Ellen Miller
1933 – 2009
A Truly Excellent Woman

Dear Barbara Pym Society Members,

With great sadness I must announce the death of my dear friend, Ellen Miller. I met Ellen in 1981 because we shared another of her great interests, Scrabble. When we discovered our shared passion for all things British, our friendship deepened, and my interest in Pym followed quite naturally.

I visited Oxford several times with Ellen and greatly enjoyed the conferences we attended. In 2008, after the conference at St. Hilda's, we spent a few days in London visiting the British Museum and Kensington Palace and attending a Proms concert. This trip will always be a treasured memory.

Although ill, Ellen wanted to create this issue of Green Leaves*. I assured her I would help and together we would make it happen. In her typical way, even as illness limited her ability, Ellen gathered and organized the material for this issue, which makes me appreciate and miss her all the more. Now, with large amounts of help from other Society members, I have managed to put it together without her.*

We can never replace this Excellent Woman; we can only aspire to carry on the wonderful work she did.

Unfortunately, I must also announce the deaths of longtime members Joan Drexler and Joyce Williams. See page 3 for their stories.

Judy Horn

Photo by Sherrie Saint John, Spring 2003

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

Ellen Miller

by Beverly Bell

On May 26, the Barbara Pym Society lost one of its most active and beloved members, Ellen Miller. Ellen founded the North American Chapter of the Barbara Pym Society in 1999 and served as the editor of *Green Leaves* starting in 2006. Not only did she admire Pym's writing, but also she worked long and hard to bring that writing to the attention of others. With great skill and meticulous attention to detail, she organized and ran the society's annual conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, making it possible for North American readers to share their enthusiasm for Pym for more than a decade.

According to her obituary in *The Boston Globe* on 3 June, Ellen was born in Germany in 1933, but six months later her family fled to Amsterdam owing to the rise of Hitler. They moved to Auburn, New York, in 1936. Ellen graduated from the University of Rochester in 1955 and

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Ellen: A Memory
by Hazel Holt

Sometime in the 1980s (I'm not very good at dates), when I was staying with Hilary at Barn Cottage, Ellen came to make a film of our reminiscences of Barbara. Interest in Barbara's novel was growing in the U.S. and A Very Private Eye *was (amazingly) in the best sellers list in New York. I have vivid memories of the film cables snaking across the floor and the door of the small sitting room, which opened straight out onto the front garden, having to be left open (on a very cold day) to accommodate them. We took to Ellen immediately and felt that we'd made a new friend.*

When we were in America, promoting the book and talking to various groups about Barbara, Ellen arranged for us to speak at Harvard Law School and in Georgetown – fascinating venues and appreciative audiences. Great fun. Best of all, we went to stay with her. We'd been travelling around quite a bit, talking to various groups and were both feeling frazzled (one of Hilary's favourite expressions) and in the blissful peace of Ellen's lovely house, surrounded by trees, and with the comfort of a cat and dog to pet, we were able to relax. Typically she knew exactly what to give us to eat that first evening: a bowl of soup and boiled eggs. Exactly right. And there was a copy of The House at Pooh Corner *by my bed .One day she took us to the Alcott House – for me one of the high spots of all my trips to America.*

She always kept in touch and would travel up to New York to see us whenever we were there, usually bearing a gift – a perfect New York cheesecake or a copy of Cooking with a Harvard Accent *(I still use the recipes). When she was in London she made time in a busy schedule to travel down to West Somerset to spend the day. We regularly exchanged news, about family and animals, and were delighted when she took over , with her usual efficiency and enthusiasm, all the Pym Society arrangements in the States.*

Dear Ellen, she was a special person and we will always remember her with gratitude and great affection, as will her many friends all over the world.

ELLEN MILLER continued from page 1

then went on to earn a master's degree in television from Syracuse University, after which she was a television producer in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In the early 1970s, she moved to Boston, where she was a senior administrator at the Harvard Law School for 27 years. Ellen is survived by her son, Matthew Miller, her daughter-in-law, Nicole Miller, and two grandchildren.

Like Pym, Ellen was herself an accomplished writer. She was feature editor for the newspaper in Carlisle, Massachusetts, where she lived. She also authored or co-authored four books. Among these was *All This Reading, The Literary World of Barbara Pym*, published in 2003 and co-authored with Frauke Elisabeth Lenckos. The book brought together new essays on Pym, many of which had been presented at the society's meetings at St Hilda's or Harvard. In her foreword to the book, Hilary Pym Walton notes "perhaps it isn't too fantastic to feel that each of the pieces in this loving collection makes up for at least one of the years when [Barbara] was, as it were, 'in the wilderness.'" In 2004, Ellen published the short and delightful *Following Barbara's Footsteps*, calling it a "literary tour of Pym places" for readers to use when visiting places where Barbara lived, worshipped, visited, and set her novels.

Though Ellen had a wide range of interests and activities (including competitive Scrabble, dogs and cats, travel, and visiting her family), she devoted many hours to promoting the work of Barbara Pym and to keeping society members in touch with each other. But it was perhaps the scholarly side that was most important to her, as she was always looking for topics from new speakers and seasoned scholars alike. Her enthusiasm and kind support inspired them to uncover different ways of looking at Pym's work.

In his essay "Under the Spell of Barbara Pym" (*Green Leaves*, May 2006), Dale Salwak notes that "through her books Barbara meets us at our point of need – not only for pleasure but for companionship, for stability, perhaps even for consolation." So let us turn to those very books as we honor Ellen Miller, and remember the enormous and enduring contribution she made to the world of Barbara Pym.

Joyce Rosemary Williams
1934 – 2009

by Eileen Roberts

Joyce Rosemary Williams (nee Robson) was born 30 August 1934 in Bristol and lived in the Bristol area, in particular Dundry, all her life. She was the granddaughter of Ernest Robson, the well known Somerset cricketer.

Joyce was a very enthusiastic member of the Barbara Pym Society, always looking forward to the meetings. Many will remember her as Miss Foxe in the dramatisation of *The Sweet Dove Died*. Her fondness for Barbara Pym's writing possibly stemmed from the affinity she recognised in her own work. A very talented writer and poet, her short stories and poems appeared in magazines for several years and were broadcast on radio, notably her children's stories on *Listen with Mother*. She was a joint founder member of the Dundry and Chew Valley Poetry group, and her most recent success was in this year's Mid Somerset Literary Festival when she was awarded the 'Sylvia George' trophy.

Joyce was also a pianist and singer, singing first with the Bristol Cathedral Special Choir under Clifford Harker and later for many years with the Open University Chapel Choir. However she will be best remembered for her contribution to music in Dundry, teaching piano and flute as well as founding the Dundry Singers. A strong supporter of Dundry WI, she became their president. She was also the secretary of the Dundry History Society and a staunch member of the parish church. She held both a BA and BSc Hons from the Open University.

Her husband David, whom she married in 1961, recounts how words had a very special place in her life, both written and spoken. 'She was one of those people with the very special and exciting condition called synaesthesia. This meant that all words, letters, and numbers appeared to have special colours of their own. It may explain how her memory for words and writings was astonishing'.

Joyce died unexpectedly on Sunday 22 February 2009 after a short illness and is survived by her husband, son and daughter, and six grandchildren.

Joan V. Drexler
1931 – 2009
A cherished friend

by Louise Smith

I first met Joan on the Washington, D.C. Metro in the spring of 1988. I sat down beside a lady who was reading a book. It was the same book I was reading: *Wives and Daughters* by Elizabeth Gaskell, published in 1866. It turned out that we were both going to a Smithsonian class on 19th Century British Women Writers. After the class ended, Joan and I and some others from the class decided to continue our study of 19th century writers. Our Victorian Literary circle was formed, and Joan and I became friends.

Joan and Ellen
photo by Sherrie Saint John

It has been a wonderful friendship for me because we liked so many of the same things and loved to talk about them: Masterpiece Theater, Mystery, *As Time Goes By*, Victorian writers, and the novels of Jane Austen and Barbara Pym, to name a few. And Joan often seemed to know what I wanted to do even before I did. She propelled me into the Jane Austen Society of North America, and after my husband died, she bestowed upon me a membership in the Barbara Pym Society. Last summer, she persuaded me to join her on the JASNA tour of Jane Austen's Great Houses in Fact and Fiction; we had a wonderful time.

Joan was born in London in 1931 and grew up in the Cricklewood area. She and her older sister, Helen, were evacuated to the country for a time during World War II. In l956 she went to New York City to visit Helen, and there she met Stanley. They were married in 1959.

Stanley was with IBM, which sent them to Wappingers Falls near Poughkeepsie, to Paris, and eventually to the Washington D.C. area. In 2002, Stanley died of A.L.S. (Lou Gehrig's Disease). Their older son, Roger, and their son, Kenneth, and his wife, Lisa, live close by in the Washington suburbs, and Joan was happy to be near them and her two wonderful grandsons, Colin and Nathaniel.

Joan was warm, delightful, generous, amusing and endearing in many other ways; we will all miss her very much. She died on 23 May 2009 and will be buried with Stanley in Arlington National Cemetery.

Report on the Spring Conference

by Beverly Bell, photos by Sherrie Saint John

On March 20-22, 2009, the 11th annual meeting of the North American Chapter of the Barbara Pym Society was held for the second year at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. This year, local board members Tom Sopko, Judy Horn, Cindy Lacey, Ellen Pawlik, and Donna Safreed, with the assistance of Joel Horn and Marcia Cohen, did a beautiful job of running the conference, reflecting their many talents and areas of expertise, as well as the advice and long experience of Ellen Miller.

Tom Sopko opening the conference

Behind the podium in the lecture hall at EDS, a large picture of Pym holding a cat had a background of tiny leaves, hinting at the theme of the 2009 meeting – *A Few Green Leaves*.

"Grey and pointed at both ends" set a suitable tone for the conference on Saturday morning, as Yvonne Cocking chose this quotation for the title of her talk about the genesis of *AFGL* and reviewers' reactions to it. In carrying out her research in the Pym archives at the Bodleian, Yvonne found jottings in notebooks starting in the mid-1960s about a big house, a woman retiring to the country, a vicar, and "fox's droppings." Yvonne doesn't know where Barbara found the phrase, but said Pym was clearly "determined to use it at some time." The published reviews of *AFGL* were mixed – in keeping with reactions to the novel by readers today. Comments appear such as "lassitude at the centre," "lack of vitality," characters who emerge as "flat cut-outs" lacking "sparkle." Yet some reviewers were positive. One of them observed that Emma Howick is "an amalgam of all of Pym's heroines": not as sleek as Wilmet, not as depressing as Marcia Ivory, "self-absorbed but without Leonora's solipsism." Yvonne noted that even though Barbara's literary life ended with a whimper rather than a bang with this last novel, Pym herself noted that "some people may be disappointed in this – others will like it."

Saturday lunch

Gloria and Yvonne

In her talk "Fictional Finstock: Village Paradise or Cozy Cover?" Robin Joyce suggested that Pym uses various devices to promote radical ideas in comfortable and comforting settings. These settings often remind the reader of a village, but they can be a suburb of London, the outskirts of Oxford, or even a group of anthropologists. In *AFGL*, the setting is a fictionalized version of Finstock, the village where Barbara and Hilary retired. Robin considers age as a stabilizing factor that joins the clergy and spinsters in helping create a comfortable environment. But as venerable as age might be, Pym deftly undermines this notion at times; the older characters in the novel do not fit neatly into the role of meek older people.

Charles Hansmann focused on *Some Tame Gazelle* and *AFGL* as "Pym Bookends." Pym was about 30 years younger than Belinda Bede when she wrote *STG*, and about 30 years older than Emma Howick when she wrote *AFGL*. Charles believes that the age disjunction between author and protagonist gave Pym a more intimate access to her protagonist, but also allowed her to evaluate that protagonist more objectively. He found interesting and amusing parallels in the two books: for example, the many references to sheep and wool in both novels ("Well, Harriet, there's no getting away from it, he reminds me of a sheep!") and the romantic triangles in both. Also, in both novels a clergyman is the object of the protagonist's affection and the impediment is the woman he lives with, while the departures of those females lead to some sort of romantic revelation. Both books also deal with old loves and old friendships.

Isabel Stanley's talk on "Deserted Villages, Real and Imagined" focused on the role of the deserted medieval village (D.M.V.) in the novel. The complete paper appears in this edition of *Green Leaves*.

Joel Horn & customer

Catching up

In her talk "Life in a Town Forgotten by Time yet Affected Dramatically by It," Gloria Nakamura noted how village life in *AFGL* does not have the center of focus that the clergy and the surrounding social life create in some of the other novels. As an example, no excellent woman graces the novel. Moreover, there seems to be no need for one, as the state has taken over charitable roles. The items donated to the jumble sale in *AFGL* – an assortment of chipped cups, rusty nutmeg graters, and so on (prompting Gloria to bid for a Barbola mirror on ebay) – represent a sad change when viewed against the lavender sachets, tea cozies, and bed socks offered at the garden party in *STG* (which raised a "splendid amount of money".) Gloria

believes that life in the village in *AFGL* goes on because it always has, but with an ineffectual clergyman, no true friendships, and people who are more interested in television than in time-honored traditions such as spying on and gossiping about neighbors.

Along with the talks, we enjoyed delicious food throughout the weekend, thanks to Cindy Lacey's excellent supervision, with help from Donna Safreed and Ellen Pawlik. Joel Horn carefully oversaw the Pym products and book sale table, while Judy Horn, with the help of Marcia Cohen, kept track of the many registration details flawlessly.

Tom hosting Pym Jeopardy

The book sale

Finally, Tom Sopko created a Pym version of "Jeopardy," the TV game show. On Saturday after dinner, we divided into five groups to see who could answer the most questions correctly in six categories: domestic help, née, hymns, jumble, publication dates, and siblings. (Samples: Answer: Mrs. Noad sent some of these to every St Mary's jumble sale. Question: What are stuffed birds? Answer: Mildred tried to explain to her about kissing St Peter's toe. Question: Who is Mrs. Morris?) Then, on Sunday afternoon, the conference closed with a dramatization compiled by Tom Sopko for the Mighty Pym Players, *Hair Like a Dog: The Life and Times of Esther Clovis*. Yvonne Cocking, complete with woolly cap, was an admirable Miss Clovis.

We left the conference with grateful hearts, knowing that memories of our weekend together and the works of Barbara Pym would help us weather the recession, and the ups and downs of our day-to-day lives.

Tim Burnett leading the Mighty Pym Players in *Hair Like a Dog: The Life and Times of Esther Clovis*, *with* Pat Cowan, Rita Phillips, Yvonne Cocking, Charles Hansmann, and Charles Gilbert.

Fifteen Years Ago!

by Eileen Roberts

The Inaugural Dinner of the Barbara Pym Society was held on the evening of 15 April 1994 in St Hilda's College, Barbara Pym's own College, where she was an undergraduate in the early thirties'. So wrote Jean Harker, the then Secretary of the Society and currently a Committee member. She went on to describe how a large number of enthusiasts enjoyed a delectable dinner (of the sort *not* habitually featured in Miss Pym's novels of English provincial life) in very elegant setting – St Hilda's newly refurbished dining hall. Hilary Walton, Barbara's sister, and her old friend, Father Gerard Irvine, were the special guests.

Jean Harker Elizabeth Proud, Hilary Walton, Father Gerard Irvine, Elizabeth Llewellyn Smith

She went on to explain how the Society was founded as a direct result of the 'Barbara Pym Literary Weekend', part of St Hilda's Centenary celebrations in the summer of 1993; 1993 would also have seen Barbara's 80th birthday. The Weekend was covered for BBC Radio 4 by Elizabeth Proud (who became the first Chairman of the Society) and Sioned Wiliam and later broadcast as *A Very Suitable Occasion.* The broadcast finished with a request for anyone who was interested in forming a Pym Literary Society to contact me. There was a huge response and subsequently just under two hundred people became founder members of the Society. At least three-quarters of those are still members, which I think is an amazing record.

The first issue of *Green Leaves,* co-edited by Jean Harker and me, appeared in July 1994 and, in addition to Jean's article, contained one by BP member and antiquarian bookseller Louise Ross on how to find out -of-print Pym books. Other articles included Father Irvine's 'Crockfords', a magnificent directory of Pym Clergy; a report by Kate Charles of a talk by the Reverend David Cockerell, 'Something to Live by', which took place at Ely Cathedral as part of East Cambridgeshire Book Month; a summary of the audio cassettes of Pym novels; and a list of the Founder Members.

All in all, it was an admirable beginning to what has become one of the largest (over five hundred members) and most enjoyable literary societies!

Deserted Villages, Real and Imagined

by Dr. Isabel Stanley

This paper was presented at the US Conference on 21 March 2009.

Readers of Barbara Pym's *A Few Green Leaves* immediately realize that the Rev. Tom Dagnall's search for a deserted medieval village in his parish undergirds much of the novel. He attempts to harness the energies of the women of the parish, as well as his own efforts, to locate the site of the village. As it happens, Miss Vereker, the former governess at the manor house, stumbles on the remains of the village quite by accident. Dagnall is, of course, elated, but what does this find mean for him or the village? Why did Barbara Pym choose to make a possible medieval village ruin an important feature of her novel?

Perhaps it would be helpful to examine some real-life efforts to discover deserted medieval villages in the period just before Pym began her novel. Investigation of deserted villages dates only from the 1950s and the pioneering work of M.W. Beresford and W.G Hoskins (Rowley and Wood 6). As most of us are aware, historians of earlier periods mainly interested themselves in kings, prime ministers, politicians, the princes of the Church, and the fates of great nations. Top-down history was the mode, and most of the interest stayed at the top and never trickled down to the lives of lowly peasants or journeyman workers. Archeologists and geographers of earlier periods seem to have taken their cue from the historians. Who wanted to find old villages when one could excavate around Stonehenge or Old Sarum?

Certainly books about Henry VIII and Queen Victoria will continue to be written and work will go on at Stonehenge and Old Sarum, but historians and archeologists began to realize that there is much to be learned about the past from the lives, homes and work places of lesser folk than kings and queens. (As an aside, many of us can remember the popularity in France, Britain and America of the book *Montaillou* by Emmanuel LaDurie published in France in 1977. *Montaillou* chronicled the everyday doings of a medieval Cathar village.)

In Britain the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group, now called the Medieval Settlement Research Group, was founded in 1952 to provide a framework for research and preservation. By 1995 over three thousand abandoned villages had been identified in England (6, 5). However, for those currently interested in these old sites, their discovery is in a race against modern farming techniques, housing developments and shopping areas. Archeologists realize that all these sites cannot be preserved, but they can be recorded and studied to the extent practical. (8-9).

How did these villages come to be and then be abandoned? The population of England grew rapidly between 1100 and 1300. At the same time, however, monastic life also grew, and as monks such as the Cistercians, who enjoyed solitude, acquired more land, they displaced villages and their people, usually with compensation for moving the village.

The Black Death of 1349 is often cited as a cause of desertion. It certainly played its part, but the population in 1300 also seems to have grown beyond the ability of the depleted farm land to sustain it (14-16).

The rise of the wool trade in the fifteenth century evicted many people from villages as more pasture land was sought for grazing sheep. Most of the villages which have been identified today date from this period. The merchant princes of the wool trade did not deal kindly with evicted tenants. Shakespeare records this rough treatment in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*:

> 'I can compare our rich misers to nothing so fitly as a whale [who] plays and tumbles,
> driving the poor fry before him, and at last devouring them all at a mouthful; such whales
> I have heard of in the land, who never leave gaping till they have swallowed the whole
> Parish, church, steeple, bells and all.' (Rowley and Wood 17-18)

Isabel Stanley at the US Conference, 2009
photo by Sherrie Saint John

By 1500 there were three sheep for every one person in England, and the sheep had displaced many villages and people at the behest of greedy land owners.

Hard on the hoofs of the sheep came the expansive parks of great landowners. Old villages were replaced by planned estate villages hidden out of sight from the great houses (19-20). Remnants of these displacements can be found in the present-day right of the residents of Woodstock, the nearest town to Blenheim Palace, to gather windfalls of firewood and walk

in the park and forests of the palace, presumably in compensation for the removals of their forbears in earlier centuries.

In 1770 Oliver Goldsmith noted in his poem, "The Deserted Village,"

> The man of wealth and pride
> Takes up a space that many poor supplied;
> Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds
> Space for his horses, equipage and hounds. (20)

Even the great landscape architect Humphrey Repton, who lived well by creating great parks, complained of the wholesale removal of villages and villagers with no compensation or provision for relocation (20).

There were, of course, natural causes for desertion such as fire, drought, and intrusions of the sea in coastal areas (25). In modern times villages have been absorbed into nearby towns and cities (26). As an aside, I have found as a teacher that I am constantly describing places to students as having once been independent towns or villages which are now firmly entrenched as neighborhoods of London.

We might ask ourselves what Tom Dagnall and his minions should have been looking for in their quest for a medieval village. There are few remains of villages abandoned before 1300 because building materials tended to be wood, turf or unbaked clay. Archeologists' best hope of finding such villages is to wait for a dry summer (not a very common occurrence in England), then fly over open fields in a crop duster airplane. Under these conditions one can see not only the outlines of fields but also parchmarks which show the shapes of houses and even divisions in the houses. The parchmarks may be seen in a field of grain since the masonry a few feet under the ground will cause the growing crop on top to dry up more quickly than the surrounding area (27). (I have a photo which illustrates this phenomenon.)

This is all very interesting but somehow I don't see Tom Dagnall, let alone Miss Lee or Magdalen Raven up in a crop duster in goggles scoping for the D.M.V.

Finding deserted villages on the ground without aerial perspective is very difficult (50), and such villages are seldom found by wandering through the countryside or woods like Miss Vereker did (54). Such good fortune is apparently almost exclusively found in fiction. However, there are many deserted medieval villages in Oxfordshire, so we must believe that Miss Vereker just got lucky, if one can call collapsing onto the ruins of a village "lucky".

In any case, Barbara Pym was undoubtedly aware of renewed interest in deserted villages when she began *A Few Green Leaves*. Even had such renewed interest not been in the air, Pym had ample examples of deserted villages in her great love, English poetry. One turns immediately to Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," which I mentioned previously. Goldsmith eulogizes the village of Sweet Auburn, which is based on a village in Ireland but appears to be more like an English village and reflects Goldsmith's knowledge of the incursions of the Industrial Revolution into English village life (Witherspoon 622). He decries the luxury of the few which led to the demise of the village and laments the rural virtues which have left the land.

Goldsmith's poem is often paired with Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" penned eighteen years earlier in 1742. Gray's "Elegy" commemorates the brief lives of the townsmen of a very still town, a cemetery. Like Goldsmith, Gray immortalizes the hidden life "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife," the life of a simple village and its people. (In the United States Thornton Wilder would later commemorate Grover's Corner in his play *Our Town* in much the manner of Gray.)

Barbara Pym's epistolary friendship with the poet Philip Larkin is well documented and studied by admirers of both writers. They read each other's work, and Larkin was a great source of encouragement to Pym during the dark years in which she was unable to find a publisher for her work. I should like to make the case that Larkin perhaps played a part in Pym's interest in medieval villages. Most critics and general readers see Larkin's "Church Going" written in 1954 and "Aubade" written in 1977 as two of his best poems.

"Church Going" chronicles the visit of a cyclist to a small undistinguished country church. As he wanders around the church, he envisions the day when belief will have died out, and the church will have become a ruin, and people will only be able to speculate on the original use of the ruins. Even though the visitor appears to have little to no religious belief, he calls the church "a serious house on serious earth," and recognizes its importance in the life of the community over many centuries, an importance which he says "can never be obsolete" regardless of the fate of the church itself.

Over twenty years later Larkin's poem "Aubade" examines the fear of loss and death that the speaker feels at 4:00 a.m. when he wakes up and can't go back to sleep. He speaks of the inadequacy of philosophy and religion to handle such fears. Religion he calls "that vast moth-eaten musical brocade created to pretend we never die." In "Church Going" and "Aubade" then Larkin has created his own version of a deserted medieval village: Christian religious belief and all its ruins, trapping and music. A non-believer, Larkin can recognize the importance of such belief while observing its passing. Barbara Pym, who was a believer, could recognize the irrelevance of many aspects of the Church while she affirmed its continuing importance.

We now come to Barbara Pym's last novel, *A Few Green Leaves* and its deserted medieval village. I think it very likely she was aware of renewed interest in such villages and also had stored away in her mind the poems of Goldsmith and Gray, as well as the more recent ones of Larkin. Pym also had on her bookshelf the writing of the seventeenth-century antiquarian Anthony à Wood, which she describes as the favorite books of the Rev. Tom Dagnall in *A Few Green Leaves*. In fact Wood has become an obsession to Dagnall as he attempts to track down the deserted village. Pym's relationship to Wood in her own reading and in her fiction is typical of the use she makes of other obscure English authors: while she enjoys Wood herself, she recognizes that a modern-day clergyman (or anyone else for that matter) should not be wrapped up in Wood to the neglect of other duties. Wood's writing traces the fates of Oxford clergy and other notables from the time of Charles I to the accession of William and Mary, turbulent times indeed.

In a 1977 interview, Pym talks about her method of using materials she gleaned from observing people and reading odd bits of folk history like Anthony à Wood: "I boiled it all up and reduced it like making chutney "(Ms. Pym 98, fol. 24). Wood's place in the chutney of *A Few Green Leaves* is secure in the obsessions of Tom Dagnall concerning the deserted village described by Wood and in odd bits about regulations requiring people to be buried in wool. Pym says of Dagnall in her notebook on *A Few Green Leaves*, "The vicar has taken refuge in the past in the works of Hearne and Anthony à Wood" (Ms. Pym 35, 8). Observing Dagnall's search for the D.M.V., as he calls it, is Emma Howick, an anthropologist who has been named for the Jane Austen heroine by her English professor mother. Emma has come to the village to study the vagaries and happening of village life. In her notes for *A Few Green Leaves*, Pym sets up a tension between the village's corporal and spiritual ministers, the doctors and the vicar. She writes:

> The theme could be the rivalry between the doctor and vicar brought out in various ways. . . A woman has retired and is bored with life and feels useless—might get spiritual consolation from the vicar, but instead she gets pills from the doctor and the vicar gives her typing to do (Ms. Pym 35, 8-9).

The physicians engaged in this power struggle for the heart and mind of the village are an elderly doctor, Luke Gellibrand (said to be the brother of Father Gellibrand in *Quartet in Autumn*), and the young doctor, Martin Shrubsole, who seems to have been named for the eighteenth-century hymn composer William Shrubsole, who wrote "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." Shrubsole's pushy wife Avice has designs on the rectory, the prettiest house in the area, and constantly tells Tom that the house is too big for him and should have children (presumably hers) to run around its halls and gardens. Poaching on his rival's territory, as it were, Tom Dagnall has enlisted the help of Dr. Shrubsole's elderly mother-in-law, Magdalen Raven, in the search for the D.M.V. and soon has her crawling around clammy cemeteries copying tombstone inscriptions, an activity Dr. Shrubsole calls "most unsuitable." By the same token, Tom Dagnall resents his sister Daphne's many visits to the doctors' offices, although he pays little attention to her himself.

Another clerical figure in the novel is the former Anglican priest Adam Prince, who began to doubt the validity of Anglican orders several years before the time of the book and went over to Rome. He has become a restaurant critic and general fussbudget; his tedious pronouncements about food and wine are enough to make his listeners lose their appetites. Prince's advice on how to run a parish are gall and wormwood to Dagnall and makes clear how small a loss he is to the Anglican Church. We learn that he always tried to miss special events run by the women at his church such as flower festivals and jumble sales; he also identifies watching women arrange flowers as "one of the aspects of [his] calling which [he] most enjoyed" (*AFGL* 76). Pym recalls Dagnall's reaction to Prince's comment:

> Tom thought this an unusual way of looking on the duties of a parish priest, but made no comment. After all, his own most enjoyable aspect was concerned with delving into parish registers, which seemed little better than watching ladies arrange flowers (*AFGL* 76).

Dagnall realizes his own antiquarian interests are hardly the real stuff of a spiritual life any more than flower arranging. However, he cannot imagine "arranging to be in Italy" for the flower festival as Prince suggests and doggedly visits the hospital regularly described as, "not his favorite occupation or one in which he felt he did much good to anyone (*AFGL* 225)." "Arranging to be in Italy" is an allusion to Anthony Trollope's Rev. Vesey Stanhope of *Barchester Towers*, which we may remember in Father Thames of *A Glass of Blessings*. It would seem that Adam Prince has arranged to be in Italy permanently, having joined the Roman Catholic Church.

As is made plain throughout the novel, Tom Dagnall's chief interest is searching for the D.M.V. When Miss Vereker finds stones from the village and is taken to Dr. Shrubsole's office to recuperate from her collapse, Mrs. Shrubsole is not delighted by the rector's visit to check on Miss Vereker and thinks to herself:

> It would be just like him to be more interested in his wretched deserted medieval village than in the troubles of an elderly person in trouble. "I think Miss Vereker should rest now," she said

firmly,"after all this excitement," so of course Tom could not in all decency pursue the question of the stones. (*AFGL* 225).

Poor Tom can't win. He is conscientiously checking on Miss Vereker as is his duty, but he is also eager to pump Miss Vereker for details of the D.M.V. and others sense his eagerness so he gets no credit of any kind.

It would seem that the church in the current-day village shows some of the same dereliction as the deserted village. Emma Howick notes that the cottage across from the church has many broken-down cars in its yard. She muses, "was there not something significant and appropriate about this particular kind of mingling of two religious faiths, ancient and modern?" (*AFGL* 20). Later Dr. Shrubsole wonders if Dagnall equates himself with "a worn-out and dumped old motorcar" in his job as the rector of a country parish.

In one of her journals, Barbara Pym asks poignantly,

Can we only love something created by our own imagination? Are we in fact unloving and unlovable? Then one *is* alone. Then the lover and the beloved are equally unreal." (Ms. Pym 43:IV, 10)

The deserted village is a necessary love object to Tom Dagnall and an object of quest to him and the parishioners he can talk into his enthusiasm. Is this enough? Shouldn't the church have greater aims than obscure antiquarian research? Where are Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer? On the Martyr's Monument in Oxford. They have not been re-incarnated in Tom Dagnall or Adam Prince.

Pym's intelligence and honesty compel her to admit the shortcomings of the Church, but she loves "that vast moth-eaten musical brocade" and realizes that it is still "a serious house on serious earth" for people to gravitate to. If a few green leaves can perk up some fading roses, surely a deserted medieval village, even if only a few stones remain, can enliven the imaginations of modern-day villagers.

A Few Green Leaves ends with the meeting of the Parish Historical Society in the rectory. Dr. Gellibrand is to give a lecture on seventeenth-century medicine, but the talk turns into "a harking back to the 'good old days' of the nineteen thirties before the introduction of the National Health Service" (243). He rambles into the benefits of long walks in the fresh air and jogging, noting,

Ladies could do it too, no harm in that, but under medical supervision, of course. We couldn't have ladies dropping down dead, could we . . . (234)

Tom Dagnall says of the talk,

"Not quite all I'd hoped for, but I think people enjoyed it, and I suppose that's the main thing. Isn't that what life's all about?" he added, hardly expecting an answer. (244)

"Not quite all [anyone had] hoped for but enjoyable" is a good description of the world Barbara Pym depicts in *A Few Green Leaves* and in all her books.

The Anglican Church depicted in Pym's world often seems like a deserted medieval village. Its clergy are often feckless but also absentmindedly kind. The Church's trappings are often threadbare but are reminders of earlier eras of belief and prosperity. And what of the D.M.V. Miss Vereker finds? Pym implies that it is far from a complete village, just a few stones in fact. But, if a few green leaves can spruce up those tired roses in the church, a few stones can become a medieval village in the minds of those who can see a village in a pile of rocks. Barbara Pym's final novel assures her readers that these sparse signs of life whether in the Church or in other aspects of life are enough to spur the imagination and to render life enjoyable and hopeful.

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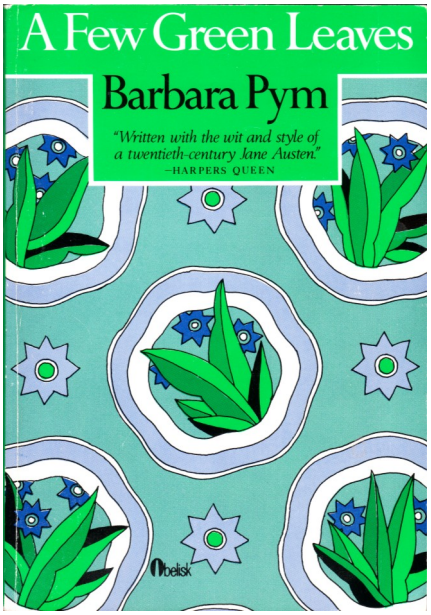

Diary of a Provincial Pymmite

by Clemence Schultze

End of term looms – and very welcome too: students are stressed with imminent exams; colleagues tired; secretarial staff at the end of their tether. Though mid-March, it feels more like the middle of winter: chilly, wet and blowy. No daffodils yet, which is probably as well, since savage gusts of wind would batter them down. I meet Our Vicar in the street and (for want of a better topic) pass a remark to this effect. He responds That it is All This Global Warming. Realise that this has nowadays become the standard reply, whatever the weather. There used to be more variety in such exchanges, which form so much of the conversational pabulum of the British. Wonder what conditions are like at the moment in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Barbara Pym Society conference will shortly take place. Banish repinings about inability to attend, and concentrate on Positive Thinking instead, wishing the conference well in all respects.

Unexpectedly sunny day coincides with discovery of clothes moth in house. Successful stalking and slaughter of no fewer than four of the little brutes (wielding rolled-up newspaper rather than terrifying spray can which seems to promise Awful Death to *all* forms of life, and not merely to insects). Realise that appearance of moths is no coincidence, and that moment of Investigating the Kilim can no longer be put off. (This is antique carpet, recently acquired from house of deceased relative, but put aside in the midst of term.) Unroll it and investigate. Can only say that it is a shame that moths are not well-affected enough to follow example of higher animals (at least those in fiction) who pine and expire when their owner does.

Carry the seething mass out to washing line, shake and batter it, and end up hoovering it all. Decide not to mention episode to husband, who (in Archdeacon-like fashion) still holds me entirely responsible for Holes in Favourite Scarf and (worse!) Holes in Dinner Jacket. Have mended former and assured him that no-one will notice latter unless they are getting unduly intimate with him, but shall plainly never be completely forgiven. Cannot decide where kilim will best go, so end by rolling it up again (but this time with lavish insertion of mothballs). All in all, a rather Pymmish activity.

Decide, on the strength of this, to re-read *Some Tame Gazelle* – to my mind, perhaps the most amusing of the corpus, although *Crampton Hodnet* runs it close. The meal for Mr Donne the curate gives me the idea of boiling rather than roasting the chicken bought for this weekend. Cannot find my *A la Pym* cookery book but am confident of ability to boil chicken; what, however, would the white sauce which masked it have been flavoured with? Resort to Internet, but cannot believe that Belinda and Harriet's white sauce would have included mushrooms, scallions and walnuts, as one recipe suggests, or tomatoes, as another does (*tomatoes*?) Shall Strike Out on My Own by incorporating gently seethed onions and nutmeg into a basic sauce. Check to see what they drank with the meal, but nothing is mentioned, not even a sherry beforehand. So am free to go for a nice crisp Sancerre, reflecting that, at least in respect of ready availability of wines, our age has an advantage over the pre-war world. The chicken proves to be subtle yet tasty, enhanced by the slices of lemon mentioned in the text. Feel that I am participating by proxy in the North American Pym conference as I drink a toast to Pym-in-Cambridge and send greetings to all members.

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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Plaque in memory of Hilary Walton

by Yvonne Cocking

Last August I received a letter from Michael Collard, a Society member, and resident of Finstock, telling me that a plaque had been placed in Holy Trinity Church in memory of his great friend Hilary Walton, and that this plaque would be dedicated at the Harvest Festival service on 26 October.

I attended the service, which was informal and family oriented, with groups of children playing musical instruments, and singing, among other hymns, "Lord of the Harvest."

After the service, the vicar, the Rev. Jane Knowles, spoke of Hilary's desire that the children of the village should have a space in the upper room, and provided financial assistance for this purpose. Then she read out this dedication:

"We bless this plaque in memory of Hilary Walton, a loyal member and generous supporter of this church. We thank God for her, and for all that she did for this church and for this community, and we remember her with gratitude and love."

The plaque is situated on the retaining wall of the upper room, on the left side as you stand with your back to the altar.

A Day in Oswestry – 16 May 2009

by Deborah Fisher

A Prologue

"We appear to have run out of biscuits," remarked Dr Cleal in a concerned tone.

"There are a few broken ones left," ventured Miss Mepham timidly. "Do you think it would be all right to put them out?"

"Broken biscuits? At a meeting of the Barbara Pym Society?" replied Mrs Fisher sternly. "I think *not*!"

****

For a town of only 17,000 people, Oswestry is remarkable for having produced not one but two world-class writers. The poet Wilfred Owen was born at Plas Wilmot in 1893, but his family had long since moved on to Birkenhead by the time Barbara Pym was born only a short distance away in 72 Willow Street, Oswestry, on 2 June 1913. While the First World War, in which Owen would be killed, loomed on the horizon, Frederick and Irena Pym were no doubt preoccupied with the upbringing of their first child. A younger sister, Hilary, followed before the war was over.

The house where Barbara was born can no longer be seen, having been demolished and replaced with newer buildings. Along with it went the birthplace of another illustrious Oswestrian, Sir Henry Walford Davies, Master of the King's Musick 1934-1941. One of Barbara's later homes, Morda Lodge, does however still stand, and this house featured in several of the slides that opened our morning at St Oswald's Parish Centre.

I must digress briefly to comment on the Pymishness of the location. The parish centre is a modern building, but suffers from a lack of signage. Most of us arrived via the kitchen; only a handful succeeded in locating the front door. The weather was changeable, and inside the centre it was, if anything, colder than it was outside. There was lots of huddling in coats and questions were asked. "Maybe one of the *men* can get it working," someone suggested. Sadly, none of the men proved up to the task, and external assistance eventually arrived just before lunch. (Better late than never.)

The first session was a slide show with commentary mainly from Rev Lawrence Garner, author of the best-selling (or at least it was that morning) *Oswestry Girl*, an account of Barbara's Shropshire upbringing. Our Secretary, Kris Rutherford, and archivist, Yvonne Cocking, assisted Rev Garner with the occasional titbit of information to add to our enjoyment. The first picture was the wedding photograph of Barbara's parents, about whom enough could be said to fill this article. Perhaps it is enough to comment that Frederick was illegitimate, the son of a housemaid, but proud of

his connection with the wealthy Crampton family who sponsored his legal training. As for Irena, she rode a motorbike! There are still numerous buildings around the town associated with Barbara's family, including her grandfather's ironmonger's shop, now a travel agency but still surmounted by the original cast-iron columns. Much of our day would be taken up with tracking and visiting these sites, with the aid of Kris's annotated map.

Thanks to its location on the border between England and Wales, Oswestry enjoys a mixed cultural history, to which might be attributed its success in nurturing literary genius. The very name "Oswestry" looks strange at first sight, even to an English-speaker. Its Welsh version, Croesoswallt (literally "Oswald's Cross") more clearly commemorates the death of King – later Saint – Oswald, a 7th-century Northumbrian king whose Christian beliefs brought him into conflict with Penda, the pagan king of Mercia. The town remained a focus for warring factions, and was burned to a cinder in 1400 by the revolting Welsh under Owain Glyndŵr.

Morda Lodge

Canon John Edge, a former curate of Holy Trinity ("the servants' church"), remarked, in his entertaining reminiscences of parish life between 1958 and 1979, on the mix of cultures evinced by Oswestry's bilingualism. It was at one time a railway town and a garrison town as well as a market town. The departure of the railway and the garrison have clearly made a dent in the town's prosperity. Next to the hotel where I was staying was a drab shop called "Seconds Ahead" (for the benefit of non-British readers, this indicates the sale of "imperfect" goods). I had walked past it several times before recognising it as the former Regal Cinema, one of the young Barbara's regular haunts. However, the Victoria Rooms, where Barbara went to dances, still looks imposing, as does the Wynnstay Hotel, into which her father Frederick moved for a time after Irena's death. Frederick's second wife, Alice, as Canon Edge recalled, was a tireless church worker and Chair of the Friends of the local orthopaedic hospital. The children's ward was named after her in recognition of her fund-raising efforts.

This theme of the clash of cultures was taken forward by Rev Colin Oxenforth, in his appreciation of the unfinished "Home Front novel", which is presumed to be set in Oswestry. The character of Flora represents the young Barbara, and the novel was likened by the speaker to a dance with people changing partners throughout. He very much regretted that it had been abandoned in favour of the revision of other works.

The lunchtime buffet which followed our morning session was truly sumptuous, for which those of us involved in clearing away were duly ungrateful. Ten people washed up amid cries of "Martin, are you sure you can't cram this ham/cheese/biscuits/grapes/quiche into that carrier bag to take home?" And at the very last moment: "What shall I do with these jugs of cream? Shall I just leave them in the fri… Oh no! I've found another trifle!"

I cannot conclude without mentioning excursions during that showery afternoon. In small groups we traversed the town, staring at buildings that most people would pass by. Top of the list for everyone was Morda Lodge, into which the Pym family moved in 1918. Its present owner kindly allowed us to view its wonderful and beautifully-kept garden. Although it appears vast to modern eyes, the garden was in fact once much larger, part of the land having been sold off many years ago for building. To round off the day, even after that enormous lunch, one or two members found their way into the heritage centre for tea and cake!

Just as a post-script — and something I almost missed — the town centre boasts a delightful statue entitled "The Borderland Farmer". Its sculptor, Ivor Roberts-Jones, was born in Oswestry — in 1913. Could he have known Barbara? It seems likely. My fond imagination takes a giant leap as I picture the infant Ivor and Barbara playing together in the street with a group of other children, oblivious to the future that would make him a Fellow of the Royal Academy and his playmate a much-loved novelist with her own literary society.

Yvonne Cocking and Clemence Schultze
photo by Christine Shuttleworth

Green Leaves of Spring

by Judy Horn

In honor of the Spring Conference theme of *A Few Green Leaves*, Tom Sopko chose the lovely 1887 William Morris "Willow Bough" pattern to accent all the graphics of the conference. He used the pattern, together with a charming pencil-drawn rendition of the famous photo of BP with her cat, to create two large banners that hung behind the speaker's podium as well as the registration table signs.

Robin Joyce and the banners

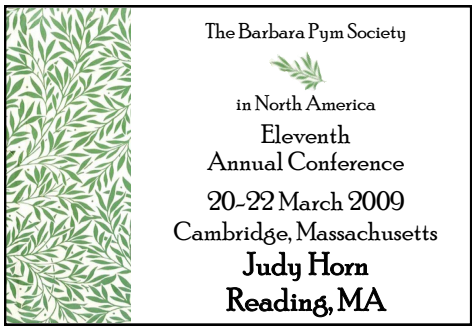
Registration table sign Pym products with signs

photos by Sherrie Saint John

Friday dinner table decorations

photo by Judy Horn

I used the Willow Boughs, too, to decorate many items, such as the name tags, the price signs for Pym products, and the labels for the folders (green, of course) given to each attendee.



Saturday lunch table decorations

To further the theme Tom made beautiful table decorations for Friday night dinner. Saturday the lunch tables featured flowers ("planted" by Tom) and leaves arranged by Cindy Lacey and Joel Horn.

Tom also created a gorgeous large flower arrangement that Joel and I delivered to Ellen on Sunday after the conference.

photos by Sherrie Saint John

Coming Events

The Annual Conference and the AGM
of the Barbara Pym Society will be held at
St. Hilda's College, Oxford,
on 5 and 6 September 2009.
The theme will be
An Academic Question.
Information will be posted at
www.barbara-pym.org.

BARBARA PYM SOCIETY
COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

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

For Secretary, to serve a three year term

Lorraine Mepham

To a three year term as an ordinary committee member

Jean Harker, Alex Ward

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

The twelfth annual North American Conference of the Barbara Pym Society will be held on

20-21 March 2010

at Harvard University's Barker Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The conference will focus on A Glass of Blessings. *As usual the conference will run all day Saturday and until noon on Sunday, with an optional Friday night dinner and Sunday brunch for those who can come early or stay late. Details about lodging options will be posted online in the next few weeks.*

Call for papers: *The North American organizing committee is looking for speakers for the March 2010 conference. Please send a 100-150 word abstract to Tom Sopko, jtsopko@gmail.com by 1 January 2010. Preference will be given to papers dealing with the focal novel* A Glass of Blessings *and related topics, but other topics are also welcome.*

Note from Acting Editor, Judy Horn

With the loss of Ellen and the resignation of another North American Board member, the remaining members decided we needed reinforcements. So we asked two of our distinguished scholars, Dr. Kathy Ackley and Dr. Isabel Stanley, to become members-at-large and three local members, Sarah Saville Shaffer, Charlotte Silver, and Diane C. Thompson, to join the committee. We are pleased to say that they all enthusiastically agreed to serve, joining

Judy Horn, Treasurer,
Membership Secretary and
Green Leaves Editor
Cindy Lacey, Recording Sevretary
Donna Safreed
and
Tom Sopko, Acting Chair.

We greatly appreciate their willingness to help and promise to provide lots of hard work ☺

The Barbara Pym Society
2008-2009

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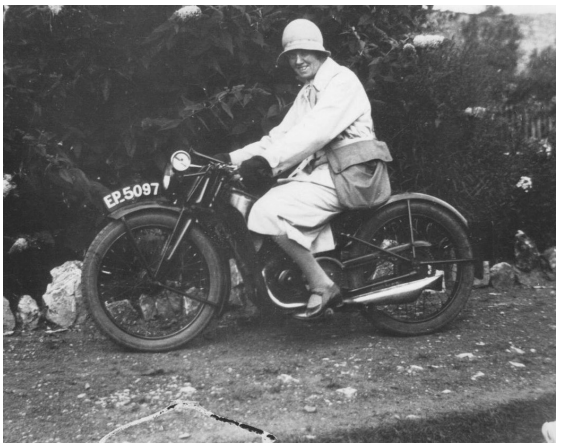
From the Archives

by Yvonne Cocking

In the last issue I mentioned a photograph album compiled by Hilary, containing photos of her parents and the Thomases, her mother's family.

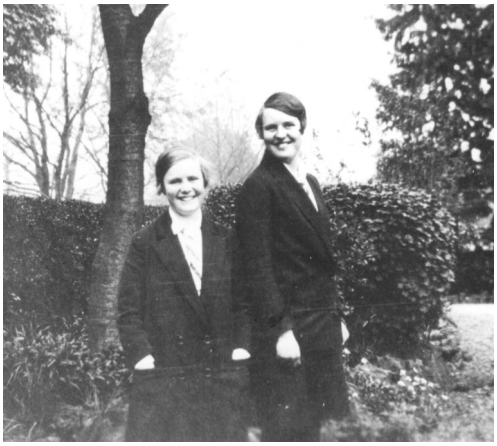
The album continues with pictures of Barbara and Hilary in childhood - a very sweet one of Barbara at Pwllheli, wrapped in a towel and wearing a shower cap; their pony Mogus; their Selway cousins (children of Irena's sister Nellie) and their Aunt 'Ack' with her dogs.



The Selway cousins, Neville ('Bobbie'), Tony, Diana ('Betsy') and Johnnie ('Johnbar') - how the Pyms did love nicknames! - used to stay at Morda Lodge, to which the family moved in about 1918, during the Christmas and Easter holidays, where they took part in Barbara's 'operetta' *The Magic Diamond*, in 1922.

Next door to Morda Lodge was Scotswood, where Barbara's grandmother Mary Jane Thomas had moved in about 1912, with May and Janie ('Ack'), her unmarried daughters.

There are many pictures of holidays spent on the Welsh coast, and two of Barbara's mother on her motor cycle, on which she rode to Pwllheli (a distance of some 80 miles) at least once!



Ellen Miller
1933-2009

Photos by Sherrie Saint John