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GREEN LEAVES

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THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY 2000 CONFERENCE

The 2000 Annual Conference of the Barbara Pym Society, entitled '**Barbara Pym, Libraries and Librarians**', was held on Saturday and Sunday, 2-3 September, at St Hilda's College, Oxford. It was attended by sixty, including visitors from Austria, Germany, Italy, Scotland, the US and Wales, and was greatly enjoyed by all.

First on the programme was the Annual General Meeting, the full minutes of which appear on page 3.

The first conference speaker was **Angela Carritt**, former Library Assistant at the Bodleian Library where she catalogued the Pym papers. She quoted a letter from Robert Liddell to Barbara Pym, humorously contemplating the difficulties there might be in archiving and cataloguing their correspondence – and, said Angela, 'Sixty-five years later, I did it!'

She spoke of 'The Pym archives', describing the collection as extensive and comprehensive, comprising 18,500 leaves, divided into four categories: literary papers, diaries, correspondence, and miscellaneous. She found them all fascinating. The diaries so well conveyed what their periods were like; the literary papers, including unpublished works, showed how much Pym cut and recycled passages in her stories.

The Bodleian Library had acquired the collection when Hilary Walton donated it to them after her sister's death. Pym had left no instructions about her papers in her will, but had asked Philip Larkin 's advice in a letter in 1978: 'Ought one to bequeath one's MSS to some English University (much to their dismay)? I imagine you must always be having requests for the scraps of paper you keep by your bed to write down things. What do you do about it?'

The work of archiving the Pym papers had comprised sorting them into the four categories, conserving the actual paper by mounting and framing the leaves with acid-free strips on all sides, and indexing them. The index 'fleshed out the descriptions' of the catalogue. Holders of readers' tickets to the Bodleian now have unrestricted access to the collection.

Nicholas Bennett, Vice-Chancellor and Librarian of Lincoln Cathedral, described the practices of that library most amusingly, claiming, 'Everything I know about libraries I learnt from Barbara Pym'. He quoted passages from the Pym novels plentifully in support of this, with particular reference to Mervin Challow and the Forsyte Research Centre. 'For a librarian, there is no greater pleasure than the creation of a card index', he maintained, referring to 'the catholic librarian's obsession with the works of Miss Barbara Pym'. He credited her also with spreading knowledge of anthropology, and promotion of research – particularly noting that into *The Owl and the Nightingale* in *Some Tame Gazelle*.

Phil Bacon spoke of his twenty years' acquaintance with Philip Larkin at Hull University, where he had been a lecturer in sociology during Larkin's years as the University Librarian. They met chiefly in bars. He traced Larkin's biography, dwelling on his unhappy family life and the strictness of his father. Larkin wrote from an early age, and became a close friend of Kingsley Amis at Oxford University. His first novel, *Jill*, written when he was 22, represents Larkin's own experiences at Oxford as a working-class boy. He was always diffident. After rejection from the Civil Service to which he had applied for a position, he worked in the library of a small town, then in the library of University College at Leicester, living with his widowed mother; then moved to Belfast Unversity Library; and was finally promoted to be University Librarian at Hull.

The after-dinner speaker on Saturday night was **Barbara Levick**, Librarian of St Hilda's 1956-59. Her paper is reproduced in full on pages 6-7.

Sunday morning offered a choice of activities, a party attending St Cross church, another being shown over St Hilda's Library (with full collection of works by and related to Pym), and relevant videos available in the Common Room.

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Helen Taylor

Then **Helen Taylor**, Professor of English, Louisiana State University, Shreveport, spoke on 'Libraries and Librarians in the Pym novels' – to be congratulated afterwards by Hilary Walton on 'a beautiful piece of research'. She gave many examples of libraries entering Pym's work both as settings and symbols of the possibilities of romance, and background both for excitement and despair. In Pym's transmuting of her youthful haunting of the Bodleian, anxious for encounters with Henry Harvey, into the events of *Crampton Hodnet*, 'Life indeed became art'. Pym's skill in finding out about people Taylor saw as both an asset and subject for the novelist. The Bodleian Library achieves full grandeur in *Civil to Strangers*, signifying romance, retreat from the world, donnish eccentricity, and becoming associated also with death.

Pym makes references to libraries in her letters as well as in her books, particularly in letters to Robert Liddell and Philip Larkin, Librarians both. Taylor described her as 'a library-novelist, whose youthful experience in one of the world's greatest libraries gave it a lasting place in her work' and whose writings 'show her witty reverence for both the library and the books'.

Discussion following this paper considered Pym's treatment of gender-issues, and whether she is so under-regarded because of this (or because of her concern with librarians, or with Anglicanism, others suggested). Taylor thought Pym offered a subtle view of gender-relationships: women place themselves on the margin, observing; Pym makes sardonic comments on gender roles. As the study of women writers and women's roles, the female perspective, increases, Pym is attaining a more established place on university syllabuses. Helen Taylor teaches Pym 'on a par with Austen, George Eliot, Woolf – the great writers'. Her representation of English life of her period may cause historic interest to accrue to her work.

Yvonne Cocking spoke of her experience working in the library of the International African Institute, during the years when both Barbara Pym and Hazel Holt were engaged in editorial duties there. Her paper appears on pages 6-7.

The concluding session was an open discussion, '**Libraries and Librarians**', conducted by Michael Wilson, with Yvonne Cocking and Nicholas Bennett completing the panel. The session revealed what a large number of professional librarians were present, and pro duced many amusing anecdotes and examples of current problems besetting libraries – particularly, archiving and the advent of electronic publishing.

Blackwells provided a bookstall; the Talking Book versions of Pym novels available from Chivers were on display, and the newly produced notelets and remaining mugs on sale. It was a conference offering many different sorts of satisfaction to Pym devotees.

Hazel Bell

Yvonne Cocking, Michael Wilson and Nicholas Bennett, the Panel for the final discussion of the conference

Pym week

The New York Public Library has produced an engagement calendar for 2001, 'Celebrating Women Writers' (a page a week), $13.95. It includes more than fifty (black-and-white) photographs and thumbnail biographies of writers from around the world. One week is devoted to Barbara Pym.

Detailed information, including how to order the calendar, is on the Library's website:

www.thelibraryshop.com/index.html

Due thanks

Hazel Holt's biography, *A lot to ask: a life of Barbara Pym* (published by Macmillan, 1990), includes a full index by Hilary Walton, prominently credited at the head of the index. Lovers of *No fond return of love*, recalling Dulcie's reply on learning that Viola is to index Aylwin's latest book: 'Oh, then you'll get some kind of acknowledgement in the foreword. Something about your having undertaken the arduous or thankless – though I hope it won't be that – task of compiling the index.' – will greatly appreciate the wording of Holt's printed acknowledgement to her indexer, which faithfully runs:

> I would like to thank Barbara's sister Hilary Walton, without whom this book would not have been possible. She has, of course, been an invaluable source of information and has shown herself to be a true friend by undertaking the thankless task of compiling the index.

We even learn from letters in *A very private eye* that Pym originally wished to call *NFRL* 'A Thankless Task'.

OCEL

Barbara Pym's entry in the new, revised, 2000 edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Margaret Drabble, has been expanded. It now runs:

> PYM, Barbara Mary Crampton (1913-80), novelist, the daughter of a Shropshire solicitor. She was educated at St Hilda's College, Oxford, and later worked at the International African Institute in London. Her novels include *Excellent Women* (1952), *Less Than Angels* (1955), *A Glass of Blessings* (1958, described by Larkin as 'the subtlest of her books), and *Quartet in Autumn* (1977). They are satirical tragi-comedies of middle-class life, and contain some distinctive portraits of church-going spinsters and charismatic priests: many of the relationships described consist of a kind of celibate flirtation.

CALENDAR

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Barbara Pym Society of North America Spring Conference
31 March – 1 April 2001
Harvard Law School

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Annual Meeting and Conference:
Some Tame Gazelle
1 – 2 September 2001
St Hilda's College, Oxford

MINUTES

REPORT OF THE SEVENTH A.G.M. OF THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY HELD AT ST HILDA'S COLLEGE, OXFORD, ON SATURDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER 2000, AT 11.30 a.m.

Committee members present: Kate Charles (Chairman), Hilary Walton, Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary), Hazel Bell (Editor – *Green Leaves*), Yvonne Cocking (Secretary,) Devon Allison, Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Rita Phillips, Louise Ross, and Michael Wilson.

1.Chairman's Opening Remarks

The Chairman, Kate Charles, opened the meeting by welcoming members and saying that it was good to be back in the Vernon Harcourt Room. She said that a fine programme was planned, and hoped that everyone would enjoy it. She was sorry that Ellen Miller could not be present because of bereavement, but a card for everyone to sign would be sent to her.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Hazel Holt and Muriel Maby.

3. Minutes of Previous A.G.M

The minutes of the previous A.G.M. were accepted.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Item 4. Kate said that the Society would like to have a complete set of audiotapes for its archives. BBC audiotapes have been difficult to obtain, but Devon has managed to get one copy of the dramatised version of *Some Tame Gazelle*. Kate asked if the audience had any tapes that could be copied for the Society's archives, and Gabrielle Page offered *No Fond Return of Love* and *An Unsuitable Attachment*. Devon said that the Society had bought one copy of each of the tapes published by Chivers; she had put these out, for display only, with order forms for members to send directly to Chivers, who offer a 10% discount to members. Eileen said that it would not be possible, for reasons of copyright, to make copies of our own tapes for members or researchers She reminded members that we already hold tapes of conferences, an interview with Henry Harvey, etc.

Item 8. Kate said that it had not been possible to have Christmas cards ready for last year, but with many thanks to Deirdre, they are ready now. Deirdre said that two of Frankie Pollak's drawings from *A la Pym* had been used – the Aga design as the Christmas card, with 'Seasons Greetings', inside and the cat and jug for no-message notelets. These are available in packs of 5, at £1.50 a pack, from the Development Office. She read out the attribution on the back of the card, which includes the Society's addresses.

5. Financial and Membership Report

Eileen Roberts reported that at this time last year there had been a balance of £4326.02 in the main account which now stood at £4041.82. Income for the year was £1618.78 and expenditure £1905.52. She referred to the cost of the conference, for which, unlike the practice of many societies, no conference fee is paid.

The names of forty members registered at the inaugural meeting of the Society, from whom nothing has been heard since, have been deleted from the membership list. Money has been spent on tapes for the archives, and on greetings cards and the remaining stock of *A la Pym*, but it is hoped to make a profit on the latter two items.

6. Editor's Report

Since Jean Harker's resignation Hazel Bell had proved an excellent editor. It was regretted that the last issue of *Green Leaves* was delayed because our usual green paper was hard to find, owing to EEC paper colour standardisation! In future we may have to use a slightly different shade of green. Kate expressed her thanks on behalf of the Society to Hazel.

7. Elections

Devon has completed two terms and is not eligible for re-election this year. Her energy and enthusiasm will be greatly missed, and a vote of thanks to her was recorded. Triona Adams will not be standing for re-election as she has retired to a convent. The only nominations received were Bridget Guymer and Maggie Lane, both of whom are therefore elected.

8. Any Other Business

Devon said that Blackwells' representative was due to arrive at 3pm, and a bookstall would be set up in the hall.

Eileen announced that it was not possible to see the Bodleian's archives at weekends, but Judith Priestman has offered to run a special seminar for up to sixteen Pym members on a Friday afternoon in December, and will display some interesting Pym material such as correspondence, diaries and early manuscripts. A sign-up sheet, making a definite commitment (with a payment of £10) would be displayed, and it was hoped that the successful 16 would be informed at the end of the meeting.

Eileen also announced an earlier breakfast time to allow church-going members time to get to St Cross Church where the new vicar would be waiting to greet them.

A member asked about publicity material for new members, and Eileen confirmed that she had a leaflet for this purpose and would put some out for members to give to their friends, or display in a suitable location.

Gabrielle Page asked if anyone had made a recording of the BBC's dramatization of *So Very Secret*. Teen Haskell said she had one and would send it for the archives.

Hilary Walton said she had been sorry to hear that Lotus Snow had died. Lotus, at New York State University, was one of the first US scholars to study Barbara's novels, in which she had particularly loved the literary allusions. She had attended the 1995 meeting, but being very shy and retiring may not be well remembered, but Hilary and others who knew her will miss her.

An article in the *Church Times* of 11th August this year by Ronald Blythe (of *Akenfield* fame) entitled 'Word from Wormingford' in which he "recalls the Christian perceptiveness of Barbara Pym" was read out by Eileen. Some years ago, Blythe edited a collection named *Places*, and Barbara had contributed a piece called 'A Year in Oxfordshire'. He called her "the doyenne of Anglican novelists". It was suggested that permission be sought to reprint the article in *Green Leaves*. [It appears on page 9.]

Another member asked how the proposed book, 'Reading Barbara Pym', edited by Ellen Miller and Frauke Lenckos was getting on. It appears that there are difficulties with the publishers, who wish it to be more academic in nature than was originally envisaged.

Deirdre then asked if the membership would like to discuss the suggestion that a conference fee be charged. Deborah Fisher was against it because she felt that an extra charge might discourage attendance, and that the accommodation in college was not really very good. However, Eileen said that compared with hotels in Oxford (Hilary was paying £135 for her room!) St Hilda's rates are very reasonable. She added that there would be 35 en suite rooms in the new Garden block, two of which will be named after Barbara and Hilary. Most members thought that a conference fee of £5–10 would not discourage members, and Kate said that £10 was by no means extortionate. This figure was proposed for implementation next year by Hilda Kees and seconded by Devon, and agreed by the majority of the members.

Another member asked whether a group of US members might come as a party, but since air fares are so high, this was thought not feasible.

It appears that Claudia di Georgio is having problems finding the time to update the Pym website. Eileen said that she would investigate the creation of a link between the site and St.Hilda's website.

Another member asked if we usually send a delegate to the Alliance of Literary Societies' meetings, and if not, perhaps we should. Clemence Schultze said that she would be going next year to represent the Charlotte Yonge Fellowship, and will report back to us.

Stephen Shell said that he was delighted to see the refurbished chapel in Milham Ford building. Eileen told the meeting where the chapel was situated and urged members to look at it.

Hazel said that she had updated her index to the Pym novels and related works. Eileen offered to make copies of the 15-page index for sale to members for £1.

Devon would like to compile a bibliography on Oxford in the '30s as a contribution to next year's conference, which will be centred on *Some Tame Gazelle*. She said that she would make a preliminary list and would like to hear from anyone who could add to it.

Eileen offered to take a party to see the college library after breakfast on Sunday.

There was no other business, so the meeting ended at 12.30 p.m.

Yvonne Cocking

Barbara Pym and the Library of the IAI

Yvonne Cocking

Although my memories of the time I spent there are few and somewhat hazy, I must take the opportunity provided by this conference on "Barbara Pym, Libraries, and Librarians" to tell you something about the library with which she was closely associated for nearly thirty years – that of the International African Institute (IAI).

The Institute was founded in 1926 by Lord Lugard, a soldier and administrator who had served in many parts of the Empire, including the Sudan, Nyasaland and Uganda, finally becoming Governor General of Nigeria.

The purpose of the Institute was to promote the study of the languages and cultures of sub-Saharan Africa.

By the beginning of the 20th century the work of ethnologists was being conducted in a more systematic manner than heretofore, and was consequently being taken more seriously by the politicians in England. Even before the first World War the Colonial Office was beginning to think that it ought to know more about African customs. After all, Sir Frederick Hodgson, Governor of the Gold Coast, nearly lost his life in 1900 because he offended the Paramount Chief through his ignorance of the sacred role of the Golden Stool in Ashanti culture. (Did he attempt to sit on it? I must try to find out!)

According to one source, the Colonial Office decided that "African customs were to be accorded some respect instead of being studied simply to change them into European ones". The famous anthropologist Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard was given special facilities for his work among the Azande and Nuer peoples in the Sudan, and in 1915 B. Northcote Thomas received government support for anthropological study in Nigeria. Lugard's Institute was to coordinate the ethnological and linguistic studies of all the Colonial powers in black Africa.

After World War II, the Institute was revitalised by Daryll Forde, Professor of Anthropology at University College London. At that time there were about 25 anthropologists working in British colonial Africa on government grants.

To further its aims, the Institute had a considerable publishing programme, viz. a quarterly journal entitled *Africa*, which contained reports of original work from the field, conference news, book reviews and so on; two series: *The Ethnographic*

Yvonne Cocking

Survey of Africa, and The Linguistic Survey of Africa, which updated the subjects from time to time; and occasional monographs. In 1946 Barbara joined the Institute's staff as assistant editor to Professor Forde on these publications. There was another regular (quarterly, I think) publication, *African Abstracts*, but this was primarily the concern of the Library staff, who constituted two fifths of the total complement.

I myself joined the IAI as a library assistant early in 1963. The offices were in St Dunstan's Chambers, Fetter Lane, off Fleet Street. The chief claim of this undistinguished building was that Dryden had once lived here, and as Barbara noted in her diary, she and Hazel (Holt) liked to think that *Absalom and Achitophel* might have been written there! The doorway opened on to a wide flight of brown lino-covered stairs, and the offices were on the first and second floors of the building. As I recall, the staff at that time consisted of the Professor, two senior administration staff (ladies), and Barbara and her assistant Hazel on the upper floor; and on the lower, the Librarian and three staff, and a bookkeeper.

At the top of the stairs, a door on the right led into the library, a suite of three rooms, all overlooking Fetter Lane. To the left was the reading room, and on the right a room divided into two, for the librarian and a filing clerk. The centre room saw most of the activity. The greater part of three walls was occupied by wooden card filing cabinets beneath which unbound journals were stored in boxes specially made to fit a wide variety of journal sizes. Beneath the windows my colleague and I faced each other across large desks, with the big typewriters of the day in front of us and surrounded by galley and page proofs and other impedimenta of library duties. And, of course, overflowing ashtrays – most of us smoked in those days. All visitors came here first, and part of my job was to help them to find the information they sought, or to pass them on to the appropriate staff member, the Librarian herself preferring not to deal with readers. Apart from the usual library routine of entering journal receipts, dealing with our small collection of books and so on, our main task was to prepare entries for *African Abstracts*. To this end, we made analytical entries, and the appropriate added entries for *every* article within our subject fields from *every* journal we took, and also for *every* reference cited in these articles if we did not have them already. In pursuit of these fugitive items I had to traipse around various other institutions, like the Royal Anthropological Institute and the School of Oriental and African Studies, to obtain copies, or at least to verify their authenticity. Our catalogue was really a bibliography, since it contained entries for some material we did not actually hold, and was disproportionately large for the size of the collection. In fact, several years later I believe that the weight of these cabinets was exerting such stress on the floor that they had to be moved around in order to distribute the weight more evenly and avoid an imminent collapse! I'm sure this must have been one of the reasons for the move in 1972.

I did not see Barbara very often as our areas of work did not overlap much, and when they did Hazel was the usual intermediary. Bringing us books they didn't want to review, or coming to check a reference, or reporting the possible arrival of a VIP, Hazel came down to see us for a few minutes most days, visits which I and my fellow worker much enjoyed as Hazel had a gift for investing the slightest piece of news with a dramatic quality.

However, I do have a very clear mental picture of Barbara sitting in her office upstairs, one arm draped over the back of another chair with a cigarette in hand, on her lips the "warm, crooked smile" that Nancy Ellen Talburt noted in her recent article in *Green Leaves*. She seemed to me always to have an air of calm confidence about her – despite the chaotic ap-

pearance of her desk, strewn with manuscripts and proofs. She spoke in measured tones, enunciating very clearly, never rushing her words or raising her voice suddenly. To me she was an authoritative, slightly awe-inspiring figure, partly because she was my senior in status as well as age, but also because she was a novelist, the first I had met. She was however very kind and non-condescending to junior staff, and received a deal of respect in return.

There are only a few references to the library in *A Very Private Eye*, and these are mostly in letters to Philip Larkin. She mentions to him that *An Unsuitable Attachment* has a librarian in it "Of course, only in a small way – the library is rather like ours at the IAI – not to be compared with University libraries and *their* problems".

In January 1964, the subject arose again. "This leads me to speak of our library and what the staff do. There seem to be more staff in the library than anywhere else – I suppose their purpose is to discourage visitors." This rather cynical remark may have been occasioned by the fact that the Librarian was reluctant to let "Outsiders", e.g. journalists, commercial companies and so on, in short, non-academics, use the library, and wanted to charge them a fee to do so. I was rather against this and did my best to oppose it, and the matter was, I think, eventually dropped. Barbara continued "We don't buy a great many books, but have good holdings of foreign periodicals, some being exchanged with *Africa*. I have sometimes thought of writing a Pinterish play about our library". I think this shows that Barbara was keeping a close, if unobtrusive, eye on the library, in which she found a rich source of comic situations.

Later that year she writes to Philip Larkin "Our library has been made slightly more interesting – in a macabre way – by a rather peculiar young man joining the staff. He doesn't come in till 10.35 most mornings, and is given to cryptic utterances which one can only half hear. I don't have much to do with him myself but hear all this from the other staff. I find it pleasanter to observe these things rather than actually participate in them."

This strange person replaced my former much-liked colleague who had, sadly as far as I was concerned, emigrated to Australia. He was *very* difficult to work with. I don't think he liked being told what to do by a woman only slightly older than himself – in fact I don't think he liked women much at all. He rarely made eye contact or addressed me directly, and was indeed given to semi-audible mumbling. No doubt Barbara would have heard from Hazel of his violent reaction, storming out of the room muttering as he went, when Hazel made some humorously disparaging remark to me in his hearing about the new Prime Minister the day after the 1964 General Election!

Some months later Barbara continued the story. "Our library problem, I mean the peculiar young man, seems to have been solved. At least, he was given the sack after Christmas, being told, I believe, that there was to be some 'staff reorganization'. Is that always how it's done? Then a woman of uncertain age [the library clerk, who spent most of her day filing the innumerable catalogue cards we churned out] suddenly seemed to be sixty and she had to retire, and for a time it seemed as if nobody would come. But now there is a young girl — here I stopped writing yesterday, I suppose because I was seeing the procession of young girls over the years and perhaps got thinking that it's only the older, duller and more reliable members of the staff who go on and on". Again in September 1969 – "We continue to have trouble in staffing our library at the Institute. A Ghanaian we had was *not* a success and spent a large part of his day conducting endless telephone calls in his native language (Fanti, I think)."

I left the Institute in mid-1965, made a couple of working visits in 1967, but lost all contact when I came to live in Oxfordshire in 1970. In 1977 when *Quartet in Autumn* was published, I read it with great interest, not only because it was Barbara's first novel for many years, but also because I thought I might recognise the originals of the fictional characters. The identity of the men is most puzzling. Where could she have known such people? She had been at the IAI for 28 years, working mainly alongside women; the men I've already mentioned were surely non-starters. Where else could she have come across Norman and Edwin? They would hardly have been part of her private life. Are they entirely figments of her imagination? I don't think so. I believe I have heard Hilary (Walton) say that Barbara's characters were an amalgam of characteristics from several sources and were rarely obviously recognisable as "real" people. My own conclusion is that the quartet were *all* based on women she had observed at work and very likely in the library, where the turnover was greatest. After all, Norman and Edwin are not aggressively masculine, indeed they might be somewhat unkindly described as "old women" themselves, and it would only have taken a little tweaking by an expert like Barbara to make female into male characters.

I conclude my short and regrettably patchy story with a few notable dates: in March 1972 the Institute moved its offices to 210 High Holborn. In May 1973 Professor Forde died and it was some months before a new young director was appointed. In November 1973 St Dunstan's Chambers was pulled down, and in summer of the next year Barbara retired to Finstock with Hilary, returning for her retirement party in December 1974. In November 1977 *Quartet in Autumn* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, and Barbara Pym's career as a novelist was successfully relaunched.

Paper delivered to the Barbara Pym conference, Oxford, 3 Sept. 2000

Barbara

You gave us
Your Green Leaves,
Summer days
were filled with you,
we glowed
on winter evenings,
holding you in our hands .
You brought us back
our broken hearts,
healed by the hilarious shades
of your rainbows.
You gave us
Jane,
Prudence,
so many Excellent Women,
a bunch of wisteria,
Crampton Hodnet,
a last night long ago.
You gave us
a Glass of Blessings,
A Quartet in Autumn,
gave the greatest news
of nineteen thirtynine
that spring had come.
You gave me
so much of my laughter.
Thank you
Miss Pym.

Elspeth Smith

A College Librarian's perspective on Barbara Pym

Barbara Levick, *Librarian of St Hilda's, 1956-9*

First of all I should like to thank Eileen Roberts and the Society for inviting me to share this meeting with you; but I am also indebted to Dr Margaret Rayner, author of the superbly illustrated *Centenary History* of the College. Everything I say comes from that – except what I have made up myself.

What I should like to propose to you is an era of the B.C.E. and C.E. type in the twentieth-century history of British librarianship: B.L. and A.L., meaning Before and After Philip Larkin. There is a turning point and landmark not because librarians themselves are intrinsically different but because they are seen differently, and their status has been immeasurably raised.

Before Larkin, one could become a librarian by being pounced on in a dark corridor; almost, I suspected, because one was wearing spectacles, and they gleamed irresistibly in the shadows. Nowadays, one undergoes severe intellectual scrutiny before becoming a professional. 'What is going on behind those spectacles?', interviewers ask themselves; if they have read Larkin may even feel uneasy about what the new Librarian's insights might be.

The A.L. period has incidentally produced another feature that has enhanced librarians' prestige: a plethora of letters to follow name; no dangerous poetry implied here: rather the esoterics of NIS preservation and Information Technology.

You will see what I mean by the B.L. /A.L. watershed if I tell you about how I became librarian of St Hilda's College in 1956. I was definitely B.L. in every sense, and with no letters after my name either, not even D.Phil. Oxon. All I can remember being asked at my interview, by the distinguished medieval historian Beryl Smalley, as she peered at me nearsightedly, was, 'And have you got a weak heart?'. At the time I thought that it was being able to claim a rowing blue that won the day for me. Some time afterwards, though, I learned that the tutor in Politics, a great traveller in North Africa, had been loud for me to be appointed; and Miss Sibyl Crowe's crunch argument was 'She has slept with sheikhs!'. All this was on the basis of an innocent archaeological trip to Turkey the year before. My main rival on that day is now a Professor of Latin Literature at Princeton University, but intellectual superiority did her no good against my rowing blue and what was taken to be my experience of Life. Besides, unlike her I had those specs and a known history of librarianship at school and college.

At this point I have to apologize for offering you such a poor specimen of the B.L. librarian; for of course the most distinguished example of it was Philip Larkin himself. My early days in office were not auspicious. Some of my first achievements came when an astute undergraduate got me to part with a nineteenth-century sea captain's MS memoirs for a shilling, and then an even more astute College Fellow bought the eleventh edition of *Britannica* when we acquired the latest.

But all this also shows how different a College Librarian's life is from one in a University Library such as the Bodleian or Larkin's Hull: none of those magisterial pronouncements from mandarins up in boxed-off oaken pulpits. In those days St Hilda's Librarian worked alone, and you were on the floor of the Library, eyeball-to-eyeball with your customers as you carried those heart-weakening piles of books up and down the stairs. And what the customers looked for behind your specs was not poetry or insight or access to a web but the reason why you'd sent the book they wanted for their next essay off to the binders.

It was the same behind the scenes, at the top level of the Library Committee and Governing Body: none of this nonsense about the Librarian choosing the books for the tutors and they meekly acquiescing; they disposed, she just put forward schemes for dividing up the minuscule amount – about five hundred a year in 1956; that was all that the College could afford then. If there were any feuds in the college they found expression in those struggles for another pound or two on or off a Tutor's book allocation. Being at those annual meetings was the nearest thing to being in Jurassic Park that I have experienced.

But money was already getting easier when the exhausted contestants finally agreed to a five-year grand battle rather than standoffs every year; and distributions from the University to match the Colleges' expenditure eventually made them unnecessary.

I didn't stay alone for long, either (perhaps a librarian like me needed a minder). My assistants were marvellous – but equally B.L. There are two I think of with most affection. One had previously worked in the College Lodge, Miss Gwen Hossell, and the other, who was even then writing crime novels, is now internationally celebrated as Margaret Yorke, winner of the Diamond Dagger award.

What I have been talking about happened more than a quarter of a century after Barbara Pym came up. She had found a library proportionally smaller, and at that time in 1931 housed in two oak-panelled rooms in the basement of the 1909 wing of Hall Building, the panelling paid for out of her own pocket by the Vice-Principal. Nowadays those rooms hold only the Law section and the Law Reports are bursting out of them.

In charge of the Library Barbara Pym will have found a very young Librarian (with specs). Later she was to be a truly great Principal of the College and then Professor of History at Nottingham, but at that time she was a beginner and didn't have any letters to her name either, not yet even her imminent B.Litt.: but that won't have stopped her being a marvellous librarian – Kathleen Major. Barbara Pym will have found the Library as friendly and welcoming under her as it and the rest of the College still is. In those days the College must have been like a well run country hotel. One description of it before the war mentions 'a great many maids in smart uniforms and very modest academic standards'.

Reading English, Barbara Pym will have had the best of the Library. The English School has always been numerous, distinguished, and influential. It must have had a good share of that exiguous allocation, being championed by Barbara Pym's formidable tutors: Eleanor Rooke and, in Anglo-Saxon, Dorothy Whitelock; Dorothy would always announce with satisfaction when one of her Penguins had laid another egg.

But as a quondam Librarian I have questions about the time Barbara Pym spent in those panelled rooms. How much time did she spend there anyhow? Maybe to consult dictionaries, but St Hilda's is a lending library, and there is no need to stay there. Besides, we know how much she enjoyed the Bodleian and its opportunities for meeting young men from other colleges. And when she was in the Col-

lege Library, I can't help asking, did she sin by eating and drinking in it? Or, unforgivably, smoking? Did she take books out without a ticket? If Miss Major had searched the College for missing books, would she have found any in Barbara Pym's rooms? And there was another sin, hardly less capital: did she lend St Hilda's books to undergraduates from other colleges?

Maybe this sounds implausible, given what I have said about the size of the book allocation, but it take us to the prime feature of college Libraries: they are all tailor-made. St Hilda's was always catering for young women who were not well off and might not be able to afford books. One of the first jobs given to the first Principal's daughter in 1892, the year before the College opened, was to stock the library and install its single book case. Even then it was beautifully housed, in the central ground floor room of Hall Building, now a desirable Tutor's room, with steps leading down to the garden and a fire always in the grate. When tutors fought over their allocations it was not for selfish reasons: they were defending the interests of their pupils. That was where all the money went, nothing on luxury volumes. We have always depended on gifts for that. And as soon as the College had paid off its mortgages in 1933, it took out yet another and began building the fine, listed library building we have today, designed by Sir Edwin Cooper, which must have been under construction in Barbara Pym's last year as an undergraduate. As a result, as far as supplying undergraduate needs went, even fifty years ago the College was well up with the competition, if not actually ahead of it. Late-night visitors could be found in the Library, probably still can, and its books were being passed illicitly to members of other, much richer, colleges.

College Libraries can make using Libraries seem undergraduate-friendly. They are a half-way house between the school and University Libraries. That educational dimension is why it is such an advantage to have one Librarian who is also a tutor. St Hilda's Library, even after it moved into its new 1935 building, was still a warm and welcoming place (sometimes a bit too warm, readers complain). I hope that Barbara Pym found it so, but only those who know her early life inside-out, personally or from the memoir and diaries and indirectly from the novels, can tell us.

Paper delivered to the Barbara Pym conference, Oxford, 2 Sept. 2000

Pym online

In the May edition of *Green Leaves*, Claudia di Giorgio described her experiences in creating the Barbara Pym web site. The Internet-based discussion forum/mailing list, the Pym listserv,* also continues to thrive, with 126 members at present.

I've been following the progress of this discussion group for a year or so now. Most of the contributors are US-based; I seldom see names that I recognise from the annual Society conference. The American contributors take their Pym very seriously (they don't like it if someone strays from the topic in hand) and, not surprisingly, they have a different perspective on Pym.

Last Christmas, for example, there was a very interesting discussion proceeding from one member's query, "What is this Christmas cake which Barbara Pym mentions?" Another asked for an explanation of the term "Anglo-Catholic". (Being a Presbyterian myself, I kept out of that controversy.) Another useful feature of the list is that the contributors tend to read works by BP in tandem with others – sometimes English, sometimes American – and comment on the differences and similarities. Thus I get to hear about books and authors that I wouldn't otherwise have thought of sampling.

My own contributions to the list have been sporadic, compared with those from across the pond; it is only one of several such lists that I belong to.

Since the Society conference in September about Pym and libraries, I have been pondering on what Barbara Pym would have made of the enormous advances in information technology in the last twenty years, and how it might have featured in her work. Accordingly, I've been amusing myself by re-writing a few passages from Pym for the 21st century. I hope no one takes offence.

First, from *An Academic Question*:

> Alan stopped asking me about the unpublished manuscript but I knew he was working on his article. The clicking of his keyboard and the whirr of his disk drive kept him from coming up to bed, and I felt abandoned and neglected.

Next, from *An Unsuitable Attachment*, the scene where Ianthe and John are introduced:

> 'How do you do, Miss Broome?' he said. 'I must say all this is rather terrifying for me – these databases and things – or should one say dah-tabases? I never know.'

From *Quartet in Autumn*, Marcia's first meeting with Janice Brabner:

> 'I don't think so', said Marcia firmly. 'I go out to work and my evenings are fully occupied.'
>
> But there was no satellite dish on the house, so what did she do in the evenings, Janice wondered.

Also from *Quartet in Autumn*, after Letty has moved in with Mrs Pope:

> 'Has Mr Braithwaite got his own web site?' Mrs Pope asked.
>
> Letty had to admit that she didn't know, or even whether Edwin had a PC at all.

When Catherine goes through Tom's papers, in *Less than Angels*, the passage might today have read something like this:

> She poked about idly in his Inbox, and opened a message at random.
>
> 'My own darling', she read, 'this is going to be a silly sort of e-mail when I only said goodbye to you ten minutes ago.' ... She read through to the end of the message with critical detachment, as if she were considering it as a piece of literature, then sat with it still on screen, not liking to delete it and clear the backup directory.

The last word goes to one of my favourite characters, Miss Doggett in *Crampton Hodnet*. I imagine the tea party with the students, which opens that book, to include this conversation:

> 'Now, Michael, what are you laughing at?' asked Miss Doggett indulgently.
>
> 'He wants to see the listings of your Fortran programs', said Gabriel, 'but he's too shy to ask.'
>
> 'I shall be glad to show them to you', said Miss Doggett. She turned to the others. 'Michael and Gabriel are really interested in Computer Science', she said impressively. 'One so seldom finds that nowadays. I don't mean that frivolous stuff you call Computing', she said suddenly to Mr Bompas. 'Not those games with the poor graphics that might just as well be run on a Sony PlayStation.'

Deborah Fisher

* The new address for the list is

pym-l@egroups.com

– but one must be a subscriber (no cost involved). To subscribe, go to the following Internet address:

http://www.egroups.com

and insert the name pym-l. (Be careful not to use the number 1 but the letter l.)

On compiling a bibliography to Barbara Pym*

Dale Salwak

Like many admirers, I came upon the novels of Barbara Pym through the recommendation of a friend. Three years later, in 1983, after I had read everything by her that I could find, I was eager to learn more—particularly about the way that the work, once it had left her hands, had been received and interpreted by the scholar-critic or contemporary reviewer. I also felt drawn to pay tribute, in a small way, to the ever-growing interest in her work on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus was born the idea for a bibliography that I hoped would be useful to anyone who desired, as I did, to learn how Barbara Pym's career had developed. But where to start?

You think you are alone. Then you look up, and you are surrounded. Long hours spent perusing the customary research sources (*before* the Internet!) at UCLA, Claremont's Honnold Library, and the Huntington Library helped me to locate earlier bibliographies, including those by Lorna Peterson and Judy Berndt in the *Bulletin of Bibliography* (June 1984, December 1986), in both Jane Nardin's *Barbara Pym* (Twayne, 1985) and Robert Emmet Long's *Barbara Pym* (Ungar, 1986). Along the way, I scanned the indexes and bibliographies of over 2,000 scholarly and popular treatments of contemporary fiction, as well as every known contemporary literature journal and popular magazine for even remote references to the author. My queries published in the PMLA, the *New York Times Book Review*, and the (London) *Times Literary Supplement* also led to *my* discovery of many items that I might otherwise have missed.

Constance Malloy, for example, shared with me what she had compiled while writing her doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Davis; Margaret Cannon, Sioghan Bremner and Rupert Knox of Macmillan, London, generously sent me xeroxed copies of 350 British reviews; and Paul De Angelis, Caroline Press, and Jean Rawitt at E.P. Dutton, New York, allowed me to study their publicity files on Barbara Pym from which I made copies of over 400 items. And Hazel Holt and Hilary Walton provided references that proved to be essential to tracking the early days of Barbara's career.

Each time I found an item, I xeroxed the page(s), attached a 3 x 5" card with the necessary bibliographic information, and arranged the material alphabetically by author within each year. By 1989 my

Dale Salwak

collection had grown from a mere three dozen to over 1,200 items drawn from newspapers, periodicals, journals, dissertations, and books. While I limited myself to British and U.S. critics and reviewers, a few foreign-language essays appeared as well. (Since then, Barbara Pym's reputation in Europe and other non-English-speaking countries is, in itself, the subject for another study.) I wrote an annotation for each article (descriptive rather than evaluative), and in most cases included excerpts of phrases from the original reviews themselves. In abstracts of interviews, bibliographies, major critical studies, and dissertations, I emphasized scope.

One of the inherent hazards with such a project is that the bibliographer begins to duplicate his/her efforts or get bogged down in ephemeral reviews that have been picked up by a wire service and re-printed in several newspapers. (Alida Becker's half-approving, half-complaining review of *Crampton Hodnet*, for example, was printed in the *San Jose* [California] *Mercury News, New Haven Register, Charlotte Observer, Columbus* [Ohio] *State-Journal, Savannah News, GASTONIA* [North Carolina] *Gazette, Wausau* [Wisconsin] *Record-Herald, Rochester Democrat and American*, and *Green Bay Press-Gazette.*) Over time I narrowed my collection to about 750 pieces – beginning with an anonymous review of *Some Tame Gazelle* from the *TLS*; and ending with the American edition of Hazel Holt's biography (1991), published eleven years after Barbara's death. All along, I followed the guidelines outlined by G. K. Hall, who had by 1988 accepted my proposal and given me a contract for the book.

To increase its usefulness, I employed several editorial devices. Within each year, I arranged the materials alphabetically and numbered them consecutively. I began each item with a reference that included the critic's name (when known), the title and date of the publication in which the item was found, and the relevant pages. I made references and cross-references to those numbers (thus "1981.13" refers to the thirteenth entry for the year 1981.) I employed this code within the text to refer to reprints and replies; I also used it in the index—which I made inclusive, with authors, titles, and subjects interfiled.

I have heard of numerous instances in which people grieving the loss of a loved one (or of their own health) have found consolation in Barbara Pym's novels. I think there is a lot to that, in part because her novels remind us of the importance of staying connected with others, and ultimately, with hope, with a simple faith in the durability of the human spirit. A great comfort has always come to me when I settle down with one of her novels. I felt that comfort, too, during the many years that I buried myself in the search for secondary materials. For reasons perhaps I'll never fully understand, that journey has brought me closer to Barbara Pym herself.

Dale Salwak is Professor of English at Southern California's Citrus College. His many publications include *The life and work of Barbara Pym* (Macmillan, University of Iowa Press, 1987) and *A passion for books* (Macmillan, St Martin's, 1999).

* *Barbara Pym: a reference guide* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991)

Crockford's

A letter appeared in *The Times* of 26 Sept. 2000 from Miss Anne Harden, who has given permission for us to reprint it here. How it would have delighted Barbara Pym – so many echoes from the novels there!

> While I was working as librarian of the Oxford University Press in Amen House, London, a mischievous proof-reader of *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, which was published at that time by the OUP, inserted the name A Pigeon (1971-72) under the previously unfilled entry for 'Bishop's messenger' apparently among the Bishop of Bangor's staff.

This appeared in the volume for 1971-72. It was eventually spotted by the amused bishop and removed.

Marcia Ivory in *Quartet in Autumn*

Jutta Schmidt

Quartet in Autumn is unique within the works of Barbara Pym: it allows a psycho-analytical interpretation of the main character in this novel – Marcia Ivory.

The development of Marcia and the circumstances that led to her death form the centre of this work. Marcia's life was determined by the moral concepts of her mother and her repressive education. Her mother is cited with only one sentence in the whole novel, but this is enough to explain how much she had influenced Marcia's life: "Marcia had been one of those women, encouraged by her mother, who had sworn that she would never let the surgeon's knife touch her body, a woman's body being such a private thing" (chapter 2). This sentence obviously refers not only to medical contact, but also to sexual contact with men in general. Apparently Marcia had never had a love affair, although she was able to develop feelings for the other sex, as shown in her affection for her colleague Norman: "Marcia had experienced a faint stirring of interest in Norman ..." (chapter 2).

When Mr Strong, the surgeon, entered her life, the author shows Marcia as a woman with the potential for deep and strong emotions. These enabled her to undergo a development from a woman without the ability to establish any contact at all, to a woman who was starving herself to death to get into touch with the human being who *cut her off* the bonds of the past, who *cut her off* the influence of her mother: Mr Strong. The amputation of her breast signified Marcia's late rebellion against her mother's dictum, "never let the surgeon's knife touch [your] body". By this Marcia had been instructed by her mother never to let her body be touched by male hands, never let her be penetrated by male 'tools'. But when Marcia gave her consent to the breast amputation she allowed Mr Strong not only to touch her body but also to use his scalpel. If the scalpel is interpreted as a phallic symbol, Marcia allowed Mr Strong to use this 'male tool' on her, and with that Mr Strong (*nomen est omen*) gave her the strength to live her emotions.

This incident is the turning point in Marcia's life. With this she "cut the umbilical cord" and her development of anorexia nervosa was consequent on this drastic event.

Latest research results about anorexia nervosa state that this is not a form of self-destruction but – on the contrary – of self-preservation. "The bad body, which is withheld from the self, watches over the existence of a good, idealized, strengthened, accepted and respected self. ... Anorexia nervosa liberates the body which is considered as bad and hypocritical".[1] Christina von Braun considers anorexia nervosa to be a rebellion of the anorectic against the mother and the values represented by her. She claims: "The anorectic sees her body as a symbol for her mother whose artificiality, 'lies', she tries to fight by denying her the food. In a direct argument she is not able to resist the power of her mother, but she can oppose her passively by her hunger strike".[2]

Following this, Marcia rebelled against her mother and her dictum, "a woman's body being such a private thing", which prohibited any body contact. The breast amputation and the anorexia nervosa enabled Marcia to move from the state of solitary existence into real life – if only for a very short time. But by "denying her mother the food" she was at the same time demonstrating why she did that: this was the only way to get into contact with Mr Strong again. When they delivered Marcia into the hospital, she: "found herself wondering when she was going to see Mr Strong, and then worrying in case she might not be seeing him at all but some other surgeon or just an ordinary doctor. She must have spoken his name aloud, for the young round-faced nurse who was settling her pillows said, 'Don't you worry, Miss Ivory, Mr Strong'll be round in the morning'" (chapter 19). Mr Strong is the person who brought Marcia back to life, a life without the pressure her mother exerted on her. "Marcia remembered what her mother used to say, how she would never let the surgeon's knife touch her body. How ridiculous that seemed when one considered Mr Strong ... Marcia smiled and the frown left [Mr Strong's] face and he seemed to be smiling back at her" (chapter19).

With this smile Marcia sealed her pact with life and this enabled her – paradoxical as it may seem – to die quite happy.

References

1. Braun, Christina von. *Nicht Ich: Logik, Lüge, Libido*. Frankfurt/Main.: Neue Kritik, 1988, p. 459 (translated here)
2. Braun, p. 462 (translated here)

Pym in the *Church Times*

Ronald Blythe writes a regular column in the *Church Times*, 'Word from Worminghford'. In the issue of 11 August, 2000, he took as his subject 'The Christian perceptiveness of Barbara Pym', writing:

I like to augment the lectionary with a few personal blessed ones; and today I insert Barbara Pym. This week she has gravely hampered my work, for, having reread one of her novels, I have reread two more. I sit in the shade and am fired at by balsam, and turn the page.

Just in case there should be anyone who has not read Barbara Pym, I must explain that she is the doyenne of Anglican novelists, and even twenty years after her death in 1980 there is none to hold a candle to her. Had she been a period of architecture she would have been called Transitional, for her stories bridge the years of liturgical change in both the village and London. Her women have good degrees in anthropology or Eng. Lit., her men are unenthusiastic and tend to get under their clever wives' feet, particularly in the rectory. Parish life plods on. It is the pre-Delia era of dreadful food and the pre-central-heating era of putting on another jersey. But it is also the pre-family-service era, so that one can worship in peace. Below the lightness of touch lies a profound understanding of English Christianity.

Barbara Pym was the victim of a now famous injustice when her publishers wrote her off as the kind of writer no one is interested in - this in 1963. Having published six of her novels, they did not want any more, thank you. A few years later they were having to eat their words, when a poet and a critic acclaimed her as the most underrated novelist of the post-war years.

She and I briefly corresponded a few months before her death about my having some of her diary for an anthology I was editing. She sent me some enchanting entries for *A year in West Oxfordshire*, her home. That August of 1979, her last August, she is wandering round Ditchley Park, where Rochester the poet was born in 1647. She notes that he writes hymns - to girls. 'My light thou art - with the glorious sight My eyes are darken'd with eternal night'. She sees that although there are memorials to his family in the church, there is not one to him. Which is what happens when you write hymns to girls.

Thanks to the *Church Times* for permission to reproduce extracts from this article.

OBITUARIES

Dr Lotus Snow

Lotus, she once told me, got her name because her parents couldn't agree about what to call her. Six months after her birth, when she was still unnamed, her father was reading Tennyson's 'Lotus Eaters' and said "Oh, we'll just call her Lotus!" This story was, in a way, typical of many of the unusual things about her.

First, the literary connection. Lotus was deeply devoted to English Literature. In some ways it was the mainspring of her life. For many years she taught English at Hope, Albion and Keuka Colleges, inspiring her pupils with her own love of the subject. And it was Barbara's palpable love of Our Greater English Poets that first drew her to the novels. Her book, *One Little Room an Everywhere: Barbara Pym's Novels*, published in 1987 by the Puckerbrush Press, Orono, Maine, where she 'brings her own affectionate and respectful critical eye to Barbara Pym's special world,' was one of the first and certainly one of the best studies of Barbara's work. Her chapter on the literary allusions in the novels must always be required reading for all Pym scholars, and the grace and elegance of her prose makes it stand out from the usual run of academic studies.

For she was the most sensitive of critics, sensitive not only to style and form but also to the nuances of subject and characterisation. The other novelists of whom she has published studies show clearly the modern writers to whom she was particularly attracted: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, Ivy Compton-Burnett and Anita Brookner all have the kind of sensibility Lotus found in Barbara. Though she was by no means unresponsive to the humour of the novels, having herself a dry wit and fine sense of irony, which made her a delightful companion.

Hilary and I have particularly happy memories of staying with her in Penn Yan, NY, when (with the faintest of ironic smiles) she organised for us a Special Tea, attended by a large group of Barbara's fans (many wearing hats), where a sumptuous English tea was provided and the tea itself was poured from silver teapots.

We will miss her.

Hazel Holt

Patricia Shaw

Patricia Shaw, who died in 1998, had been Professor of English Literature at the University of Oviedo since 1970, and President of the Spanish Society for Mediaeval English Language and Literature. She was also a member of the Barbara Pym Society and a devoted reader of Barbara Pym's novels, of which she often told her students.

Pat met Millán Urdiales, now retired Professor of French at Oviedo, while she was studying French at Leeds University, and moved to Spain after their marriage. She took a degree in English Philology at the University of Madrid in 1956, and became Professor of English at the University of Barcelona: the first woman Professor of English in Spain, and the fifth woman Professor in any discipline there. In 1988 she was awarded the OBE 'for her contribution to English studies in Spain'.

In 1976 Pat founded the Asociacion Espanola de Estudios Anglo-Americanos (AEDEAN), specializing in English and American Literature and Language. An account of the annual conference of AEDEAN, printed in the *TLS* of 5 March, 1999, described her as:

> Everyone's mentor, large as life, a medievalist who reminded people of the Wife of Bath, a marvellous performer in Lectures and in amateur theatricals, and on the side an expert on English travellers in Spain from Pepys to Mary Wollstonecraft.

In homage to her memory, on St Patrick's Day in March, 2000, the University of Oviedo published a complete edition of Patricia Shaw's works in four volumes, prepared by her former students at Barcelona and Oviedo. The volume on the English novel includes two essays featuring the work of Barbara Pym. Both of these were also published in the twice-yearly series, "Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses", devoted to English Studies in general, and more specifically, to the English language and the literature of the English-speaking countries.

These will be lodged in St Hilda's College Library, and are are reviewed on page 11.

ALS

The Alliance of Literary Societies (ALS) began in 1973 when Mrs Kathleen Adams, secretary of the George Eliot Fellowship, which had just successfully campaigned to protect George Eliot's childhood home against the local authorities' proposal to erect a petrol station beside it, wrote to *The Times* about a similarly endangered Dickens building. She suggested that literary societies (those devoted to particular authors) should band together to offer mutual support when a corporate voice was needed in such cases. The Alliance existed for fifteen years thereafter simply as an informal liaison, with a list of member societies maintained and distributed on request by Mrs Adams, its sole point of contact. In 1988 she again wrote to *The Times*, to convene a seminar to discuss formalising the Alliance with constitution, officers and committee. The meeting was held in Birmingham in April 1988, attended by 80 people representing 27 literary societies, and the ALS formally founded. Its chief immediate task was to compile and publish a directory of UK literary societies. Its President was, and still is, the actor Gabriel Woolf.

Since then the ALS has met annually, its AGM followed by a sociable lunch and 'a novel literary entertainment'. It now has a membership of more than eighty societies – including the Barbara Pym Society. It publishes, besides the annually updated, detailed membership list, calendars of member societies' events, a list of speakers available, various advice sheets for societies, and a new journal, *The Open Book*. This latter succeeds the annual 'official fanzine', *Chapter One*, that included news of societies, and many advertisements, offering, for instance, promotional pin badges, blazer badges, mugs, umbrellas, key rings; T-shirts with 'front illustration' of Byron, Lewis Carroll, Dylan Thomas, Yeats, or others, 'with full poem on the reverse'; guided tours of George Eliot country; the *Journal of Victorian Culture*; as well as out-of-print book-search services.

Next year's ALS AGM will be held at the home of the Dymock Poets in Ledbury, Herefordshire, on Saturday 28 April 2001.

The ALS Secretary is: Mrs Rosemary Culley, 22 Belmont Grove, Havant, Hants PO9 3PU; email –

rosemary@sndc.demon.co.uk

Hazel Bell

PERCEPTIONS OF PYM

Patricia Shaw's essays

'The View in Winter: the theme of old age in contemporary English fiction' by Patricia Shaw; *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* No. 5, November 1982, Universidad de la Laguna, 24 pages; and 'Barbara Pym: The Jane Austen of our day' by Patricia Shaw, *ibid.* No. 17, November 1988, 28 pages.

In the first of these enjoyable essays, Professor Shaw notes society's increased interest in the topic of aging and its related issues, and suggests that fiction is 'traditionally the vehicle of literary expression most appropriate for the reflection of the dominating social issues of any given period, or class'. She points out this theme in novels by five contemporary English writers: Muriel Spark, Paul Bailey, Elizabeth Taylor, Kingsley Amis, and Barbara Pym, whose *Quartet in Autumn* serves to illustrate the premise that 'the novel of old age [is] ...a distinctive fictional genre in its own right'.

Shaw summarizes the plots of one novel by each of the five, noting similarities in theme, literary technique, mood and use of humour. Regarding aspects of the condition of universal human comedy, she singles out *Quartet in Autumn* as 'the kindest and most helpful ... the most charitable', using its last sentence to illustrate Pym's wry touch of hope and humour.

Treatment of the younger characters in these novels is compared; Janice, the sympathetic volunteer social worker, and the young neighbour couple who invite Marcia to Christmas dinner, are described as examples from Pym.

Similarities in the depiction of domestics, close and distant relatives, and professionals who work with the elderly are noted, with clear examples from the novels. The tendency of elderly protagonists to turn to their contemporaries for companionship is another common thread, with Letty's prospect of sharing living arrangements with her school-friend Marjorie used as illustration.

Shaw highlights attitudes toward and depictions of institutional life, references to the decay of mental and physical faculties in old age, the continued capacity for strong emotions, and the variety of schemes for using the amount of leisure time oppressing the elderly. Edwin's church-going and Letty's vain attempts at serious reading are the examples chosen.

Shaw concludes that although this genre may prove somewhat limited, 'in the hands of skilled and sensitive writers ... [these novels] can be ... spellbinding and ... thought-provoking'.

The second essay begins with a brief biographical sketch of Barbara Pym and her publishing history, and goes on to detail points of similarity between Pym and Jane Austen: the more obvious, such as their work being 'vehicles for humour, irony and satire' and both deliberately ignoring the great political issues of the day; and others, such as the use of matchmakers and the treatment of male characters. 'No very rhapsodic view of mankind emerges ... Barbara Pym's irony and humour is at its most delicately mordant when dealing with ... "unexcellent men".'

The essay highlights Austen and Pym's chastising the 'vices of selfishness, vanity, shallowness, self-complacency, ... snobbery, pedantry, and negativism'. Shaw also points out both subtle and overt examples of Pym's satire and humour, and the 'profound sense of the comedy of everyday life' of Austen and Pym. Their view of love as to be taken with a grain of salt, and the use by both of literary allusions, are illustrated.

Another resemblance between the two is their use of generally optimistic endings. Shaw states, 'Barbara Pym is an optimistic writer, such optimism being convincing because, again like Jane Austen, she creates characters who are willing to come to terms with life ... not to ask too much of it'.

Shaw's observations include mentions of other authors, and are balanced with an effective use of quotes, mostly from Pym. Regarding female protagonists, she writes: 'As in Jane Austen's novels, the female protagonists constitute ... the reflecting intelligences of Barbara Pym's books, the action of which is seen and judged through their observant and, generally, acute gaze, and it is with these characters that the reader tends to identify himself'.

With her brief summaries of the Pym novels Shaw captures their essence, so that even those who have not read them all can appreciate the essay. For those who have, it serves as a helpful summary of setting, character and plot. Professor Shaw's great respect for Austen and Pym is apparent.

Norma Munson

Murdoch vs. Pym

In a lecture on 'Iris Murdoch and the characters of love' addressed to the Royal Society of Literature in November 1999, A. N. Wilson let fall the following comments on Barbara Pym (also reproduced in *The Spectator*, 18-25 Dec. 1999):

> I always felt that Iris lived entirely in her own world, her own perceptions, and that she was one of the least observant persons I have ever met. When John [Bayley, Murdoch's husband] – and I – used to go on and on about how much we admired Barbara Pym, it made her furious. Really furious. She minded, and was jealous. But also – I think – she could tell from the things we said that Pym was precisely the sort of artist that Iris herself wasn't and had never wanted to be – the sort who in Hardy's phrase 'used to notice such things'. Pym's notebooks and diaries and letters reveal exactly the same person that we meet as the intelligence behind her novels. To this extent, Pym is a transparent figure, instantly attractive, but also like Stevie Smith, disarming: you can't tell how many of the effects are flukes, or whether she knows what image or what art she is projecting. Iris Murdoch is the reverse of this.
>
> ... The world of work is not one which Iris ever chose to investigate or describe. There are no Pym-like evocations of office life in Murdoch's novels.

The journeying writer

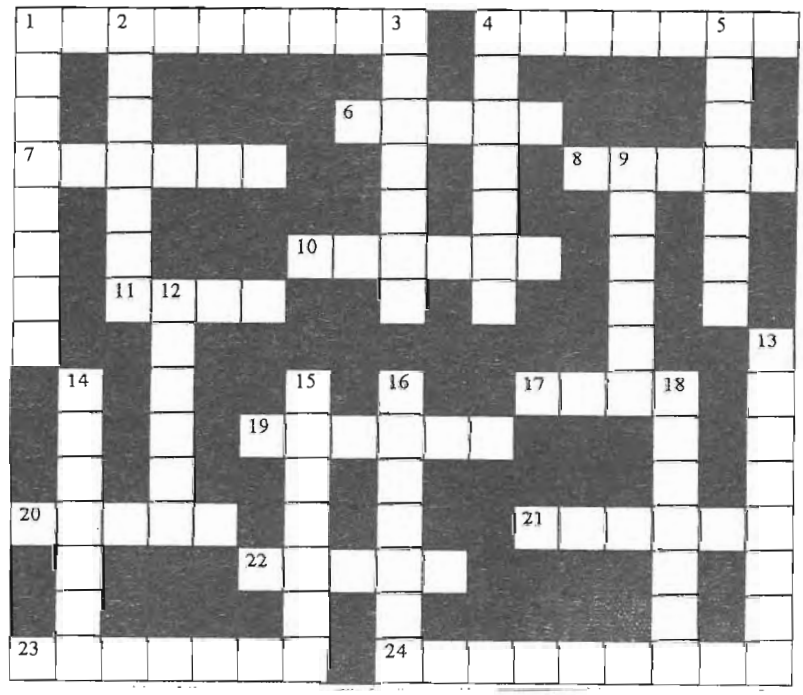
Frauke Lenckos is teaching a seminar entitled '"The Passionate Language of Geography": women's novels, women's journeys' at the Newberry Library, Chicago. The seminar groups Barbara Pym with 'other great novel writers'. The seminar notice runs:

> Modern women's fiction, like modern times, hums with the enchanting melodies of longing, travel, and distant destinations. Frequently, women's novels are organized around the metaphor of the personal odyssey. We will look at works by Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Arnim, Elizabeth Bowen, Anita Brookner, Katherine Mansfield, Barbara Pym, and Anne Tyler, and survey over two hundred years of literary voyages, examining how changing notions of sojourns have influenced the ways in which American, British, Irish and New Zealand women writers shape their heroines' destinies.

CROSSWORD

compiled by the Archdeacon

The theme of our crossword is "Barbara's World".



CLUES ACROSS

1. Part of London popular with Pym characters. (9)
4. Eighteenth-century traveller, quoted by Rupert Stonebird. (7)
6. Nationality of Mrs Morris, in *Excellent Women*. (5)
7. A continent and a periodical associated with Barbara Pym. (6)
8. "~ of Athens", a play referred to in *Less than Angels*. (5)
10. Louisa May ~ , great American author. (6)
11. *The Sweet ~ Died*.(4)
17. ~ Sedge, a native of 21 across. (4)
19. (13 down) might be of this national origin. (6)
20. Mr Lemon, in *Excellent Women*. (5)
21. European capital, birthplace of the Sedges in *No fond return of love*. (6)
22. Mr Latimer's holiday destination in *Crampton Hodnet*. (5)
23. Scandinavian country, mentioned in *Gervase and Flora*. (7)
24. Fellow countrymen of Jacob Olatunde (*Quartet in Autumn*). (9)

CLUES DOWN

1. Eastern European city featured in *Civil to Strangers*. (8)
2. Society whose members are well-travelled. (They include Everard Bone). (7)
3. Continent where Barbara Pym is truly appreciated. (7)
4. Religious order which Father Gemini *doesn't* belong to. (7)
5. Exotic meal for clergymen in *A Glass of Blessings*. (7)
9. Ms Starling of *The Christmas Visit*. (6)
12. City closely associated with Barbara Pym and her characters. (6)
13. Eaten at teatime in *A Glass of Blessings*. (8)
14. Cardinal of 16 down origin in *An Unsuitable Attachment*. (7)
15. Country whose grammar is studied by Bishop Grote. (7)
16. Language quoted by Rocky Napier. (7)
18. A mature Pym heroine. (7)

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Correction:

An item in our last issue in Gabriel Myers' 'Hymn trivia in Miss Pym' contained errors. It should have read:

HODNET: The Vicar of Crampton Hodnet was Mr Latimer's excuse for missing Evensong on the Sunday he spent with Miss Morrow.

Reginald Heber, author of "Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning" (quoted by Mildred, EW 55) & "Holy, Holy, Holy" was rector of Hodnet, Shropshire, before becoming Missionary Bishop of Calcutta.

SOLUTION to "Barbara's World" crossword (inverted)

ACROSS:
1. Belgravia
4. Johnson
6. Welsh
7. Africa
8. Timon
10. Alcott
11. Dove
17. Bill
19. Scotch
20. Teddy
21. Vienna
22. Paris
23. Finland
24. Nigerians

DOWN:
1. Budapest
2. Learned
3. America
4. Jesuits
5. Octopus
9. Isabel
12. Oxford
13. Pancakes
14. Purelli
15. Iceland
16. Italian
18. Leonora