Green Leaves

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The Barbara Pym Society Annual Meeting and Conference 9-10 August 2008 St. Hilda's College, Oxford

by Jutta Schiller

The Pym conference, whose theme was "Under the Influence – Authors Barbara Admired and Those Who Were Influenced by Her," started with a new event on Friday night for Society members arriving early. After dinner we were to meet in the Senior Common Room and beforehand, some of us strolled outside and peeped through the window. We saw a woman in a yellow dress doing something we thought looked like cleaning the room. What a Pymian moment to start with! It was Pym Society member Deborah Fisher preparing the room for the first-ever Quiz Night.

Deborah not only tested our special knowledge of Pym – she quoted from her books, and we had to name the titles, but she also provided audio samples of poets and authors reading from their works and asked us to identify them. In addition, we were asked to identify photos of well-known novelists. We worked in teams and reluctant as we were in the beginning to participate (the group I joined named itself "The Drop Outs"), we enjoyed ourselves so much in the end.

After the Annual Meeting proceedings on Saturday morning, the conference opened with a talk by Julia Courtney, an associate lecturer with the Open University at Durham University on "Uneventful Lives? Home, Family and Parish in the Novels of Charlotte M. Yonge, Ivy Compton-Burnett and Barbara Pym." We learned about the influences of Compton-Burnett and Yonge on Pym and the similarities among the writers which, according to Courtney, are established by their style.

Joan Drexler (left) of Washington, D.C., and Jutta Schiller of Berlin, Germany, catch up before the Annual Dinner.

Another aspect that links these three authors is the setting of domestic life and the use of the same background. Pym herself referred to the similarities of Compton-Burnett and Yonge when she wrote in her diary in November 1970: "Reading Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* and see the echoes or foreshadowings of Ivy Compton-Burnett in it."

See CONFERENCE continued on page 2

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"A few green leaves can make such a difference."
—Miss Grundy, *A Few Green Leaves*

CONFERENCE continued from page 1

Eleonore Biber, who holds a doctorate in English language and literature from the University of Vienna and has delivered papers on Pym at various gatherings of the Society, followed with the enchanting talk, "Under the Influence of Elizabeth von Arnim and Robert Liddell" (see page 4). Eleonore explored the parallels between von Arnim, whose novels Pym enjoyed reading in Oxford, and Pym by highlighting their writings in the tradition of English social comedy. She pointed out that they had the same taste for understated irony and mild satire. Robert Liddell, Pym's life-long personal and literary friend, not only encouraged her to embark upon a writing career but gave her literary advice. Eleonore showed how Pym and Liddell shared a tragi-comic vision of life and love of ironic nuances.

A surprise speaker was David Fuller, emeritus professor of English at the University of Durham. He admitted he had never read a word of Pym when he was asked to speak at the conference. But by now he had read some of her novels and the letters and gave us an insight into the poetry Pym used. He demonstrated how Pym's use of poetry varies greatly from novel to novel, and he wondered how Pym had come upon these poems. Obviously they were not popular when Pym wrote her novels, and David thinks this could be a reason for the reader to miss the humour of the quotation. Although he would not admit to having become an admirer of Pym, his talk was both impressive and delightful.

Janice Rossen, well-known for her works on Barbara Pym and her talks at Society conferences, spoke on "Barbara Pym and Philip Larkin: Mutual Respect and Mystification." According to Janice, Pym and Larkin shared an interest in the miniatures of life and were amused about ordinary domestic events. In spite of their often-hilarious correspondence, Pym and Larkin did not have a close personal relationship, but Janice showed how much Larkin enjoyed her work. She considers him the best possible friend Pym could have had to promote her novels.

The speaker at the Annual Dinner was Paul Binding, who came to know Barbara Pym through his friend's father, Lord David Cecil, who recommended Pym to him as "good bedtime reading." Consequently Binding became hooked on the novels and had read nearly all of them when he met Barbara and Hilary in 1974 at a party at Oxford University Press, where he worked. When he bought a cottage near Finstock, he invited Barbara and Hilary to dinner – shepherd's pie with mince and mashed potatoes – and he gave us a charming description of his dismay when the Pym sisters turned up for the small get-together in evening dresses. After that, the three met often – Paul said the Pym sisters sort of entered his life – and when Barbara Pym's work was resurrected by the *Times Literary Supplement,* it was Paul who telephoned her with news about the article. His favourite Pym novels are *Less Than Angels* and *The Sweet Dove Died*, and he "has come to appreciate *A Few Green Leaves* in the past three years." At first he thought it was not quite up to standard, but after many re-readings, he changed his mind.

At first Paul Binding thought *A Few Green Leaves* was not quite up to standard, but after many re-readings, he changed his mind.

The open discussion on Sunday morning led by Kate Charles showed that more writers were influenced by Barbara Pym than we had previously thought, e.g., Alexander McCall Smith, Anita Brookner and, of course, Kate Charles herself.

The dramatised reading has become a tradition at these conferences and it is always one of the highlights. Yvonne Cocking did a great job abridging and adapting Barbara Pym's first attempt at novel writing, "Young Men in Fancy Dress" (1929), from the manuscript in the Bodleian Library. It was a pleasure to watch the cast of Pym Society members transformed into Pym characters, and the novel, written when Barbara was only 16, shows clear signs of the future author.

Someone said the Barbara Pym Society is one of the largest literary societies in Great Britain. I should not be surprised at this, as I am sure that weekends like this with such an interesting programme, the most distinguished speakers and the most committed members must be a success which, I am sure, will be repeated next September in Oxford.

Minutes of the AGM of the Barbara Pym Society 9 August 2008.

Chair's opening remarks. Clemence Schultze welcomed everyone, especially new members, to the fifteenth annual conference of the Barbara Pym Society. She noted that in spite of the building site next door, the college looked as lovely as ever and the welcome from Eileen Roberts and the St. Hilda's staff was just as warm.

She reported that the tenth North American Conference in April at the new venue – the Episcopal Divinity School – had been a wonderful, successful occasion. The London spring meeting had heard a superb talk from David Faber, biographer of the Amery family.[For reports on these meetings, see the May 2008 *Green Leaves*.]

Clemence compared the BPS to a swan: serene, pristine and unruffled on the surface, while the committee were the feet, paddling away like heck underneath. She thanked Deirdre Bryan-Brown, the ex-chair who helped guide her through this first year, Chris Rutherford as an efficient Secretary, Ellen Miller as U.S. president and Judy Horn for keeping the website up to date. Yvonne's researches are invaluable while Deb Fisher, Jean Harker, Alex Ward, Michael Wilson, Phil Bacon and Maureen Woolley provide substantial support and advice. She noted that Phil and Maureen retired from the committee at this meeting and thanked them both for all their input over their years of service. Especial thanks were due to Eileen Roberts as the mainstay of the BPS. The members agreed with a stirring round of applause.

Apologies. Louise Ross and Maureen Woolley.

Matters arising from the previous minutes. The Chair had omitted to report that Alex Ward had been co-opted to serve out Muriel Watson's remaining term until 2009, and would then be eligible for re-election.

Financial and membership report. The Committee had reluctantly decided to raise the prices of membership, so that the new fees are to be: £10 for senior members, £18 for an ordinary member and £25 for joint membership at the same address. Joint senior membership is to go up to £15.00. All these are in effect from April 2009. The conference fee is to be raised to £15.00. Eileen explained that although no fees are paid to speakers, the conference does pay for their accommodation and meals. Membership runs from 1st April to 31st March. Some members have paid twice owing to confusing information on the website, but they are to be reimbursed and the site has been updated. The Society has approximately 300 members in the UK.

Treasurer's Report. As of 20 July 2007 the account stood at £4468.67. Income during the year was £2839.00 and expenditure £1,505.00 leaving a balance of £5802.67 on 17 July 2008. Major expenses included: St Alban's Centre £500 for the 2007 Spring Meeting and £675 for the 2008 Spring Meeting (both just broke even) and £300 for expenses for the 2007 Annual Meeting. (In the past St Alban's had been late in presenting their invoice putting the payment into the next financial year — this year with an earlier date it arrived just in time for the end of the BPS financial year. [It should be noted that some significant expenses are outstanding: costs for the newsletter and expenses for the Annual Meeting. These will be included in the Financial Report for the coming year.]

U.S. Report. Ellen reported that the North American branch has $6,800 in the bank, largely because of fundraising efforts, so the quality of the conference can be maintained. There are 293 members in the U.S. database, but some have not paid, and it needs to be updated. *Green Leaves* is always sent with a reminder for a further year in case the fees had simply been overlooked. The Barbara Pym Society is one of the biggest literary societies with an international membership. Many new members join from the web and thanks are due to Judy Horn for keeping it up to date.

Green Leaves. Ellen has extra copies and back copies available. The next *GL* is due out in November. The membership was encouraged to send anecdotal information on Barbara Pym or anything interesting, and asked to e-mail Ellen with ideas.

Archivist's Report Yvonne Cocking told members that most of the Ephemera had been listed on the website. Any members who have other material were asked to scan it and e-mail it to Yvonne. Eileen and Yvonne agreed to speak to the archivist at St. Hilda's to see if the college could take some of the material. Yvonne has received the page proofs of *A Glass of Blessings*, corrected in Barbara Pym's own hand, which she showed to the membership. Yvonne is to send an updated list to Ellen and Judy for the website.

Elections. The Committee nominated Rosamund Cleal and Lorraine Mepham. As no other nominations had been received they were declared elected, to approving applause.

Any Other Business

- U.S. meeting: the proposed dates are 21 and 22 March 2009 at the Episcopal Divinity School, but this will need to be confirmed.
- U.K. Spring meeting: it is proposed that the Society meet in Oswestry on 16 and 17 May 2009, to see Morda Lodge, the offices of F. Crampton Pym and the town itself. Arrangements are in hand and further details will follow. Kate Charles will be pleased to entertain any members for tea at her house.
- U.K. conference: 5 and 6 September 2009 on the theme of *An Academic Question*. The date has been put back to September as there are too many clashes in August. Eileen apologised profusely for the problems with accommodation for the current conference and explained the complex problems of dates. She promised to complain to the Bursar about noisy student groups. U.K. conference 2010 will be on the theme of Barbara Pym and Romance.
- Kate was congratulated on her excellent interview with Jenny Howarth for *Woman's Hour*, in connection with the BBC radio adaptation of *Jane and Prudence*. Kate also promoted Pym in an interview with *Shropshire Life*.
- Kate invited everyone to the 10.30 service at University Church, as St Cross, sadly, is now closed.
- Judy Horn's bookmarks were on sale as were Pym cards at the knockdown price of £1 for 20 folded cards or 50p for 20 unfolded cards.
- Joan Drexler would like *A Lot to Ask* to be reprinted, but this seems unlikely.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Rutherford

Under the Influence of Elizabeth von Arnim and Robert Liddell

by Eleonore Biber

Barbara Pym owes a great deal to Elizabeth von Arnim and Robert Liddell. Von Arnim certainly played some part in forming Pym's literary style. About her novels, Pym said, "I was learning; these novels seemed more appropriate to use as models than *Crome Yellow* — perhaps even the kind of thing I might try to write myself."

Liddell was Pym's lifelong friend, corresponded with her, offered much helpful criticism and encouraged her in many ways. In *A Mind at Ease*, he wrote about Pym's novels: "[They] often seem to come to us like gifts of nature, like the air we breathe or the water we drink (but purer and more wholesome)."

Elizabeth von Arnim was born Mary Annette Beauchamp in Australia in 1866. In 1870 the Beauchamps moved to England, where she received a good education. There were plans for a musical career, but at the age of 24 she married a 40-year-old German widower, Count Henning August von Arnim-Schlagenthin.

After five years in Berlin, the family moved to the von Arnim estate at Nassenheide in Pomerania, near the Baltic coast. It was here that Elizabeth began writing. Her bestselling book, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, was published in 1898. Elizabeth had to support her five children after her husband lost all his money through a combination of incompetence and misfortune. In 1909 she left Germany for England. Her husband died in 1910.

Elizabeth embarked on a turbulent affair with the writer H. G. Wells, which ended when he told her that the writer Rebecca West was pregnant with his child.

Elizabeth had a big chalet built in Montana, Valais, Switzerland, where her innumerable guests became "almost regrettably invigorated." In due course, her cousin Katherine Mansfield, who suffered from tuberculosis, and her husband, the critic John Middleton Murry, also moved to Montana.

In 1916 Elizabeth married Francis, Earl Russell, the brother of Bertrand Russell. The marriage was a disaster and ended acrimoniously in 1919. She was 54 when she fell in love with Alexander Stuart Frere-Reeves, 30 years her junior.

Paul Binding and Eleonore Biber chat after the Annual Din-

Elizabeth ended up in America, estranged from most of her children, devoted to her dog Billy, crippled by arthritis and almost forgotten by her adoring public. She died in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1941.

The critic Frank Swinnerton described her as "small, protrusive-eyed, relentless. In repose she was demure, but in reality she was a born and courageous adventurer." In her journal, Katherine Mansfield described Elizabeth as "looking fascinating in her black suit, something between a bishop and a fly."

A prolific writer, Elizabeth was a greatly admired literary figure of her time. She wrote 16 novels and an autobiography; some of the titles are: *Elizabeth and Her German Garden,* which won its author a wide public in Britain and America when it appeared in 1898; *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen* (1904) is based on Elizabeth's holiday on the island of Rügen; in 1914, *The Pastor's Wife*, in my opinion her most ambitious novel, was published; *The Enchanted April* (1922) is arguably her most popular novel. *Love* (1925) is largely based on her romance with young Frere. Reading the novel, I was reminded of Pym's falling in love with Richard Roberts, 18 years her junior. *All the Dogs of My Life* (1936) is the story of her most extraordinary life and her equally extraordinary dogs.

In her radio talk, *Finding a Voice*, Pym said:

> I particularly enjoyed the works of Elizabeth von Arnim, the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. Such novels as

The Enchanted April and *The Pastor's Wife* were a revelation in their wit and delicate irony, and the dry, unsentimental treatment of the relationship between men and women which touched some echoing chord in me . . .

Elizabeth von Arnim (date unknown)

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, we watch the seasons through von Arnim's eyes, from May's "oasis of birdcherries and greenery" to the time when "snow carpets her Pomeranian wilderness." Pym's essay, "A Year in West Oxfordshire," describing the passing of seasons in Finstock, is reminiscent of von Arnim's observations. Elizabeth is always happy in her garden; indoors there is her husband, called "The Man of Wrath," inspiring in Elizabeth a mixture of irritation, affection and irreverence. But outside, she can escape domestic routine, play with her babies and garden to her heart's content. However, E.M. Forster, who spent some months as tutor to Elizabeth's children in Nassenheide, said he never saw a garden. Hugh Walpole, who followed him, described it as a garden of trees rather than flowers.

Von Arnim's sense of irony is already noticeable in her first book. I think Pym's clergymen owe quite a lot to von Arnim's clerical portraits. In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden,* she writes:

> Once a fortnight we go to morning prayer at eleven. In Winter the church is bitterly cold ... and we sit muffled up in more furs than ever we wear out of doors ... it would be very wicked for the parson to wear furs, however cold he may be, so he puts on a great many extra coats under his gown, and as the winter progresses, swells to a prodigious size. We know when spring is coming by the reduction in his figure.

In *The Pastor's Wife*, Ingeborg Bullivant, the daughter of a bossy Bishop of the Church of England, marries the Prussian pastor Robert Dremmel, who spends all his time on agronomy experiments. The topic of his first conversation with Ingeborg is "manure:"

> "It is," he said solemnly, his eyes glistening with enthusiasm, "the foundation of a nation's greatness."
>
> "I hadn't thought of it like that," said Ingeborg.

Ingeborg has had six children in seven years, only two of whom live. She yearns for intellectual stimulation and runs off to Italy with the painter Ingram, modeled on H. G. Wells. Naively, at first Ingeborg does not see through Ingram's scheme to seduce her, but she flees from him when she realizes her awkward situation. When she returns home, her husband has not even missed her.

Sunny, submissive Ingeborg, whose one desire is to make people happy, is dominated by the three men in her life: her father, her husband, and her would-be lover. They are tyrants and sexists, all of them. Thus the Bishop reflects on "the mechanical brainlessness that makes a woman so satisfactory as a secretary." Everard Bone in *Excellent Women* is a milder version of von Arnim's Bishop. He will teach Mildred how to read proofs of his book, and for variety, he suggests, she can also learn to index.

The book's early section is set in the Bishop of Redchester's Palace; the echo to Trollope's Barchester is deliberate. The Bishop's wife is wedded to the sofa in order to escape the attentions of her wedded, lawful husband. In *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen,* a Bishop's wife is one of the minor characters in the book.

In *The Enchanted April* four women rent a *castello* on the Italian Riviera. Two of them, dowdy, childless women, are trapped in unhappy marriages, a young lady wants to escape from her life as a society beauty, and an elderly gentlewoman mourns the passing of the Victorian era. One of the two married women, Mrs. Arbuthnot, never sees her husband. He may not even

notice that she has gone away. Here is a very Pymish passage:

> Frederick had been the kind of husband whose wife betakes herself early to the feet of God. From him to them had been a short though painful step. ... All that was over now. ... Frederick, from her passionately loved bridegroom, from her worshipped young husband, had become second only to God on her list of duties and forbearances, a bloodless thing bled white by her prayers. For years she had been able to be happy only by forgetting happiness.

The Enchanted April is mentioned by title in Pym's *An Unsuitable Attraction*. The Villa Faustina and its surroundings remind Ianthe of von Arnim's book. The ending of the book is summarized by Sophia:

> Sophia had forgotten exactly what happened in the novel, but remembered enough to realize that there was a sort of bringing together of husbands and wives and that in the end everybody was satisfactorily and happily paired off.

In her introduction to *Civil to Strangers*, Hazel Holt calls *The Enchanted April* "the springboard for Pym's novel":

> There are several parallels: the selfish, uncaring husband, the apparently submissive wife who nevertheless observes life with an ironic eye, and the transformation of a difficult husband by the Romance of Abroad

Von Arnim's books inspired Pym in many ways. Both authors have a lot in common: their dry, ironic spirit, sophisticated detached comedy, tact and sense of fun, sharp observation and analysis of human behaviour. Discreet and low-keyed as their writing is, it has on every page the stamp of a strong literary personality.

Robert Liddell (1908-1992), novelist and critic, spent his early childhood in Cairo. He was educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and joined the staff of the Bodleian Library before travelling eastward to lecture in Cairo, Alexandria and Athens, where he is buried.

Liddell's first published novel, *The Almond Tree* (1938), is based on the letters of Mark Pattison, the Rector of Lincoln College. The trilogy *Kind Relations* (1939), *Stepsons* (1969) and *The Last Enchantments* (1948), which follows the boyhood and youth of two brothers and dwells on the themes of domestic tyranny, contains many autobiographical elements. A second trilogy consists of *An Object for a Walk* (1966), *Unreal City* (1952) and *The Rivers of Babylon* (1959). *Unreal City* is based on the life of Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933) whose poems written in demotic Greek celebrate homosexual love. Liddell himself preferred life without women, in Robert Smith's words "[He] often hymned the virtues of the unmarried life."

The Deep End (1968) is a poignant evocation of childhood, a tale of victims and oppressors. Liddell was also a critic in the field of modern, mainly English literature. He wrote two influential books on the novel, *A Treatise on the Novel* (1947) and *Some Principles of Fiction* (1953). He wrote studies of Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Taylor, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Emily and Anne Brontë, and – most important for us – *A Mind at Ease: Barbara Pym and Her Novels* (1989). He also published *Cavafy: A Biography* (1974) and descriptions of his travels.

In the Pym Papers in the Bodleian there is an account by Liddell of his friendship with Pym (MS PYM 153). He first met her in the summer of 1934, although he had been aware of her before. He recollects some sort of friendly signal as she passed along the Arts End of the Bodleian where Liddell was toiling with the papers of Bishop Percy at his draughty desk. Liddell (nicknamed "Jock") was a close friend of Henry Harvey, and they shared lodgings in Harvey's third year at Oxford when he lived out of college. Pym and Liddell performed domestic tasks around the flat, Liddell cooking and Pym darning a pile of socks.

Pym was impressed by the knowledge, wit and self-confidence of the two young men. However, she was already developing her own tastes in English literature and was encouraged in these by her friends, particularly by Liddell. After taking a second in English at St. Hilda's in 1934, Pym returned to her parents' home. In her diary she notes: "Actually I miss Jockie more — his company and conversation, but I am still en-

slaved by Henry's baser charms." In 1934 the correspondence between Pym and Liddell began and lasted until her death. Both were devoted to Ivy Compton-Burnett and to a lesser degree to Stevie Smith. They copied their styles in their letters.

When Harvey left for Finland, Liddell assumed greater importance in Pym's life. On December 6, 1937, he wrote to her sister Hilary asking her to break the news that Harvey's wedding would take place the following week. Liddell read Pym's work-in-progress with enthusiasm, offered helpful criticism and helped her to find interested publishers. Pym took an interest in Liddell's writing and encouraged him in many ways. Between 1964 and 1976 Pym paid five short visits to Greece, mainly to see Liddell and there she met his partner Guido. During Pym's Lenten years of silence, she was supported by Liddell's letters, which are now in the Bodleian.

Liddell was absolutely delighted by Pym's rediscovery as a novelist in 1977. She dedicated her novel of farewell, *A Few Green Leaves*, to Hilary and Liddell. In an address to the Barbara Pym Literary Weekend at St. Hilda's in 1993, Robert Smith observed that Liddell considered the publication of *An Unsuitable Attachment, Crampton Hodnet, An Academic Question* and *Civil to Strangers* damaging to Pym's reputation. He was even more disturbed by the publication of *A Very Private Eye*. To him letters were private documents, but his own *Elizabeth and Ivy* (1986) is partly based on his letters to Taylor. Besides, Smith said, Liddell had built up his own idealized picture of Pym: a devout Anglo-Catholic, dedicated to a single life, whose emotions were strictly controlled. This ideal could not be sustained against the lively, flesh-and-blood Pym who emerges from the pages of *A Very Private Eye*. Thus he welcomed the sober and measured account Hazel Holt gives in her biography, *A Lot to Ask*.

Liddell loved and admired Pym and looked on her as his literary protegée. Pym was beginning her career as a novelist in the summer of 1934 as she wrote the first version of *Some Tame Gazelle*. Liddell wrote: "Henry and I think you are a very great novelist . . . . Henry thinks you are far greater than Miss Austen. I don't quite agree though I place you well above the Brontës."

Liddell saw the work at all stages and had many suggestions for revision. In the early draft of *Some Tame Gazelle*, Belinda and Harriet are engaged in relief work for "all the dear Nazis in Africa." Liddell recommended that Pym remove all references to the Nazis, omit her Finnish characters and reduce the overwhelming number of literary allusions. He urged her to make the book "a little more professional and less home-made." Her new version was more tightly constructed, all extraneous Germans and Finns pared away as Liddell had suggested, and the tone more steadily ironic. Although they had rejected the 1936 *Some Tame Gazelle*, the publisher Jonathan Cape agreed 14 years later, at the urging of Liddell, to reconsider the novel, and this time they accepted it for publication. At that point the direct influence of Liddell on Pym's writing came to an end but he continued to criticize and

No Soft Incense: Barbara Pym and the Church. *Edited by Hazel K. Bell*

Catholic Herald, 17 June 2005: "Not since Anthony Trollope's Barchester novels has the Church of England received such minute and detailed treatment in fiction."

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and inspire her novels until her death.

He praised *Excellent Women*: "The tone is beautifully and faultlessly managed — one feels Mildred genuinely expects so little for herself that it is almost sad." He was delighted with *A Glass of Blessings*: "I adore Mr Bason and all the arrangements at the clergy-house." He was critical of Dulcie in *No Fond Return of Love*, "carrying on with a divorced man." He called *Quartet in Autumn* "her strongest finest work." Pym took a keen interest in Liddell's writing and made helpful comments on some of his novels. She was inspired to go on writing by the fact that his novel, *The Almond Tree*, had been accepted by Cape in 1938. In *An Object for a Walk*, Pym could detect bits of herself in two female characters.

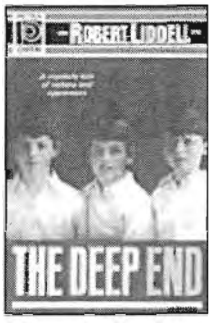
When Pym was rediscovered in 1977, Liddell was overjoyed. He wrote to her: "Ultimately, I think our books date the least – and the once 'up-to-date' is speedily 'out-of-date.'

Charles Duff in *Harpers & Queen* called Liddell "the most unknown major English writer of the 20th century, a minimalist in an Austenish way," which is reminiscent of Pym's being called "the most underrated author of the past 75 years" by Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil in 1977.

In 1950, Liddell wrote to Pym: "I hope we have influenced each other and I hope only for good." Pym's and Liddell's work is characterized by themes of personal courage and humility. Both authors rely on a Christian scheme of moral values. They treat their characters with respect and sympathy and have great flair for creating characters bizarre and convincing. Literary allusions play a great role. The narrative pace is slow, comic effects are discreetly understated, and they share a tragicomic vision of life and a love of ironic nuances. Liddell's novels are darker than Pym's. Unlike Liddell who drew upon his past for several of his novels, childhood is a topic generally absent from Pym's novels.

Pym had many lively discussions with Liddell, who was a Roman Catholic convert but had retained a deep affection for High Anglicanism, about religion in general and "the vagaries of clergy of all denominations," some of which entered her novels. Liddell's novels are not "churchy" like Pym's, but there are some clerical vignettes in his work. In the novel *The Deep End,* there is a chapter set on Sports Day at a boys' preparatory school with echoes of Pym:

> "There's something not quite right about that man," said the Canon. ... "I believe he doesn't exercise his orders, never celebrates Holy Communion."
>
> "That always looks fishy," said the Archdeacon.
>
> "The bishop's a divine man," said Charlotte Wimbush. "But, my dear, such a trying shade of purple! He must find it very difficult to wear."



Both authors were fond of Oxford. Pym found it "intoxicating," to Liddell it was "eternally beautiful." Like *Crampton Hodnet*, Liddell's novel *The Last Enchantments,* which pays homage to Matthew Arnold in its title, is set in North Oxford. It is less light-hearted in tone than *Crampton Hodnet* and reflects aspects of Liddell's sharing a home with his brother Donald, who was killed in Normandy in 1944.

Having met in the Bodleian for the first time, the library remained a background of Pym's and Liddell's thoughts and conversation. In Pym's novels the Bodleian is portrayed as a haven for scholars. In *Crampton Hodnet* Francis Cleveland is in one of his "loose-endish moods." His wife Margaret suggests he should spend the afternoon in the Bodleian: "You certainly want to get rid of me," [Francis says] "so perhaps I *will* go to the Bodleian. It's a comfort to know that there is at least one place left in Oxford where scholars and elderly people can spend a peaceful afternoon."

This paper was presented at the Barbara Pym Conference at St. Hilda's College on 9 August 2008.

Have you renewed your membership lately?

If not, this might be your final *Green Leaves*. Printing and postage costs have risen and dues will be going up in April '09. Renewal information for U.K. and U.S. members is at www.barbarapym.org. Let us hear from you!

Editor's Note: Muriel Maby met Barbara Pym in Bristol during the War, and they remained friends. She celebrated her 100th birthday last year. This letter was donated to the Pym Archives.

Barbara Pym

I always looked forward to a meeting with Barbara Pym. If I was the visitor, Barbara and her sister were all that one hoped one's hostesses would be. If I was the hostess Barbara was always a welcome visitor. We met during the Second World War when we were both doing war work. She was single-minded about eventually being a successful writer but I do not remember any in depth conversations about authorship.

At the time her relationships with the several other people, with whom she shared a large house, were mainly to the forefront of her mind. After the war our friendship continued, and I read the books which Jonathan Cape published for her. She was modest about her success and it was some time before I learned about her fan mail. Then came the disappointment which, in spite of all her efforts, lasted incredibly for sixteen years.

It was with great pleasure that I opened my 'Times' one morning to find her name on the front page. She, too, was of course delighted but sanguine: 'I don't expect anything will come of this but it has made me happy.' (postcard 4.2.77). However, in a letter dated 11th April 1977 she says,

'Since I was last in touch things have been going rather well for me - the main thing is that Macmillan have accepted the novel I had sent them and are publishing it in September! How one thing leads to another and I was beginning to think I never should be published again – the new one is called 'Quartet in Autumn'.
A card dated 29.9.77: 'We went to Bristol on the wettest day ever to record talk! (Excellent Women) – Today I go to London for the Book Programme film. I'll let you know when it comes on – I'm very much enjoying all this – Lots of letters.'

Letter dated 5th November 1977: 'I'm so glad you enjoyed the T.V. Programme – we thought it went quite well too with Minerva (the cat) stealing the show – one friend complained that we provided a somewhat inadequate tea, but there wasn't really much room – I am going to stay in London some time, don't know exactly when, but 'Quartet in Autumn' has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize and I have been invited to the dinner on the 23rd so I expect I shall go to that! - I can honestly say that I don't really want to win! - all I wanted was to be published again.'

A card dated 18th November 1977: 'Booker is next week. I hope to go with my publisher. It should be interesting. A postcard dated 17.7.78: 'Am going to London on Wednesday to record my d(esert) island discs!' Letter dated 13th August 1979: 'I haven't been very well lately but am now recovering -' This was the beginning of the end. My last communication from her was a Christmas card in December 1979. 'I have been in and out of hospital so we shan't be making much of Christmas this year!

Her handwriting may have wavered. Her interest in writing never did.

Muriel Maby
Miscellany : 1999

Diary of a Provincial Pymmite

Editor's note: Herewith another excerpt from The Provincial Lady's *mysterious diary, wherein she revels in literary pursuits and excels in an after-dinner quiz. The PP is Clemence Schultze.*

Some feeling of relief at quitting much-loved home for BPS conference in early August: home in question is turned upside-down and has a bathroom suite in dining-room, awaiting arrival of The Builder and his much more elusive associate, The Plumber. End result will be a completely remodelled bathroom, but present situation (which has lasted for a month, without slightest sign of activity on part of The B. and The P.) rather tempers joy of anticipation.

First evening gets conference off to an excellent start with an amusing yet testing after-dinner quiz: I manage to include myself in team with the most adroit and clued-up participants and am happy to say that we win the prize of two bottles of wine. Resolve, however, not to indulge, except in 'the feast of reason and flow of soul'. (Query: can this be right? quotations once half-remembered now often seem to be only quarter-remembered.)

Am very pleased to see College and gardens looking lovely, though lightly obscured by rain. Committee meeting achieves several decisions and assigns various tasks, energetically undertaken by members. Only have to resort once to rapping on table for silence when conversation on irrelevant matters goes beyond all bounds. (Query: what would reaction of Our Vicar's Wife be if the same expedient were adopted when she drops in for a little chat?)

AGM over, the audience settles to hear several excellent and diverse papers on the topic of Under the Influence. Meditate on seemingly unlikely conjunction of numerous metaphysical and Romantic poets, Charlotte M. Yonge, Elizabeth (famed for her German garden but, sadly, not as winning a personality as she painted herself), Robert Liddell, Ivy Compton-Burnett, and Philip Larkin: all brought together through the life and work of BP.

Change for conference dinner and am seized with slight doubts about outfit, bought in one of those moments of optimism – or possibly madness – that are apt to descend when in dress shop. Much reassured when Very Stylish Lady (unknown to me, and I do not catch her name) compliments me upon jacket. Am also very taken with another member's necklace: a cross between jewellery and sculpture, it can be manipulated into numerous different forms, and it miraculously retains new shape. Vow to find similar for myself.

Unfortunately rain sets in with a vengeance, so that drinks before dinner cannot be taken out to garden, but meal enjoyable as ever, and dining hall looks very well indeed. After-dinner speaker combines wit with wonder, reminiscence with reflection, and leaves audience charmed and amused. Memories of rest of evening in SCR rather hazy, but can confidently recall that wine was drunk and a good time was had by all.

Unwisdom of this becomes clear on following morning: recall that day's activities include participation in a dramatic performance in afternoon. But morning's discussion session is so stimulating that it removes any lingering malaise; and so am quite ready to play my part. The script, dramatised from a juvenile novel by BP, is a mixture of Huxley and P.G. Wodehouse: a tour de force on the part of its teenage author, and a credit to the dramatiser. Audience laugh heartily, while cast draw upon every jot of professionalism in order to refrain from laughing.

Return home in a cheerful mood, not spoilt by fact that bathroom suite is still untouched in dining room. Reflect that this too is a tribute to the well-being engendered by participating in a Barbara Pym conference, and retire happily to bed.

Chris Rutherford (left) and Christine Shuttleworth enjoy the elegant dinner at St. Hilda's on Saturday evening.

LibraryThing

by Hazel Bell

I have come across a wonderful Internet site, LibraryThing (www.librarything.com) an enormous database where people can list the books they own, allotting star ratings, descriptions, tags, reviews, and other details. It is an open, collaborative project. The statistics are stunning, and can be seen at www.librarything.com/zeitgeist. They change (increase!) constantly: here is one day's snapshot (late October 2008):

Members 535,354
Books cataloged 32,660,160
Tags added 42,728,690
Unique works 3,787,204
Total reviews 536,452
Works reviewed 245,408
Ratings 5,167,957
User-contributed covers 1,155,331
Author photos 27,795
User groups 4,454
Forum messages 858,158
Forum touchstones 564,910

Anyone can join, and list one's books. At "Add Books" typing in just the title and author means that all other bibliographical details are grabbed from Amazon or from Library of Congress catalogues and entered for you, and a page is created each for author and each work — or your listing is added to the already existing ones.

Pym's author page (http://tinyurl.com/446or8) shows her photograph, details of her biography, links to the BPS website and her Wikipedia entry, and a list of her books that LibraryThing members have listed. The statistics are fascinating: 3,133 members have listed 29 of her books (various omnibus editions and translations extend the number), with an average rating of 4.08 stars out of five; 48 of them have listed Pym as one of their favourite authors, and 83 reviews have been posted. A table enables comparison of popularity of the books. At the top are:

Excellent Women 537 copies, 18 reviews
Quartet in Autumn 286 copies, 11 reviews
Jane and Prudence 274 copies, 9 reviews
Some Tame Gazelle 240 copies, 6 reviews
No Fond Return of Love 218 copies, 5 reviews

The numbers following each title show how many members have listed the book, and how many have posted their own review of it. The 537 copies listing for *Excellent Women* gives it a popularity rating of 5,910 among the total 32,660,160 books listed.

You can see the page for each book on LibraryThing by clicking on the title on the author's page. Cover images are shown with the page for each book, if they come in automatically with data grabbed from Amazon or the Library of Congress, or are added by members; most of the pages for Pym's books show their cover images. Book descriptions may also be added by any member, and the first and last sentences of works quoted — this gives a splendid flavour of the works!

You can "recommend" on any book page up to three other books that you think would appeal to the same readers; this will also create reciprocal references back to the original books. I have thus created circles of reference between *A Very Private Eye* (which has 120 listings), Dale Salwak's *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*, Hazel Holt's *A Lot to Ask*, Orna Raz's *Social Dimensions in the Novels of Barbara Pym*, and Lenckos & Miller's *All This Reading*. I have also made references to (and from) *Jane and Prudence, Less Than Angels* and *A Few Green Leaves* to Penelope Lively's *Spiderweb*; from *Quartet in Autumn* to *Memento Mori* by Muriel Spark, *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* by Elizabeth Taylor, and *At the Jerusalem* by Paul Bailey: three other moving stories of ageing people; and from *Excellent Women* and *A Few Green Leaves* to Christina Rossetti's *Commonplace*, fiction which also deals with the plight of spinsters. Alas, I can make no promotional recommendations to books on Anglo-Catholicism from *No Soft Incense*, as one is prohibited from recommending one's own books!

There are hours of fun to be had exploring and adding to it — and it's a great way to promote one's favourite books!

From the Archives

by Yvonne Cocking

A category of archival material to which, for lack of time, I have not yet given as much attention as it deserves, is a collection of photograph albums which I received after Hilary's death. These go back a long way – I think the earliest is dated 1926, containing the small, black-and-white-photographs of that period, depicting the young Pym family and their dogs which feature largely throughout. There is an occasional date, but the pictures are not identified, though those of Barbara and Hilary and their parents are obvious. The prints are glued on to the pages, and it is tempting to try to remove them to see if there are any names of the unknowns on the back. Many of the photos have been removed or cut out.

One album, however, though also mutilated, is particularly interesting. It was compiled by Hilary at Barn Cottage, and I think was intended mainly as a record of Barbara's life. It contains some fine pictures of the family, particularly the Thomases. Edward Thomas of Oswestry married Mary Jane Carr of Scotswood, Northumberland, on 17 August 1871

Barbara's and Hilary's mother Irena was the youngest of their ten children. Hilary gives the date of birth of most of these children, recording that three died early. However, there is one large photograph of the ten of them with their mother, who was widowed in 1887, the year after Irena was born. Of the three who died young, at the time of the photograph (1888?) Stanley must have been about 14, Percy about 8 and Ethel about 6. I wonder what was the cause of their deaths? Some epidemic, perhaps?

Then there is a large photograph of the marriage at Oswestry Parish Church on 26th October 1911 of Frederick Crampton Pym and Irena Spenser Thomas. They had met while on holiday at Ilfracombe in north Devon in 1909 or 1910. He was 32, she was 25. Hilary thought that their first home was in Shrewsbury.

Frederick passed his final law examination in 1912, and he and his wife moved to 72 Willow Street (now demolished), Oswestry, in 1913. It was here that Barbara was born in the same year.

The Thomas family photographs include one of four of the five daughters, May, Nellie,

The wedding of Barbara's parents, Frederick Crampton Pym and Irena Spenser Thomas, in Oswestry in October 1911.

Jane and Irena, probably in their teens, after Ethel had presumably died, and several of Irena ("Baby") with Jane, the next youngest.

Less in evidence than the mother, apart from the wedding photo Frederick is featured with Irena and her sisters, and with a tennis partner.

The album continues with some lovely pictures of Barbara as a toddler and young girl, about which I shall write at another time.

A Day in Oswestry

The Barbara Pym Society invites you to spend **Saturday, May 16, 2009**, in Barbara Pym's home town, including a walk around the town. The day will start in the Parish Centre, attached to St. Oswald's Church where Barbara was a regular worshipper.

The schedule will be roughly as follows:

10.00 a.m. Coffee

10.30 A slide show and talk introducing sights and memories of the Pym family.

11.30 – 11.45 Break

11.45 Two speakers yet to be confirmed

1.00 p.m. Lunch at the Heritage Centre, a very Pymish tea shop!

2.00 Walk. A marked map will be provided. Oswestry is not a very big place.

4.00 Tea at the Heritage Centre (optional extra)

Cost: £15.00 including coffee and lunch. Members must make their own way to Oswestry and book their own accommodation. A list of hotels and B&Bs is available and many are very reasonably priced. Further information will be posted on the Pym website.

Barbara Pym and the Romantic Novelists

by Jean Harker
Member, Pym Society and the RNA, Oxford Chapter

It has been proposed that the theme for the 2010 Conference should be "Barbara Pym and Romance." This will immediately call to mind two types of romance, both dear to Barbara Pym's heart – romantic fiction and actual personal romantic involvement. Pym, as we know from her writings fictional and personal, was deeply interested in romance, her own and other people's, and was adept in including it in her novels.

In his fascinating talk at the 2008 conference, Paul Binding mentioned the affection that Pym had for the Romantic Novelists' Association (RNA) which recruited her as a judge for its major award (The Romantic Novel of the Year) during her wilderness years and continued to esteem her as a writer although she was unable to find a publisher for her work.

The *RNA News* of Spring 1978 includes a report by Jo Germany of a talk given by Pym on 8 March 1978: "Once again the Ulster Room at the Overseas Club was filled to capacity with members who this time had the pleasure of listening to charming Barbara Pym talk of her writing experience..."

What a rich talk that must have been! It included her account of being "rediscovered" in 1977 and subsequently shortlisted for the Booker Prize, and also touched on her own brush with [straightforward] romantic fiction which she had enjoyed reading during a stay in hospital, even wondering if she could write it herself. She had begun work on a romantic novel, she said, but, as noted in her diary for March 1972, the idea for a new novel about "old crabby characters, petty, obsessive and bad tempered" simply took over — and became *Quartet in Autumn*.

It is proposed that RNA members be allowed to attend on payment of the conference fee, without any obligation to join the Barbara Pym Society. The topic of Barbara Pym, romance and the Romantic Novelists' Association is particularly appropriate for 2010, the RNA's 50th birthday. A meeting including RNA members should be a particularly interesting event which might even result in increased membership (for both societies!). For more information, see www.rna-uk.org.

A word about dues

Well, actually, a few words. Membership renewals are due now for the 2008-09 year that runs from April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009.

The current dues for UK members are Seniors £8, Individual Memberships £15, and Family Memberships (at same address) £22.

The current dues for US and Canadian members are Seniors $12, Individual Memberships $22, and Family Memberships (at same address) $34.

Renewal forms for UK and US/Canada are on the web site, www.barbara-pym.org. Members without Internet access will find a renewal form enclosed in this newsletter.

Dues will be raised for 2009-10, by vote of the Executive Committee at its February meeting. The new fees will be Seniors £10/$20, Individuals £18/$36, and Family Memberships £25/$50. These dues become effective April 1, 2009.

The Barbara Pym Society
2008-09

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Pym Gleanings

Editor's Note: Fortunately we can now find frequent mentions of Barbara Pym in print and online. Because of numerous Gleanings, we will not include here instances in which Pym is merely listed in a string of writers without further context. Similarly, we will sidestep blogs – the references to Barbara Pym in the blogosphere seem to increase each week, and while we are delighted that so many new readers have found her, we will try to restrict our Gleanings to substantive references. Please continue to send your choice Gleanings to the editor.

Noted in Books

• *The Letters of Penelope Fitzgerald*, edited by Terence Dooley and recently published on both sides of the Atlantic, brought forth two reviews that mention Barbara Pym.

Christine Shuttleworth sent this review by Jeremy Treglown from the *Spectator*, 16 August 2008:

> 'I can't remember whether you said you liked Barbara Pym,' Penelope Fitzgerald wrote to an old school friend around 1980, 'but am sending *Quartet in Autumn* in case you haven't got it, otherwise it can go to the Mothers' Union Xmas sale. I do like her very much, the incidents look so trivial that there's nothing in them and then you suddenly realise how much she's said.' This recommendation is typical in its light-handedness and could also be mistaken for a fair summary of Fitzgerald's own fiction at that time. But her work went further and deeper than Pym's.

Scott Herrick has forwarded a review by Rosemary Hill in the *London Review of Books*, 25 September 2008:

> She [Fitzgerald] was compared, inevitably, with Barbara Pym and Beryl Bainbridge (the latter she thought 'a good corrective to vanity'), and was informed by a pundit at a soirée that she had to be in Pym's 'group': 'You either have to be in hers or Beryl's. This made me vow never to go to a literary party again and I shan't, either.'

• Paula Sutcliffe found a mention of Pym in what she thought was an unexpected place – in a book of essays by Wheaton College English Professor Alan Jacobs. The book is *A Visit to Vanity Fair*, the title of the essay is "Lives of Essayists":

> Of course many novels are about middle-aged people, but it seems that more often than not such characters are in various stages of rebellion against their time of life. Sometimes, as in Barbara Pym's books, these rebellions are so gentle and befuddled as to scarcely deserve the name – maybe 'vague unease' would be more accurate than rebellion.

Noted in Journals and Newspapers

• A medical journal (of all places!) was a surprise resource for Alison Stratton, who found this essay in the *British Medical Journal* of 17 September 2008. The author is Theodore Dalrymple, writer and retired doctor, who seems to have understood Miss Doggett perfectly:

> Small details in novels can sometimes evoke a chain of memories. For example, when I read of the smelling salts of Miss Doggett, the elderly spinster in Barbara Pym's novel *Crampton Hodnet* (the last of her novels to be published but among the first to be written), I could not but recall my grandmother. . . .
>
> She wore a fur stole that ended at one end in a bouquet of tails and at the other in a medusoid mass of heads with glass eyes. She wore hats just like Miss Doggett's, on which were perched stuffed birds, feathers, and fruit, and that were secured with hatpins that nowadays would probably be considered offensive weapons. . . .
>
> Like Miss Doggett she had a companion. Was she friend, factotum, servant, nurse? I never understood; and now, when I would be in a better position to observe, the whole profession of lady's companion is no more.

• From the *Ellsworth [Maine] American* comes word of the reissue by Pushcart Press of novelist Doris Grumbach's *Chamber Music*. This is Grum-

bach's most celebrated novel, originally published in 1979. Reviewer Ellen Booraem writes, "When it was first published, Barbara Pym described *Chamber Music* as 'a haunting story, all the more powerful because of the elegant economy of the writing.'"

• Michael Wilson sent a review of a hotel in the Lake District by Michael Rowley for the *Daily Telegraph*, 17 September 2008:

> We have a lunchtime sandwich in the lounge bar which leads, curiously, straight off the lobby. It's very quiet. An old lady straight out of Barbara Pym puts down her large-print book, trundles over to the door, inspects the weather (wet) and trundles back to the book. All the scene lacks is a palm-court trio.

• Scott Herrick (prodigious reader of reviews) sent a review essay titled "Bondage" by Geoffrey Wheatcroft on the James Bond books and films in *The New York Review of Books*, 14 August 2008:

> When Philip Larkin grumbled once about the 'spy rubbish' he resented having to read (along with 'science-fiction rubbish, Negro-homosexual rubbish, or dope-taking nervous-breakdown rubbish'), Fleming must have been what he had in mind, but there is more than one type of espionage novel. Larkin's words may sound more than characteristically dyspeptic, but they were written in a generous and altruistic letter to Charles Monteith of Faber, trying to persuade him, though without success, to take on Barbara Pym and her 'ordinary sane novels about ordinary sane people doing ordinary sane things' (August 15, 1965).

• Yvonne Cocking found a review of the Virago reprint of *Excellent Women* in Metrolife (www.metro.co.uk), a free paper circulated on the London Underground, in the 20 August 2008 issue:

> The divine Barbara Pym's *Excellent Women* (£10, Virago) is narrated by a thirty-something churchgoer, the sort of dependable woman who keeps an oven glove on a nail by the stove. More troubled by her spinster status than she lets on, she is constantly entreated by her less sensible friends (and the local Father) to solve their various marital and domestic troubles, which Pym takes immense delight in satirising. Every seemingly mundane observation of her mediocre world conceals a bee sting: if you haven't discovered Pym, this hardback edition is the perfect opportunity.

Miscellany

• We were told that Barbara Pym is included in the third edition of *The Oxford Guide to Literary Britain and Ireland,* by Daniel Hahn and Nicholas Robins, published in June 2008 by Oxford University Press.

• Surely the strangest Gleaning comes from Jean Thilmany who writes: "I buy scents from Demeter in fragrances such as Crayon, Play-doh, Pipe Tobacco and Laundrymat. Today I was clicking around eBay and found a new-to-me scent, Paperback. The write-up from the seller (who is not the manufacturer) reads":

> A dusty old copy of a Barbara Pym novel did it for us. This Demeter scent is sweet and just a touch musty, a lot like Pym's world come to think of it. Read her if you haven't. Her writing is wonderful, if slightly musty, English satire from the '60s and '70s.

More Pym Gleanings

• Faithful contributor Scott Herrick found "the amazingly universal Barbara Pym" in yet another unexpected setting. The *London Review of Books* (17 July 2008) has a review of *The Nancy Book* by Joe Brainard, a 'prodigiously gifted artist and writer' who died of AIDS in 1994. ... The book, reviewed by Mark Ford, is a collection of illustrations putting the cartoon character Nancy into familiar art works and other various situations.

The review reads, in part:

> When asked about his prolificness in in terviews, Brainard freely acknowledged that it was partly the result of the large quantities of speed he took. During the early 1970s he'd work for days without stopping, sifting through the thematically coded piles of bric-à-brac in his loft on Greene Street, or snipping paper with X-Acto blades to fill plexiglass boxes with imitation foliage. His great goal, though, was to master oil painting, and it was partly his failure, in his own eyes to do so, that led to his willingness to spend his days immersed in the fiction of Barbara Pym rather than taking the Manhattan art world by storm. ☙

Looking Ahead to 2009

The eleventh annual meeting of the Barbara Pym Society of North America will be held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on 21-22 March 2009, at the Episcopal Divinity School, the same venue as last year. We will focus on one book as our theme: *A Few Green Leaves*, Barbara's final — and most poignant — fiction. You are invited to submit proposals for papers by 31 December 2008; please send your proposal to ellen@ellenmiller.net.

A Day in Oswestry, Shropshire, will be offered on 16 May 2009 — please see page 12 for details. This "field trip" will replace the annual London Spring meeting of the Barbara Pym Society.

The Annual Meeting and Conference of the Barbara Pym Society at St. Hilda's College is set for 5-6 September 2009. The theme will be *An Academic Question*, perhaps Barbara's least studied work. If you are interested in presenting a paper at the conference, please send a brief proposal to the Executive Committee, c/o Eileen Roberts, St. Hilda's College, Oxford OX4 1DY, or e-mail eileen.roberts@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk. Please check the website, www.barbara-pym.org, for details. ☙

At the St. Hilda's conference in August, the group discussion was led by Kate Charles (center) and included speakers, left to right, Julia Courtney, Paul Binding, Eleonore Biber and Janice Rossen.

(Photo by Christine Shuttleworth)