

GREEN LEAVES

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society

Vol 5, No 1, July 1999

THE 1999 SPRING MEETING



Pym Society Members enjoying the Spring Meeting

Neither snarled London traffic nor the last minute absence of her speaking partner, Rosemary Mellor, could ruffle Mary Turton, formerly of the ATS, whose talk at the Society's Spring Meeting demonstrated the aplomb and professionalism one hopes to find in a woman who did work of national importance during WWII.

Displaying a picture of herself in full ATS uniform, Mary admitted that she had wanted to join the WRNS, as Barbara Pym did, because they had the best looking, best fitting clothes. Lucky WRNS even received silk stockings. However, the WRNS moved slowly while the ATS pounced, so Mary, on leaving St Hilda's, did most of her war work at the famously mysterious Bletchley Park.

On arrival at Bletchley Park Mary discovered that the superiority of WRNS was even apparent in their billets. WRNS stayed at Woburn Abbey while Mary and her peers in the ATS lived in prefabricated huts. Their address and their tailoring may have combined to make the WRNS 'rather a snooty lot'. Even at the 3am night-shift meal (capable, surely, of

shaking any social organization to its foundation), the WRNS persisted in eating at a separate table from the other women.

Security was taken very seriously by everyone doing war work, as illustrated by the absence of detail in Barbara's diaries about her work, including her journey to Naples. The habits of security were practiced so completely that no potentially sensitive information would be shared, even between friends.

For example, Mary only learned on the 50th anniversary of VE Day that her best friend and neighbour at Bletchley Park worked on the decoding machines.

Like her friend, Mary has only recently begun to tell people the content of her own work, which was identifying and decoding German messages. The German army had strong security consciousness, but the air force was a gold mine for Mary and her peers, as the fly boys tended to have conversations with each other without regard to whom might be listening in. 'I picked up a nice girl in Rouen last night' didn't tax the

decoding talents of the clever women employed at Bletchley.

While the work was important, it was often dull, and not what the talented women temporarily in the services necessarily wanted to be doing. Mary quoted some of Barbara's frustrated comments about the amount of time spent doing apparently pointless things - drilling in drizzle, queuing for everything, and learning a multitude of arbitrary rules - as reflecting her own experience.

Sometimes the tyranny of rules in the services meant miserable times. During training in London, Mary missed her own 21st birthday party through a diabolical combination of the ATS's arbitrary rules and last minute plans, and the impossibility of crossing wartime London, from Hampstead to Wimbledon, in a hurry.

But Mary recalled that all the boring hours spent listening and searching for messages were justified during the run-up to the Normandy invasion. A very long message came through from German High Command relocating units, and revealing the critical information that for 4 to 6 hours there would be virtually no German troops in Falaise, where the Allies broke through.

The classic reaction to the stress of the war and the boredom of war work was, of course, to party. Barbara's diaries, which don't mention work, do feature parties and the transitory relationships that flourished with them. Mary experienced some of the same life, especially after she was posted to Berlin as part of an education unit after VE Day.

Life in Berlin in the winter following peace was grim, especially for the Germans. Ignoring the rule against 'fratting' with the locals and the rule that visits to the Russian sector were only to be made with an armed escort of three soldiers, Mary immersed herself in the cultural life.

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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BARABARA PYM

Brother Gabriel Myers, OSB, Monk of St Anselm's Abbey, Washington, DC

As Barbara made 'Denton Pilgrimages' to Greenwich and Middle Orchard, so a friend and I made a 'Barabara Pilgrimage' when we were in London this summer. There was something suitable about our lodgings for this adventure, which were in the elegance of Eaton Place, but in a decidedly 'downstairs apartment'. The kindly retired Irish landlady made an excellent pot of tea, well-shrouded in a cat-shaped cosy; she loved talking of 'home' in County Mayo (though she had lived in London for some fifty years); she was fond of daintiness (the toilet's requisites were very pink and very fluffy); and one evening she entertained us with 'jigs and reels' and melancholy airs on a miniature accordion! She thus was ripe, with a little polishing, to slip into a Barbara Pym novel.

On our first morning my friend and I walked from our lodgings into the 'wrong side' of Victoria, to visit St. Gabriel's, Warwick Square, the prototype of the church in *Excellent Women*. How astonished we were to discover that Barbara's actual address was right across the street from St. Gabriel's noble spire! I had always imagined Mildred's much-loved view from further down the square and just glimpsing the church in the distance. The Cambridge Street address did not look at all shabby: the windows are large and the facade has a classical symmetry. Perhaps the Pym sisters did 'raise the district's tone,' as Barbara once joked to Robert Liddell.

We were thrilled to perceive that it was the morning for the cleaning rota. So a ring of the doorbell gained us an only slightly-hesitant admission; we were welcome to look around while they finished their 'trivial round and common tasks'. We walked through the vestry which Mildred described as 'gloomy and untidy' and into the large nave. The altar was beautifully vested; there were 'Roman statues' - some wearing actual clothing - and (as in Italy) some artificial flowers at

small shrines. We also noticed confessionals, but on a Wednesday morning there were no clergy lying in wait for the sensitive consciences of Anglo-Catholic ladies.

Our hostess had been married at St. Gabriel's in 1948. While she acknowledged some change and decay (the pipe organ needed repairs and the sandstone exterior was crumbling in a worrisome way), the fifty Sunday worshippers were served by three priests. Two of them 'do it for love!' she announced with justifiable pride. We met one of the assistants outside, who also spoke with confidence of St. Gabriel's ministry. 'Our deanery is of one accord,' he responded to our queries. 'We do not suffer from the divisions and hesitations that our neighbouring brethren seem to be having.' My friend and I, though both of Roman persuasion, went on our way encouraged. 'We'll offer him up on Sunday,' had been his parting words, the piety leavened by an almost chirpy delivery.

We then took the number 36 bus, sitting on the upper level as excited tourists, to Queen's Park, NW 6. It must only be in comparison to the great London parks that Hazel Holt describes Queen's Park as a 'little' oasis. There were wide manicured lawns, beautiful flower beds and many little boys playing soccer near a banner saying 'Sponsored by the Corporation of London.' We saw old men on constitutionals, young mothers with strollers, and other inhabitants of the Larkin poem 'Toads Revisited'. None could answer our questions about the redundant St. Laurence's, so we finally decided that the modern flats on St. Laurence Close *must be* the site of the end of the Pym's' Sunday morning car-chase after cassock-clad Bear's Hillman Husky. (cf. *A lot to Ask*, chapter 14)

We found net curtains on the 'rather gloomy' downstairs window of 40 Brooksville Avenue, where the Pym sisters lived from 1961-1972. A

large uncurtained bay-window displayed a tree-like plant in the upstairs front room. So we wondered whether the present residents also used it as a sitting room in order to see various 'comings and goings,' as Mabel and Rhoda did.

Just below the upper window was a black medallion witnessing to the Pym association. I believe that the recognition of an official London blue-tile plaque cannot be given until twenty years after the person's lifetime. So it was a joyful pleasure to find such a memorial. We had bought a camera to record our pilgrimage sites. My friend tried to include me in a photograph showing both the gate and the door-number. This was not entirely possible. However by 'crouching' in the street (to use a favourite expression of Barbara's) he hoped to include both me (smiling) and the medallion. The upper window did seem to be a problem.

'I know!' he shouted with typical Italian exuberance. 'Why don't you climb up on the gatepost, and then we'll have everything.' A rather heated discussion followed in which I, of more retiring disposition, explained how utterly unsuitable such typically rude and American tourist behaviour would be, how it would infringe upon the memory of Barbara's impeccable and fastidious manners. How could he possibly think, and so on, and so on.

I was pulled up short by the volume of our American tourists' voices in this utterly silent street when the figure of woman appeared in the upper window where the Pym sisters once sat. She was tall and friendly-looking, apparently not cross with all our noise. She smiled and nodded briefly before disappearing. She was, in Mildred's words, 'not pretty, but with quite a pleasant face'. I was not quick enough to notice whether her smile could be described as charmingly lopsided.

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MEMORIES OF MY MOTHER

In our village churchyard there is a memorial plaque dedicated to my mother - it reads simply "Honor Wyatt Ellidge 1910-1998. Journalist and Mother". These were the two things at which she excelled. We could perhaps have added 'and Grandmother'. Even towards the end of her life, she was a young persons' person. As her contemporaries died, most of her friends were nearer my age than hers. She seemed always to have her 'finger on the button', so to speak, and thanks to a modern outlook and her eight grandchildren she was almost unshockable.

Some weeks before my wedding in 1962 I confided that I might be pregnant (something that one simply did NOT allow to happen!), her response was "Well, if you are, you are: it won't show and we'll say it was a seven month baby". In the event, I wasn't! I think the only thing that shocked her was gratuitous violence, as was displayed three summers ago when a young family, walking home across the fields from the village school were attacked and left for dead by a madman. She wrote in her diary, 'Satan has visited this beautiful place and it will never be the same again'.

Memories of my mother go back a long way, and it is difficult to choose just a few to share with you. As a journalist, she worked all her life and was even being published in *The Oldie* magazine up until two years ago. For most of our childhood she was a single parent. My brother, Julian, and I were the issue of her first marriage to Gordon Glover. When that marriage failed, she had to make a living by her wits - which were considerable! She started writing for Schools Broadcasting and later, after my brother Robert was born, she moved to *Woman's Hour* as a talks producer. Robert's father, George Ellidge, was married to someone else when Robert was born, so things were not easy. Eventually they were married very happily, but unfortunately George developed Multiple Sclerosis and once again my mother was the main breadwinner.



Honor Wyatt 1937

She always ensured that we were being well cared for when she was not able to be with us during holidays. One winter half-term she left us lots of little parcels around the house with a list of clues: this is a wonderful memory of fighting for the prize! Maybe a box of pencils, a pack of cards or a bag of sweets! One half term when I was 13, and at home from Boarding School, she left me in Trafalgar Square (on her way up to the BBC in Portland Place) with a list of "Things to find". They included the Roebuck outside South Africa House; Renoir's "Les Parapluis" in the National Gallery and a certain tomb in the Crypt at St. Martin In The Fields. She was a natural teacher and loved the challenge of filling the empty vessels that young people came along with.

She always managed to find the money to send us abroad on foreign exchanges and she welcomed our friends to our large and very comfortable tatty Georgian house near Dover. I can't really remember a time when we were just the family. If we weren't entertaining foreign students (£7 per week all found) + 1 hour's

English tuition daily) then we had family friends, either just passing through on their way to the continent or making a point of spending time with us.

Barbara and Hilary Pym were in that category and how we loved it when they came.

"The Pym Girls will be here this weekend!". I shall never forget them painting the bottom of the Vicar's cups with nail varnish when we had been roped in to 'do the teas' at the village fete - Barbara made great play of this and I remember at the time thinking that had "The Girls" not been with us, there would have been no nail varnish to put on the cups, as we certainly didn't have any!

Alcohol has always been a family weakness and we enjoy it rather more than we should. My mother was no exception and on many occasions, I could see her arm stretching up above the crowds (she was only 5ft. 2ins) waving an empty goblet - "my glass darling, my glass, it appears to be empty!"

The lovely story told by my son, her youngest grandchild, Ben at the Memorial Service was of the day that my daughter Lucy got married. Much wine was drunk on that day, and at the end of the evening my mother was walked home from the festivities in the Village Hall. She just remembered, before crawling into bed, that her orchid should be placed in water - it was - but in the morning she saw that she had put it in upside-down. The last few years of her life were not easy. As she became deafer, she also began to (cont. on page 4)



L. to R. Honor, Barbara, Janey, Liz Palmer, Dick Palmer. Seated Hilary, Mary Palmer, Linda Palmer

Continued from page 2

But later I learned that the house was owned by two male colleagues, not a married couple. So who *was* that tall, pleasant faced woman who nodded kindly to the American pilgrims? I should like to think that from the place where Tom Boilkin drank the holy water at the Pym's house-blessing, there is still some 'virtue' going out. To us it was a happy omen.

Two months later, after a ministerial internship at a Benedictine parish in Lancashire, I was again in London before returning to the USA. My spirits were a bit low as I had no travelling companion, and I was sad to bid England farewell. I even had some flu symptoms. Nevertheless, I took the Tube to Hammersmith, questioned a friendly Eastern Businessman about the way to Barnes, SW13 (the Pym residence from 1949-61)

And so I found myself walking over the beautiful scroll-work of Hammersmith Bridge (now closed to traffic because of construction). There were some drops of rain, and it was a *very* long walk. But it gave me the chance to think of Tom and Catherine walking (and arguing) on their way to Sunday afternoon tea at the Swans. On the way there is a charming little park with a duck-pond, and the thought of Mrs Beltane using a watering can shaped like a swan, was somehow just right. The front garden of 47 Nassau Road is entirely bricked over, but there are carefully tended vines and pot-plants.

With the help of several passers-by I found my way along the river to St. Michael's Church, which is in a quiet street and has a lovely garden. The large gleaming-blue signboard showed that the parishioners get full Catholic privileges and a regular Prayerbook mass, but that the assistant priest and curate are women: to me, this seems a nicely balanced profile.

After my long walk I was almost fretful to find the church locked and that Monday morning was not among scheduled office hours. I rang the

vicarage doorbell and stammered out my plea to the young, handsome clergyman who answered.

'I'm in a meeting right now,' he answered, 'but here is the key and a few postcards. It is a pity that we have never pursued the Pym connection, I suppose.'

I finally got the key to turn in the lock and let myself in. At the back of the church were needlework kits for kneelers and a brand new set of 'The English Hymnal' which I think (in Henry Harvey's phrase) 'remarkably fine'.

'Dark churches are the best for praying in,' said Robert Liddell. I did not light a candle, as Skipper once did with Barbara in a little Roman Church. But I think that it was a fitting place to end my Barbara-Pilgrimage: in a dark church, alone, with a thankful heart.



If you would like to make your own Barbara Pilgrimage, like Brother Gabriel's, here are a few addresses:

Pimlico, where she lived in 1946, associated with 'Excellent Women'
108 Cambridge Street
St Gabriel's Warwick Square

Barnes, before 1950, associated with 'A Glass of Blessings', 'Less Than Angels', and 'No Fond Return of Love':
47 Nassau Road, St Michaels,
Barnes Bridge

Queen's Park, 1961 'An Unsuitable Attachment'
40 Brooksville Ave
St Lawrence the Martyr, Chevening Road (no longer a church)

Marlybone, associated with 'Quartet in Autumn'
Bed sit at 32 Balcombe Street

Other churches worth visiting on your pilgrimage:
All Saints Notting Hill in Clydesdale Road; St Mary Magdalene's, Paddington, Rowington Close, W2; Church of the Annunciation, Marble Arch; St James Picadilly; St Martin in the Fields; St Paul's Churchyard, St Alban the Martyr, Holborn.

Devon Alison

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lose her sight: a woman who once never had enough time, became sad and very frustrated. She couldn't see to read or watch television, her hearing became so bad that she couldn't join in conversations or listen to her Talking Books. She told me she was living in a silent world. She lived in her memories, writing down episodes of her life (in very wobbly thick felt pen) and she would copy out poems and folk songs from memory. Some summers ago, I came into her garden in the early evening and she was sitting at her table with a glass of wine. I stood and listened while she sang "Early One Morning" from beginning to end. I didn't know whether to cry or clap!

When she was asked to be guest speaker at St. Hilda's four years ago, her initial reaction was that because she couldn't see she couldn't do it. We persuaded her to at least to try to cobble something together before turning down this lovely opportunity to talk about Barbara. As you probably all know, she did manage to 'cobble something together'. She learnt her talk by heart and I can honestly say that it was one of my proudest moments, as her daughter, to watch her professionalism as she stood up and gave her audience a day to remember.

On the back of that success, and only four months later, we travelled to Oxford again, to St. John's College this time, for The Robert Graves Centenary Conference. It was a blisteringly hot day and the car broke down - we almost decided that it was a monumental folly to travel so far in the heat, but my mother was determined we would get there. Once again she stood up and talked from memory about Robert Graves, her friend, and her time spent in Deya, Mallorca in the 1930's. She had asked me to sit with her on the podium in case she needed prompting. I sat with pride and watched this octogenarian give the performance of a lifetime; she needed no prompting and ended to a standing ovation.

They loved her - and so did I.

Prue Anderton

PYM IN AMERICA

The first meeting of the Barbara Pym Society in North America held at Harvard Law School the 9th and 10th April 1999 was an unqualified success!

The meeting was organized by Founder Member, Ellen Miller, who is Director of Administrative Publications at Harvard Law School. She seemed to be astonished at the success of her own endeavours - the story goes that when Ellen announced the conference to the public at large, she had no way of knowing what the response would be ...could it be possible that no one might come??? Luckily, this was not the case! On the contrary, Ellen was overwhelmed with requests to attend, so overwhelmed that she was finally turning people away because the space allocated could not accommodate any more participants. (The author confesses to crashing the occasion by just 'showing up'. Luckily, Ellen was far too gracious to 'send me packing', so I had the opportunity to participate in the conference by default.)

Needless to say, the British contingent was a great success. Our own acting Chairman, Kate Charles, was one of the featured speakers, as well as Dr Barbara Everett of Somerville College, Oxford.

Dr Everett initiated the Saturday proceedings with her talk 'Excellent Women and After: The Art of Popularity', a talk which our American cousins found as stimulating as we did when Dr Everett gave the same presentation to our conference last September. One is always impressed by her luminous intelligence, and the fact that she considers Barbara Pym as a writer of real significance brings an element of gravitas to the whole area of Pym studies. During the post-presentation discussion, Dr Everett made some extremely interesting comparisons between the works of Barbara Pym and the works of her contemporaries, Elizabeth Taylor and Ivy Compton-Burnett.

Kathy Ackley, of the University of Wisconsin spoke on the topic of 'Everyone has a Mother', thought provoking to say the least! Kate Charles gave her eloquent presentation entitled 'In the Footsteps of Barbara Pym' as well as bringing best wishes

and greetings from the UK. We had been fortunate to have heard Kathy's and Kate's talks at St Hilda's on previous occasions.

The afternoon session began with a reminiscence by Brother Gabriel, OSB, of the various Pym pilgrimage places he and a friend visited while in London. (His talk was read at the Spring Meeting in London by fellow American James Myers and is recorded on page 2 of this *Green Leaves*.)

This was followed with presentations by Paul DeAngelis, 'From a Publisher's Files' and a highly theoretical analysis of Pym's works, 'Some problems of a Transatlantic Thesis-Monger' from Ph.D. candidate, Christopher Shields.

Paul DeAngelis brought a highly personal contribution to the proceedings, because as Barbara's American publisher at E.P. Dutton there were many anecdotes of a personal nature which threw light on an aspect of her career which I had never heard addressed. Perhaps because it was so anecdotal in nature I found it deeply moving.

Christopher's talk was an extract from his thesis and a mixture of the theoretical and the subjective and I found this presentation to be the least sympathetic - but it was an interesting exercise.

The conference ended with a stimulating general discussion led by Professor Emeritus Emrys Jones (Oxford) where all the speakers took the dais to be 'cross-questioned' by the attendees. The discussion was thought-provoking, good-natured, and simply great fun. The meeting was for me personally not only great fun but a reminder that there is a tremendous amount of interest in Barbara Pym and her novels. There is also a large amount of serious scholarly study taking place and the conference embraced the fun and the serious in the most stimulating way. It was also wonderful to meet new Pym enthusiasts and to renew acquaintances from earlier meetings.

Congratulations to Ellen Miller! And much success to future meetings in North America.

Rita Phillips

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Between assignments to give lectures on 'The British Way and Purpose' and 'Current Affairs', Mary attended as many concerts (some given by musicians of the Berlin Orchestra), operas etc. as she could, especially in venues that were heated.

Mary's talk ended with a series of questions from her appreciative audience, and the information that tours of Bletchley Park are available every other Sunday.

Devon Allison

(Note: Rosemary, unable to attend the Spring Meeting because of illness, will be invited to speak at a future meeting.)

The Barbara Pym Society

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Ms Rita Phillips

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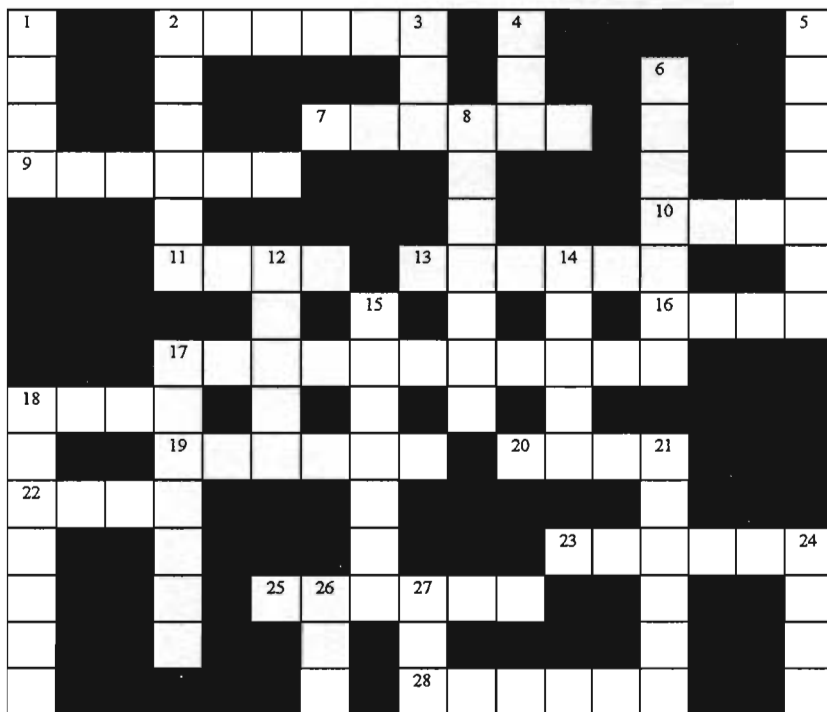
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Solution to the Crossword

G	T	E	A	P	O	T	O		A
O	E				O	W	F	L	
L	D		J	U	M	B	L	E	P
F	R	E	E	Z	E	E	O	H	
	U			R			W	I	N
		M	A	S	S	B	R	I	D
			H	E	I	O	R	O	S
			G	R	E	E	N	L	E
D	O	R	A	L	G	S	E		
O		R	A	F	F	L	E	I	R
G	O	O	D		A		E		
G		E		N		T	O	W	E
E		N	H	E	D	G	E	S	I
T		S		N	A		N	L	
T			D	S	P	R	I	N	G

SUMMER CROSSWORD Compiled by The Archdeacon

Appropriately, Summer is the theme of this crossword.

**CLUES ACROSS**

2. Utensil brought out frequently in Pym. (6)
7. May be sold by Pym characters in any season. (6)
9. Only one Pym heroine has the facility to do this with food in summer. (6)
10. Drunk appreciatively in all seasons. (4)
11. High Church service. (4)
13. Game sometimes played by Pym characters. (6)
16. Variety of 6 down most often seen in summer. (4)
17. A few of these could signal the arrival of summer. (5, 6)
18. Mildred's friend and holiday companion. (4)
19. Sometimes held at charity events. (6)
20. Variety of 6 down or a woman's name. (4)
22. Works of this kind are practised throughout Pym. (4)
23. Surname of a character in "A Glass of Blessings"; rhymes with 6 down. (6)
25. These might need trimming in summer. (6)
28. It comes before summer. (6)

CLUES DOWN

1. All-weather sport mentioned in "A Glass of Blessings". (4)
2. Church anthem. (2,4)
3. First name of Mr Mallow. (3)
4. "The --- and the Nightingale", quoted in "Some Tame Gazelle". (3)
5. A church dedicated to this saint appears in "A Glass of Blessings". (7)
6. Arranging these is a traditional activity for Pym heroines, especially in summer. (7)
8. Ingredients for a summer pudding. (7)
12. Pym heroines worry about being left on this. (5)
14. Channel port visited by Francis and Barbara in "Crampton Hodnet". (5)
15. The setting for all Pym novels. (7)
17. Fetes and parties may take place in these. (7)
18. Surname of spinster who appears in two novels. (7)
21. Activity engaged in before a sale of work. (6)
24. Fabric seldom available to Pym characters. (4)
26. Regrettably, all Pym novels come to this. (3)
27. May be used for heating or lighting - or a barbecue in summer. (3)

Pymming Pym

On a tour of southern England in March 1999, three of Barbara Pym's ardent readers made a Pym pilgrimage to Barnes, where Barbara had lived with her sister Hilary in Nassau Road from 1949-1961. We sat in the car parked outside that very house, thinking of Dulcie Mainwaring's expedition to view Aylwin's mother-in-law's house in Deodar Grove, of Marcia Ivory thrilled to pass the Dulwich house of her adored Mr Strong. We set off in search of Deodar Grove, and found Deodar Road in nearby Hammersmith, though no 'particularly fine deodar' in any front garden. We saw what must have been the 'gateposts ornamented with stone lions' that delighted Catherine Oliphant on her visit to Deirdre Swan - 'Poor things, their noses and paws all worn down' - so indeed they were. Passing the top of Nassau we found the riverside walk where Deidre stopped with Bernard and reflected, 'People who didn't live here thought the river looked so beautiful at night, but to her, it was just the place where Mr Dulke and Mr Lovell took their dogs and the young men from the club (Barnes Sports Club so nearby!) walked with their girlfriends'.

We felt that in the whole trip and its preparations we had been applying to Pym her own techniques described by Hazel Holt (in her preface to *A Very Private Eye*): 'the fascination of finding out about people, searching for clues in Crockford's, Kelly's Directories or street maps'.

Hazel Bell

Further nominations may be made up to one month before the meeting (in writing to the Secretary and with the written consent of the candidate). If there are such further nominations, a ballot sheet will be distributed at the start of the Annual General Meeting and the results announced at the conclusion of the meeting.

BARBARA PYM SOCIETY COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

The slate of candidates for membership of the Committee is as follows:

For Chairman, to serve a five year term

Kate Charles (Kate has just completed, as acting Chair, the last year of Elizabeth Proud's term)

To a second three year term: Rita Phillips, Deidre Bryan-Brown

To complete Kate Charles term as a Committee member (to 2000): Triona Adams