Green Leaves

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

2012 AGM and Oxford Conference Report

by Diana Gulland

The Barbara Pym Society's 2012 Annual Conference started on the evening of Friday 31 August and continued until the afternoon of Sunday 2 September. The chosen theme this year was 'Barbara Pym and Gardens'. It was therefore most appropriate that a guided tour of the Oxford University Botanic Garden had been arranged for Friday afternoon. The tour, led by a very knowledgeable young man, included a visit to see the 1645 yew tree and the water lily of such size that it can hold a child in its cup. Was the lily in 'the very hot hot-house' visited by Barbara and Henry Harvey in May 1935, I wonder? A meal in the Dining Hall was followed by the now traditional quiz, this year ably organised by Deb Fisher on the theme of heroes and anti-heroes in literature. The quiz was won by the 'Cauliflower Cheese' team!

On Saturday morning the AGM was expertly handled (see Lorraine Mepham's report) and we were given some tantalising glimpses of what is planned for 2013, Barbara's Centenary year. After a convivial buffet lunch, when old friends met up again and new contacts were made, we started the afternoon of excellent talks with Elizabeth Buchan on 'Thoughts on Barbara Pym and Gardens'. Elizabeth, herself a bestselling novelist, explained how important her own small London garden is to her in providing a space with constantly changing interest. Seeing gardens as theatres on which life is acted out, she used illustrations from Pym, Daphne Du Maurier, Charlotte Brontë and Nancy Mitford, among others, to show how gardens can be both places of danger and uncertainty as well as of comedy.

Visiting the Botanic Garden

Tom Sopko's presentation on 'Lady Farmer's Lilies: some problems of a church flower arranger' was multi-layered. While Tom worked on a large flower arrangement, with real flowers, Triona and Yvonne read appropriate extracts from Pym. We were then treated to slides of very impressive flower arrangements in Tom's own church, the Church of the Advent, in Boston Massachusetts, created for various religious festivals. Many of these displays are created against the clock, using a large number of volunteers, and care has to be taken to prevent conflicts – or even umbrage – creeping in.

Tea was taken on the South Lawn in brilliant warm sunshine, a welcome contrast to the cold summer so far. Thus refreshed, we returned for the last two presentations of the day. Clemence Schultze read a paper by the late John Francis entitled 'The gardens of Barbara Pym' which had been found in the Pym archive collection. Originally published in *Hortus* in 1990, it has a wonderful opening sentence 'The wise gardener who is contemplating matrimony would do well to submit a few questions before actually sinking onto one knee and proposing'. Many much-loved Pym characters and episodes in gardens were used as examples. The final speaker of the day was Roger Phillips, nature photographer, TV presenter and designer and author of over 30 books. One of my favourite books is Roger's *Wild Flowers of Britain*, which I turn to regularly to identify those intrusions into my not very cultivated garden. It was therefore a great pleasure to hear Roger speak on London squares and to view his superb slides, many with quotes from Pym superimposed.

The sun still shone, allowing us to take the drinks reception out onto the South Lawn. A delicious meal followed, and over coffee Eileen Roberts rose to give the after-dinner speech. In answer to requests from members for details of how the Society was formed, she quoted from the first issue of *Green Leaves*, July 1994. The Society had been founded as a direct result of the Barbara Pym Literary Weekend held at St Hilda's in August 1993, as part of the College's Centenary

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celebrations. It was pointed out by many of the 120 enthusiasts attending that Conference that 1993 would have seen Pym's 80th birthday, and that it was therefore an appropriate time to be thinking in terms of a society to foster the appreciation and wider knowledge of her life and work. So the Barbara Pym Society was founded by popular demand. I am personally proud to have been among the list of founder members and to be present, with other founders, at this year's Conference. Eileen then read some quotes from a book written by Chiang Yee, a Chinese visitor to Oxford during the war years, entitled 'The Silent Traveller in Oxford'. He was seeing Oxford as Pym would have done, following a route that Martin Rush planned to follow on Sunday morning.

Sunday dawned without the sunshine we had enjoyed on Saturday, but the threatened rain held off, allowing Martin to lead a party to Magdalen College to enjoy the splendid architecture and to admire the beautiful display of white hydrangeas. Roger Phillips was on hand to identify flowers in the herbaceous borders before the party continued through the grounds and out onto the river bank, returning to St Hilda's in time for coffee. Some of us attended a church service in St Hilda's chapel taken by Conference participant, Rev. Colin Oxenforth. The chapel is tiny but pleasant with modern stained glass windows. Beside the altar was a statue of St Hilda recently found in an attic. Tom Sopko's comment, 'How unsuitable,' summed up our concern that she had been put out of sight for so many years.

The morning talk was by Margaret Rayner on 'St Hilda's garden in Barbara's time'. Margaret is no stranger to the Society, having spoken to us at previous Conferences, but also as a former Dean of the College, and now its historian, she was well qualified to speak on the history of the site, the buildings and why there were originally two gardens. In Pym's time the Vernon Harcourt Room was the lecture room, but it was later split up into tiny students' rooms before returning to its present state. In discussion, after Margaret's talk, various alumnae entertained us with tales of life in the College. Deb's room appeared to have been no larger than a cupboard, and Jean Harker explained why she had to sign an undertaking that she would not climb onto the roof!

A more general discussion ended the morning session. We strayed from the theme of gardens to discuss, among other topics, Henry Harvey and how he had charmed participants at the first Society dinner, and Pym's work at the International African Institute and if she had been suitably acknowledged for it. News items included notice of a Pym study day to be held on 12 July 2013 at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston (further details about this later in this issue); Hazel Bell's enhanced index to *A Very Private Eye* to be added to our website; and Barbara's *Desert Island Discs* programme of 1978, now available on BBC iPlayer.

After a leisurely Sunday lunch we returned for dramatised readings. These are now a traditional part of Conference proceedings; always eagerly anticipated, they never disappoint. This year the title was 'Garden scenes from *Crampton Hodnet* and *Jane and Prudence'*. Alex Ward was the narrator, with Deirdre Bryan-Brown and Lorraine Mepham beautifully portraying the characters of Miss Morrow and Miss Doggett. Other parts were played by those seasoned thespians Tom Sopko, Chris Rutherford, Rita Phillips, Rose Little, Triona Adams, Martin Rush and Michael Wilson. Yvonne was warmly thanked for producing and directing the readings for yet another year.

After a round of applause for all those who had made the weekend so successful, the Conference was brought to a close. We all agreed that we had enjoyed the subject content, the food and convivial company, and that we eagerly look forward to 2013, the Centenary year.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society Saturday 1 September 2012, 11.30 am

Committee members present: Clemence Schultze (Chair); Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary), Lorraine Mepham (Secretary); Yvonne Cocking (Archivist); Tom Sopko (US Organizer); Deb Fisher; Jean Harker; Rose Little, Martin Rush, Chris Rutherford, Christine Shuttleworth, Alex Ward

Chairman's remarks: Clemence welcomed all to the 19th annual conference of the Barbara Pym Society, noting that a number of the founder members are still with us. She thanked Eileen Roberts, Yvonne Cocking, and Chris Rutherford for their sterling work in organising the conference, and also all the St Hilda's staff.

The loss of two long-time friends who, sadly, died this year was noted: one is Rita Brewer, who was at almost every UK BPS conference, while the second loss is that of Jeannette Molzer, a stalwart of the North American conference. Both of them will be greatly missed.

In March 2012 the BP 'birthplace' plaque was unveiled in Oswestry by Kate Charles. The notion of a plaque was carried through by the Revd Lawrence Garner; the Society is most grateful for all his efforts, and the plaque forms a most appropriate tribute to her.

Also in March, Clemence was amongst a record-breaking attendance at the North American conference, celebrating *Jane and Prudence.* Tom Sopko and his organising team produced a stimulating and convivial conference, including wonderful papers from Yvonne Cocking, Perri Klass, Charlotte Silver and Isabel Stanley.

In May, Clemence and Deb Fisher represented BPS at the AGM of The Alliance of Literary Societies, hosted in Nottingham by the Dickens Fellowship. Next year, BPS will be the host for this event at St Hilda's, on 1-2 June (i.e. The Birthday Weekeknd), replacing the usual London spring meeting. This event is not just for ALS delegates but for all ordinary members of all societies, including BPS. The planned programme centres on the Pym-Larkin connection and the so-called 'Oxford novel', with Professor James Booth from Hull as the keynote speaker.

The UK spring meeting also took place in May at St Alban's, Holborn. This included a sparkling talk from Estella Tincknell of UWE on the theme of 'Jane *or* Prudence', making us think about gendered roles then and now.

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Just a week later came the Queen's Park Literary Festival in London, where Elizabeth Proud (a former BPS Chair) organised a slot which allowed the society to bring Pym's work before the public. Sioned Wiliam gave a superb general talk, accompanied by readings from actors Jamie Newall and Elizabeth Proud herself. The day's highlight, however, was the chance to visit Barbara and Hilary's former home in nearby Brooksville Avenue. We are enormously grateful to the owners, Luke and Francis, for their hospitality, and the privilege of seeing this unique dwelling.

In June there was a Garden Fête in Cambridge, Massachusetts: these social occasions are enjoyed by all who attend, and they help foster and strengthen links of friendship within the Society.

Tom Sopko, Alex Ward, Martin Rush and Lorraine Mepham at the AGM

Clemence then thanked the Committee, without whose active help and support none of this could happen, including editor of *Green Leaves*, Martin Rush, and his editorial team. Alex Ward retires from the Committee this year, with many thanks. Special mention was made of Lloyd Miller, who has generously put in much time and talent to reshaping the Society's visual profile. Others, not currently serving Committee members, have provided help in various ways, especially Devon Allison, Linda McDougall and Michael Wilson.

Next year is the Centenary, and a number of events are planned: the North American conference in March ('100 years of Pym'); in June the ALS meeting at St Hilda's; and at the beginning of September the UK conference ('Remembering Barbara'). The weekend will include a visit to Finstock with a service in the parish church. In October, we hope BPS will participate in the Manchester Literature Festival thanks to Libby Tempest. As well as this we are planning souvenirs and media events which will greatly raise Pym's profile with the wider public. Clemence invited any other suggestions from members.

Apologies: Kathy Ackley, Hazel Bell, Iona Bennion Roberts, Eleonore Biber, Sheila and Mike Garforth, Hazel Holt, Maureen Lenk, Maria-Teresa Rivers, Stephen and Jean Shell, Marianna Stewart.

Minutes of the Previous AGM: the minutes had been circulated earlier in *GL* and were accepted without amendment.

Matters Arising: there were no matters arising.

Financial and Membership Report: Eileen Roberts reported that BPS UK membership stood at 258 members, 21 of which are overseas (but not US). The total includes 12 Joint Members, 12 Honorary Members, and 22 Life Members. The UK account stands at £7076 (up on £6498.70 at this time last year), although there are still some outstanding bills. The UK spring meeting made a profit of £132. The largest expense this year has been for the BP photos. Two issues of *GL* have cost £410, and postage costs were £160 for the year. The Oswestry plaque cost £150.

***Green Leaves**:* two issues of *GL* appeared in 2012. Thanks were offered to all contributors, to those who have helped to produce the issues, particularly Judy Horn, Tom Sopko and Christine Shuttleworth, and to all who have contributed photographs.

BPS in North America: Tom Sopko (US Organizer) presented a report on the activities of the North American Chapter of the BPS. The NAC has 185 members paid up, with an additional 68 currently in arrears. There are also 35 new members this year, approximately half of whom are seniors.

The bank balance stands at a healthy $11,892 (at the same time last year it was $7560); the increase includes donations, a significant profit from the 2012 NA conference, and $986 from the photo appeal.

The 2012 North American Conference in Boston was a great success; attendance was at capacity for the venue, and included many new faces, as well as old friends. Other events were covered by Clemence in her opening address.

The 2013 North American conference will be held at Harvard on 15-17 March, with the theme of '100 years of Pym'. Booking is likely to start in early December.

Archivist's Report: Yvonne Cocking reported that the Bodleian Library has now accepted some of the BP archive previously held by the Society, as reported in *GL*. This material includes copies of the novels, short stories, and adaptations (all copyright BP and BPS), BP's address book, her German vocabulary and her signed copy of Oxford University's Constitution, the score of *The Magic Diamond* (opera), and the page proofs of *GOB*. The Bodleian have also agreed to accept some correspondence post-dating BP's death, and will also consider further material from the BPS archive. Thanks to Linda McDougall's initiative we have started to scan albums of BP family photographs (the originals will eventually go to the Bodleian), and have various ideas of how these could be exploited during the Centenary.

Elections: Alex Ward is retiring after serving two terms as Ordinary Member. The Committee recommended the election of Linda McDougall to fill Alex's position. No other candidates were proposed, and Linda was elected with no objections.

AOB

Books from Blackwells sale: Roz Cleal continues to collate lists of BP's and HW's books bought at the Blackwells sale, with a view to publishing a list on the BPS website, and to curate a small exhibition of these books at the centenary UK conference.

Her email address is roz.cleal@googlemail.com, or rosamund.cleal@nationaltrust.org.uk.

The meeting closed at 12.35pm.

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Lady Farmer's Lilies: Some Problems of a Church Flower Arranger

by Tom Sopko

From Winifred Malory and Allegra Gray in *Excellent Women* arguing about where to put Lady Farmer's lilies on Whitsunday to the church flower festival described some thirty years later in *A Few Green Leaves*, Barbara Pym describes church flower arranging by deftly filling in the pertinent details of who, what, when, where, and how. She gets the details exactly right, not because she did painstaking research, but because she herself had participated in the activities described. She wrote in her diary on 31 August 1974:

> On the altar roses, carnations and little yellow chrysanthemums. Near the altar on a pedestal a sombre arrangement of Elisha's Tears, on the pedestal facing the congregation an arrangement of small yellow chrysanthemums and white daisies and yarrow gathered in the churchyard and arranged by a pensioner (me).

Who does the flowers is obvious – it is another task for the excellent women. Jane Cleveland sees 'two middle-aged ladies in tweed suits carrying bunches of dahlias' enter the church and thinks, 'An English scene... and a precious thing.' Wilmet's description of the Whitsunday preparations states that 'The only man present, apart from the clergy, was Jim Storry, a feeble-minded youth...'. As usual, the clergy don't count as actual men, and they provide encouragement but absolutely no practical assistance.

While it is obvious who does the work, it is not always so obvious who should be in charge. Usually the vicar's wife would be expected to take command, unless confronted by the likes of Miss Doggett, whose suggestion that Jane Cleveland might want to supervise the decorations for the harvest festival forced Miss Morrow to stifle a hoot of laughter:

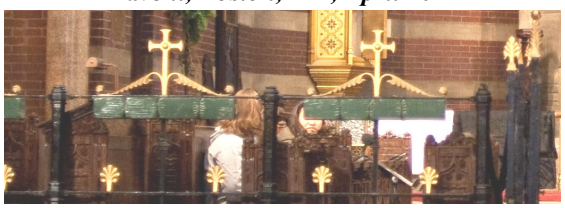
> Even Mrs Pritchard, the last vicar's wife, who had been a forceful woman, had been unable to depose Miss Doggett from her position as head of the decorators. Mrs Cleveland, as far as one could see, looked as if she would be neither desirous nor capable of doing any such thing.

While Jane knew that she had no aptitude for flower arranging, this was not the case with other clerical wives. In the short story 'So, Some Tempestuous Morn' Miss Morrow 'supposed she would have to go into the garden and pick some flowers for the church and then stand by while the vicar's wife arranged them more tastelessly than one would have thought possible'.

The situation is more complicated in churches with unmarried priests. The showdown between Winifred Malory and Mrs Gray leads Mildred to observe, 'I suppose it's really a question of whether a vicar's sister should take precedence over a vicar's widow. I don't imagine that books of etiquette deal with such refinements.' There was no such confusion in Tom Dagnall's church, as described in *A Few Green Leaves*. The indomitable Christabel G. – a worthy successor to Miss Doggett – left Tom's sister Daphne in tears, 'standing uselessly by a heap of greenery, waiting to be told what to do'.

Then there is the question of *when* there would be flowers, and of what sort. In Pym's Anglo-Catholic tradition, church flowers would range from none at all during Lent, to a few simple greens during Advent, to opulent decorations throughout the church on Easter and other major festivals.

Easter Decorating at the Church of the Advent, Boston, MA, April 2012



9:30 am Bars of floral foam attached to the screen

10:30 am Floral foam covered with foliage

12:30 pm Excellent Men and Women adding flowers

3:00 pm All done, ready for Easter vigil

Where in the church there would be flowers depends on local custom, the architectural setting, and the feast or liturgical season. There would usually be a pair of vases placed just behind the altar table or a single large pedestal arrangement off to one side, and the Lady Chapel and votive shrines might also be decorated with flowers. The screen, font, windows, side chapels, and entrance porch would be

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decorated for Christmas and Easter and perhaps at other times.

In *A Few Green Leaves* Christabel G. organizes a flower festival. Emma observed that, 'There had never been such a thing in the old days.' Later she thinks, 'It certainly did look lovely, though not quite like a church. The arrangements were too elaborate....' I think Barbara Pym was also at best ambivalent about the concept of a flower festival disconnected from the worship of the church.

Whether for a flower festival or for Easter, decorating the whole church takes a lot of flowers and foliage. In the country the material could come from people's gardens, the churchyard, and the nearby hedgerows and fields. Because of their larger scale and soaring gothic architecture, cathedrals and large Victorian churches require more and bigger flowers than a small country church, and in urban parishes people's gardens would be small or nonexistent, requiring the purchase of at least some of the flowers. Pym looked askance at this; she often described flowers from a florist as 'expensive' or 'extravagant'. In her diary for 31 August 1974 she wrote:

> The flower festival at Standlake was this same Saturday afternoon; so magnificent were the flowers all in the different colours, but they had cheated a little by buying carnations. We got all ours from our own garden.

Finally, there is the question of *how* the arrangements are made. Mildred speaks of potted meat jars attached to the screen and wire racks on the window sills to hold the flowers. Such devices, along with assorted vases filled with wire mesh, pebbles, or moss to hold the stems in place, were used for generations. Now Oasis® floral foam, invented in 1954, allows flowers to be placed on window ledges and pew ends, attached to ironwork, and hung on the walls, and facilitates sweeping pedestal arrangements.

Pym seems to have found the new style a bit ostentatious; we read in *An Academic Question*:

> My mother [bustled] about with the sheafs of flowers and branches which she began to put in the vases in the same sort of floral arrangement style I had noticed at Esther Clovis's memorial service.

Those funeral flowers are described as 'a striking arrangement of carnations and delphiniums, of the type often seen in the foyer of an expensive block of flats or an advertising agency'.

I don't know if Barbara would approve of the flowers in my church in Boston, or would find them too elaborate and flashy for her taste, but certainly she would be happy to see a rota of devoted women and men doing the arranging. And I am quite certain that if she showed up some Saturday morning with an armload of delphiniums, she would fit right in.

***Tom Sopko**, North American Organizer for the Barbara Pym Society, has been doing the flowers at the Church of the Advent (Episcopal) in Boston for over twenty years. He has been director of the flower arranging guild at the church since 2004, and in 2009 his work was featured in* Church Flowers: The Essential Guide to Arranging Flowers in Church *by London floral designer Judith Blacklock.*

St Hilda's Garden in the 1930s

by Margaret Rayner

In *Jane and Prudence,* Barbara Pym begins her novel with a pair of old students walking in a college garden which sounds very much like that of St Hilda's. Another St Hilda's old student, Eleanor Rohde, writing in the early 1930s, said: 'Naturally everyone thinks their own college has the most beautiful gardens', and St Hilda's, with its waterway and views of Merton and within the sound of all the bells, is, I think, the loveliest, although the smallest, of the women's college gardens. Seen from the river, part of St Hilda's South garden is a miniature vision of spring - the violet, mauve, pale yellow and white of the irises, the rock gardens with violas, thrift, phlox, aubretias, rock roses, London Pride and forget-me-nots, the poppies and, in the background, the brooms, and to the left the orchard with buttercups, sorrel and a white mist of cow parsley.

College gardens certainly generate nostalgia in old students, but they also create problems, and St Hilda's had its share. Students in residence were always concerned about adequate places for sport. A site was needed for a chapel. The Council had the constant worry about how to maintain and keep secure a garden on two sites. The underlying problems were lack of space and the way in which the College grew.

St Hilda's was founded in 1893 by Dorothea Beale in a house called Cowley House. It had a garden with an extraordinary interest, not because of its plants but because of its original owner and his son. Cowley House was built by Dr Humphry Sibthorp, Professor of Botany from 1747 until 1783. Part of his duties as Professor of Botany was responsibility for the Physic Garden. Part of the remuneration for the Professor of Botany was a large house between the Physic Garden and the road, opposite Magdalen College. By 1772, it was known that Magdalen Bridge was to be pulled down and replaced by a much wider one. The Professor's house was in the way and now had to be demolished. The University was prepared to replace it, but maybe not quickly enough. Dr Sibthorp had remarried and, in addition to his earlier large family, he now had a son John. In 1775 Dr Sibthorp built a grand house looking across to the Broad Walk in Christ Church Meadow and within sight of the Botanic Garden. It was said that he intended it as a residence for his successors as Professors of Botany; however, the gift was never made.

John Sibthorp followed his father into medicine; in 1780

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his mother died, leaving him an immense fortune. He went to Europe and became interested in the recent developments in the study of botany which had taken place there. He returned to Oxford in 1783 and persuaded his father to resign his Chair of Botany in his favour. John was just 25. He now took over Cowley House but almost immediately went off on a tour of Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean which lasted five years. He collected a vast number of plants which were new to Western Europe and it was the publication of his discoveries which made him famous. On his return to Oxford in 1787, he lived in Cowley House for seven years.

In 1794, Sibthorp was off again travelling through Europe and Greece, but he became ill and returned to Oxford just a year later. He died in 1796. He was only 37. John Sibthorp left all but one of his estates to his father. The remaining estate went to the University of Oxford to pay for the publication of his great book *Flora Graeca* and then endow a Chair of Rural Economy which still bears his name.

In 1843, Cowley House was bought by Dr Tuckwell, who showed considerable interest in the garden. He believed that the lilac bush had been planted by John Sibthorp. On his last journey to Greece, Sibthorp found lilac growing wild in what is now Romania. So it is possible that seeds from Romania were cultivated by Sibthorp in the garden of Cowley House although, as H. W. Lack (who recently wrote of this rediscovery of lilac) commented, if John Sibthorp planted the seeds, he did not live long enough to see them flower.

When Miss Beale bought Cowley House in 1893, she did not buy the buildings near Milham Ford. The consequences of that decision were very unfortunate, creating a problem which was not resolved for almost 70 years.

After the First World War, St Hilda's was desperate for more accommodation; in 1920, it acquired a large house nearby in Cowley Place, but separated from it by a school next to Milham Ford. St Hilda's had two gardens on two sites separated by a City school and access to a ford. The land separating the two sites was finally acquired by St. Hilda's in 1958.

Margaret Rayner *was Fellow and Tutor in Mathematics at St Hilda's College and is now an Emeritus Fellow. She is author of* The Centenary History of St Hilda's College, Oxford *(1993) and has spoken to the BPS on 'Oxford Students in Revolt' (*Green Leaves*, Autumn 2009).*

Jane or Prudence? Career versus Domesticity in the 'Age of Marriages'

by Estella Tincknell

The period of Barbara Pym's early success precisely spans the 'long 1950s', coming to an abrupt end in 1963 with the rejection of *An Unsuitable Attachment* by Pym's regular publisher, Jonathan Cape. This action came appositely at precisely the cultural moment pinpointed by Pym's friend, Philip Larkin, as the point when 'the Sixties' actually began: 'between the end of the Chatterley ban and the Beatles' first LP'. However, from being perceived as a quaintly old-fashioned novelist incapable of articulating female desire in the context of a newly 'permissive' society, Pym has since emerged as a writer whose approach to gender and sexuality is in some ways more complex than that of her more fashionable peers whose embrace of the 'sexual revolution' now looks relatively uncritical. Here is a writer whose early success coincides with the cultural moment of the nuclear family, yet whose writing consistently distances itself – and us as readers – from the nuclear ideal and heterosexual romance. Here too is a writer whose placing of the unmarried woman at the centre of her novels gently but firmly reminds us that female identity is only problematically and contingently tied into romantic love and the idea of marital fulfilment.

The post-war period saw enormous social shifts produced by the establishment of the welfare state combined with a renewed emphasis on tradition (represented most powerfully by the monarchy), features described by Alison Light and Janice Winship as central to the development of a national narrative of 'conservative modernity' which characterised the United Kingdom during these years. In this formation, the 'shock of the new' is finely balanced by the persistence of established conventions and habits. Crucially, the ideal of the 'modern' companionate marriage became central to a new economy of desire in which reproductive sexuality was foregrounded and the median age at which couples married went down. Such changes articulated the ideological assumption that monogamous heterosexuality and the nuclear family were 'natural', that they presented the best basis for social organization, and that they offered emotional and psychological fulfilment for women in particular in their roles as mothers and wives. 'The age of marriages' thus spanned the years from the end of the Second World War to the 1960s and the impact of second-wave feminism and sexual permissiveness. Pym's early work stands at the apex of that encounter between the modern and the traditional, public and private, and masculinity and femininity which

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'conservative modernity' describes, and itself offers a rich combination of conservatism and modernism in both content and style.

During this period the expanding opportunities for paid work women were encountering had to be balanced against the cultural insistence on homemaking as the primary feminine career, and women who married were required to be 'modern' in their approach to domesticity yet 'traditional' in their acceptance of the role of housewife. While the youthful 'career girl' featured in this national narrative as a glamourised cultural figure who seemed to demonstrate the successful and – importantly – the wholly temporary entry of women into the economic realm (since she would leave most jobs upon marriage), her older counterpart (perhaps her older *self*) was represented either as a hard-faced harridan or a dowdier and more abject figure: the spinster. To be an unmarried woman over 30 in the 'age of marriages' was to be an implicitly unnatural and marginal person hovering, embittered and sexually frustrated, on the edges of the nuclear ideal. The spinster was frequently held personally responsible for her misfortune in not catching a husband (she just hadn't tried hard enough), yet the active expression of desire was cast as the preserve of masculinity. At the same time, the double standards that operated around sexuality and social mores ensured that to be an unmarried (heterosexual) man in the post-war period was conventionally represented as an enviable source of freedom from feminine banalities and the restrictions of domesticity, as Kingsley Amis's novels attest. These assumptions shaped much of the mainstream literary and popular culture of the period which also reinforced the 'compulsory' nature of reproductive heterosexuality. In contrast, Barbara Pym's novels make space for identities and relationships which, while hardly counter-cultural, do not conform to these norms. Her spinsters and single women speak from within and about the marginalised position they occupy, yet do so with a degree of ironic detachment that calls into question the dominant sexual ideology of post-war life.

Indeed, far from failing to engage with post-war social change, as Cape's rejection suggested, Pym's novels offer an astute eye on 1950s youth culture (in *A Glass of Blessings* Wilmet Forsyth visits a Soho coffee bar) and on London's emergent cosmopolitanism during the same period (the 'continental' bistros and Cypriot restaurants enjoyed by a number of Pym heroines). Pym is also probably one of the few white British novelists writing in the late 1950s and early 1960s to recognise and reflect on the presence of non-white post-war immigrants (the 'Lonely Londoners' identified by novelist Samuel Selvon). Pym's novels also repeatedly suggest that the post-war marriage and the emotional labour women were supposed to put into it were really too much trouble to bother with. Marriage is rarely offered as the conventionally happy ending (it is, at best, a settlement of resignation, as in *Excellent Women*) and the marital relationships she depicts are frequently compromises in which the cheerful acceptance of intimacy is often countered by regret. Furthermore, the ambivalence about the value of sexual desire found in her characters seems somehow to be expected, given the many romantic disappointments Pym's spinster heroines must deal with through the wry humour and a sense of absurdity that renders everyday life a comic performance.

Yet the camp qualities which are discernible in Pym's writing are not simply a matter of this performative approach to identity or even to her arch linguistic register. The presence of sympathetic and minutely well-drawn (if somewhat coded) gay male characters such as Piers and Keith in *A Glass of Blessings* together with the foregrounding of decidedly 'butch' female characters such as Sister Blatt and Esther Clovis also contribute to such a reading. Virtually all of Pym's male characters are, after all, in their different ways 'a bit queer'; from the improbably hyper-masculine and desirable Rocky Napier in *Excellent Women* (whose name now seems to tie him to that other bravura example of 1950s queer masculinity, Rock Hudson) to the fey, china-collecting housekeeper-turned-teashop-owner Wilfred Bason and the cryptically asexual 'Noddy' Forsythe in *A Glass of Blessings*, as well as the apparently avowedly confirmed bachelor Neville Forbes in *No Fond Return of Love*. This thread of campness, expressed through characters and tone, helps to clear discursive space for the problematization of marriage and the foregrounding of alternative networks of relationships. Indeed, notwithstanding the period's dominant ideology of compulsory heterosexuality Pym's gay young men and ageing queens are to be found throughout the institutional structures of British post-war society: the Church, the civil service, even the military. Furthermore, the social fabric of everyday life in Pym's universe is managed not by the idealised nuclear family but by the networks of church-going spinsters and unmarried office workers who inhabit its margins. The books are, therefore, conservative, but very far from enthusiastic endorsements of the dominant values of their age.

In this regard, *Jane and Prudence* offers a wittily incisive sketch of the career options open to women in its two protagonists: one a vicar's wife whose housewifely endeavours are only reluctantly exercised while the opportunity to 'meddle' in church affairs offers intellectual temptation, the other a self-identifying (but deluded) 'career girl' whose ambitions are, in fact, more or less fixated on getting a man – the dismally unromantic Arthur Grampian. The dilemmas faced by both Jane and Prudence *stage* the underlying problem of social identity for women during the post-war years, when paid work for women rarely offered the economic or professional security men enjoyed – least of all the glamour of a 'career'; while domestic life was dominated by repetitive and unrecognised manual and emotional labour and by a social role defined almost entirely in relation to a husband's occupation. While neither Jane nor Prudence offers a feminist critique of the stark choices they face, nor do they submit willingly and uncomplainingly to the social expectations they encounter. For both, their friendship is in many respects the most enduring and most important aspect of their lives. For, while Prudence has invested considerably in that idealised image of herself as a 'career girl', the novel's ironic voice makes it clear that she actually sees marriage as an escape from the dreariness of her work. She also depends on Jane rather than any boyfriend for emotional support. Jane, on the other hand, cannot identify a useful outlet for her real talents as a literary scholar and must content herself with the

unsatisfactory and unending duties of a vicar's helpmeet. She does this with a much more sceptical and resistant attitude towards the marriage ideal than Prudence, and in her refusal of the role of domestic manager achieves much greater personal freedom than her friend. Indeed, Jane's resistance to domesticity carries with it the social modernity of 1920s feminism, pointed up by Prudence's ambition to be part of the 'age of marriages'. Prudence's anxiety about her marital status is the source of much of the book's melancholically tinged comedy; and Pym's writing, both in this novel and elsewhere, is consistently acerbic and subversive about the social prescriptions which structure women's lives. It is the empathetic exploration of Jane's and Prudence's dilemmas which takes us to the heart of the novelist's refusal simply to reify the binary of 'fulfilled' housewife and mother versus 'ambitious but sexually frustrated' career woman or 'dowdy spinster' that dominated the post-war period's representation of femininity (although it must be confessed that Miss Trapnell and Miss Clothier, Prudence's colleagues at the 'cultural institution' where she works, undoubtedly do conform to the latter stereotype).

Such discursive binaries around housewifely skills and career ambition are, then, underpinned by a deeper struggle over the production of an autonomous female identity in relation to the changing social landscape against which the novels are set. While Prudence must learn the self-knowledge that Jane exhibits, many of Pym's single women are wryly detached observers of the supposedly companionate marriage, aware that while it is cast as the 'solution' to frustrated sexual desire it may also further compromise their limited social autonomy. Barbara Pym's stories carefully trace the complex relationship between these binaries through their witty rehearsal and refutation of a pathologised femininity. They help to question the dominant idea of the 1950s as a period in which heterosexual marriage and the family were an unproblematic social good, and remind us that struggles around gender identity, desire and social freedom are ongoing. If Pym's gently subversive spinsters could be seen as quaint and old-fashioned in 1963 at the end of the 'long 1950s' and the beginning of a social and sexual revolution, they seem now to present us with a remarkably contemporary critique of both the uncertainties of marriage and the rewards of career. Like Pym, instead of choosing *between* Jane and Prudence, we can instead recognise the limitations of both with comic fortitude.

Estella Tincknell *is Associate Professor in Film and Culture at the University of the West of England. She has published widely in the areas of gender, ageing and representation, popular television and cinema, film and musical performance, and adaptation. Two of her co-written journal articles – one on* Big Brother, *the other on lads' magazines – have been in the 'top ten' of most frequently downloaded sources from their respective journals, and the former has become a canonical text on courses on reality TV. Estella has been a contributor to BBC4's* The Cinema Show, *BBC Radio 4* Woman's Hour, *BBC Radio Wales*, *and BBC Radio 4* From Jane Austen to Carrie Bradshaw: Single Women in Fiction.

The Spring Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society, St. Albans Centre, London, March 2012

by Rose Little

I set off for the St. Alban's Centre confidently, airily refusing the map my husband proffered, saying, 'I've been there before' – and then absent-mindedly stepped off the tube at Holborn instead of Chancery Lane. Thirty five minutes later I arrived to find the committee meeting was on the top floor. But there was a lift – and in church! (Wilmet would have been as surprised as when she heard the telephone ringing in St.Luke's.) I finally met up with other Pym people, and after my second cup of coffee I began to hear what the chairman was saying.

We mingled at an excellent lunch consisting of a variety of sandwiches (including a vegan option), cake and fruit, choice of wine and juice and lashings of tea and coffee. Old friends met and there was also the opportunity to talk to people we had only met electronically up to now on the Facebook Pym page! And then we settled down to hear Estella Tincknell, Associate Professor of Film and Culture at the University of the West of England, who had come to speak on 'Career versus Domesticity' in Barbara Pym's work.

Comparing notes at tea afterwards, people agreed that Estella's talk had been both high-powered and delivered at some speed. She had had a lot to material to include in the allotted time. As Barbara herself pointed out in *An Academic Question*, 'It is the aim of every speaker to have it subsequently recorded that 'a lively discussion followed'' – which is exactly what happened here too. And, just as in *AAQ*, the start was hesitant, but then the questions came in thick and fast. Many comments, including those from the speaker herself, added to the talk and gave us more to ponder on!

The full title of her talk was 'Jane or Prudence, Career Choices in an Age of Marriage', and in it Estella showed us

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both how Barbara's approach to sexuality in her novels was much more complex than that of her contemporaries and how her novels 'distance us' from the nuclear family ideal.

The new family model in the 1950s differed from the pre-war model, where husband and wife each remained strictly in their own spheres – the 1950s boasted shared interests, with the couple staying in together in the evenings. BP makes fun of this in *Less Than Angels*, for example, when Catherine humorously counters Tom's comment that they don't share interests (as he and Deirdre do) with, 'No, I suppose we didn't sit by the fire in the evenings doing fretwork'. Barbara continues the joke when Catherine wonders whether she and Alaric were 'perhaps to spend long evenings reading extracts from wine lists to each other'.

In *Excellent Women*, it would seem Mildred is heading for a pre-war model of servitude with plenty of typing and housework, and indeed, later (in *LTA* again) we are shown that she is expected to type out the essays in the collection her husband is organising. However, a subsequent novel mentions that Everard and Mildred have been 'in the field' together in Africa, so her life has its share of excitement after all and is more like a 21st century model. Mildred achieves with Everard the life that Helena would have liked, although anthropology is not Mildred's interest.

'Jane *or* Prudence' – Estella used the novel's title, changing it to focus our attention on this aspect of Barbara's work. Home *or* career, that was a choice people had to make in the post-war years. Barbara looks at the results of these choices – for example, in *J&P* she shows us that Jane, choosing marriage above the academic career she could have had, is happy with Nicholas, but her passion for her husband is nevertheless largely unrequited. Prudence (said by Barbara to be the character she most resembles) has a job, as opposed to a career, but seems to relish having a continuous series of love affairs. Eleanor Hitchens enjoys a comfortable spinster life as a successful business woman.

However, in *No Fond Return of Love* Laurel's friend, Marian, reprimands Dulcie when she refers to 'career women', telling her that it is 'rather an old-fashioned way of putting it (as) one takes it for granted nowadays that women have careers'. Things have evidently moved on, though not perhaps for women of Dulcie's generation. Dulcie feels the divide, for she says that as soon as she met Marian, she knew she 'was an aunt, old, finished.'!

Estella put Barbara Pym's novels into the context of post-war reassessment of family and relationships for us, pointing out that the major difference between Barbara and other writers of the time was her comic irony. She creates a space for us to consider conventional marriage – where is woman's place? Like other Pym enthusiasts, with so much stimulating food for thought in Estella's excellent talk, I went home to consider all her novels in this light.

We would like to thank all the many people, BPS members and others, who have contributed their photographs to this edition of Green Leaves.

The committee at the AGM

Around Barbara Pym's table after dinner

Rita Brewer
A Postscript from Steve Brewer

Steve Brewer would like to add the following post-script to the obituary of his mother, Rita, which was published in the last issue of Green Leaves. *It includes some interesting information about Rita's family background, which perhaps none of us suspected. The mention of Rita's facility in English literature is also revealing, given her later interests!*

My mother Rita Brewer was born in Mile End Old Town, Stepney, now Tower Hamlets, in 1926. Her mother Florence Millman came from Cambridge, and her father was a pogrom refugee from Odessa, Russian Empire, now Ukraine. She never thought of herself as having Ukrainian roots, but always talked of our earlier family being Russian Jews.

As a child she moved all over London with my grandmother – Ilford, Crouch End and Tottenham. After the war she came back to Shepherd's Bush from Devon. From there she worked in the Isle of Wight and with a touring light orchestra. After she married, she settled in South London, but even when married she managed to get out and meet people like Lance Percival and Ray Ellington from the Goon Show in various clubs.

Her venture in night school was like a liberation for her, and she was amazed how easily she achieved top grades in English Language and English Literature.

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Contributing to ALSo, the magazine of the Alliance of Literary Societies

Calling all BPS members! If you find Barbara Pym's humour one of her most delightful characteristics, please share your insights with other potential readers by writing a short article for ALSo, the annual magazine of the Alliance of Literary Societies. **The length of the article should be about 1000 words, and the deadline is 1 December 2012.**

The ALS is the UK umbrella organisation for literary societies, run entirely by volunteers each of whom also belongs to another society (or societies). Its aim is to provide a forum for discussing matters of common interest, exchanging news, and seeking advice: often this most usefully avoids the need to reinvent the wheel for oneself. A conference every year (open to *all* who belong to the 125 or so member societies) gives attendees the chance to sample the wares of organisations devoted to writers ranging from Austen to Yonge, via Waugh, Wodehouse and Wordsworth. Next year the Barbara Pym Society will host the ALS conference at St Hilda's College Oxford, on 1--2 June 2013.

The ALS publishes newsletters, advice pamphlets, and a magazine called ALSo. Each year this is devoted to a specific theme; and the Editor, Linda Curry, is always on the lookout for articles from member societies. For 2013, the topic is 'humour in literature'. Linda suggests some angles on this:

- How an author expresses their humour in their writing – is it obvious, subtle, dark?
- How might the use of humour convey a particular message, especially a potentially controversial one (e.g. protesting about political, humanitarian, cultural, or gender issues)?
- Using parody – a classic being the writings of Thomas Love Peacock.
- How humour can not only be constructive but also destructive.
- The particular type of humour associated with the 'gothic novel'.

She concludes, 'As always, the theme is broad – open to many forms of interpretation and the above are just some ideas. Would someone from your society be willing to contribute a piece for the journal – of around 1,000 words?'

Pym's understated humour is one of her most appealing qualities, so please do make Pym's centenary year one in which a Pym-related paper again appears in ALSo. (See this year's ALSo for an article by Chris Rutherford on 'Buying Clothes in 1930s Oxford'.) The deadline for the 2013 edition is 1 December 2012. Linda Curry can be contacted by email at: l.j.curry@bham.ac.uk, or by post to 59 Bryony Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4BY, United Kingdom.

Barbara Pym Centenary Conference Advance Notice and Call For Papers

Friday 12 July, 2013
University of Central Lancashire, Preston,
Lancashire PR1 2HE, UK
www.uclan.ac.uk
Contact: Dr Nick Turner, NTurner4@uclan.ac.uk

Conference

This one-day international conference will celebrate the achievement of Barbara Pym in the year that marks the 100th anniversary of her birth. The day will be a mixture of academic debate and a session with more informal discussion. Our keynote speaker will be the author Paul Binding, who wrote the introduction to the Virago edition of *No Fond Return of Love*.

We are seeking papers that discuss any aspect of Pym's writing and that may open up new avenues in scholarship. We also welcome anyone who would like to attend without presenting a paper.

We look forward to welcoming members of the Barbara Pym Society to what promises to be an intellectually stimulating, enjoyable and friendly event.

Call for Papers

Abstracts may consider, but are not limited to the following:

- Single women and widows in Pym
- Pym as a feminist
- Englishness
- Portrayal of Africa/Postcolonial readings
- Pym's London
- Literary influences (Austen, Compton-Burnett, and others)
- Friendship and correspondence with Philip Larkin
- Relationship to the middlebrow
- The comic novel; Pym's humour and irony
- Use of realism
- Portrayal of homosexuality
- The Church
- Comparison with other women writers of era (Margaret Drabble, Elizabeth Taylor, Iris Murdoch, and others).
- Tradition and modernity
- Pym's 'fragments'/Posthumous writing

Abstracts should be 250 words, accompanied by brief biographical details. Please send to Dr Nick Turner (NTurner4@uclan.ac.uk) by **28 February 2013**. Feel free to make contact before then with any general enquiries about the event, or about the topic you may wish to speak on.

Stop press!

Pym's books to be available in the US

We have heard on good authority that most of Barbara Pym's books will again be available in the US during the centenary year – and possibly the e-books too. It's too soon to give details, but this is welcome news. Watch the website for an announcement

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Lunch at the AGM

Lorraine Mepham, Maggie Parsons and Christine Shuttleworth

Yvonne Cocking giving the Archivist's Report

Pre-dinner drinks (Roger Phillips in the white suit)

Lorraine Mepham, Clemence Schultze and Eileen Roberts

Phil Bacon and Roz Cleal

Rehearsing for the traditional Pym reading

***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 Yvonne Cocking, 14 Southfield Drive, Sutton Courtenay, Oxon OX14 4AY.

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/check payable to The Barbara Pym Society.

Also available on Amazon.com

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New Choral Work for Pym Centenary

by Tom Sopko

The North American Chapter of the Barbara Pym Society has commissioned a new composition by Boston composer Rodney Lister in honour of the upcoming Pym centenary. The work, an anthem setting of 'God moves in a mysterious way', will have its world premiere at the service of Solemn Evensong and Benediction which will open the annual North American Conference on Friday 15 March 2013.

Rodney Lister

'God moves in a mysterious way' was Barbara's favourite hymn (and also Belinda Bede's). Barbara wrote in her journal on 13 April 1943, '[Hilary and I] began playing and singing hymns – and I remembered some things I'd forgotten, favourite bits and lines … and of course my dear old favourite "God moves in a mysterious way". But of *course*

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.'

The anthem will use the 1774 hymn text by William Cowper and musical motifs from the 1635 Scottish Psalter tune 'London New' which is associated with the text in the *English Hymnal* and many others. Copies of the anthem, for SATB choir and organ, will be available through the Society starting in February 2013 and may be downloaded and printed free of charge. It is hoped that the work can be performed in other places during the centenary year and thereafter; it would be particularly appropriate to have it sung in churches on Sunday 2 June 2013, Barbara's 100th birthday. Members of the Society are encouraged to suggest this to their church choirmasters.

Composer Rodney Lister received his early musical training at the Blair School of Music in Nashville, Tennessee. He received a Bachelor of Music degree, with honours, from the New England Conservatory of Music and his Master of Fine Arts from Brandeis University. Between his undergraduate and graduate studies he lived in England, where he studied privately with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and subsequently was a member of Davies's composition seminar at the Dartington Hall Summer School of Music. He was also a Bernstein Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center.

Rodney Lister is currently on the faculty of Boston University and the Preparatory School of the New England Conservatory, where he teaches composition, theory, and chamber music and is co-director of the annual contemporary music festival. He is also a music tutor at Pforzheimer House, Harvard University, and is on the faculty of Greenwood Music Camp. In addition to his work as a composer and teacher, he has performed and recorded as a pianist.

His more than 200 compositions include sacred and secular works for piano, voice, mixed chorus, and a wide variety of instrumental ensembles. His numerous vocal and choral works include settings of texts by W.H. Auden, William Blake, Shakespeare, John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, George Herbert, Wallace Stevens, Walt Whitman, Gertrude Stein, and e. e. cummings, as well as texts from the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer.

Pym people at an Italian restaurant on Sunday evening

The German Chapter of the BPS

Charles Gilbert and Michael Wilson

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Gleanings

The Virago reprints of Barbara Pym's novels have resulted in several press comments.

In 'Serpents in Suburbia', an article in *The Spectator* of 14 April 2012, Kate Saunders writes that 'Barbara Pym was never just a cosy writer. She could be barbed and sour – and seriously, hilariously funny'. In her introduction to this new edition of the novel, she quotes from a letter from Barbara to Philip Larkin in 1971. 'I have nearly finished the first draft of another novel about a provincial university told by the youngish wife of a lecturer. It was supposed to be a sort of Margaret Drabble effort, but of course it hasn't turned out like that at all.'

She adds that the novel was 'witty, sharp, light as a syllabub, nothing like anything by Margaret Drabble and with a cast of typically Pym-like English eccentrics'.

Margaret Drabble herself reviewed *An Academic Question* in *The Spectator* of 5 May.

'It is disconcerting to discover that a novelist a generation older than oneself has been trying to write "a sort of Margaret Drabble effort", even if the book "hadn't turned out like that at all" ... Pym mentions me several times in letters and journals, and I think I represented for her something in the spirit of the age... We met once, at the Malvern Writers' Circle in 1966, but I didn't know who she was. The last comment she made on my work was in 1979, when she wonderfully wrote that

> *the enrichment of my own novels may be suggested by my reading of the two latest [Drabble novels]. She gives one almost too much – but I give too little – laziness and unwillingness to do 'research' which doesn't seem to fit my novels.*

Yes, I do over-research, and how I wish we had met properly, with time to talk over these matters. One thing she and I share is an irresistible urge to quote poetry in our fiction, often quite inappropriately, a tendency she seems to have restrained in *An Academic Question*.'

Michael Deacon in *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 July, wrote:

> *As a nostalgist for times I never knew, I love Barbara Pym, who captured what I imagine to be the true England of the Fifties and Sixties with her unhappy comedies about prim spinsters and spineless bachelors. A novel of hers I haven't read,* An Academic Question*, was republished in May by Virago.*

On the same day, in an article on Prime Minister's Question Time in the Commons, Deacon also mentioned our heroine.

> *The Tory MP for Newton Abbot ... is a neat little pepper-pot of a woman. Her large spectacles, her loaf of brown hair, her dark blue blazer: she might be a provincial librarian, or a minor character in one of Barbara Pym's 1950s comedies about stiffly respectable women and their hopeless entanglements with hopeless men.*

On 27 July Val Hennessy wrote a short review of *Crampton Hodnet* in *The Daily Mail.*

> *Written in 1940, abandoned in a drawer, then first published in 1985, this is Pym at her absolutely funniest. Her characters are civilised, stifled, salt-of-the-earth types – absent-minded dons, vicars, dutiful wives, bossy spinsters, ex-public school students – all bursting with vague yearnings and unrequited passions ... Full of edgy wit and brilliant social comment, every page is a delightful treat.*

Jilly Cooper, a devoted fan of Barbara Pym, was quoted in 'Cuttings' (the Anthony Powell Society's equivalent of our 'Gleanings') in the Society's Summer Newsletter. 'Rereading is crucial ... Poetry I reread constantly ... With fiction I frequently reread Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* and Barbara Pym's *Jane and Prudence*.'

Sophie Duffy, the Devon-based author of *The Generation Game* and *This Holey Life*, blogged:

> *Why has it taken me all these years to read the magnificent Barbara Pym? I'd certainly heard of her, believed her to be a novelist who was of a certain era, one that has changed so much that she is no longer relevant. Well, I was most definitely ill-informed and it took a review, comparing* This Holey Life *to* Excellent Women*, to put me right.'*

Thanks to Sheila Kane, Linda McDougall, I. Roberts, Martin Rush and Michael Wilson for these contributions. Please send future 'Gleanings' to Yvonne Cocking (Yvcocking@aol.com).

Yvonne Cocking and her daughter Nicky Foy

Rita Phillips

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Diary of a Provincial Pymmite

by Clemence Schultze

On a pleasant Friday in May, head for Nottingham, where the AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies is to take place. Since I am starting from Durham, this requires three changes of train, which seems excessive. Small case loaded with copies of Pym publicity materials and books gets heavier each time I have to disembark, change platform, and re-embark. Am glad to leave it in hotel room and go out in search of the Castle Museum, where there is a stunning exhibition of Chinese textiles as well as a good art collection. Stay there until closing time, and then feel the call of coffee and cake. What I want is a continental *Konditorei*, with superb range of coffees and lavish selection of the kind of cake far too complicated to make oneself (who would ever essay a *Dobostorte* or a *Gâteau St Honoré*?) What I find is an Olde Englishe Tea Shoppe; waitress greets me with the news that They Will Close In Five Minutes, in tones of extreme satisfaction. Accordingly beat a retreat, reflecting, however, that I have been saved from needing to consume their sole offering, carrot cake – that most hypocritical of cakes, which masks its inherent inedibility under a pretence of Healthy Goodness.

The Alliance of Literary Societies is hosted this year by the Nottingham branch of the Dickens Fellowship. I have never been able to attend an ALS meeting before, so I get acquainted with their committee at a restaurant that evening and pick up some helpful ideas about the hosting role. This is good preparation for the 2013 meeting, to be held under the auspices of the Barbara Pym Society, at St Hilda's on 1-2 June. Next day, meet Deb Fisher, an old ALS hand, who is the official delegate for BPS as well as representing the Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship. The venue this current year is the wonderfully named Nottingham Mechanics Institution, founded in 1837 – but alas, no longer the same building in which Dickens in 1858 gave one of his famous readings. The welcome is warm, the business is rapidly expedited, and the lectures (on D. H. Lawrence and – of course – on Dickens) are all that could be expected. The lunch interval, however, reveals the depths of unscrupulousness to which keen lit. soc. members will sink. This is the opportunity for publicity and sales; all bring out their flyers, booklets and publications, and hustle for the meagre table space. There is no order, no assigned area, no compunction: Tennyson vies with Trollope, Benson with Betjeman. By re-positioning Richard Jefferies I win a scanty square foot for Pym, but return later to find that a society devoted to the writings of a certain clergyman – a body from whom one might expect Better Things – has wantonly placed their membership leaflets on top of ours. It is War to the Knife: I reverse the situation, stand guard over the Pymmian Patch, and manage to hand out several flyers.

The next day is our own spring meeting, so I leave ALS matters in Deb's hands, and hotfoot it to London. St Alban's offers its usual friendly welcome, and Estella Tincknell, sparking with energy, addresses the 'Jane *or* Prudence?' dilemma with incisive wit. Reflecting afterwards, decide that I tend to be one of nature's Janes – except insofar as regards meals. Have always totally agreed with Prudence about choosing some Specially Enjoyable Dish when one feels in need of cherishing.

Summer brings rain, more rain, and then rain again. Gaze out at garden, leaping to high heaven with lush green growth, and feel I can actually hear the shrieks of appreciation from snails and slugs. Further gazing reveals a round furry form nibbling away at my treasured parsley: an Urban Rabbit, no less – indeed, a Herb-Fed Young Wild Rabbit, fit basis for *Lapin Moutarde* or *Lapin au Vin*. But, First Catch Your Rabbit: good advice, which there's no hope of following.

Luckily, the rain more or less lets up for the BP Conference in Oxford, so that visits to 'the Physic Garden' and to Magdalen's gardens – befitting the year's theme – can take place without undue discomfort. The topic stimulates an excellent range of papers; surroundings and all accompaniments are most enjoyable; and of course there is the delight of meeting Pymmian fans and friends. One and all express their intention of coming to as many events as possible in 2013, on both sides of the pond. As the conference concludes, Countdown to Centenary really begins.

Conference dinner on Saturday

Triona Adams

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Coming Events

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

2013 North American Conference

The fifteenth annual North American conference will be held on 15–17 March 2013 at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
The theme is '100 Years of Pym'.

Oxford Literary Festival

There will be a Pym-related event as part of St Hilda's contribution to the Oxford Literary Festival. Biographer Ann Thwaite and her husband, poet Anthony Thwaite, will read selections from the Pym/Larkin letters (scheduled for the afternoon of Sunday 17 March). Anthony is one of the literary executors of Philip Larkin and the major editor of Larkin's work.

Alliance of Literary Societies on Barbara's Birthday

On 1–2 June 2013, the Barbara Pym Society will host the AGM of the ALS (an umbrella organisation for literary societies) in the Jacqueline Du Pré Building at St Hilda's. The main speaker is the renowned Larkin scholar, Professor James Booth, on 'Philip Larkin and Barbara Pym: An Elective Affinity'. All BPS members are very welcome to attend the meeting, the dinner, and the related activities. Booking forms will go out with the spring mailing of *Green Leaves*.

Finstock Local History Society

This takes place in Finstock Village Hall at 8 pm on 21 June 2013. Clemence Schultze will talk on 'Green Leaves versus Golden Pavements: Town and Country in the Novels of Barbara Pym', with readings by Yvonne Cocking and Martin Rush. Those who are not members of FLHS are welcome to attend (entrance fee £2.50).

Conference on Barbara Pym at the University of Central Lancashire

Please see page 10 for details and call for papers for this one day conference (12 July 2013), organised by Dr Nick Turner, author of *Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon (2010).*

2013 AGM and Centenary Conference

The BPS Annual General Meeting and Centenary Conference will be held at St Hilda's College, Oxford, on 30 August–1 September 2013. The theme is 'Remembering Barbara'. If you would like to contribute your memories of Barbara (either in person, or by means of a recording or video), please send an email by 10 January 2013 to barbarapymsociety@gmail.com, and include 'UK centenary proposal' in the subject line.

Library of Birmingham

Birmingham will gain state-of-the-art library and exhibition facilities when a £188.8 million project opens to the public on 3 September 2013. The official opening ceremony is part of a larger Discovery Festival, focussing on the new services and spaces of the Library of Birmingham. And Barbara Pym will be one of the featured writers, thanks to Maggie Parsons and Yvonne Cocking, who are collaborating on a dramatised reading of *An Unsuitable Attachment*, to be staged as part of the festival. Full details will appear in the next *Green Leaves*.

Manchester Literature Festival

We hope to have a well-known literary figure speaking on Pym in the course of the MLF, which runs from 7 to 20 October 2013. There will be more details in the next issue of *Green Leaves* and on the BPS website.

The Barbara Pym Society 2012-2013

Website: www.barbara-pym.org

E-mail: barbarapymsociety@gmail.com

On Facebook: search for "Barbara Pym Society"

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Board: Kathy Ackley, Barbara Boles, Donna Safreed, Denise Marois-Wolf, Sarah Saville Shaffer, Isabel Stanley

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BPS CENTENARY SHORT STORY COMPETITION

The competition is supported by a generous donation from Kelvin Carr in memory of his late wife Jean, a member of the BPS.

When the writer Barbara Pym (1913–1980) died, she left behind notebooks with plans for more novels and short stories. As we commemorate her centenary in 2013, we offer prizes totalling £375 to winners considered to have written a short story such as she might have written.

1st prize £150; 2nd prize £100; 3rd prize £50

Three other finalists will each receive £25. All winning stories will be published on the Barbara Pym website: www.barbara-pym.org

Closing date: 30 May 2013

Entries will be judged by a panel of readers, chaired by Kate Charles, crime novelist and former Chair of the Barbara Pym Society and The Crime Writers' Association.

COMPETITION RULES

YOUR ENTRY MUST BE IN THE STYLE AND MANNER OF A BARBARA PYM STORY

(1) Stories can be up to 2,200 words in length and can be on any subject.
(2) The winners will be contacted by email in August 2013; the winning names will be announced at the Barbara Pym Centenary Conference on 31 August 2013, and then posted on the BPS website www.barbara-pym.org. (No competitor will win more than one prize.)
(3) The winning stories will be published on the Barbara Pym website.
(4) Copyright of any story remains with the author, but Barbara Pym Society has the unrestricted right to publish the winning stories in its journal *Green Leaves*, on its website, and in any related material for PR purposes.
(5) The decision of the judging panel is final and no correspondence can be entered into.

ELIGIBILITY

(6) Stories should be in English and should not have been published or accepted for publication, including personal logs and web pages.
(7) Stories that have won or are under consideration in other short story competitions are not eligible.
(8) Stories should not be a translation of another author's work.
(9) You do not have to be a member of the Barbara Pym Society to be eligible.
(10) Members of the BPS Committee are not eligible to enter.

PRESENTATION

(11) Your entry will be judged anonymously, so do not put your name on the pages of your story. Use a separate cover page with name, address, phone number, email address, plus the title of the story you are submitting, and a word count.
(12) Please submit your work typed in 12 pt font, double-spaced on A4 or US Letter paper, single sided, with pages numbered and with the title of the story as a running header on every page. If submitting online, format it as a Word (.doc or .docx) *or* .rtf *or* .pdf file, and do not use your surname in the title of the file.
(13) No alterations may be made to a story once submitted. You may submit by email or post.

SUBMITTING AND PAYING ONLINE

Email your story to stories@barbara-pym.org by 30 May 2013; include the details stated under point (11) above in the body of your message, and please indicate whether you prefer to pay in sterling or US dollars. Attach your manuscript as a Word (.doc or .docx) or .rtf or .pdf file. We will send you a PayPal payment request for £7 or $10, which you may pay using a credit or debit card or a PayPal account. Multiple entries from the same author are permitted, but each must be submitted and paid for separately.

SUBMITTING BY POST, WITH CHEQUE PAYMENT

Mail your story to the address below by 30 May 2013; include the details stated under point (11) above on a separate cover page, format the manuscript as specified under point (12), and enclose a sterling cheque for £7.00, drawn on a UK bank and made out to 'Barbara Pym Society'. Multiple entries from the same author are permitted, but each must be submitted and paid for separately.

BP Comp c/o D Fisher
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United Kingdom

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