Green Leaves

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society **Vol. XVI, No. 2, Autumn, 2010**

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

Report of the 2010 Conference in Oxford

by several hands

The Barbara Pym Society's 2010 Annual Conference took place over the weekend of 3 – 5 September. On the Friday afternoon, there was the special treat of a tour of the newly extended Ashmolean Museum, conducted by Alison Roberts (Eileen's daughter) who is Antiquities Collections Manager and Curator for European and Early Prehistoric Collections. She and her colleague Moira Hook led us on a tour of the redesigned space, unrecognisably transformed from its previous formal nineteenth-century layout. Everything is now light and open, there are lifts for the less active, and well-considered captions explain the imaginative displays. The tour received rave reviews, and we are grateful to Alison and Moira for generously giving us their time.

Conference Attendees

Back at St. Hilda's there was time before dinner for some catch-up chat, and after the meal we adjourned once more to the Senior Common Room to take part in another Pym quiz. This time Lorraine and Ros had devised the questions – and very testing ones they were. There was much good humoured rivalry among the teams (and great care to avoid one's deliberations being overheard); the winners were heartily congratulated, and enjoyed their liquid prize.

The real business of the weekend began on Saturday morning with the AGM (see separate report), and, after a buffet lunch, we settled to the theme of 'Barbara Pym and Romance'. All were agreed that romance was a topic close to Barbara's heart, even if often depicted in her novels as providing poignant disappointment. In the afternoon Barbara Everett presented a paper entitled 'Barbara Pym in the Round'. The paper was, as we have come to expect from Barbara Everett, outstanding, and demonstrated her usual luminous perception of Pym's mind and work. We hope to bring news in a future issue of *Green Leaves* of the paper's appearance in a literary journal, so that those who missed it will be able to read it in full.

After tea, best-selling author Natasha Cooper, aka N. J. Cooper and Daphne Wright, talked spellbindingly in 'Abandoning Romance' about her writing career, which took her from romance and sagas through lighthearted crime novels to grittier consideration of criminal psychology. In 'Embracing Romance' Jean Harker, aka Jean Buchanan, who started her writing career with romantic short stories, spoke about Barbara Pym's happy, generous and mutually supportive relationship with the Romantic Novelists' Association, as documented by correspondence in the Pym Archive in the Bodleian Library. Members of the RNA bolstered Barbara up in the last part of the Wilder-

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ness Years and rejoiced with her when she again achieved publication and literary celebrity. Both of these talks are written up in later pages.

Pym-related conversation and discussion continued through the reception and the excellent dinner, and the after-dinner treat was a touching and sympathetic reading by Miriam Margolyes – surely one of the world's favourite actors, and a BPS member – of an unpublished early Pym short story, 'A Letter from my Love', transcribed by Yvonne Cocking from documents in the Pym Archive. Set in Budapest, and probably written in the latter part of 1935 after Barbara had visited that city in the summer, its theme was suitably romantic. The Hungarian 'hero', Miklos Foldy, and some German phrases allowed Miss Margolyes to demonstrate her considerable ability with foreign accents, and she made a fairly bland story very funny indeed.

Miriam Margolyes

Sunday morning was devoted as usual to church-going and sightseeing until we re-assembled for coffee. The final paper of the conference, 'Barbara's First Oxford Romance', by Yvonne Cocking, drew upon material from the Pym Archive regarding the relationship between Barbara and Rupert Gleadow. Classicist, Egyptologist, and (later) writer on astrology, Rupert was Barbara's first real 'boy friend' at Oxford. It made a fascinating story, expertly told. Yvonne's own summary appears later in this issue. Tim Burnett led a general discussion of all the papers, and this brought the morning's programme to an end.

After lunch the by now traditional dramatised reading was presented. This was an adaptation by Tom Sopko, our North American Organizer, of the published short story 'Across a Crowded Room' which he had originally put on at the Cambridge (Mass.) conference in 2007. It was so suited to our theme, and so well adapted, that we thought it deserved another outing. Miriam Margolyes read the part of the Narrator, thus keeping the whole thing tightly knit. Deirdre Bryan-Brown, our last Chairman, played Barbara, and Tom the gnat-voiced Ned. The other parts were played by our stalwart regular performers, Tim Burnett, Martin Rush and Michael Wilson.

With thanks to the conference organiser, Eileen Roberts, to the contributors, and especially to Miriam Margolyes for devoting so much of her time to the Society, the Chairman brought another very successful conference to its close.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society St Hilda's College, Oxford Saturday 4 September 2010, 11.30am

by Lorraine Mepham

Committee members present: Clemence Schultze (Chair); Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary); Lorraine Mepham (Secretary); Yvonne Cocking (Archivist); Tom Sopko (US Organizer); Kathy Ackley (US Representative); Deb Fisher; Jean Harker; Alex Ward; Michael Wilson.

The Committee at the Annual General Meeting

1. Chairman's remarks

Clemence Schultze welcomed all to the seventeenth annual conference of the Barbara Pym Society. She reported that over the last year, BPS had been more active than ever on both sides of the Atlantic.

March saw a memorable Spring Conference, held at Harvard, on the theme of *A Glass of Blessings*. Everything from religious ritual to social mores, from clothing to cakes, was explored, and the session ended with Tom Sopko's dramatisation, entitled *Remembering Scampi*. Besides the NA Conference, there has also been a June fete in Tom's garden. And Tom, who keeps the BPS website up to date, is also undertaking, with Judy Horn, a complete redesign, plus additional content, which will greatly enhance the Society's public presence on the web. Clemence thanked Tom (BPS US Organizer) and Judy (Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Technical Editor of *Green Leaves*) and the rest of the active and committed team in the US, who put much time and effort into the Society.

Clemence also paid tribute to the efforts of the current UK Committee, particularly Yvonne Cocking, who celebrated her 80th birthday this spring. The title of Archivist comes nowhere near expressing her full role; she also gives considerable help to researchers on Pym from all over the world, with her knowledge of the resources in the Bodleian Library.

The reprinting by Virago of several of Barbara's novels was welcomed. They are not only charmingly produced, but have new introductions by noted authors and admir-

We thank Marianna Stewart for her beautiful photography during the AGM. All conference photographs in this issue are by her.

ers. One of these is Salley Vickers: she wrote the introduction to *Less than Angels*, which in April was launched at a Pym church: St Michael's, Barnes. Salley expressed her enthusiasm for BP's work, and Eleonore Biber and Clemence took part in a question session. Another famous fan is P. D. James: her talk at the Oxford Literary Festival in March was very well attended, and is sure to have brought more new readers to Barbara Pym.

Many members attended the Society's spring meeting in May, at St Alban's in Holborn. Sprightly Frances Kendrick, interviewed very ably by Michael Wilson, talked about her friendship with Barbara Pym. The Committee intends to bestow Honorary Membership on Frances Kendrick.

Looking ahead, the US conference in March 2011 deals with *No Fond Return of Love*; and this time next year in Oxford, the book is *Crampton Hodnet.* In May 2011, the BPS will hold a joint meeting with the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship. The conjunction is appropriate, since Charlotte Yonge was one of Barbara Pym's most loved authors. The meeting will be in Canterbury, and its theme is 'Anglicans Abroad'.

Then, looking further ahead, 2013 will be Barbara Pym's centenary year; Clemence invited suggestions from

Clemence Schultze

members as to how the Society can publicise and promote her works, and celebrate her life and achievements.

2. Apologies

Hazel Bell, Kate Harmond, Maureen Lenk.

3. Minutes of the Previous AGM

The minutes were accepted without amendment.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Financial and Membership report

Eileen Roberts reported that the BPS account stood at £6498.70 as of 14 July 2010. This was up on last year's figure of £5286.15, and means that the Society is in a healthy financial position. There are, however, a few outstanding bills not registered by mid-July. The main expenses over the last year were *Green Leaves* (£250 for 325 UK copies, plus mailing costs of £128.05; this is a substantial saving on the last issue which cost £492.25. The Spring meeting in London made a profit of about £180. The UK membership stands at 268 members, of whom 16 are overseas (non-US). Of these, 28 are Life Members, which means that they pay no more subscriptions.

6. Green Leaves

Two issues of *GL* have now been edited by the UK editorial team, following Ellen's death. Jean Harker, currently the commissioning editor of *GL*, praised the last issue (which reported on the 2010 US conference, and featured full colour throughout), and registered her thanks to Judy Horn, the technical editor of *GL*, and also to Yvonne Cocking and Tom Sopko, who gave invaluable help with the last issue.

7. BPS in North America

Tom Sopko (US Organizer) presented a short report on the activities of the North American Chapter of the BPS. The 2010 US conference had been a huge success. The US membership now stands at 214 members, a 15% annual increase, and with 26 new members in the last year. Financially, the NAC is on a sound footing; all events at least broke even, and the account stands at around $6000. Book sales via Amazon are slow but steady. The BPS Facebook page currently has around 190 friends and followers, few of whom are actually BPS members.

8. Archivist's Report

Yvonne Cocking stressed again that the archives of BPS were completely separate from the BP archive held by the Bodleian; the holdings are not great in size, but form a useful resource. There is still a question, however, as to how this resource can be best stored and exploited. The best option currently seems to be to hold it in St Hilda's College Library, but discussions on this matter are still in progress.

9. Elections

The slate for new elections to the Committee comprised Libby Tempest and Rose Little, who were standing, respectively, as an Ordinary Member to complete the term of Lorraine Mepham (now Secretary), and for a three-year term as Ordinary Member. In the absence of any other candidates the elections were confirmed.

10. AOB

Gleanings: Eileen is still receiving 'Gleanings' for *GL*, despite instructions to the contrary. Members were urged to send any Gleanings instead to Yvonne, who will co-ordinate all received snippets for inclusion in *GL*.

Electronic books: Dan di Pietro raised the possibility that the new technology of the Kindle (electronic book) could be used to bring BP to a new audience. The technology allows readers to request specific works to be made available via Kindle. It was pointed out that Hazel Holt, who controls the BP estate, should be in-

volved in any moves in this direction.

More books: Charles Gilbert, following the discussion of the BPS archives, and a recent request for members to pass on books bought at Blackwell's sale of Barbara's and Hilary's books, wondered whether this was practicable, and where such books could be stored. No immediate solutions were offered, but Ros Cleal offered to compile a list of what books had been bought by whom.

Conference theme: Diana Gulland offered the theme of Gardens (which could include garden parties) as a theme for the 2012 conference.

Centenary 2013: Diana also asked whether any thought had been given to offering BP merchandise during the centenary year in 2013. This is currently being discussed by the Committee.

Next year's meetings: The 2011 US conference will be held from 18 - 20 March. The UK spring meeting in 2011 will be held jointly with the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship (CMYF) in Canterbury on 14 May, on the theme of 'Anglicans Abroad'. The dates for the 2011 UK annual conference are 26-28 August at St Hilda's. The featured novel will be *Crampton Hodnet*.

The meeting closed at 12.25pm.

Natasha Cooper (Daphne Wright) on 'Abandoning Romance'

by Christine Shuttleworth

The title of Natasha Cooper's talk to the 2010 BPS Conference seemed to suggest that she was not what is commonly thought of as a romantic novelist of the Barbara Cartland type, rather, perhaps, an anti-romantic novelist. After ten years in publishing, told by friends that she was 'like a Pym heroine', she went looking for herself. 'It's not the cardigans, it's the self-sufficiency,' she comments (I thought it was Anita Brookner whose heroines were known for looking rather drab in droopy cardigans). Her grandmother had been a novelist producing what were known as 'housemaids' novels', and Natasha – or Daphne, as she was known then – thought that if her grandmother could do it, anyone could. She soon found out that this was not the case.

She began with historical romances. Her first book, surprisingly perhaps, was set in the First Afghan War, as she had become fascinated by the women who took part in it, whose stories were recounted in the journal of Florentia Sale, the wife of a commander of the British forces. She decided that her heroine, though a gentle and sweet person, should kill someone (shades of Melanie in *Gone with the Wind*?) This was the first of several historical romances, and after these, and several 'frivolous' stories featuring Willow King, who leads a double life as the romantic novelist Cressida, she turned to darker themes and embarked on a new, less light-hearted series. Her new, somewhat tougher heroine was the barrister Trish Maguire, who gets involved in investigations rather above and beyond her official duties. This meant doing a great deal of research to ensure authenticity. She is now happy in the field of crime fiction, her heroines having remained self-sufficient throughout her career. She admits that her editors have a strong influence over her choice of subjects – 'when publishers say jump, I jump'. But she has resisted any tendency to be seen as 'girly', writing violent scenes to prove that she can be as hard-hitting as any male writer.

Natasha Cooper

Finding that men, apparently, don't read books by women, she decided (like J. K. Rowling and P D. James, to name only two) to use initials in order to disguise her gender, and became N. J. Cooper (she has also written under other pen names, while her historical novels have appeared under her real name, Daphne Wright). Having got past the notion of romantic fantasy and discovered that her main interest is how relationships actually work – she questions, for example, what motivates the mind of a murderer, why people behave in a way that will ensure their own misery, and where the impulse comes from to make someone else unhappy – it seems that she has successfully made the journey from romance to realism.

Coming Events

Please visit ***www.barbara-pym.org*** *for details.*

2011 North American Conference
18-20 March 2011

The 13th annual North American Conference will be held at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The conference will focus on ***No Fond Return of Love****.*

Barbara Pym Society/Charlotte Mary Yonge Fellowship Joint Meeting
Saturday 14 May 2011

St Peter's Church Hall, Canterbury

2011 Annual General Meeting
26-28 August 2011

The Annual Conference and the AGM of the Barbara Pym Society will be held at St Hilda's College, Oxford. The featured novel will be ***Crampton Hodnet.***

Barbara Pym and the Romantic Novelists' Association

by Jean Harker

During the last six years her life, Barbara Pym had a very special, happy and supportive relationship with the Romantic Novelists' Association, whose members were thrilled to secure her services as a preliminary judge for their Major Award for the Romantic Novel of the Year.

When they issued the invitation to judge in 1974 the RNA were aware (many of them, indignantly aware) that Barbara had not been published for some time. But what they could not have known was that their invitation arrived shortly after Barbara's recovery from the stroke which had put her in hospital and then caused her to retire early from her post at the African Institute. A correspondence card placed in the Pym Archive just before the RNA section suggests how serious her condition had been. It reads, touchingly, 'Do know that my thoughts and prayers are with you. Much love, Skipper.'

Jean Harker

Barbara reckoned that she could convalesce with a bout of light reading and so accepted the RNA's invitation. She certainly didn't do it for the money (fee: 52p per book, in subsequent years upped to £1). The job involved reading some 28 or 30 novels between September and January and giving them marks out of ten for Story, Characters, Style and Dialogue, Setting, and (the great indefinable) 'Plus' Element. Then the six or eight highest-marked novels would go forward to the Final Judges, who would decide on the winner.

Barbara continued as a preliminary judge for the next few years, and was just finishing her stint of reading for the 1976 Award in January 1977 when the famous *TLS* article with mentions by Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin appeared. The RNA were jubilant at this literary recognition and at the publication and later Booker Prize short-listing of *Quartet in Autumn*.

When the Booker short-list was published, Elizabeth Harrison, Chairman of the RNA, wrote to Barbara, 'I do hope you were pleased, and I hope too that Jonathan Cape are truly and deeply ashamed of themselves ... Also, of course, I hope that you and Macmillan are getting on like a house on fire.' And, tellingly, she wrote, only *after* Barbara had again achieved publication and literary celebrity, 'I hope as the years went by that you didn't lose faith in what you had to say. It's so frustrating to feel you've produced something people want, only there's no way of making contact with your readership ...'

In March 1978 Barbara gave a talk to the RNA at their Spring meeting (her typescript is in the Pym Archive). She began modestly by reminding her audience that she had never been 'what you might call a professional writer – never earned my living by writing.' She recalled the Wilderness Years, 'the long, boring, and seemingly hopeless struggle of trying to get something published', and then the delight of having a telephone call from Macmillan on 14 February 1977, to say that they wanted to publish *Quartet in Autumn*: 'Surely no rejected author ever had a more wonderful valentine.'

Barbara's last engagement with the RNA was when she agreed to be a Final Judge for the 1978 Major Award. Her fellow judges were Dorothy Dunnett and Derek Parker. She attended the Awards Lunch in April 1979. Afterwards, writing to thank her, Elizabeth Harrison reported the reaction of the winner, Josephine Edgar, after being presented with her trophy: ' "Barbara Pym and Dorothy Dunnett," she kept saying, as if she could wear you both like little rosettes. I felt much the same myself.'

Jean Harker, who writes under the name of Jean Buchanan, is a member of the RNA.

2011 North American Conference

On Friday evening 18 March we will meet at the Church of the Advent in Boston for a Candlelight Supper and Hymn Sing, and on Saturday and Sunday 19-20 March we'll be back at Harvard University's Barker Center for the conference. The complete conference schedule, registration forms and details about venues and accommodations are available on the Society web site: **www.barbarapym.org**. The deadline for registration is 11 March.

The speakers include several returning favorites as well as newcomers Thad Cockrill, Associate Professor of English at Southwest Tennessee Community College in Memphis, and journalist Martha Wilson, a columnist for Nova Scotia's main daily newspaper. Their topics are as follows:

Yvonne Cocking: "A Thankless Task?"

Thad Cockrill: Sister Acts: The Unlikely Pair in the Early Novels of Barbara Pym

Martha Wilson: *Cooking in a Bedsitter*: Barbara Pym on the Allure and the Loneliness of Single Life

Gloria Nakamura: *No Fond Return of Love*: The Birth of the "Angry" Young Excellent Woman

Sandra Goldstein: "The Things I See!" – Suburban Sagas in *No Fond Return of Love*

Barbara's First Oxford Romance

by Yvonne Cocking

Barbara Pym made several friends during her first term at Oxford, and added many more in subsequent terms. As a vivacious and attractive girl she drew the attention of many admirers. The first with whom she was to share a long friendship was Rupert Gleadow, who was working for his final examinations in Classics and Egyptology when they met and shared tea for the first time in May 1932. They met as often as possible during the hectic examinations period, and then almost constantly in the final week of term. It is clear that Rupert was quite besotted with her, and she found him very intelligent and attractive too. During the long vacation they corresponded frequently, both being bored at home and missing Oxford. Rupert was undecided what career to pursue, torn between joining the Royal Air Force (he was a qualified pilot and owned his own aeroplane) and returning to Oxford to do a D.Phil. He was inclined to the latter as he wished to go on seeing Barbara, but the subject of his thesis was undecided. In September he stayed at Morda Lodge in Oswestry, a romantic interlude of which Barbara wrote 'a perfect week which must be recorded and remembered as about the best of my life'.

Yvonne Cocking

During the Michaelmas Term, when Rupert returned to Oxford, they continued their relationship; but when he intimated to her that his intentions were 'strictly dishonourable' Barbara was not prepared to indulge him, and she asked him not to consider her his exclusive girl friend. She herself made new friends, and little by little detached herself from Rupert. The romance was doomed when Barbara fell in love with Henry Harvey.

Rupert had finally to accept that Barbara was not for him. As Hazel Holt says in *A Lot to Ask*, 'He tactfully made a comfortable joke of the whole affair', and he bowed to the inevitable with good grace. They continued to correspond and remained friends throughout their time at Oxford, and beyond.

Rupert Gleadow
Courtesy of the Bodleian Library

In fact, several years later, Rupert, widowed after a few months of marriage to his Parisian wife, Marguerite Rendu, wrote to Barbara: 'One learns to love, you know, and I began learning in 1932. It seems incredible to realise that in those lovely days none of the tragedies of life had yet happened. But if we had not had those wonderful times together probably I should not have known those sublime heights of love which Marguerite and I together achieved and which will always remain a light of my life. So you see you have made a difference to my life which I shall not forget. With love, Rupert'.

[Summary of a paper given at the BPS annual conference at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, on 5 September 2010.]

Pym Online: The Barbara Pym Society website, www.barbara-pym.org, has been given a complete makeover. Along with membership and conference information, links to online Pym resources, Barbara's biography, quotations from and summaries of all the novels, and papers from past conferences, new additions to the web site include Barbara's radio talk *Finding a Voice* and the archives of *Green Leaves* from 1999 through 2008. (Volumes 1 through 4 are being scanned and will be added soon.) When combined with Hazel Bell's updated *Green Leaves* index, this provides a wonderful trove of information for Pym scholars and fans alike.

We also have a Barbara Pym Society Facebook page with more than 250 followers; this is where we post photos from Society activities and it also allows us to reach out to non-member Pym fans worldwide.

Frances Kendrick's Memories Of Barbara (Spring Meeting, 9 May 2010, St. Alban's Centre, Holborn)

by Rose Little

Frances Kendrick served with Barbara in the WRNS, just after the war. They met in 1945, when Frances was 22 and Barbara 32, which immediately reminded me of the relationship between Jane and Prudence who are close friends but 'of a different generation'. Frances was a life-long friend who kept in close touch with Barbara and when they no longer lived near each other they telephoned and exchanged many letters. Yvonne Cocking interspersed the interview with some of the letters, which are in the Bodleian Library, and other observations from those times.

Frances sat at the table on stage between Yvonne and Michael Wilson, very smart with her beautiful white hair parted on one side. Speaking clearly and with a decisive, often humorous tone, she told us how amused Barbara would be to know she had a 'Society'! As Michael was making the preliminary remarks, Frances was clearly nonplussed at seeing her letters to Barbara again, and in fact when Yvonne read the first one, dated 24 April 1950, praising her wonderful novel, *Some Tame Gazelle*, in superlative terms, Frances almost denied having written it! 'It is all true, though', she added.

Frances told us that she always admired Barbara's novels and that it was taken for granted in their circle of friends that this was what Barbara did. One recalls Barbara's diary entry in which she tells us, as early as April 1933, when she was 20, that she had 'bought a lovely fat book at Blackwell's to write my novel in (plain paper)'. Frances told us how she and Barbara's other friends shared her disappointment when *An Unsuitable Attachment* was not accepted for publication and were indignant and sympathetic.

Frances knew both Hilary and Barbara and told us how they had had a lot of fun on walking weekends together, and how Hilary had once given a party in Frances's father's house (he being the Director of the British Museum). However, life in London was grim, with dull food owing to the rationing which continued until 1954: for instance, jam could be spread on bread, but not butter as well (to have both would have been an unknown luxury); and there were various substitute foods, such as powdered egg instead of the real thing. Five shillings was the price for a set meal in a restaurant at that time. Then there was the unavailability of everyday essentials such as stockings. Frances recalled herself and Barbara and the other WRNS drawing thick black lines up the back of their legs to mimic seamed stockings so that they would be correctly dressed in their uniforms.

Frances told us that they didn't reminisce about the WRNS but got on with their lives, dealing with immediate problems. Barbara had nursed her mother and was subsequently looking for a job when she met Frances's aunt, Beatrice Wyatt. Beatrice worked at the International African Institute and through her Barbara came to work for the journal *Africa*, eventually becoming its assistant editor.

Yvonne amusingly brought to life the ambience of the Institute and of the times when she described working in the library with the tall librarian, Ruth Jones, 'who wore socks and sandals and was devoid of humour and charm'. She thinks there are elements of this lady and of Frances's aunt in Esther Clovis. Yvonne told us a funny anecdote about the grand professor who once told Yvonne off for using electricity after office hours. Perhaps he served as a model for Professor Mainwaring?

Frances Kendrick

Michael keenly pursued his questions on our behalf and so Frances's memory was stretched – what *had* Barbara said about food, about clothes, about boyfriends? Apparently Barbara had had no food fads, and as for clothes, Frances remembered that they all added frills to the bottom of their dresses, to lengthen or freshen them, like Jane in *Jane and Prudence* letting a piece into a skirt which she wryly notes dates to before the war. We waited breathlessly for news of the boyfriends but to no avail, at this point in the interview. While apologising for her lack of recall on these points, Frances nevertheless evoked the atmosphere of those times in her unplanned asides and revealed aspects of Barbara's character in her unprompted anecdotes. She remembered a 'lumpy' girl who had attached herself to Barbara and Frances while on holiday in Malmsmead, North Devon. They had been unable to appreciate the beautiful setting of Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* as it had rained nonstop. The unfortunate girl dogged their footsteps, for 'everyone who met Barbara loved her, couldn't not', Frances told us devotedly, and the girl even went so far as to look them up in London on their return.

Frances remembered their having a 'high old time' in Portugal in 1954 (making us think of Piers and his Portuguese lessons in *A Glass of Blessings*). Unfortunately we could not find evidence later on in the photo albums Frances kindly brought along, although there were pictures of Lisbon. Barbara did not drink to excess, Frances told us, although naturally enjoying her wine on holiday. Frances related how another friend had raised her eyebrows at Barbara, remarking '*Another* bottle?'

On the whole Frances did not remember Barbara talking much about her own relationships but Frances gratefully recalled how she 'was a wonderful sounding-board' for Frances's own problems. Henry Harvey and Gordon Glover were mentioned but Frances never met them. In her letters, Frances often wrote to Barbara about her books. Yvonne read us another letter, (18 October, 1955) in which she calls Barbara 'Dearest Buddye', a nickname they all used, and she tells her how she has 'devoured with indecent greed' her latest novel, *Less than Angels*, finding it shrewder than *Excellent Women*. She congratulates Barbara on her writing and applauds the new book.

There was a long gap in the correspondence, but Frances and Barbara never lost touch. The gap in correspondence is probably due to the fact that they lived near each other: there are photographs of Barbara in Frances's garden and photographs of Frances's cats. Like Barbara, Frances loved cats and had six, writing at one time that she 'had three cats to support'. Frances told us about her house with its wonderful garden overlooking south London that she had bought in 1968, for the mere sum, she hardly dared tell us, of £400! Barbara wrote when Frances's father died, after Barbara and Hilary had moved to Finstock in 1973.

Barbara had not been fazed by Frances and Richard's living together in London before they were married, although Frances's own family 'declined to know her' until they were. This led to Michael asking questions about Frances's family, but she did not want to talk about her family difficulties, simply musing as an aside which had us all laughing that her father 'got his comeuppance with his second wife ...'!

'I have been incredibly lucky in life,' Frances told us, 'and knowing Barbara was not the least of it.' This brought the interview to a beautiful and natural end. There were a few enthusiastic questions to follow, for example, what books did Barbara like to read? As Frances told us, she liked Ivy Compton-Burnett and Elizabeth Taylor, and she told us that Penelope Lively was at her funeral, but as Yvonne pointed out, Barbara kept very careful note in her diaries, with comments, on everything that she read.

We have brought away from Frances's talk an account of an age we are all trying to reach through Barbara's books, the age of many of our mothers, a world hard and grim and yet reassuring and full of love.

BPS Social Event in Ontario

by Judy Pollard Smith

On Monday 30 August 2010 Barbara Pym Society members in Ontario met at the home of new member Kerry Clare in Toronto for cucumber sandwiches, scones and tea. It was the first time this small but enthusiastic group had met one another. It happened at the behest of Judy Smith of Hamilton, Ontario, who had asked Tom Sopko to share the e-mails of Ontario members. It seemed easier than getting to either Harvard or Oxford! Kerry lives in the vicinity of University of Toronto so perhaps we got it partway right.

Harriet, Kerry, Judy, Ellen, Gloria

The fun part was our age ranges. We went from the charming Harriet who at one year of age is destined to carry the torch for Barbara Pym in years to come, to our 86-year-old member Gloria who came with her daughter. They had been to Finstock on their own a few years back so were able to share their photos and memories. We discussed how we had come to Barbara Pym and what we enjoy about her novels. It was decided that we all admire how she infuses the daily round with meaning so that even the dullest tasks take on new dimensions. Perhaps the high point was when Harriet disappeared into her bedroom and returned wearing a hat and carrying a 'hold-all' à la Miss Blenkinsop et al.!

The group plans to meet again. Next time we will focus perhaps on a particular novel or idea.

For more Canadian Pymiana, see Harrison Solow's recollections of discovering Barbara Pym's novels in a bookshop in Nova Scotia (p. 10).

Kerry Clare is a Toronto writer and blogger, mostly on literary topics: www.picklemethis.com.

There is a photo of the happy gathering on her blog for 1 September 2010, at http://www.picklemethis.com/?s=Pymian.

2010 Pym Events in the US

Garden Fête in Cambridge Massachusetts

by Cindy Lacey

The Boston-area members of the Barbara Pym Society gathered for a Pym garden fête on Sunday, 27 June 2010, from 2:30 to 5:00 p.m. at Tom Sopko's home in Cambridge MA. We did have to momentarily scramble for the shelter of the table umbrellas when a small shower came over, but the skies soon cleared. We had a delightful array of savory and sweet treats, plus two punches, one with champagne and one non-alcoholic. Toward the end of the afternoon we were invited to view the garden of one of Tom's neighbors across the road, part of which was reclaimed from a former parking lot. The koi pond was impressive (some of the fish were HUGE!). Although the dress code was summer casual, we saw quite a few smart hats, including at least one from Paris.

Tea in Boston

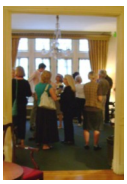
by Barbara Boles

Pym Society members from Boston and beyond gathered for afternoon tea at Church of the Advent in Boston on Saturday afternoon, 6 November 2010. About sixteen people attended, including several new members from Western Mass and New York State who have not yet attended an annual conference and a visitor who learned about us from an online book group. The food and atmosphere were cozy, and conversation lively. Preliminary thinking about a fall or winter tea next year has already begun, with ideas of including a brief program such as a Pym reading or trivia contest.

Tea in New York

by Virginia Wilhelm

On Sunday afternoon, 19 September 2010, a group of Barbara Pym enthusiasts gathered at the charming Parish House of the Church of the Incarnation in Manhattan for tea and conversation. The historic church on Madison Avenue near the Morgan Library and Museum proved to be a perfect setting for the first social event of the Barbara Pym Society in New York City. The church staff did a splendid job of setting up the space with lace tablecloths and hot water urns for endless cups of tea in several varieties. Guests brought tea treats including cucumber sandwiches, shortbread and home-baked fruit breads and cake. Those who stayed to the end were treated to a brief tour by Barbara Dunlap of the church next door, with windows by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. We hope this will be the first of many Barbara Pym Society events in the New York area.



Felicity & Barbara Pym

by Harrison Solow.

I am honoured to write a short piece for *Green Leaves* about the origins of my engagement with Barbara Pym's work and the reason for writing *Felicity & Barbara Pym*.

When did I first encounter Barbara Pym? Honestly, I don't know. I cannot remember my introduction to Miss Pym. I can remember our subsequent rendezvous, but not the first. I know where it occurred, however – in my favourite small independent bookshop, one of many scattered throughout the picturesque city of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Housed in an early Victorian building, this tiny haven had an untidy explosion of books, a host of Pym titles, and an air of not really being there, a portent that it actually fulfilled by quietly disappearing some years later, much like the world of Barbara Pym.

I clearly remember buying my subsequent Pym books there so I imagine I purchased the first there as well. Oddly, I rather like not remembering my first purchase, since it now seems that Barbara Pym has always been a part of my life and remembering the first encounter might dispel that fancy. But why Pym?

Although I am regarded in some circles as a scholar, I am not and what I will say next should be irrefutable proof. I bought and read these books (many many times) because I liked them. No other reason. I was not smitten with their verbal frugality or blazing characterisation. I wasn't enamoured by their innovative treatment of time. I wasn't intrigued by symbolic meaning. I just liked them. A lot. That's all.

Later, much later, I was to discover, savour and investigate all those things, and more, though never in the manner of the theorist or critic. I am a literary writer. A fellow writer's work engaged me for many reasons, some of them profound, and I appreciated that.

The answer to the second half of the request above is this: In its inception, *Felicity & Barbara Pym*, in a slightly different format, constituted part of my rigorous Master of Fine Arts degree requirement at Mills College in California, one of the few remaining private Liberal Arts colleges for women in America. In order to qualify for the MFA in Literature and Writing, one must both study literature and write a creative work. One's thesis must give evidence of accomplishment in both. I thought that writing a creative work *about* the study of literature would be a fascinating way to demonstrate such accomplishment.

In thinking about how to go about this, I realized that I had inherited much of my literary philosophy from my own undergraduate tutor, Dr. Christopher Terry, who had been a student of F. R. Leavis at Cambridge and a literary exemplar to me two decades earlier. His great pedagogical / literary gift to me – the interrelatedness of all of literature, and the literary history and context I hold in my head – was something I wanted to pass on to my students with the conviction, passion, discipline with which I had been taught. I chose to centre this thesis around Barbara Pym, because by then, I had become deeply engaged with her work. I knew it well and saw that not many other academics did. As there was comparatively little written about her, I could fulfil one of the principal tenets of scholarship: to make an original contribution to Literary Studies. If I could illuminate the worth of this 'obscure' author, to a very young and not very interested college student standing on the cusp of the 21st Century, in a creative work, I felt I would have earned the title of Master, which was about to be conferred on me. *Felicity & Barbara Pym* is what evolved.

This thesis was very well received, duly filed in the library, the MFA was conferred, and life went on, as one would expect.

What one did not expect is that ten years later, this dormant document would be resurrected in Wales, by publishers who loved it. Nor did I expect the outstanding reception it has received nor the unqualified approbation of Hazel Holt (whose books I had of course read and whose knowledge I revered) when Cinnamon Press, unbeknownst to me, asked her to write the Foreword. I did not expect that my fellow authors on the Red Room (a superlative society for writers and authors) would promote it with such enthusiasm, nor that academics would like it at all, much less commend it.

I must say that my central character, Mallory, is a bit of a snob, but writing this book has been a humbling experience for me. I'm very grateful to have this opportunity to present *Felicity & Barbara Pym* to the Barbara Pym Society, which is unquestionably its most perspicacious readership.

Review of Harrison Solow, *Felicity & Barbara Pym* (Blaenau Ffestiniog: Cinnamon Press, 2010. 176 pages)

by Tom Sopko

I read this book twice, found it occasionally irritating and bombastic but still compelling on first reading, then read it again with different expectations and enjoyed it a good deal more. It is not a Pymmish novel, in fact it is not a novel at all. Solow has called her recent works 'epistolary novels' and said in a 2008 interview on BBC Mid Wales: 'I know "novel" conjures up "fiction" in most people's minds but this work is both fiction and non-fiction. Everything in it is true, insofar as truth can be quantified, but the letter isn't written to anyone. It isn't a real letter. The form is fiction. The content is true. The final book however will be fictionalized.'

The premise of the book is that an American writer and former academic has agreed to tutor a first-year college Eng Lit student named Felicity who is taking seminar on Barbara Pym, and therefore has to read several of Pym's novels and write a series of essays and papers thereon. This is tutelage in the classic one-on-one Oxbridge model, except that it is done by e-mail; we read the tutor's responses to Felicity over a period of months, but never see the other side of the correspondence. Perhaps 30% of the book is actually about Pym, another 30% is the biographical details and various pet peeves and crusades of the tutor, and the rest ranges over a wide variety of topics.

The author is clearly very intelligent and well-read, and has lived, worked, and studied in multiple countries, cultures and disciplines – an educated person in the broadest and truest sense of the word. She has a deep appreciation for Pym's writing, and her expositions of Pym's literary, cultural and social class influences are excellent. And she has a very disparaging view of self-important academics, especially those who insist that all of creation must fit into whatever model or world view they espouse, and those who teach things which they cannot, or have never tried to, actually do.

I liked the book more on second reading because I knew that it was written by someone who is most decidedly not an English gentlewoman of Barbara Pym's generation and class, and does not aspire or pretend to be one. I also considered the possibility that there might be a bit of Pym's wry humor under the surface. And I appreciated more the difficulty of the challenge the author created for herself, namely to help a very young 21st-century American appreciate skillfully written books that are set in, and assume detailed knowledge and understanding of, a very different world.

More about Cinnamon Press and its fiction and poetry lists can be found at:

http://www.cinnamonpress.com/

The Spoken Word

Two new unabridged recordings of Barbara Pym novels in three formats are now available from Magna Story Sound.

No Fond Return of Love, read by Maggie Mash, with a listening time of approx. 10 hours 35 minutes, may be had in 8 cassettes (£42.50), 9 CDs (£45.50) or 2 MP3 CDs (£45.50)

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NB. VAT will be added at the current rate.

The Barbara Pym Society 2010-2011

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From the Archives

by Yvonne Cocking

Among the Barn Cottage papers sent to me after Hilary's death were two poems written in memory of Barbara Pym by her friends and fellow writers Gilbert and Kay Phelps.

The Phelpses were already established writers and broadcasters when the Pym sisters arrived in Finstock. Barbara wrote to Philip Larkin on 24 October 1972: 'I haven't been doing any writing – my divided life hardly allows it ... next year when I retire I shall have more time ... There is another novelist in Finstock – Gilbert Phelps who wrote *The Winter People.* He is very nice.'

Gilbert Phelps wrote nine novels between 1953 and 1975, as well as travel works and much literary criticism. His *An Introduction to 50 British Novels 1600–1900* was published in 1979; *A Short Guide to the World Novel: from Myth to Modernism* in 1988 – his last work – described, in the words of his obituarist, Robert Waller, 'the decline and fall of the novel in world literature.' He was also a prolific broadcaster who held a number of important posts with the BBC in Bristol and London. He was responsible for bringing the now well-known poet Charles Causley to the attention of the listening public. He eventually left the BBC in order to write full time, and he was soon recognised as 'an outstanding contemporary novelist', and was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

In 1972 Phelps married Kay Batchelor, described by Waller as 'a writer and broadcaster of great exuberance and intuitive insights', and, he added, 'They knew that they were meant for each other'. Kay may be best known for her anthologies *Laughing Matter* (1976) and *Laughing Matter II* (1977). Kay and Gilbert bought Robert Waller's cottage in Finstock where they lived together until 15 June 1993, when, as Waller wrote in his obituary, 'Gil died in the garden where we had so often talked together.'

The Pyms and the Phelpses became good friends. In her diary for 1974 Barbara wrote: 'A full Christmas day in mild winter weather. Ginger wine with the Dores after church (duck in the oven), sherry with Vicky and Bob Redston (duck looked at and turned), punch with the Phelps (duck finally eaten)'. In another letter to Larkin, on 15 March 1979, she says, 'Gilbert Phelps (the other Finstock author) and I have recently been judging entries for the Southern Arts Association Prize ... we gave it to Penelope Lively for her book of short stories *Nothing Missing but the Samovar*, and we had a little gathering at Chipping Norton to meet her, drank champagne, ate canapés, and had "literary talk".'

Kay came to the conference dinner at St. Hilda's in August 2007, and afterwards she and Judith Baron, a one-time next-door neighbour of the Pyms at Well Cottage, recalled their memories of Barbara and Hilary. Barbara had given to Kay the wooden box, mentioned in Barbara's diary on 3rd April 1940, which Kay later most generously donated to the Society (see *Green Leaves*, Spring 2010, p.14). Gilbert's poem is 'In Memory of Barbara Pym: died 12/1/80'.

It seems appropriate that these poems should be published this year, the thirtieth anniversary of Barbara's death.

Circles

Once we talked of Pasternak
in Dr. Zhivago, *how he can make*
coincidences, like trucks on a track,
so jostle each other that
patience, and credulity crack
until, suddenly, you see what he's at –
an act of creative will, shock-tactics to take
you out of the grid of a single system, flat
and concentric, doubling forward and back,
because he believed there are other systems that break
into this one, out of the future or past,
yours, mine, or a stranger's, or even, we said,
from those further dimensions which cast
an immeasurable loop alike round the living and dead.

That word 'coincidence', though, we agreed,
was too crude by far for something that came
closer to miracle: the Russian, indeed,
preferred 'intersection' – one hand
at any rate spurning the need
to posit a spiritual strand,
though perhaps our time-space conceptions were
roughly the same,
sharing some vision of a primum mobile *planned*
to puncture, as the sun does the case of a seed,
each lesser circumference that's hardened too much to
reclaim
its special potential of freedom and truth,
or, even, to fashion some simple act
of justice – loose ends of youth,
say, ravelled in age, or a hope confirmed as a fact.

The imagery of circles struck
chords in us both – especially apt
for the writer's span, where chance or luck
checked or speeded the spin,
inserted gusset or tuck
in the line, or meshed it within
a complex of cog-wheels and gears so spaciously
gapped
more than a lifetime might pass without loosening the
pin:
And your *rotation, of course, stuck*
sixteen years at one notch, might never have lapped
your circuit of flesh ... And now you're a part
of a greater circumference, will you
stay there, or at times will your heart
shoot out a tangent – and strike as coincidence too?

Kay's poem is handwritten in pencil, signed, and dated Feb 1980.

Barbara

Your written world was small, they said,
Its passions
Slight.
But the size of a prism is irrelevant,
As long as what falls through it
Is light.
The rainbow is unchanging and true,
And so, in your creative arc,
Were you.

'Anglicans Abroad'
Joint Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society and the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship
14 May 2011, Canterbury

by Clemence Schultze

BPS members perhaps do not know that the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship owes its origin to a remark made at a Barbara Pym Society meeting: 'Charlotte Yonge should have an organisation like this!' Jean Shell and Janet Clarke did not let this notion wander idly down the path paved with good intentions, but set to work and established the CMYF. Now the two societies intend jointly to explore the theme of 'Anglicans abroad' – a fertile one in the works of both authors. The two writers are often thought of as home-birds, tied to England, if not positively parochial. But in fact 'abroad' plays a significant role in their novels: travellers, missionaries, anthropologists, diplomats and tourists visit foreign climes both for work and pleasure, seeking health, wealth ... and cups of tea. And in both authors there is rich interplay between the circumstances of home life and the tempting attractions of travel.

Speakers will include Canon Edgar Ruddock, the Revd Colin Oxenforth (well known to BPS members), Ms Terry Barringer, who is both an Africanist and a researcher into nineteenth-century missions, and our own Triona Adams.

Yonge was one of Pym's favourite authors; and Wilmet Forsyth owes her name to the (very different) Wilmet Underwood, mainstay of her family in Yonge's *The Pillars of the House.* If you want to get a flavour of Yonge's work, the best place to start is *The Heir of Redclyffe*, a best-seller in its day, read from the parsonages of middle-England, to the attics of New England (Jo, in *Little Women*), to the tents of Crimean war soldiers. But more characteristic are *The Daisy Chain* and its sequel, *The Trial*. These form the core of Yonge's linked family novels, where characters grow and develop over the years and through many books. There is much more about Yonge on the CMYF website: **http://www.cmyf.org.uk/**

Canterbury is a delightful town, with many wonderful buildings and tempting shops. The papers and lunch will be at St Peter's Methodist Church Hall in central Canterbury (ten minutes from Canterbury West Station, to which there is a very fast service from London St Pancras). Then we hope to visit both the Cathedral and the King's School (formerly a mission college); an optional restaurant dinner will be organised for anyone wanting to stay over. So note it in your diary now!

Review of Jane Bingham, *The Cotswolds. A Cultural History* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2009. 244 pages)

by Clemence Schultze

Signal Books has devised a stimulating series called 'Landscapes of the Imagination'. This ranges from the Andes to Andalucia, from the Thames to the Alps; now the Cotswolds is included. As a 'Cultural History' the work is thematically rather than chronologically organised, on topics such as the land, war, the industrial age, arts and crafts, authors and artists, gardeners, collectors, and eccentrics (the last category including some notable figures, like Charles Paget Wade of Snowshill Manor).

Naturally, with so wide a scope, each place or individual receives only brief treatment: Jane Bingham accords Barbara Pym a couple of pages. Half of this sketches Barbara's career and reasons for retirement, and her rediscovery; the rest concentrates on *A Few Green Leaves*, Barbara's last completed novel, and the resemblance of Finstock to Emma's village. Bingham sums this up wryly as a 'fragmented community [where] the church is no longer the hub of social life. People turn for help to the doctor rather than the vicar, and villagers eat ready-meals in front of the TV, leaving the newcomers to make jam for "village" events' (p. 170).

Other writers discussed include Jilly Cooper and her aptly named 'Rutshire' (is its origin from 'in a rut' or from 'rutting', one wonders), the Mitfords, and Jane Austen, who – a century before Edward Thomas – visited Adlestrop. Some of those treated had only a slight connection with the district: this allows many famous names to be included. But the most interesting sections deal with those who made a lengthy commitment to the Cotswolds: for example, Arts and Crafts movement figures such as William Morris, Ernest Gimson and Charles Robert Ashbee. The author well brings out the remoteness of the area in their day.

I observed one error worth correcting: the excellent children's novel, *The Wool-pack*, is mentioned (p. 35) apropos the mediaeval wool trade, but the author's name is misspelt: it is Cynthia Harnett. And I have one gripe: the softback binding is so tight that one has to weight the book open in order to read it. Otherwise, the whole makes for a fascinating take on the region: an excellent complement to a standard guidebook, and also well-fitted for reading on its own.

More about Signal Books and its fiction and non-fiction lists can be found at:

http://www.signalbooks.co.uk/

Pym Gleanings

Christine Shuttleworth sent four gleanings from some interesting sources.

In a review of Pam Hirsch's *The Constant Liberal: the Life and Work of Phyllis Bottome* in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 25 June 2010, Caroline Moorhead writes:

> *If* The Constant Liberal *suggests a certain worthiness, it should nonetheless serve to bring Bottome back to public attention. Like Barbara Pym, she is a writer who should not be forgotten.*

The Observer on 27 June carried an article by Rachel Cooke about Philip Larkin's supposed misogyny:

> *At the new Hull History Centre ... you can see Larkin's notebooks ... and the thousands of letters he wrote to his mother ... But you can also look at his books, and the first thing you notice is how many of them are by women. Barbara Pym is present, of course (Larkin championed her work even after her publisher abandoned her) ...*

On 3 July, in a letter on 'village strife' to *The Spectator*, the correspondent writes:

> *[It] is right to advise aspiring villagers to get in with those who 'know everyone and everything' ... At a church harvest supper, I was given excellent advice by the sister of the late novelist Barbara Pym, who informed me that my modest hamlet [Chorleywood, Hertfordshire] was 'where one found one's servants' and the more pukka village down the road was 'where one found one's friends'.*

The Lady, 30 August, featured an article by the novelist Elizabeth Buchan, who finds that 'women's emotions are firmly rooted in their gardens':

> *At one end of the spectrum, there is the exuberant gaiety of Nancy Mitford as she contemplates her roses: 'My garden looks as if a thousand Edwardian hats have fallen into it'. Molly Keane's daughter recalls her mother finding 'an inexhaustible parsley patch is necessary to security and well-being'. Barbara Pym's quiet exposé of roaring emotions also connects the garden with feeling: 'Belinda noticed how splendidly the aubrietias had done ... They had had a particularly hard winter that year and she had been afraid the frost would kill them ... What a lot of hardship plants could stand! And people!' In the matter-of-fact linkage between plants and humans, we, the readers, suddenly clock that Belinda is suffering.*

Regular contributor to this column, Michael Wilson, also sent a garden-related piece, by Francine Raymond in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 20 June:

> *I rather enjoy growing flowers on series ranks, feeling like a country lady from a Barbara Pym novel as I cut the blooms and neatly laid them in their trug.*

The Internet, assiduously trawled by Martin Rush, came up with several Pym items. One is the abstract of an article in *The Gerontologist*, vol. 28, pp. 835–9, by Anne M. Wyatt-Brown 'Late style in the novels of Barbara Pym and Penelope Mortimer':

> *Gerontologists, who are studying creativity throughout the life span, are interested in the question of late style. Novels written in old age by two contemporary British novelists, Barbara Pym and Penelope Mortimer, reveal that their late style is related to lifelong methods of adapting to changes in their situation. Furthermore, the strength and direction of their creativity in old age have fluctuated in response to their aging bodies and their new roles in Society.*

And the Lit Chicks Book Group (Bangor Public Library, Maine) has chosen to read *Quartet in Autumn* for its October meeting.

Thanks for all these contributions, and keep them coming! Send yours to: yvcocking@aol.com

Diary of a Provincial Pymmite

by Clemence Schultze

An most enjoyable BPS conference at St Hilda's is followed by a return to Real Life. Three weeks more of work before semi-retirement kicks in – and numerous calls for this thing to be finished, that matter to be explained to a successor, the other item to be recorded. Hope that on 30 September life will become leisured, and plan small dinner party for the following day to help achieve this. Husband looks wryly on and says he will Believe It When He Sees It.

Downsizing becomes urgent: how to fit the contents of former spacious office into the 15 square yard cubbyhole now assigned to me for teaching and research. Husband and self (helped by some students who take pity upon our creaking knees) transfer a couple of thousand books and numberless files into cubbyhole. Finally we resort to forming tottering piles outside it, for sorting and disposal: agonising process of decision, condemnation and reprieve follows. 'Yes, get rid of it.' 'No, no: don't bin that!' Inferior shelving in cubbyhole collapses, and, rather than wait for the ministrations of Estates and Buildings Department, Husband wields drill in masterful fashion. After this feat, he returns to Oxford, muttering about People Who Have Too Many Books.

Both of us forget our wedding anniversary.

Head of Department asks me just to arrange a meeting about such-and-such on 30 September and looks surprised when I say grudgingly that I will organise it but do not propose to attend. Final week arrives: take renewal form for continuing computer access to Information Technology Department in person, and am assured that It Will All Roll Over Seamlessly. Believe them.

Hold successful dinner party for select group of dearest colleagues. Next day, find that IT has Rolled me Out rather than Over, turning me into a computer displaced person, sans PC, sans email, sans library, sans everything. Retirement, Ho!

Forward Planning for Barbara's Centenary

by Clemence Schultze

Late autumn 2010: Advent is imminent, then Christmas. So 2011 is almost upon us – and you know what it's like: turn round, and it'll be 2012 before you know it. And after that ...? The centenary of Barbara Pym's birth falls on 2 June 2013. In other words, there is only two years' planning and organising time available for us to make this an occasion memorable for ourselves as Pym fans and members, and one which further raises Barbara Pym's profile in the spheres of literature, research and education.

The Committee and US Board are already canvassing ideas for possible events, speakers, and activities to fall throughout the year – and we want your input, suggestions and practical help. What would you, as members, enjoy? Are there speakers you would like to hear? Should the BPS aim at a publication? Is there some appropriate form of commemoration in a place associated with Barbara?

The conferences on both sides of the Atlantic will of course be core occasions: perhaps these should be longer than usual; or maybe another celebratory event should be timed as close as possible to the actual anniversary. If so, of what kind? A dinner-dance? a fete? a fancy-dress tea party? Is there a significant place where a centenary birthday party could be held? Oswestry, as those of us who were on the recent visit will remember, is unfortunately a little too inaccessible to be a suitable venue, but perhaps you have a brilliant suggestion. (Naples?) A service giving thanks for Barbara's life and achievements might be held at one of the many churches with which she was associated.

If there is to be a publication, should it consist of past papers, or new essays? Maybe well-known authors could be asked to contribute: do you know anyone? Should a fund-raising effort be associated with the centenary – maybe to add to the existing BP Fellowship in English Literature at St Hilda's, or to offer a one-off prize to a new writer or a student? If a prize, a suitable theme for a story or essay is needed, as well as expertise in managing and publicising an appeal. We shall certainly be asking Pym's publishers to help in promoting her books in the centenary year: do you have contacts among editors and journalists, so that reviews and reflective articles raise awareness in a wider public?

We have a wonderful website: can we exploit the internet further, to create an web event that would give publicity on the day? A round-the-world Pym-twitter, maybe? Or if anyone knows who it is that chooses Google's daily banner ...? We might aim at increasing our membership: surely each of us has at least one friend who is a natural Pym-person, although s/he doesn't know it yet?

Other centenary items include calendars, memorabilia, souvenirs ... would you wear a Pym apron, carry a Pym bag, buy a mug, notebook or pen? (and give them to your friends and relations!) What about contributing your work to a friendship quilt, where individuals make themed squares, and these are joined into one large item? This could be designed as a quilt to be raffled, or as a banner / panel to be used at meetings.

We want your experience and your contacts, in publicity, fund-raising, web use, and event organizing. And, above all, your ideas, please!

Geoffrey Holt

Members of the Society will be sorry to hear of the death on 8 August 2010 of Hazel Holt's husband, Geoffrey. Mr and Mrs Holt had been married for 59 years. Their son is the novelist Tom Holt.

Flowers were sent to Mrs Holt to express the Society's sympathy, and, with permission, this paragraph is reproduced from the subsequent email conveying her thanks:

'Barbara and Geoffrey were good friends for many years. He helped to sustain and encourage her during the dark years, and rejoiced at her final success. He loved and admired her writing and was greatly moved by her courage at the end. This last year he has been rereading the novels as they came out again in the Virago reprints, and was discovering (as we all do) new felicities.'

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE SOCIETY

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."

In the UK: £6 (incl. p & p), from HKB Press, 139 The Ryde, Hatfield, Herts AL9 5DP**. Please make cheque payable to HKB Press.**

In the US: $14 (incl. postage/handling, USPS First Class), from Norma Munson, The Barbara Pym Society, 5225 Ponderosa Drive, Rockford IL 61107. **Please make cheque payable to The Barbara Pym Society.**

A la Pym: The Barbara Pym Cookery Book, by Hilary Pym and Honor Wyatt

Publisher's Weekly: "A treat for devotees of Pym, this literary cookbook assembled by the author's sister and cookbook author Wyatt offers a modest selection of recipes...for foods mentioned in Pym's novels. Respectfully yet whimsically presented, the recipes come to seem a genuine, if minor, part of Pym's oeuvre, where the 'small things of life', cooking among them, are reckoned 'often so much bigger than the great things'."

In the US: $17 (incl. postage/handling), from Norma Munson, as above. **Please make cheque payable to the Barbara Pym Society in either case.**

Both books are also available on Amazon.com

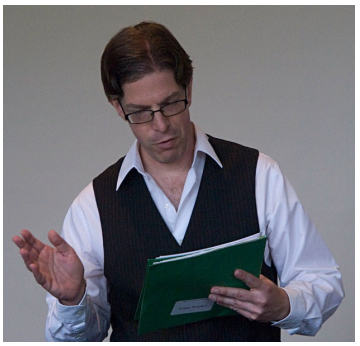
Across a Crowded Room

Barbara Everett and Miriam Margolyes

Tim Burnett

Eileen Roberts

Breakfast in the dining hall



Tom Sopko

South building

Miriam Margolyes

The Committee

Senior Common Room

Saturday night dinner

Chatting at teatime

Magdalen Bridge punt station

Sunday night at La Cucina

Eleonore Biber