to contribute a foreword to *A La Pym*. You can imagine how I welcomed this opportunity to, as it were, lay this small posy on her grave [that] students of recent history seeking the truth about what I call the Linoleum Years ... will find in her pages a truthfulness wholly missing from lesser writers.

This is undeniably the case with the accounts of her own cooking, as much as with the food she records in her novels.

Barbara Pym's own recipes are redolent of a way of cooking that no longer exists, except probably in colonial outposts untouched by our lust for all things glossily Mediterranean. It's hard not to sound patronising or simply kitsch, but there is something captivating about the food that is sweetly documented in *A La Pym*, food that belongs to a time when basil was measured by the teaspoon; curried stuffed eggs and consommé mousse ('I tin beef consommé, 8oz cream cheese, curry powder to taste'), a risotto that stipulates patna rice, and in which the onions are sweated in lard; John Francis's evocative phrase 'the Linoleum Years' is quite right.

But it would be quite wrong to suggest that quaintness was all this book had to offer. The recipes are an entirely personal selection, gently quirky, and if they remind one of a way of eating that has long since faded, some of them, too, provoke reconsideration; the itemisations of toad in the hole or the aptly named queen of puddings (my absolute favourite, and this is a very good version with plenty of breadcrumbs to stiffen the custard), plum and parkin cakes pull one towards the kitchen. But the place to which this volume most strongly draws one is the bookshelf, to read her wry, measured, lethal prose again.

A note here should be made, too, of Prospect Books. This company prints some of the best specialist, in the main, cookery books around. It's a small firm in Devon run by Tom Jaine, who used to edit *The Good Food Guide*, but has a more illustrious pedigree besides, and a catalogue may be ordered by telephone on 01803 712269. I mention this not because I am trying to do Prospect Books any favours, but because I feel that I may be doing you one.

Nigella Lawson

This article has been reprinted by kind permission of *The Spectator* and Nigella.

## THE 1995 ANNUAL MEETING THE SUNDAY SESSIONS



The final session of the Annual Meeting, following a St Hilda's Sunday Lunch, was dramatised readings under the title *Barbara on Clothes* arranged by Elizabeth Proud. The readings were introduced by Elizabeth wearing a waistcoat of Barbara's (I think made by her), which Hilary had brought, along with a number of dressmaking patterns, for the exhibition. Sioned Wiliam, Miriam Margolyes, Joanna David and Elizabeth (pictured above) enchanted us with an exquisite collection of cameos beautifully connected with explanations and analyses from Elizabeth. Miriam's *Miss Doggett* and Joanna's *Jessie* were Pym to perfection. We have a good video recording of the readings, so those of you who missed this 1995 meeting will be able to enjoy them at future meetings.

Sunday morning had commenced with time for church, Pym videos or a tour of Oxford. Coffee was followed by an exhibition and a slide presentation of a bygone time - *Style and the Oxford Women* - given by St Hilda's Archivist, Ellie Clewlow. This was Oxford as Barbara would have remembered it and many members present did. I am of the view that little has changed - in fashion that is!

Eileen Roberts

## 'GREEN LEAVES' - IT'S OFFICIAL!

When at the first meeting of the Barbara Pym Society we announced our intention to produce a twice-yearly journal, suggestions for a title immediately began to circulate, mostly Pymish allusions ranging from Parrot's Eggs to Hawaiian Fire. Amid the enthusiasm a small scholarly note found its way across the room to me, from one of Oxford's most distinguished librarians, urging us to include an explanatory sub-title and reminding us that we should obtain an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) for our journal. The possession of an ISSN confers publishing respectability on any serial publication, however limited its budget or pagination. It also brings free publicity through inclusion in official lists, hence the desirability of an explanatory sub-title.

After some debate the allusive title *Green Leaves*, the suggestion of Ellen Goodwin in St Hilda's Development Office

was chosen. This would also signal our intention to keep the memory of Barbara Pym green, and allow us to use this elegant shade of paper. We added the sub-title 'The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society'.

At the beginning of September this year I wrote to the ISSN U.K. Centre, which is part of the British Library and is situated along with their Lending Division in Boston Spa near Wetherby in Yorkshire, and requested an ISSN. Following their instructions, I enclosed copies of *Green Leaves* already published, and information as to sub-title, start date, frequency and production office.

At the beginning of October we received our ISSN: ISSN 1360-9920, to be printed on all issues of *Green Leaves* at the top right-hand corner of the first page. Please quote it freely!

Jean Harker