

GREEN LEAVES

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society

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THE 1996 SPRING MEETING



Roger Phillips, the Garden Manager of Eccleston Square Garden with Pym Society Members

The Spring Meeting, by popular request in London, started with a magnificent lunch at St Alban's Holborn. As Robert Smith was to tell us later, this was one of Barbara Pym's favourite churches - and she also loved the lunches. After lunch Robert took us on a wonderful tour of the London churches that he and Barbara had enjoyed, and the audience responded with a plethora of questions.

St Alban's was a wonderful choice, so warm and friendly, and not surprisingly, it has now become the choice of the Charlotte Yonge Society and St Hilda's for their London meetings.

For the second part of the Spring Meeting, twenty-two members in five taxis, and more in cars, drove across London to Pimlico for the Open Afternoon (National Gardens Scheme) of Eccleston Square Garden.

From 1945-48 Barbara and Hilary Pym lived a block or so away, in 108 Cambridge Street, on a corner of Warwick Square, which provided the setting for *Excellent Women*. We should like to imagine the sisters taking a walk around their

neighbouring square and admiring the garden there as we see it today, but its development under the present management started only about fifteen years ago, and the storm of 1987 which uprooted many trees changed its appearance even further.

We were greeted by the honorary Garden Manager, Roger Phillips, the prolific garden and natural history writer and historian, known also for his television programmes, *The Quest for the Rose* and *The 3000 Mile Garden*, the latter comparing and contrasting Eccleston Square Garden with a garden in Maine, New England, USA.

We gathered under the shade of a huge plane tree while Roger outlined for us the development of Pimlico by the architect Thomas Cubitt between 1821 and 1860. He had already completed Belgravia for the Grosvenor Estate, which also owned most of the land between what is now Buckingham Palace Road and Belgrave Road. He became the primary leaseholder of Eccleston Square, where he and other architects built houses for the upper middle class between 1836 and 1860.

Trollope considered it to be the southern frontier of upper class respectability - "For heaven's sake" advises a friend to a bride in *The Small House at Allington* "don't let him take you anywhere beyond Eccleston Square!" So Barbara and Hilary's flat in Cambridge Street was beyond the pale!

After tea and delicious home-made cakes we wandered around the three acre garden, with Roger pointing out items of special interest. The National Collection of ceanothus grows here, some species of which were in flower. Camellias, the rare handkerchief tree, the wonderfully scented azalea *George Reynolds* and *Pittosporum tobira*, a very tender subject which will not grow even as far north as Oxford, were among the highlights.

We were fortunate in having a beautiful sunny day for this visit at a time of the year when the weather is notoriously fickle!

STOP PRESS

Members will be wondering why the editors have not covered the Annual Meeting. The reason is simple, the material was so good that we have decided to produce a conference proceedings of the two days.

We were fortunate in that most of the speakers let us have their texts and as you would have noticed we were busily taping everything. Much of the material is now sitting on Eileen Robert's computer and we are hoping to have the whole proceedings ready hopefully for the Spring Meeting.

If we have done our sums right we will only have to charge £2.50 - £3.00 and you will have a complete record of the 1996 Annual Conference, *Barbara Pym and the Church*.

GREEN LEAVES

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REPORT OF THE THIRD A.G.M. OF THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY HELD AT ST HILDA'S COLLEGE, OXFORD, ON SATURDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER 1996.

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks

The Chairman, Elizabeth Proud, welcomed members to the meeting, and gave a brief review of the year. It was felt that this year's innovation, the London Meeting, had gone well, and there were suggestions for a regional meeting in Bristol in 1997. Committee members present were: Miss Elizabeth Proud (Chairman), Mrs Hilary Walton, Mrs Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary) Mrs Jean Harker (Secretary), Ms Kate Charles, Mrs Louise Ross, Miss Peggy Hawthorne and Mr Michael Wilson.

2. Apologies

The Chairman read out apologies from Committee members unable to attend: Hazel Holt and Devon Allison (both unwell), and Yvonne Cocking, who was at a family wedding.

3. Minutes of Previous A.G.M.

The minutes of the previous A.G.M. were accepted and signed by the Chairman, once the mistake 'Church Commissioners' had been corrected to 'Charity Commissioners' in section 4(iii).

4. Matters arising from the Minutes

- (i) It was agreed that the theme for the Annual Meeting in 1997 should be 'Barbara Pym and Food', which would follow on neatly from the publication of *A la Pym: the Barbara Pym Cookbook*.
- (ii) Publications. The Chairman reported that Devon Allison had offered to transcribe tapes of the 1993 Barbara Pym Conference. Eileen Roberts thought however that the Society should pay for this job to be done by a professional typist as there is so much material to transcribe and the finance exists. Both Devon Allison and Jean Harker had attempted to interest publishers in the proceedings of the Barbara Pym Conferences, and had had no success. Eileen Roberts proposed that we needed texts ('something to show people'). There was a suggestion of seeking advice from the Alliance of Literary Societies, whose member societies produce small occasional publications, mostly of the desktop variety. Jean Harker confirmed that she has discussed this with the A.L.S., but it appeared that our best bet would be desktop publishing at St Hilda's.

5. Financial and Membership Report

Eileen Roberts reported that there were now 256 members, all of whom had been entered on St Hilda's database which would make mailings easier. The finances were in

a good state. The current balance was £4479.96. The year's income was £2017.32 and expenditure £1079.59. The expenditure was mostly the cost of the production and mailing of the Newsletter and the small scholarship grant (£100) awarded to Miss Eleni Godi who is producing a dissertation on Barbara Pym. It was moved that there should be an expression of appreciation to the Treasurer, and there was a lengthy round of applause.

6. Elections

Yvonne Cocking and Peggy Hawthorn had completed their terms of office. Mrs Cocking was happy to stand for re-election, but Miss Hawthorn wished to retire. Peggy Hawthorn was thanked by the Chairman for her work on the Committee and there was a spontaneous round of applause. Yvonne Cocking was proposed for re-election, seconded and re-elected. Rita Phillips was proposed, seconded and elected to the Committee in place of Miss Hawthorn.

It was proposed that there should be a subcommittee which would function as an 'intellectual and creative' working group to consider themes for annual, regional and London meetings. At this point members were told that 'suggestions' forms would be available, on which they could give ideas for themes, etc. (to be handed in before leaving). Eileen Roberts asked that there be a second working group to give practical assistance (stuffing envelopes, etc.).

7. Constitution

Originally it had been hoped to include a draft amended constitution with the Newsletter (this had not proved possible), so a proposed constitution was circulated for comment. Discussion was mainly with election procedure. It appeared that a relatively uncomplicated one would be generally favoured by the membership.

8. Editor's Report

Jean Harker expressed the hope that the last issue of *Green Leaves* had met with members' approval. It had been particularly large because of including in their entirety two glowing reviews of *A la Pym* and also (sadly) Alison Shell's excellent and appreciative obituary of Henry Harvey. Contributions both short and long were requested for the next issue of *Green Leaves*. Details of the London meeting were requested as many members had been unable to attend (these will be provided).

9. Pym Archives

Eileen Roberts reminded members of the work done on the Pym Archives by St Hilda's archivist Ellie Clewlow. Ellie, who left St Hilda's in May to take up the post of Archivist at Caius College, Cambridge, established a wonderful foundation for the

Barbara Pym Archive, and the membership's appreciation of Ellie's sterling work will be passed on to her.

10. Any Other Business

The Chairman reported that BBC Worldwide (the marketing arm of the BBC) has finally released her Radio 4 dramatisation of *Some Tame Gazelle* on cassette, as part of the BBC Radio Collection. Further releases of the Pym dramatisations will depend on sales figures of *Some Tame Gazelle*, it must sell 40,000 copies in order to be regarded as viable.

This led to a general discussion of the availability of Barbara Pym's novels in print. There seems to be a need to make bookshops aware of the desirability of stocking her work. Blackwell's Paperback Shop in Oxford has offered to display her books during Pym Conferences in Oxford.

Eileen Roberts queried our seeking more publicity, possibly publicising the Barbara Pym Society on the Internet, and pointed out that the most successful publicity so far for the Society had been the announcement on Radio 4 which followed *A Very Suitable Occasion* and (in print) the special note facing the title page of *A la Pym*. As far as we are aware there are no plans at the BBC to repeat the programme *Miss Pym's Day Out*, which to date has been shown twice. The Chairman was complimented on her dramatisation of *Some Tame Gazelle*, and asked about further dramatisations. She replied that she had submitted a synopsis.

On the subject of plans for 1997, there were suggestions for another London meeting at St Alban's, and for a regional meeting in Bristol in the Spring (Saturday, 26th April or 10th May), which would centre on that city's role in Barbara Pym's life. The conference and A.G.M., with its theme of 'Barbara Pym and Food', was scheduled for September (exact date to depend on St Hilda's commitments).

It was proposed to send the membership's best wishes to Hazel Holt, who was unwell. (Later a card was circulated and signed by all those present.)

Eileen Roberts reported that she had received a letter from Father Gerard Irvine regretting that he would not be able to give the post-dinner talk that evening owing to a preaching engagement, and sending his best wishes, also that Eleni Godi had expressed her gratitude for the grant which had enabled her to complete her work and for the questionnaires which members had filled in at last year's meeting.

Souvenirs were discussed; it was decided to order mugs to be sold at about £5 each. Other items such as Christmas cards, blank cards, post-cards, tea-towels, etc. will be investigated. After some discussion of photographs suitable for post-cards, etc. Elizabeth Proud closed the meeting.

BIRDS, WOODWORM AND JESUITS: ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN BARBARA PYM'S NOVELS

Joy Grant

"Had the church been older and darker and smaller, had it perhaps been a Roman Catholic church, I thought wickedly". Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women* has slipped into her Anglican parish church to meditate a while, only to find it sadly lacking in atmosphere. Would she have drawn more comfort from a Roman Catholic church, she asks herself - but only for a split second, for Mildred (most conscientious of Pym heroines) knows a naughty thought when she has one, and considering how much it would have upset her mother, that was a naughty thought indeed.

The late Mrs Lathbury, wife of a Low Church parson, was given to pursing her lips and "breathing in a frightened whisper, 'Incense'", even in Anglo-Catholic surroundings: it was the suggestion of Rome that upset her, as it did others in Mildred's life. Her friend Dora grasps her umbrella and waves it like a sword at the thought of entering the monks' enclosure at Buckfast Abbey, her cleaning lady is shattered by relatives' comments on her style of worship: "They said it was Roman Catholic or something, and we'd all be kissing the Pope's toe before you could say knife", while her dinner hostess, Mrs Bone, issues the strongest warnings against birds, woodworm and the Society of Jesus: "The Jesuits got my son, you know. You would hardly believe the things that go on in their seminaries. I can lend you some very informative pamphlets", no doubt from the Protestant Trust Society, whose bookshop was near Barbara's place of work.

Barbara distanced herself from rank prejudice of this kind by laughing at it. A more reasoned approach was looked for in the Anglo-Catholic circles in which she moved, where a priest might use a sermon to "explain about the Pope", like Julian Mallory, or to tell "Why I am not a Roman Catholic", like Mark Ainger. In point

of fact, so close were the two churches in doctrine and ceremonial that it was only right to remind people of the real differences, lest some of them be tempted to jump the gap. As the main reasons for departures from her North London congregation, Barbara listed "Rome, Death and Umbrage" (and the greatest of these was Umbrage!)

Any emotional crisis - a broken engagement, for example - could in theory send a priest over the edge, make him leave this Church of England, convert to Rome and end up a cardinal, as was feared for Father Mallory in *Excellent Women*. And we know how Barbara regarded such behaviour from her comment on that bright young Anglican hopeful, Ronald Knox: "I thought what a pity it was he ever went over to Rome and how beastly it must be for a priest to do it and become a *Roman* priest" Strong words!

Father Sainsbury in *A Glass of Blessings* becomes "Poor Edwin" from the moment he takes the plunge at Westminster Cathedral, "which seems a little less sinister than Farm Street, don't you think?" remarks Father Ransome (many a notable fish was caught in Peter's net by divine grace and the Jesuits of Mayfair). "Couldn't the Romans have welcomed him with a party?" asks Wilmet Forsyth, determined to be aggrieved for the victim's sake, and Ransome replies: "They've been coming so thick and fast lately - the converts, I mean, I suppose they couldn't welcome each one individually". Father Sainsbury had joined the exodus of 1955, in protest against the Anglican attitude to the Church of South India, some of whose clergy were not episcopally ordained. Father Thames, it may be recalled, thought of arranging some discussion groups on the issue, but dropped the idea. It was too hot a potato.

While over the years a great many Anglo-Catholic priests came under

Barbara's eye, her contact with the Roman clergy was restricted to various priest-anthropologists met in the course of her work at *Africa*: Father Van Bulck (notable for having taken a plastic portable altar into the field) was the model for Father Gemini in *Less Than Angels*, the Italian missionary who memorably throws off his clothes, and is suspected of securing a research grant by devious means ("I can't help feeling that the Jesuits are behind this", says Miss Clovis). Her Roman Catholic parish priests make only fleeting appearances, no sooner do we catch the lilt of their - invariably - Irish voices than they're gone. An endearing "Bye-bye now!" is all we have of Father Bogart in *Excellent Women*, while the well-meant platitudes of the young hospital chaplain in *Quartet in Autumn* abruptly cease when Marcia tells him she is not a Catholic: "'Ah then, you'll be a Protestant'". The violence of the word has a stunning effect, as it must to anyone used to the vaguer and gentler 'Anglican' or 'Church of England'. 'Well, it's nice to have had this chat. The Protestant chaplain will be along to see you.'" An altogether foreign encounter, not really typical of the mid 1970s when the Irish church was despatching fewer priests on what was jokingly termed the English mission.

Far from being sinister (though clad in strictest black) Barbara's priests are full of manly good cheer: "And you'll have the Limerick Times with the account of the hurling?" cries one Father to another at the airport. "A grand match it was, a *grand* match." "Did ye get the little bottles?" demands a jolly-looking, curly-haired Irishman with a strong brogue of a fellow reverend newly landed in the Eternal City. Anything more remote from the world of Father Thames and his Faberge eggs is hard to imagine.

When it comes to the R.C. laity, Barbara is selective, ignoring both the

"Old Catholic Families who kept the Faith alive in Penal Times" (and were so much admired by Evelyn Waugh) and the average English Catholic. Barbara's cradle Catholic is either Irish or quaintly Continental, like the Gallic anthropologist Jean-Pierre le Rossignol in *Less than Angels*, who bafflingly describes himself as a Thomist, and spends his Sundays sampling the various brands and flavours of English Protestantism.

She gives us a handful of English converts, a blunt term out of favour nowadays. Richly comic is Mildred Lathbury's introduction to a pair of cultured English spinsters: "I gathered that they had 'gone over' in Italy, which seemed a suitable place to do it in, if one had to do it at all. 'There was really no English church where we were,' said Miss Boniface almost apologetically, 'We didn't care for the priest either, he was very Low'. 'And the congregation was rather snobbish and unfriendly,' said Miss Edgar. 'You see, Bony and I were governesses and they were mostly titled people'" The friends are well aware that their curious conduct will be more readily understood and forgiven if explained, not in theological terms, but in terms of social class, that most English preoccupations. Had they too been coached by Jesuits?

One must remind oneself how very set in her ways, how proudly separate from other Christian bodies, was the English Catholic church that confronted Barbara and her fictional converts in the 1950s. The Latin mass was offered by the priest with his back to the congregation, and in a lowered voice, as from time immemorial. Nuns still wore their antique habits. A priest's celibacy was seen as his crowning glory, and the idea of women Roman Catholic priests had not been mooted. The well-disciplined faithful - forbidden to worship in non-Catholic churches - were late in the decade actually granted permission to say the Lord's Prayer with other Christians in certain circumstances.

The sweeping changes initiated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), both in the liturgy and in inter-Church relationships, as reflected in *A Few Green Leaves*, dating from the late 1970s - significantly, the only Pym novel in which a Roman Catholic

character has a sizeable role to play. Adam Prince, Anglo-Catholic clergyman turned Roman Catholic layman, is on easy terms with the Anglicans, dropping off a bundle of jumble at the vicarage for the parish sale without a second thought, and even advising the vicar on the selection of communion wines, a delicate point, since Adam left the Church of England because he doubted the validity of Anglican orders. These are hardly heroic stands for togetherness, but they mark an advance on a quarter-century earlier. To feel the difference, one has only to recall the indignation of Anglican Sister Blatt in *Excellent Women* (1951) when invited by a member of Father Bogart's congregation to look in on *their* jumble sale!

Doing her bit for ecumenism, Barbara attended a new-style Roman mass in her church at Finstock, and was not impressed: "very unthrilling, no incense very unbeautiful language. Methodist harvest festival was better!"; she could understand why there was a Latin Mass Society, she said. The vicar in the novel would agree. He feels sorry for Adam: "That dreadful vernacular mass," he thinks, "scant consolation for one brought up on the 19th century Anglo-Catholic revival and the *Ritual Reason Why*". But interestingly, Adam makes no complaint, and whether driving off to Sunday mass in his ruby-red Renault, or preparing a "rather special" dinner for Father Byrne (yet another priest with an Abbey Theatre accent) seems perfectly comfortable in the church of Rome.

Barbara herself felt no temptation to "go over". Happy with the Church of England, and with definite misgivings about Rome, her attitude was much like that of Jane Cleveland, the vicar's wife in *Jane and Prudence*: while wandering round the various departments of a large religious bookshop, Jane feels as though she were looking round the entire Anglican Church, from one extreme to the other, "climbing higher and higher, peeping over the top to have a look at Rome on the other side, and then quickly drawing back."

SUGGESTIONS WELCOMED

We thank all those who filled in the blue 'suggestions' form at the last A.G.M. Twenty-seven forms were received. We are grateful for the ideas for future programmes and events, for the offers of help therein and for the enthusiasm with which they are expressed!

BARBARA PYM POTTERY

Our potter, Barbara Payne, reports that she is glazing and firing the last few of the mugs which we ordered. These will feature her designs (sleeping cat, and sitting cat with ball of wool) as on the 1993 Conference mug, but with the words 'Barbara Pym Society'. The mugs will be available in four colours (blue, green, oatmeal and brown). They will be on sale at the Annual Meeting or by mail from St Hilda's.

ROBERT SMITH'S LIST OF LONDON CHURCHES

Many of those who heard Robert's excellent talk at last year's Spring Meeting asked for the list of churches. Here it is:

1. St. Alban's, Holborn
2. St Gabriel's, Warwick Sq., Pimlico
3. St. Michaels & All Angels, Barnes Bridge
4. St. Mary's Aldermary, Queen Victoria Street, City
5. St. Mary-Le-Strand
6. St. James, Piccadilly
7. All Saint's Talbot Road, Notting Hill
8. Holy Innocents, Paddeswick Road, Hammersmith
9. St Cyprian's, Clarence Gate, Regent's Park
10. St Augustin, Kilburn
11. St Laurence, Chevening Road,
12. St John the Divine, Richmond, Surrey

Eleni Godi asked us to thank all members who filled in her questionnaire at the Annual Meeting, she has almost finished her thesis and hopes to let us see it soon.

TWO ENGLISH LADY NOVELISTS: THE ATS AND THE BPS

Hazel Bell

Two authors of our century, Angela Thirkell and Barbara Pym, are taken to write in the same genteel, satirical vein, and their novels often appeal to the same readers. Both wrote wittily of their own social class in their period, including the effects on English life of the Second World War. Both feature the Anglican clergy, with scholars, members of the professional classes, and many ladies in their cast. Both make much use of literary quotation and allusion, not always identified, greatly intriguing their readers (Thirkell draws particularly on Dickens; Pym on seventeenth-century poets). The novels of both, while most enjoyable narrations to read, may also be taken as social history of the 20th century, closely observing its clothes, food, behaviour and relationships. They each cast on the world around them the outsider's eye of a woman alone, lacking the support and social status of a husband-escort. Both have been called malicious, and compared, for their subject range and style, to Jane Austen.

There are, though, many differences between their lives and works, counterpointing the similarities.

Angela Thirkell lived 1890-1960, the cherished child of a distinguished family: granddaughter of the pre-Raphaelite painter, Sir Edward Burne-Jones, and daughter of Dr John Mackail, a classical scholar who became Professor of Poetry at Oxford. J. M. Barrie was her godfather, bestowing her name on Peter Pan's Wendy Moira Angela Darling. She did not herself attend university, though, and suffered two broken marriages leading to bitter relationships with her elder two sons.

After her return from Australia, scene from 1920-30 of her disastrous second period of married life, she became a solitary figure, isolated in London society, through her later years. She comments sardonically (in *High Rising*), 'a woman who can't bring a man with her is apt to be, if not

unwelcome, at least the sort of person who doesn't head one's list of guests'.

Barbara Pym lived 1913-80, born in Oswestry, Shropshire, the child of a suburban solicitor. She graduated from Oxford in English Language and Literature, then followed a London career as an editor in a learned institution. She experienced a succession of unhappy love affairs, but never married. After retirement she spent her last years living with her sister in an Oxfordshire cottage.

Both writers' frustrations found outlet in their work. Thirkell railed derisively against university-educated women, career women, foreigners, the Labour government (the terrible 'Them') and its effects on postwar English, and dreary husbands 'removed by death with kindly care'. Her snobbishness in her later years grew extreme, and her portrayals of members of the working classes, particularly servants and evacuees, are sneering rather than satirical, making quite uncomfortable reading.

Pym, by contrast, shows what Philip Larkin called a 'rueful yet compassionate acceptance' of loneliness, lack of fulfilment of potentialities, lack of appreciation, the lowly status accorded by society to the unmarried woman. Her cast of 'excellent women', many of them 'typical English spinsters', accept the apparent emptiness of their lives without complaint or demand for more, devoting themselves to 'good works', pastoral duties and the clergy, suffused, like Letty in *Quartet in Autumn*, with a 'mild general undemanding kindness to all'. Warned not to 'expect too much', Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women*, 'forbore to remark that women like me really expected very little -- nothing, almost'. A. S. Byatt observes, 'Pym's novels are cosy and sad'.

Thirkell wrote thirty seven novels, nearly all in a single sequence set in 'Barssetshire', in succession to Anthony Trollope's. They appeared annually at least, her characters recurring

constantly, ageing and intermarrying through a time span of nearly thirty years. She presents herself in her most-featured character, Laura Morland, a best-selling novelist, much-loved - indeed universally venerated - who nonchalantly dismisses her own work as 'good bad books; the same every year, you can't tell them apart'. Laura is the heroine of the first of the Barssetshire novels, *High Rising* (written when Thirkell was forty-three), appears in each of them, and celebrates her seventieth birthday in the last, *Three Score and Ten*. She is a widow who turns to novel-writing to pay for the private education of her four sons - as the twice-divorced Thirkell did, providing alone for her three. Perhaps she sought thus to compensate herself in her fiction for the lack of social and critical success in her life. Laura explains to her publisher, 'It's not highbrow. I've just got to work. You see, my husband was nothing but an expense to me while he was alive, and naturally he is no help to me now he's dead, so I thought if I could write some rather good bad books, it would help with the boys' education'. Laura refuses many offers of marriage through the sequence, preferring (somewhat unconvincingly) her independent motherhood.

Thirkell's last novel, unfinished at her death, was completed by C. A. Lejeune and published posthumously. She never achieved true critical esteem, and after her death her books fell out of print. Some are now being republished in paperback.

Pym wrote twelve novels, portraying the scenes with which she was familiar - middle-class village life, parish churches, London offices, scholarly institutions - in minute detail. Cups of tea are provided to meet all crises. She too reintroduces characters in subsequent novels, but less obviously; they make only minor appearances, sometimes unnamed, simply for the *cognoscenti* to appreciate. Her first six novels met

with popular success; then she suffered seven bleak years of rejection and obscurity. Acclaim for her work by both Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil led to her rediscovery, repute, and a nomination for the Booker Prize (for *Quartet in Autumn*). She too appears in her own novels, always as an unobtrusive, observant figure. For example, in *No Fond Return of Love*:

It was at this point that somebody came to the unoccupied table, but as she was a woman of about forty, ordinary-looking and unaccompanied, nobody took much notice of her. As it happened, she was a novelist; indeed, some of the occupants of the tables had read and enjoyed her books, but it would never have occurred to them to connect her name ... with that of the author they admired.

Pym's humble fictional acceptance of her position contrasts poignantly with Thirkell's triumphant but scattily endearing Laura Morland. Dying (of cancer) at sixty seven, Pym never fully enjoyed the cult status and acclaim that have since been accorded her. How she would have loved to know that she had achieved an entry in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*! Her novels ... are satirical tragi-comedies of middle-class life: many of the relationships described consist of a kind of celibate flirtation'). All her works are now available in paperback, and even in translation in other languages. Several of her unfinished stories have been edited and published since her death by her friend and editorial colleague, Hazel Holt, as have her letters and diaries (*A Very Private Eye*). There has also been a spate of posthumous publications, including a book of recipes drawn from her novels, *A La Pym*.

Each writer now has her own appreciation society. These too somewhat resemble each other, seeking to publicise and celebrate their author and her works (and both being members of the Alliance of Literary Societies). The Angela Thirkell Society was founded in 1980, with her third son, Lance, as its President. It has now produced sixteen annual journals, and has a membership of nearly four hundred, in the UK, Ireland and North America. Activities include visits to sites in Thirkell's life -

and to her grave; to places of events in the novels; hearing talks; and 'Barchester teas' in members' homes. They also search for second-hand copies of her out-of-print works.

The Barbara Pym Society was inaugurated in 1993 at St Hilda's College, Oxford, where she lived as a student from 1931-34. Its President is Barbara's sister Hilary. A weekend conference has been held at St Hilda's each year since, with talks and demonstrations of a particular theme in her works: clothes, the church, and this year, food. It has also visited Pym sites in London, particularly churches. Future plans include an in-depth look at single Pym works, study of her own reading and literary influences, and of her influence on other writers. It has two hundred and forty members, and produces an occasional newsletter, *Green Leaves*.

Both writers, quintessentially English as they are, find particular appreciation in the US, where their works are studied at universities, and criticism continues to appear. Each has had one of her earliest novels dramatised on BBC Radio (Thirkell's *Wild Strawberries*, Pym's *Some Tame Gazelle*).

Membership of the two societies in some cases overlaps; perhaps more of each should try the works of the other author. Both find that, agonize over themes for meetings as their committees may, simple reading aloud of the texts fills the halls with laughter. The predominant characteristics of both novelist is their sparkling wit.

Reference

1. Byatt, A. S. *Barbara Pym in Passions of the Mind*. Chatto & Windus, 1991.

In view of A La Pym and this year's Annual Meeting Miss Maby thought a copy of the menu which she served on one of Barbara's visits to her might be of interest

The Weekend of 1st, 2nd, 3rd of November ????

Friday Night

Onion Soup
Gammon Rashers with Apple Rings
Junket and Bananas

Saturday

Breakfast
Scrambled Eggs

Lunch

Royal Game Soup
Fish Fingers with tomato and baked beans
Cheese and Celery

Supper

Irish Stew
Queen of Puddings

Sunday

Breakfast
Bacon and Mushrooms

Lunch

Beef Casserole with new potatoes and cabbage
Lemon Mousse