

Barbara Pym and the Naming of Names

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Most authors have felt the need to attach names to the characters in their novels. These names tend to fall into two groups: the fantastical or symbolical, such as are found in the works of Dickens (Wackford Squeers, Uriah Heap); and the realistic, such as those in the works of Jane Austen (Elizabeth Bennet, John Willoughby). Indeed, one sometimes wonders if Jane did not find her names by wandering through a country churchyard, reading the grave-stones. Barbara Pym herself refers to ‘a cemetery [with] informative gravestones’. Barbara Pym steered a course between the two. Her names are realistic, but many of them were derived 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 authors, though, of course, John Lydgate (c. 1370-1449/50?) was also a very well-known medieval poet and monk. A ‘Lydgate’ appears in both *Some Tame Gazelle* and *Less than Angels*. In the case of the narrator in *Excellent Women* there is even a Lathbury Road in North Oxford. Appropriately enough, Thomas Lathbury, 1798-1865, no doubt the eponym of the road, was a Church of England clergyman and ecclesiastical historian. In this paper I hope to be able to trace the origins of the names of some of the characters in some of the novels. To trace them all would, I fear, test even your enthusiasm for the works of our favourite novelist.

A novelist may need to name both places and persons in his or her works. On the whole, Barbara did not feel the need to supply the names of the villages in which her characters lived. An exception is ‘Taviscombe’ in *No Fond Return of Love*, a name made up from the real Devon place-name ‘Tavistock’ and the component ‘combe’, common in the West Country. We are, however, not told the name of the village where the Misses Bede lived, nor yet of that occupied by Jane and Nicholas Cleveland, nor the village at the heart of *A Few Green Leaves*. Only one of Barbara’s novels is named after a place, and that an imaginary one even in the story, Crampton Hodnet. Both parts of the name reflect Barbara’s childhood in Shropshire, Crampton being one of her father’s forenames, and Hodnet being a village some twenty-five miles east of Oswestry. Hodnet was also the parish where Reginald Heber, hymnographer and later Bishop of Calcutta, was Vicar for sixteen years, and where he wrote all his hymns, even the one that refers to ‘India’s coral strand’. But then, it also refers to ‘Greenland’s icy mountains’, and as far as we know the Church of England has never attempted to plant a diocesan in that inhospitable island. It is probably cared for, quoad sacra, by the Bishop of the Arctic. Barbara was not one to waste good material found in a novel just because it might not be published. Mrs Crampton appears in *Jane and Prudence*, and, of course, Cleveland is a surname common to both that novel and *Crampton Hodnet*. But it went further than that. Barbara makes extensive use of cross-over characters, sometimes to carry their story forward, sometimes to explain or enhance something said in an earlier novel. Prudence Bates appears again in *A Glass of Blessings*, where Prudence, whom Wilmet thinks is named Patience (two virtues which Miss Bates signally lacks), has an affair with Rodney thus confirming her as a woman condemned to a succession of doomed relationships, while Wilmet and Keith turn up together in *No Fond Return of Love*, signalling her acceptance of his relationship with Piers. Archdeacon Hoccleve from *Some Tame Gazelle* preaches a sermon full of quotations in chapter nine of *Excellent Women*. In *Jane and Prudence* we learn from Miss Doggett, formerly of *Crampton Hodnet*, that Mildred Lathbury and Everard Bone

formerly of *Excellent Women*, did after all get married. William Caldicote, who used to lunch with Mildred in *Excellent Women*, reappears in *Jane and Prudence* as a fastidious stranger who recommends the bouillabaisse to Prudence and Geoffrey, and tells the waiter Henry that he has been very naughty, thus making clear the homosexuality that prevented his relationship with Mildred from getting anywhere. Esther Clovis appears in both *Excellent Women* and *Less than Angels*, as do Mildred Lathbury and Everard Bone. Miss Clovis' memorial service is recounted in *An Academic Question* and in *A Few Green Leaves*. The head begins to spin somewhat. Barbara did confess in a letter to Philip Larkin, who had taken her to task for using so many cross-over characters between novels, that this was at least partly due to laziness, and also to 'superstition'.

The novels set in London and Oxford do not need place names inventing for them though Barbara can be quite reticent about exact locations, sometimes, as in *A Glass of Blessings*, merely providing hints such as bus routes. The house where Wilmet and Rodney live with his mother must be at the Notting Hill Gate end of Bayswater though this is never spelled out. In *Excellent Women* Barbara is explicit about Pimlico and the rough boys who live there – still do, there has recently been a fatal gang-related stabbing on Lupus Street. At the same time she combines the exterior of St Gabriel's, Warwick Square, with the interior of St Saviour's, St George's Square, at the eastern end of Lupus Street, in order to create her fictional St Mary's. When Barbara lived in Cambridge Street, on the corner with Warwick Square, St Gabriel's was a middle-of-the-road parish, and it was St Saviour's that was Anglo-Catholic. What is more, she describes the East window of St Mary's as hideous, which is certainly not true of St Gabriel's, where the East window is a fine example of the work of the great Victorian stained glass designer, Kempe. The East Window of St Saviour's, however, could fairly be described in less than flattering terms. In *Quartet in Autumn* Barbara provides hints as to where the quartet's office may be. When Edwin and Norman part company on leaving work Norman heads for the Bakerloo line and Edwin for the Northern line, which is a little puzzling since the nearest Bakerloo line station is at Oxford Circus, while Edwin would need to go to Tottenham Court Road on the Northern line. Both of these are at quite a distance from Holborn station where a blackboard had been hung up one day announcing a person under a train. Holborn Station is close to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and indeed not far from the British Museum and the Camden Boirough Library. All of this points to that part of London that Barbara knew so well from her work, the area stretching from Gamage's department store in the east to High Holborn in the west.

Characters usually have two names, a forename and a family name, though in the cases of Herbert Nicholas Cleveland, Jane Mowbray Cleveland, nee Bold, and their daughter Flora Mowbray Cleveland, they have three. Jane must have been proud of her Mowbray connection to give it as one of her forenames to her daughter. It is rather a grand name, being prominent throughout the middle ages and that of the Duke of Norfolk in the fifteenth century. This is, however, in the formal setting of Jane's entry in her *College Chronicle*. Barbara seems to have enjoyed choosing forenames, and took a lot of trouble to ensure what she judged to be their suitability. In this part of my talk I have to acknowledge, as indeed we all do, the huge debt of gratitude I owe to Yvonne Cocking and her wonderful talks, now to be published in book form, based on her research into Barbara's notebooks and drafts in the Bodleian Library.

A procedure which Barbara used for many of her novels was to jot down a list of possible names. 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.

In the early stages of planning the novel that became *The Sweet Dove Died* Barbara jotted down: Cecily, Abigail, Julian, Elinor, spelled ELINOR, Rosamund, Dorothea, Leonora, Rose, Marian, and Pansy. The first name to be firmly established is ‘Rupert Stonebird’. The echoes of Beethoven’s *Fidelio* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in the name Leonora Eyre are both deliberate and ironic.

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’, as in the case of Emma in *A Few Green Leaves*. 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. (Have you noticed how, in England at least, first names taken from other people’s family names are seldom a success – Percy, Howard, Neville, Stanley, Sidney – I’m glad I’m not called after any of them). Edwin is a brilliant choice. Little known outside the north-east of England, it conveys his rather wispy personality in a way that the warlike names of Edward, Eric and Edgar would not. Marcia does not appear in the list. At first sight it appears an odd choice for the female character who together with Norman represents the lower-middle class as opposed to Letty and Edwin in the middle to upper-middle class, being a rather grand-sounding name, but when one thinks about it it is found more widely than might be supposed.

A name that stands out for its originality is that of Rockingham (Rocky) Napier, who crops up, if only sometimes in a mention, in several of the novels. It is, of course, the name of a castle in Northamptonshire, and also a title of nobility taken from the same. It is, however, also the name of a hymn tune, and perhaps it was this that inspired Barbara’s choice.

When it came to family names Barbara cast her net pretty wide, making use of real life persons, often with literary or clerical connections, street names in London and Oxford, and names with the same rhythm as people who had played a part in her own life, and who sometimes shared the same personality. Fabian Driver, for instance, has the same rhythm as Gordon Glover, and is based on him. When using the names of real life persons Barbara was urged by her publishers to be very careful not to make both parts of the name the same as that of a living individual, for fear of incurring a libel suit. They had had a fright over Barbara’s mention of Marks and Spencer in *Jane and*

Prudence which had provoked a lawyer's letter. She was careful to check in *Crockford's Clerical Directory* and other works of reference to make sure that nothing similar happened again.

Some unusual names were dropped in the course of composition. Helena Napier's name, for example, was originally 'Eleanor Mogden', a name most uneuphonious. Where on earth had Barbara got it from? No such name occurs in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, but there is a Mogden Place in Isleworth, a district of London not far from Barnes. The only problem is that when she was writing *Excellent Women* Barbara was not living in Barnes.

Another name that occurs in *Excellent Women* and other novels is Everard Bone. Everard is a name found attached to not a few religious figures of the 17th century. Bone is the name of an artistic family including Sir Muirhead Bone and his son Stephen 1904-1958, artist, writer and broadcaster. Stephen sounds like a very Pymian character. He was very tall, with deep-set eyes, and well-boned features. He had a life-long affectionate friendship with Elisabet Waldenstrom, a wealthy Swedish woman, but married Mary Adshead, a mural painter, and contemporary at the Slade School of Art. His career stalled in 1945 when his work fell out of fashion, and he took to journalism and broadcasting..

The origin of the very unusual name Mr Bompas, he who had the unfortunate encounter with a cactus at Miss Doggett's tea-party in *Crampton Hodnet*, reveals another of Barbara's sources. A newspaper clipping reporting Rupert Gleadow's marriage in Paris reveals his step-father's name to have been Harold Bompas.

A name which seems to have appealed to Barbara is 'Mainwaring', since it appears as Dulcie Mainwaring in *No Fond Return of Love* and as the resounding Felix Byron Mainwaring in *Less than Angels*. She may have come across Matthew Mainwaring 1561-1652, an obscure author, but perhaps she just enjoyed the way that it is spelled Mainwaring but pronounced Mannering. Of course, for British readers of a certain age the name will always be associated with the hero, if that's the word, of *Dad's Army*, the series making fun of the Home Guard, a collection of geriatrics who prepared to repel the Nazi foe should he dare to invade their tight little island. Captain Mannering's deadly rival is careful always to mispronounce his name Main Wearing.

When writing *Some Tame Gazelle* Barbara seems to have drawn for her family names on writers and clergymen, and also the Oxford connection. Except where documented in her notes, diaries or letters, these equivalents must remain conjecture, but I offer them for your consideration. Bede is of course the Venerable Bede, Anglo-Saxon historiographer. It could also be Cuthbert Bede (both names those of Northumbrian saints), the pseudonym of Edward Bradley, Church of England clergyman, and author of the very successful *The Adventures of Mr Verdant Green, an Oxford Freshman, by Cuthbert Bede BA*, 1853, which sold out in Oxford on the day of publication. Edgar Donne (though he insists that it is pronounced 'Don') is taken from John Donne (1572-1631), poet and Church of England clergyman, while Henry Hoccleve is taken from Thomas Hoccleve, c.1367-1462, poet and clerk at the Privy Seal office, author of *The Regiment of Princes*, addressed to the future Henry V. Edward Plowman may well be taken from *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (spelled the same way), a dream-vision by William Langland 1325-c.1390, poet. Miss Jenner may be suggested by Charles Jenner 1736-1774, clergyman, writer and poet, though I doubt that Edith Liversidge was inspired by Archibald Liversidge, chemist. On the other hand, Barbara may have known of James Aspinall 1795?-1861, Church of England clergyman and author. It is less likely that she knew of Francis White, ne Francesco Bianco, Italian immigrant and Chocolate House Keeper in St James's, eponym of the famous White's Club on the same site. She will, however, have known of Mark Akenside 1721-1770, poet and physician, author of "The Pleasures of Imagination", 1774. I doubt that Lady Clara Boulding

is named after Mary Boulding, 1929-2009, nun and theologian, but you never know. Olivia Berridge could have been suggested by Elizabeth Berridge 1919-2009, novelist, author of *Across the Common*, 1964. Perhaps less likely is that Miss Beard is related to Thomas Beard, Church of England clergyman and author. As Master of the Free Grammar School in Huntingdon he taught Oliver Cromwell, and wrote *The Theatre of God's Judgements*, 1597, a series of colourful anecdotes of the divine vengeance visited upon flagrant sinners. What a subject for one of Archdeacon Hoccleve's sermons. Thomas Parnell 1679-1718, Church of England clergyman, poet and essayist, friend of Swift and Pope, was author of "A Night-Piece on Death", yet another subject for a sermon that would terrify the congregation. What is certain is that Barbara will have known about John Lydgate c. 1370-1449/50?, poet and monk, author of "The Fall of Princes", begun at the request of none other than Duke Humfrey himself, founder of the library which became the Bodleian Library. Theodore Grote's name was surely inspired by Harriet Grote, nee Lewin 1792-1878, woman of letters and "philosophical radical", married to George Grote 1794-1871, radical politician and historian of Greece.

In her latest novel Barbara abandoned English literature as a source of names. In her notes for *A Few Green Leaves* she plays around with complete names, both forename and family name:

Dr William Gellibrand.

Dr Martin Shrubsole, wife Gillian or Gabrielle. [She became Avice].

Clergyman Rev. Tim or Ben Dagnell or Doggett. [he became Tom Dagnell].

His sister Chloe / Kate. [renamed Daphne]

Emma Howick or Howard

Her mother Mrs Beatrix (not Trixy) Howick

Miss Lickerish can die

Miss Scudamore [became Miss Vereker]

'Gellibrand' is a strange name, but a name she seems to have enjoyed since it is found in both *A Few Green Leaves* and *Quartet in Autumn*. I can only trace two 'Gellibrands' in real life, Henry Gellibrand (1597-1637), a clergyman and mathematician who was educated at Oxford and lived there at one stage of his life (he made an important contribution to the navigational problem of determining longitude), and, perhaps a more likely candidate, Sir John Gellibrand (1872-1945), an Australian General, and hero of the First World War. 'Shrubsole' is an interesting example of another source of names. 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, but does, I believe, still exist in New York. Another wonderful silver dealer's nearby, in High Holborn, which Barbara must also have known, was Shapland's. It had a window display featuring such useful everyday objects as peeresses' coronets, and a door which doubled-up as a display vitrine. It was presided over by one Roger Shapland, one of the nicest people one could ever meet. He had been in the Royal Navy, and was mad about old cars and old boats, a passion which he shared with me. His house in the country, which starred in the movie *Howard's End*, had silver plates above the pegs in the cloakroom bearing the titles of various peers. When asked how they came to be there Roger explained that they came from the lids of plate chests. The Shaplans had started out as corn-merchants then moved on to being silver dealers. In the latter role they had acted as pawn-brokers to the aristocracy, and when various peers failed to redeem their pledges the plate chests were added to Shapland's stock. Although I cannot trace a Shapland in her novels, I do hope that Barbara knew this history. She would have enjoyed it so much. It's interesting to note that Tom Dagnell nearly ended up as yet another Doggett. Barbara clearly had her favourite names. Emma's name was to be Howick or Howard, both very aristocratic names, Viscount Howick being the secondary title of Earl Grey (yes, it was for him that the tea was blended, the reason being that the local water tasted disgusting), while Howard is the family name of the Dukes of Norfolk. Two minor characters with unusual names are Miss Lickerish

– she who is allowed to die – and Miss Scudamore, afterwards Vereker. The latter is given two very grand names. The Scudamores were a leading gentry family in Herefordshire over several centuries while Vereker was the family name of no less a personage than John Standish Surtees Prendergast Vereker 1886-1946, 6th Viscount Gort, Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the run-up to the Second World War.

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. None of her names jar, in no case does one think 'No, she or he just would not have had a name like that'. 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.