Green Leaves

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

North American Conference of the Barbara Pym Society (21–23 March 2014)

by Ann and Dan DiPietro

The 16th Annual Barbara Pym Society's North American Conference began on a cold March night with drinks *and* good cheer at the lovely historic Church of the Advent in Boston's Beacon Hill. Old friends and new feasted on a buffet dinner of grilled salmon, stuffed pork roast, roasted vegetables and crispy salads in the candlelit Parish Hall. A rousing 'Pym Sing' followed upstairs in the Church sanctuary. Enthusiastic members shouted out their requests from the *Pymnal* – a collection put together by Tom Sopko of hymns referred to in the writings of Pym. With many fine singers in the group, this was a spectacular opening to what was to be a most spectacular weekend.

Early the next morning the lucky participants gathered – because of space limits, registration closed early in February when the one-hundredth person enrolled, so everyone present did indeed feel lucky. After a light breakfast, a bevy of excellent men and women marched into the main meeting room of Harvard University's Barker Center to be welcomed by the Pym North American Organizer, the affable Kathy Ackley.

The first presenter was Beverly Bell, long-time friend and member of the Society. Beverly explicated the opening chapter of *Excellent Women*. Calling on her skills as an editor and stylist, Beverly compared original texts and manuscript corrections that she had found at the Bodleian Library with the help of the much-esteemed Pym archivist Yvonne Cocking. It was a fascinating exercise that left everyone with a greater appreciation of Pym's writing and editorial skills. Hope Howell Hodgkins followed Bell with an analysis and slide presentation of the clothing of postwar England, and in particular those styles worn by the characters Mildred, Allegra Gray, and Helena in *Excellent Women*.

After a delicious luncheon – so hard to decide which box to choose: mozzarella with tomato and pesto, ham with honey mustard, grilled vegetables, roasted chicken? – the afternoon took off with a stimulating presentation by Orna Raz, 'Not Really First in Anybody's Life – The Friendship Between Mildred and Dora', but not limited to these two: friendships of all sorts in *Excellent Women* were covered. Very thought-provoking, indeed!

The audience was then treated to a wonderful, wonderful experience: the viewing of Linda McDougall's video *Remembering Barbara*. Linda had shown this at the centenary celebration at St Hilda's last summer, but this was a recently edited and updated version with the inclusion of an introduction and commentary by the renowned actress and Pym fan Miriam Margolyes. Linda interviewed Pym's friends and acquaintances (Prue Anderton, Frances Atkin, Yvonne Cocking, Luke Gertler, Francis Guilfoyle, Hazel Holt, Adrian Nicholls and Richard Roberts), which is an important and daunting task when you remember that Pym was born one hundred years ago. But Linda has done an incredible job not just in assembling these people, but in getting them to reveal their feelings – vivid and powerful and angry and, yes, at times, heartbreaking. Each of those interviewed had unforgettable stories, and McDougall brilliantly captured it all in this video.

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Triona Adams, actress, writer, and theatrical agent, followed with an extraordinary presentation on the narrative voice in *Excellent Women*. No one who heard this lecture can ever read Pym again without recalling Adams's insights. The afternoon ended with a sherry party that left everyone quite mellow and reflective. A few hours later, an Italian buffet dinner at Wasserstein Hall – a short walk from the Barker Center – began and lasted well into the night with lively conversations at each and every table.

The next morning, many of those excellent men and women returned to Barker for coffee and cake before listening to new member Amaret Johnson playfully recounting the volcanic joys of Hawaiian Fire lipstick and the mundane pleasures of potato peelings. The last in a series of unbelievably excellent presentations was Triona Adams's dramatization of 'Dear Mr Larkin, Dear Miss Pym', based on letters between the two edited by Adams. Playing Larkin was noted stage and screen actor Jack Gilpin. There was many a tear shed by members of the audience as the letters drew to a close with Pym's death.

Jack Gilpin and Triona Adams, as Philip Larkin and Barbara Pym

Spirits lifted with the singing of Tom Sopko's parody of 'Unsuitable Things', featuring all things Pym. A lavish mimosa brunch followed and a few hours later the conference concluded. An excellent, excellent weekend filled with good times and superb presentations!

We would like to thank Sherrie Saint John for her photographs in this edition of Green Leaves.

A Close Look at Chapter One of *Excellent Women*

by Beverly Bell

With *Excellent Women*, Barbara Pym offers us a splendid example of a strong opening chapter. Through carefully crafted dialogue and Mildred's observations and asides, Pym packs Chapter One with her major themes: 'things', clothing, housekeeping, spinsterhood, the church, and anthropology. When the chapter closes, we care about Mildred – described by John Updike as 'one of the last of the great narrating English virgins' – and we want to keep reading.

To prepare this paper, I needed to look at drafts of *Excellent Women*, so Yvonne Cocking and Eileen Roberts helped me gain access to the Bodleian Library. The draft I focused on, dated 19 February 1949, is headed 'No life of one's own', and has two other notations: 'Spinster without ties … Inquisitive, willing to help others' and 'the time the novel begins is February 1946'.

I also looked at letters, essays, side notes, and the little notebooks Pym kept from 1948 through 1952. As an editor myself, I hoped this research would help me understand what makes Pym's novels so funny, so real, so comforting. I have no clear answers, but a close look at Chapter One of *Excellent Women* hints at how she did her work.

One reason behind Pym's success as a novelist was her ability to edit her own writing – which she also loved doing. Someone said that all good comedy is basically serious, and subjects such as religion, anthropology, and certainly love can be made comical because they *are* so serious. Yet it is the exactness of Pym's words that creates much of the humor and sets the tone of *Excellent Women*. The critic Annette Weld points out that the irony that identifies a Pym novel isn't related to the plot but instead to dialogues and internal observations. Thus readers 'must observe in addition to scenes, the impact of single sentences, even single words'.

In Chapter One, most of the major characters have a role. Mildred and Helena are in the spotlight, and we learn how widely they differ. Rocky, Dora, and Winifred and Julian Malory are referred to and Everard Bone briefly appears. Even Mrs Gray is waiting in the wings at the end.

The chapter opens outside Mildred's building, with Mr Mallett teasing her about eyeing the van containing the new neighbors' belongings. The action continues inside, with lots of moving about on the staircase. At intervals along the way, Mildred tells us that she is single, in her early 30s, and a clergyman's daughter; how she came to London, roomed

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with Dora, and worked at the Censorship; and why she chose St Mary's.

In the draft, the chapter opens with Mildred and Helena in the basement. No 'jewel' is mentioned, but Mildred learns that Mr Napier has the 'dignified' name of Rockingham. Pym rewrote the section, making it much livelier.

Other wording in the draft that Pym changed include descriptions of Mildred as 'plump' and Helena as 'dark and in well-tailored slacks'. Helena declares she is 'not domestic' (rather than a 'slut'), and Mildred worries that she herself might not buy toilet paper that meets Rocky's approval. Helena is also too nice in the draft, so Pym sharpens her tongue. This was not the first time for such changes. In a 1945 notation in the *Some Tame Gazelle* papers, she wrote herself this reminder: 'Go over all the characters and make them worse – as Proust did.'

Mildred's wit and intelligence are clear-cut, but we also see her vulnerable side: her love for the church, her fond childhood memories, and her friendship with the Malorys. She also seems to be affected by Helena's unkind remarks, though she is quick to blame herself.

In Mildred, Pym has created what writer Susan Lumenello calls a 'resonant' character: we can imagine her having a life off the page – or being in another novel. By the end of Chapter One, we sense that life will change for Mildred over the course of *Excellent Women*. So we keep reading.

Beverly Bell *has been a member of the Barbara Pym Society since 1999. She worked as a financial research editor on Wall Street for 25 years and is now a freelance editor in New York City. She has a particular interest in Pym's style of writing and her techniques as a story teller. This technical side of Pym first intrigued Beverly in the 1990s when she began comparing the French translations of Pym's novels against the originals and found that much of the humor had been lost in translation, leading her to closely examine what it is that sets Barbara Pym apart.*

John Updike, *Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism*. (NY: Knopf, 1983) 520.

MS Pym 14 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, contains the draft that I refer to and quote from in this paper.

Annette Weld, *Barbara Pym and the Novel of Manners*. (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1992) 101.

Robert J Graham, 'The Narrative Sense of Barbara Pym' in *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*. Ed. Dale Salwak. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987) 154.

Susan Lumenello, 'Barbara Pym's Lessons for the Fiction Writer', *Green Leaves* 13/1 (May 2007) 4–8.

Joanne Garrahie, Ellen Pawlik, Linda Von Imhof

The Spinster's Natural Clothing: Postwar Styles in *Excellent Women*

by Hope Howell Hodgkins

Philip Larkin saw *Excellent Women* as 'a study of the pain of being single, the unconscious hurt the world regards as this state's natural clothing. … one senses not only that Mildred is suffering, but that nobody can see why she shouldn't suffer, like a Victorian cabhorse.' Barbara Pym responded, 'Why is it that *men* find my books so sad?' Like traditional spinsters, with whom Mildred often identifies, cab horses were neglected and overworked, blinkered, and often abused. Are such conditions the Pym spinster's true 'natural clothing'?

The exigencies of wartime clothing help explain Mildred's postwar adventures in dress. Wartime Austerity restrictions had limited materials along with pockets, buttons, seams, pleats, and lace. The effect on fashion was depressive. Stocking shortages were acute, which is why Rocky brings Helena Italian silk stockings as an intimate gift. Hats were not rationed, though materials cost more.

Dreary clothing made cosmetics a sign of stubborn survivors' spirit. Although Mildred sees herself as modest and drab, she insists on buying Hawaiian Fire lipstick, an exotic moniker typical of the era. Subsequently, in the Ladies' Room, Mildred meditates upon the seriousness of cosmetics: '*All flesh is but as grass* ... I thought, watching the women working at their faces with savage concentration, opening their mouths wide, biting and licking their lips, stabbing at their noses and chins with powder-puffs.' The grand language is parodic but telling: these women are disturbingly 'savage': 'biting', 'licking', and 'stabbing'.

Ostensibly Mildred admires stylish women such as Helena, who first appears 'gaily dressed' in trousers, where Mildred's 'oldest clothes' for cleaning consist of a 'shapeless overall and old fawn skirt'. Although more women wore trousers to work during the war, they had not become an accepted style. So Helena's trousers demonstrate confidence in her own feminine beauty.

War also affected intimate women's styles, uncovering private concerns. Young Barbara had confided to her diary, 'I bought a peach coloured vest and trollies to match with insertions of lace. Disgraceful I know but I can't help choosing my underwear with a view to it being seen!' However in mid-wartime, after an unhappy love affair, Pym felt apathetic about lingerie: 'I … looked vaguely at materials – red spotted chiffon for a spinsterish nightdress.' Fabric options in 1943 were reduced, and Austerity measures banned lace on undergarments. But the contrast – between a young Pym's delight in choosing underwear 'with a view to

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it being seen' and the thirtyish Pym's apathy – appears also in Mildred's comment that 'there is no need to describe' the underwear in her washing. To be a spinster is to wear underwear that men never will see.

Despite continued shortages and rationing, Dior's New Look, a combination of full blouse, tiny waist, and longer fuller skirt, made a sensation in 1947. Both conservative and rebellious, the style depicted an extravagant self-expression, stringently controlled: the same artistic paradox appears in Pym's fiction and in postwar British literature.

In the postwar era Pym finally attained literary success, publishing six novels; her style dovetailed with the new literature associated with Larkin, Kingsley Amis, and the Movement poets of the Fifties. Postwar writers used hesitation, apology, qualifiers, and even flat negation; their anti-eloquent language especially suited leveling, comic fictions. Pym's pared-down grammar is as wittily understated as any Movement poem and as hilarious as an Amis novel.

Yet Pym's stylish fictions remained segregated as women's novels. Her negations often encapsulated a spinster's experience, defined by lack. And she used dress details to capture a peculiarly feminine self-objectification: when Mildred buys *another* brown hat she enacts a serious trope for stagnation; her flowered Whitsuntide hat is cast into the shade by the predatory, fox-fur-wearing Allegra Gray's showy fruit-trimmed version.

Mildred's possible escape from brown spinsterhood is signified when she finally wears a black dress. But rather than the recommended 'brilliant touch of colour' Mildred fastens a decorous Victorian cameo to her little collar. With her newly 'scraped-back' hair, she has inadvertently styled herself like a traditional maid. Everard may not notice, but Mildred's servant-style enables her – both boldly and humbly – to enjoy their dinner while remaining clear-sighted about its implications.

Finally, Pym's modest rhetoric suited her novels to minimized postwar Britain. Perhaps the men who found her novels sad could not grasp the profound implications of trivial clothing details, or see that even the sufferings of a self-objectifying spinster may be shockingly funny.

Hope Howell Hodgkins *earned her PhD from the University of Chicago in 1994 and taught British and European literatures at the University of North Carolina – Greensboro for a dozen years before retiring early to work on writing projects. She has published articles and presented papers on subjects including James Joyce, modernist rhetorics, children's literature, Virginia Woolf, Oscar Wilde, Dorothy L Sayers and Muriel Spark. This paper is an offshoot of her book project,* Style and the Single Girl: How Modern Women Re-dressed the Novel, 1922–1977.

Martha Gershun and Phyllis Hathaway

'Not really first in anybody's life' – the friendship between Mildred and Dora in *Excellent Women*

by Orna B Raz

When Mildred reflects on the death of 'unmarried women with no ties', she wonders who would be there 'really to grieve for [her]'. The first name that comes to mind is Dora's, her best friend, since otherwise she 'was not really first in anybody's life'.

The world of Pym's novels contains almost twice as many women as men, and by necessity women often seek out each other's company. But companionship is different from friendship, and there are only three true friendships in Pym's novels of the 1950s – between Dora and Mildred in *Excellent Women,* Jane and Prudence in *Jane and Prudence*, and Wilmet and Rowena in *A Glass of Blessings*.

Among Pym's heroines, the oldest friendship is that of Mildred Lathbury and Dora Caldicote. They met at the age of thirteen, when they were sent away to school and in effect ceased to be part of their own nuclear families, and have stayed friends. Thus, their relationship is most similar to that of sisters.

The sociologist Graham Allan defines friendship as an informal, voluntary, reciprocal, equal, and non-exploitative personal relationship. Friendship is formed not 'for instrumental reasons, but … exists only simply because it is found to be enjoyable. It should be undertaken for its own sake rather than for some ulterior motive or as a means to some other end.'

Mildred and Dora's childhood friendship is presented as a lifelong relationship; Dora is not only Mildred's oldest friend, but also the person closest to her in the whole world. Their relationship is presented as reciprocal; she is as important to Dora as Dora is to her.

However, in spite of their closeness, their interaction is often petty and consists of 'foolish and pointless' arguments. With Dora, Mildred lets herself regress to childish modes of behaviour, 'bickering about silly trifles', which she knows to be inappropriate to a grown woman. Still, they may take each other for granted but at the same

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time Dora and Mildred trust each other completely.

Since, in Pym's world, most of the friendships between women were formed early on, it seems almost impossible to form close friendships later in life. It seems that once a heroine has one close friend, she does not need more intimate ties with other women friends. Thus, Mildred resists Helena Napier's attempts to confide in her.

In the novels, friendship lasts for life, and makes a valuable part of the heroines' identity; it is not always enjoyable, but its intrinsic value transcends any consideration of self-interest or momentary pleasure. It is presented as a voluntary yet abiding unwritten contract. In contrast to ties with men, which tend to be temporary and disappointing, friendships between women are constant, and their communication effortless and informal.

As many of Pym's heroines have no relatives and no home, their friends become their family, their best friend a substitute for other significant relationships in their lives, and for the married ones the friend is either a source of excitement or provides the intimacy and thoughtfulness missing in their married lives.

The friendship that Pym's women give each other is most significant since it is treated not as a means to an end, but an end in itself.

Orna Raz *is a Lecturer in English at the College of Management Academic Studies, Rishon LeZion, Israel. She holds graduate degrees from the University of Missouri–Columbia and the University of Iowa and a PhD in English literature from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her current field of interest is social changes in England during the 1950s and British girls' magazines from the 1950s. She has published and presented articles on the works of Barbara Pym, education and feminism, the Church of England, and the representation of radio broadcasts in British novels, as well as translations of the works of numerous Israeli authors and poets, and is the author of* Social Dimensions in the Novels of Barbara Pym, 1949–1963. *She has an active blog on Red Room.*

'But I have that within that passeth show' (letter, early 1938): The Polite Sufferings of Spinster Life in the Narrative Voice of *Excellent Women*

by Triona Adams

Excellent Women is a funny book: a comedy of manners with laugh-out-loud moments, eccentric characters and everyday absurdities described to us with the dry wit of our narrator, 'that nice Miss Lathbury'. What makes it more than an amusing book, what makes it a fine novel, indeed (according to P D James) 'a perfect novel', is that the foil to this humour is loneliness, anguish and real suffering. This anguish is suffered by our heroine who, despite her strenuous attempts otherwise, is preoccupied with her post-war spinster status, 'the negative state'. Barely noticed by the man she falls for, she considers compromise rather than an empty life.

In *Excellent Women*, Pym paints an evocative portrait of post-war austerity London life – its privations, its ruins, vast nightmarishly impersonal self-service caffs, lonely secretaries in bedsits, shared bathrooms on the landing, the little woman making coffee on a Primus stove in the ruined church aisle – and she writes about the seismic shift in class and money and status experienced by the whole nation, but thrown into sharp relief by the pace, the anonymity, the brutality of London life. Most trenchant of all, through Mildred, the story and status of a whole generation of post-war women widowed literally or figuratively, the generation of future husbands and lovers decimated by war, the woman's place in the home altered forever, the notion of 'home' altered forever, finding their way in a new society, new workplaces, new feminism, but still defined by the old order, spinster of this parish.

Mildred is extraordinary among Pym narrators. Not merely a first-person narrator, she addresses the reader directly, even positing herself as observer and writer – albeit one 'not at all like Jane Eyre'. We conflate Pym herself with Mildred more than with any other character. Mildred's understatement of her own feelings, her determination to conquer and dismiss her own distresses, is indeed the attitude of Pym and her lack of luck in love. It is this very understatement, this gallant restraint, which makes the novel so moving and so rich and its author/heroine so very excellent.

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14 July 1964, in a letter to Barbara: Philip Larkin re-reads *EW* and finds it 'even better than I remembered it, full of a harsh kind of suffering … It's a study of the pain of being single, the unconscious hurt the world regards as this state's natural clothing – time and time again one senses not only that Mildred is suffering but, that nobody can see why she shouldn't suffer, like a Victorian cabhorse.'

Larkin identifies two characteristics of the novel here: the first is that the narrative is not obvious, that emotions 'seem' rather than are presented, that the reader has to be alert to them, and the second that Mildred is classed as being below other people. This leads on to examining Mildred's treatment by others, her own reactions to her own emotions, her love for Rocky, her literary awareness of her own narrative and then, crucially, to identifying her as an unreliable narrator.

'I suppose an unmarried woman just over thirty, who lives alone and has no apparent ties, must expect to find herself involved or interested in other people's business, and if she is also a clergyman's daughter then one might really say that there is no hope for her.' Surely this is self-satire, which is not exactly to say Mildred thinks it is entirely untrue. The more you consider Mildred, the more complex she becomes. Pym continually posits her as narrator, writer, anthropologist:

'My thoughts went round and round and it occurred to me that if I ever wrote a novel it would be of the "stream of consciousness" type and deal with an hour in the life of a woman at the sink' … (which is not what *Excellent Women* is, so why not? Perhaps a clue as to how to read, reminding us that is it perfectly possible to fill a novel with only an hour of apparently mundane human experience, so, dismiss nothing!)

'Mimosa did lose its first freshness too quickly to be worth buying and I must not allow myself to have feelings, but must only observe the effects of other people's.' Why should she humble herself in this way?

And not only is she an unreliable narrator, she is a reluctant one too. ' "We, my dear Mildred, [says William] are the observers of life … Let Dora marry if she likes, she hasn't your talent for observation." … It was not much of a compliment, making me out to be an unpleasant inhuman sort of person. Was that how I appeared to others? I wondered.'

In everything from the incongruous Hawaiian Fire lipstick ('It had not occurred to me that I should have to say it out loud') to her desolation when Rocky first leaves ('The effects of shock and grief are too well known to need description and I stood at the window for a long time … There seemed to be a great weight inside me') we as readers have to be alert to Pym's writing of this rather gallant character. 'Shock and grief', the language of bereavement, can all too easily be effaced, for the less mindful reader, by Miss Statham and her tin of Brasso.

The quote of my title is found within a letter from Barbara to Henry Harvey and his new wife (1938). In it Barbara considers the lambs of the field but compares herself to an old brown horse, all passion spent. Yet this is not all: 'But this spinster, this Barbara Mary Crampton Pym … ha-ha she will be saying inside. *But I have that within which passeth show* – maybe she will be saying that, but she is a queer old horse, this old brown spinster, so I cannot clearly forecast what she will be saying.' (*AVPE*, 96)

In a funny slightly silly letter to her ex-lover (only recently married to another woman) Barbara jokes, and while she jokes she quotes *Hamlet*, the most famous of all English tragedies. P D James rightly identifies this letter as key to Pym's style: the wry humour, the hidden pain, the literary play. Take this to its logical critical conclusion and Pym herself, even in her own letters, is an openly unreliable narrator.

In being constantly aware of Pym's understatement, of Mildred's gallant restraint, of the play of comedy and calamity, the reader will find *Excellent Women* rewarding on every level. Perhaps, with this insight, Mildred, the book and Pym herself can be described rather as Mildred describes Everard Bone: not romantic but 'just a little splendid'.

Triona Adams *is a London-based theatrical agent, writer and performer. She read English at St Hilda's College, Oxford, where she was awarded The Rachel McClean College Prize and The Eleanor Rooke Award for English (named after Barbara Pym's own tutor, who used to make marmalade during tutorials and ask Barbara to stir). Her MA in Text and Performance is from King's College, London, and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. She spoke at the first official conference of the Barbara Pym Society and has been an active member ever since. In 2013 she edited a selection of the letters of Barbara Pym and Philip Larkin for performance at the Sunday Times Oxford Literary Festival, taking the role of Pym, with Larkin played by Oliver Ford Davies.*

Potato Peelings and Hawaiian Fire

by Amaret Johnson

What a delightful character Mildred Lathbury is! Barbara Pym draws Mildred with such richness of detail that we feel we know her. But what can we say about a novel whose action is framed by its heroine's preoccupation with toilet paper? The intimacy of the details in *Excellent Women* is unusual even in a Pym novel. We meet Mildred by the dustbin, duck under her clothesline, peer into her market basket, and even follow her into the bathroom, and in the process we discover the conflicting currents of her personality.

When *Excellent Women* was published in 1952, rationing was still in effect in Britain, so items such as toilet paper, lipstick, new underwear, and meat were hard to get. Pym skillfully uses these artifacts of daily life to highlight the conflicts that mar the predictable course of Mildred's life and to draw us inevitably into Mildred's inner life.

One of the potent fascinations of the novel is the contrast between Mildred's outward appearance, conventional and somewhat drab, and her vivid inner life. This is a woman who gets praised for watching paint dry, while inwardly she is maintaining 'an inexplicable distrust of widows'. How can we not love a heroine who exclaims over a bottle of Nuits St Georges, 'How exciting that sounds ... It conjures up … armour and white horses and dragons, flames too …' Yet

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this fiery and romantic inner self is balanced by an inner voice of common sense that is constantly reminding Mildred of how she 'ought' to be viewing her life.

As the smooth tenor of Mildred's life is interrupted by new people, new fascinations, new experiences, each intrusion is marked by the homeliest of details. Thus in Chapter One, when Mildred meets Helena Napier, the emancipated 'new woman' whose husband and colleague will cause longings and insecurities to break through into consciousness, it is by the shared dustbin: 'I bent low over the bin and scrabbled a few tea leaves and potato peelings out of the bottom of my bucket. I was embarrassed that we should meet like this. I had meant to ask Mrs Napier to coffee one evening. It was to have been a gracious, civilized occasion …'

So from the beginning, Mildred's idea of the ease of a solitary life where she is finally 'old enough to become fussy and spinsterish' is in conflict with reality. The need to share a bathroom with her exotic new neighbors, one of them a man, underlines this intrusion. Helena's replacement roll of toilet paper turns out to be inferior, and the bathtub is improperly cleaned, emblematic of the lack of comfort and privacy Mildred is about to undergo.

Where do we make ourselves comfortable without needing to reflect on it but in the privacy of the bathroom? Mildred's moments in restrooms, and in particular her encounters with mirrors, highlight the conflict between the inner and the outer woman, between how others see her and how she sees herself.

When Rockingham Napier bursts on the scene, he brings an air of strong sexuality and casual charm. In a parallel development, Allegra Gray brings her sexual attractiveness and rapacious self-centeredness to the Vicarage. Mrs Gray's surface glamour leads directly to Mildred's contemplation of her own underwear. What is more connected to a woman's private view of herself as a sexual being than her intimate garments? Mildred's unhappy verdict: 'Just the kind of underclothes a person like me might wear, I thought dejectedly, so there is no need to describe them.'

While we never find out whether Mildred buys herself some sexier undergarments, we know that she begins taking more care with her makeup, a quintessentially feminine way to increase sexual attractiveness. Shaken by Allegra Gray's news that she is going to marry Julian and her demand that Mildred take Winifred Malory into her own home, Mildred heads for a department store and starts frantically looking at makeup. 'I did not feel that I could ever acquire a smooth apricot complexion,' she says, 'but I could at least buy a new lipstick'. She may not want to marry Julian Malory, but neither does she want to look less attractive than the woman who snared him.

The result is wonderfully revealing. Hawaiian Fire! The salesgirl may look doubtful, but Mildred is determined to have the volcanic color. What visions of flames erupting! Fiery soul, fiery anger, fiery lips! 'Hawaiian Fire indeed!' Mildred chides herself. 'Nothing more unsuitable could possibly be imagined.' But then, 'I began to smile and only just stopped myself from laughing out loud'. In that moment, we see Mildred's spirit triumphant over the one who would try to keep an excellent woman down.

While the disturbing Rockingham and Allegra bring out Mildred's concerns with appearance, the imagery surrounding her encounters with Everard Bone is surprisingly domestic. He is associated with a broken casserole, an oven cloth, a frying pan.

As the conflicts in Mildred's life begin to resolve, the imagery related to her private life reflects this. Her new neighbors turn out to be *suitable* rather than disturbing, underlined by their separate roll of toilet paper and rota for cleaning the bath.

With the issues of the shared bathroom and the divided heart now resolved with the advent of the new neighbors, our initial view of Mildred by the dustbin with her potato peelings is balanced at the end by her vision of bending over Everard's sink, peeling his potatoes. And where is Mildred's Hawaiian Fire? The only answer we get from Barbara Pym is this: for Mildred, all is changed, and all continues on in its usual pattern.

Amaret Johnson *has a BA in English Literature, summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa from the University of New Hampshire. After a brief stint in teaching, she spent many years in human services and was also a Pampered Chef consultant. She maintains a passion for reading and knitting. Sadly, she is allergic to both incense and cats.*

A question from Dan DiPietro

Donna Safreed registering Betty Zausner

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Obituary: Sheila Garforth

Sheila was born in Dunston, Tyne and Wear in 1941. She was educated at grammar school but did not go on to university until much later in life. Instead, she went to work as a shorthand typist for the National Coal Board. But for that, she might never have encountered her husband Mike: the two of them met when Mike had an appointment to see her boss.

In the course of their long marriage, Sheila and Mike first lived in Liège (Belgium) for two years before coming to Sheffield. They continued to travel extensively for business and pleasure, on trips to Europe, Russia and the USA. Sheila loved travelling and made many friends wherever she went.

At the age of about 55, Sheila decided to take a Mature Access Course, and then won a place at the University of Sheffield where she graduated with a BA in English Language and Medieval Literature. She went on to achieve an MA; her dissertation topic for this was very much concerned with Barbara Pym's writings. She was a devoted attendee at the Society's meetings.

In the last 5 or 6 years of her life she had several health problems and her mobility was severely affected. Travel became difficult, and Oxford was about as far as she could get. So most of her spare time was spent reading – and she really loved her Kindle!

As a teenager she was very fond of dancing – tap and ballet as well as ballroom. Indeed, she once appeared as a chorus girl in a seaside music hall show at Scarborough. Those who knew her at BPS meetings will recall her elegant and distinctive appearance, and it comes as no surprise that she had stage experience: there was about her a touch of the theatrical, combined with great kindliness of manner. Her observations on Pymmian and other matters were always original and incisive. She was warm, witty and wise, had numerous friends, and everybody who knew her loved her.

This appreciation was compiled by Clemence Schultze, using material kindly supplied by Sheila's husband Mike Garforth.

Obituary: Maureen Lenk

The Society has lost another old friend in Maureen Lenk, who died on 18 December, a few days after her 91st birthday. Along with her friend Rita Brewer, who died two years ago, Maureen was a founder member of the Society and regularly attended the spring meetings in London and, until the travelling became too much for her, the AGM weekends in Oxford. A quiet and somewhat unobtrusive figure, she would nevertheless derive huge enjoyment from the proceedings. Her moment of fame came when she and Rita took part in Yvonne Cocking's first non-professional dramatised reading, *The Pilgrimage*.

She was born Maureen Carne on 13 December 1922 in London, and lived there all her life. After leaving school she rejected the idea of teaching and instead learned shorthand typing, leading to jobs in a variety of organisations including the East India Company, De Havilland, Youngs Brewery, British Rubber and the London Press Exchange; she also served as a Sunday school teacher. One of her passions was dancing, and towards the end of the war she was swept off her feet at the Astoria Ballroom by a Viennese refugee, Hans Gerhard ('Gary') Lenk, whom she married in 1950; they shared more than 50 years of marriage before he died in 2001. Their only child, a daughter, Gia, was born in 1957.

Among Maureen's many interests were French, yoga, Pilates, tap dancing, theatre, concerts and walking. She was an active member of the Liberal Party and U3A, worked on the tea trolley for the League of Friends at St George's Hospital in Tooting, and also volunteered for 'talking books for the blind'. Clearly an excellent woman, it is a wonder that she ever found time for the Barbara Pym Society, or indeed for any reading at all! She persevered through two major operations and a stroke, none of them dimming her huge zest for life, her love of family and friends, and her enormous capacity for interest in other people's lives – she always wanted to hear one's news, and was always encouraging of others' efforts. In her final days in the hospice, she and Gia started to read *Jane and Prudence* together. Alas, the book was never finished, but we can imagine the comfort that it gave to both.

This appreciation was compiled by Lorraine Mepham, with biographical details kindly supplied by Maureen's daughter, Gia Thompson.

Talk at Francis Holland School, Sloane Square, London

by Triona Adams

In response to a query to the Society from Francis Holland School, Sloane Square, London, I was delighted and fascinated to speak at their Literary Society on the subject of *Excellent Women*. Every term, the society invites speakers in to address the girls on particular authors/ texts. I was following close on the heels of Dr David McAlister of Birkbeck College on *Great Expectations* and Professor Barbara Hardy on *North and South* and *Middlemarch*. The request for someone from the Barbara Pym Society had come about as the Lower VIth, AS Level English class are studying *Excellent Women*. How wonderful that Pym is being studied in some schools!

The event was terribly useful for me as I was able to test-drive a version of the paper then under preparation for the 2014 US conference, 'But I have that within that passeth show' (letter, early 1938): the polite sufferings of spinster life in the narrative voice of *Excellent Women*' [see p. 5 of this issue]. I hoped that references to Larkin, Eliot, Roland Barthes etc., and to possible themes to study (the role of the Church, the urban village, the writer as anthropologist, what defines an Excellent Woman, post-war austerity and the London novel, the role of comedy, Pym herself, her life, her other novels, her diaries) might help the students situate Pym and her work in relation to their other exam texts and other subjects.

This from the school website: 'Adams proved to be a most engaging speaker. In addition to biographical insights

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into Pym's background – one that dovetails with Adams' own as both read English at St Hilda's College, Oxford – Adams touched on the relationship between Pym and Philip Larkin and offered much in the way of interesting interpretations of *Excellent Women* itself, focusing on the character of Mildred Lathbury. The enduring legacy of Pym's work was also considered in what proved to be an enriching and enjoyable event for all.'

For myself, I was dying to know what these literate teenagers, coming to Pym for the first time, made of Mildred's post-war spinster life. In all honesty the Q&A was not exciting but the chat around the wine and canapés proved far more lively. The VIth form seemed quite resigned to Mildred's marrying Everard and not especially moved by her love for Rocky or her treatment at the hands of Helena, Allegra et al. A few younger students, however, were perfectly outraged on her behalf, notwithstanding they had not read the book ... yet!

Research at the 'Bod'

by Rose Little

They were making alterations to the square outside the Natural History Museum when I first discovered the underground Bodleian Library Special Collections Room (SCR), the home of the Pym archive. My first sampling of the Pym treasures was accompanied by the background music of the dentist-like pneumatic drill from the square directly above our heads.

Anyone can consult the special collections if you bring something to show you are a bona fide student (not necessarily a member of any institution) and you swear an oath not to start a fire. You pay a fee and then you are issued with your Bodleian Library Reader's Card which will let you into all the Bodleian libraries. You put your Library Card into the automatic machine and get the *Open Sesame* feeling as the barrier gives way, granting you the freedom of the Radcliffe Science Library. This is where the SCR is temporarily housed while they build us the Weston Library, the much-heralded new extension to the Bodleian Library. Along the main hall you walk and down two flights of stairs, in their utility and simplicity transporting you back to your own university of many years before! Not for us the elegance of the Upper Reading Room used by Barbara with its mahogany and murals.

You put your belongings, including handbag, into the locker – no bags allowed in the Reading Room. Writing materials, wallet and phone (on silent) go into a transparent bag, specially supplied, and then you press the automatic button to open the SCR door. You can get in but you can't get out without swiping your card. You have booked your items in advance, using the SOLO online catalogue.

You present yourself at the desk and get signed in. You wait patiently for your box. Did your request go through alright? The helpful librarians pad back and forth with people's boxes of items from the storeroom with its tightly packed shelves of ordered material. Everything in here is an original MS and perhaps not published, so there are plenty of rules: you can only have one box at a time, you mustn't use pens or take a photograph, you are forbidden to eat or drink.

You are reminded of *An Unsuitable Attachment* and Mervyn's scorn when Ianthe indulgently let someone eat sandwiches in the library; and of his outrage at the HP sauce stains found on a book she had allowed to be borrowed – which, as in the Bodleian, is not permissible.

So, you wait anxiously at the desk, but your box appears in due course and you bear it away triumphantly. You pass students reading their precious manuscripts, some of which look medieval, their pages thick and crowded with tiny writing. Readers are of all ages but everyone is silent and absorbed and I can't help feeling privileged to be here, pursuing my hobby among these very earnest scholars.

There are about 30 places to sit at the long tables which have sliding anglepoise lamps spread out at intervals and obligatory black book rests, varying in size. Discreet notices tell you how to get onto the Bodleian 'Intranet', but I have not brought my laptop anyway. (I regret this later as I write laboriously in my exercise book with my pencil.) Most people are sitting with their coats on or muffled up in a long woolly scarf.

On my first visit I collected my snake (an affectionate name for the metal bookmark with bendy links that you use to keep your book open), my magnifying glass and my non-absorbent paper and sat down, serendipitously opposite the books about Barbara Pym on the open shelf, Dale Salwak et al., to keep me company.

I opened my box. Inside were ten large books full of letters tidily attached to each leaf. I bent my head to read.

Immediately I was transported to the world of Barbara Pym by means of the wonderful warm and witty letters sent to Barbara over many years by Robert Liddell, the writer and critic. He wrote in black with a fountain pen in clear, squarish handwriting. Reading his cheerful, newsy and supportive letters to Barbara I felt very much part of the world that I had read about in Hazel Holt's biographies and Barbara's own novels. Barbara and Robert and Henry Harvey had all been friends together at Oxford in the 1930s and now Robert was lecturing at the University in Athens.

After two hours of intense concentration I returned to the real world of the silent readers and realized I needed a break. I handed in my box, murmuring 'Back soon,' and set off for the library's refreshment room, the 'Abbot's Kitchen'. Back up the stairs, along the hall and up the stairs at the further end, and now you enter the library proper, with its tall bookshelves sheltering little alcoves of solemn students, some ardently reading, some feverishly turning pages, others staring out of the windows at the sunshine playing on the beautiful Keble College architecture. But Outdoors, for now,

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is unobtainable, the work must be done.

Through the double doors you go and down more steps, quite a grand staircase this time, to a little seating area with hot drinks and snacks machines. Three or four people are sitting there already, one older man in a black leather jacket slumped on a sofa, two young girl students with serious expressions and long dark hair perching on the high stools at little round tables, one woman gazing bemusedly at a screen informing us that the library will close today at 7pm and that the air pollution index is 4 – this is probably me.

The coffee and sandwich are immensely restoring but no one speaks or makes a phone call. Either everyone is resting from the total immersion in print or perhaps they are still sunk in studious thought. Your eyes might stray for relief to the sunny windowsill on which a lacklustre plant sits sulkily, the ends of its leaves still green, beside a miniature sculpture of an elegantly twisting staircase that arrives nowhere. ('All this reading … what does it lead to?' Dulcie is asked in *No Fond Return of Love*.) The door onto the square outside informs you that it is alarmed, so you drink up and return to your obsessive perusing.

Back at my desk that first day I read on. With the mention of mutual friends I felt more of the jigsaw coming together and I was awed at the thought that the letters from many friends were all here in the Pym Archive in Oxford, readily accessible to all Pym lovers! The excitement and absorption has never really passed away but the drilling has now stopped, the temperature is rising and I look forward to many future hours dipping into these letters, so carefully conserved, and to meeting them again in their new home in the autumn.

Gleanings

compiled by Yvonne Cocking

Jean Harker, one of the Barbara Pym Society Committee members (and writer under the name Jean Buchanan), wrote *In Praise of Pym* in the University's *Oxford Today*, Michaelmas Term 2013. Jean organised the one-day conference on Barbara Pym's life and work in 1985, so she is perfectly placed to give a brief history of the novelist.

> Pym is particularly good on detail, minutely observed with a gimlet eye. We learn a lot about her characters' tastes in food, clothes, household accessories, and literature. There is much literary quotation and allusion, particularly as a means of expanding the vision of her characters beyond their humdrum worlds ... Her sister Hilary reckoned that she would be hugely amused by the wealth of Pym scholarship that has since risen, and I hope that she would be pleased to know that her centenary year also marks the 19th birthday of the Barbara Pym Society.

In the *Guardian*'s Books Blog on 2 October 2013 was a fascinating post by Moira Redmond entitled *Women in trousers: fiction's sartorial trailblazers.*

> One of the tantalising details to emerge from newspaper extracts of the latest Bridget Jones novel is that fifty-something-year-old, widowed Bridget opts for jeans for an evening out with her old boyfriend Daniel. And not just any old jeans but 'a brand chillingly called Not Your Daughter's Jeans'. Clothes have always played an important part in Bridget's life – and this particular fashion choice puts her in a tradition of trousered women in *fiction* which goes back to the early 20th century.

Among the examples given, which include characters from Agatha Christie, Benson's Mapp and Lucia series, Evelyn Waugh and Dodie Smith, is Barbara Pym, who

> has a very exact eye for any social signifiers. In *Excellent Women* (1952), the narrator meets her new neighbour, and the differences couldn't be more clear. 'She was fair-haired and pretty, gaily dressed in corduroy trousers and a bright jersey, while I, mousy and rather plain anyway, drew attention to these qualities with my shapeless overall and old fawn skirt.' We can definitely draw conclusions about the adventurous neighbour from this.

In the *Her Indoors* column in *The Lady*, 11 October 2013, Mary Killen writes

> I have learned some interesting things while banged up in the Retreat. One is that your brain really is a muscle and you can get much more out of it than you would have thought possible – purely by using it a little bit more each day. Regarding my own brain, I have used it here for about 10 hours every day … hence I have been tackling tomes that my brain would normally be too flabby for … All that training on more demanding texts meant I could read *The Sweet Dove Died* by Barbara Pym, all 208 pages in one sitting. I cannot recommend it more highly. First published in 1978, there is no sex, money or violence. Reading it was like eating the most perfect meal: no excess, all artistry concealed, subtle but satisfying.

In another item from *The Guardian* on 11 October, *On the shelf: Bridget Jones and other literary singletons,* Rachel Cooke writes

> In the 40s and 50s, books, you can't help noticing, start being a little kinder to single women, perhaps because the stays are loosening; a woman might be unmarried, but this doesn't preclude the possibility that she can have a physical love affair. Also, working is no longer so unusual. It's true that Barbara Pym, whose first novel *Some Tame Gazelle* was published in 1950, deals almost exclusively with spinsters of quite an old-fashioned kind: they are village-living, curate-loving types, in the main, but they have a spirit that was lacking up to this point. The fiftysomethings Harriet and Belinda Bede both receive marriage proposals, and both turn them down, unwilling to swap the deep pleasures of the present for a future that may or may not be happy. Elsewhere though, the problem of happiness, and of power, is unresolved.

Yet another mention in *The Guardian* on 2 November when Ian Sinclair was interviewed by James Campbell. He says

> When I did go to America and interviewed all these underground types, they were interested in P G Wodehouse and Barbara Pym – archetypes of Englishness.

Neil Powell reviewed Richard Bradford's *The Odd*

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Couple: the curious friendship between Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin in the *TLS* on 18 October 2013. He says that by the mid-fifties

> Larkin had published two novels and begun a third, *A New World Symphony*. Richard Bradford thinks this book, if completed, would 'have eclipsed *Lucky Jim*', although the tone Larkin establishes at the outset – 'While she guided her mother round the town (they did not spend long on the College) Augusta began to wonder if she had been wise in asking Butterfield to tea' – is far closer to that of Barbara Pym, a writer he would later come to admire in a much less complicated way. She, not Amis, was the kind of novelist Larkin might have wished to become.

The New York Times Book Review had previously named its *10 Best Books of 2013*, but Gregory Cowles wrote on 27 December

> I wondered what our 10 best authors would pick as *their* favourites. So I asked them. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (author of *Americanah*): I discovered Barbara Pym's *A Glass of Blessing*s this year and could not believe I had never read Pym. I loved it. It does that ancient, wonderful thing literature is supposed to do: instruct and delight. Pym is brilliant at portraying middle-class England in the 1950s, and even more so at honestly engaging with the 'psychology of femaleness'. It is a 'slice of life' sort of novel, serious without trying to be, very witty and very funny and very insightful, and it somehow manages to be both prim and subversive.

In *The University of Oxford: a new history*, G R Evans cites a Pym novel to illustrate the likely career outcomes for many Oxford-educated women:

> The 'professional' jobs to which these women students found their way were largely in teaching … and many married and ceased to work at all. In *Jane and Prudence*, published in 1953, the two principal characters, a tutor and her former student, meet at a Gaudy. Those who have attended Gaudies, will remember their peculiar sweet-and-sour flavour, nostalgic of a golden youth, but uncomfortably evocative of opportunities wasted. However, the novelist Barbara Pym (1913–80) was a graduate of St Hilda's and a woman without illusions. 'Jane and Prudence were walking in the college garden before dinner. Their conversation came in excited little bursts, for Oxford is very lovely in midsummer, and the glimpses of grey towers through the trees and the river at their side moved them to reminiscences of earlier days'. But then the student is brought up against a realization: 'Here we are, all gathered around you,' said Jane, 'and none of us has really fulfilled her early promise.' For a moment she almost regretted her own stillborn 'research' – 'the influence of something upon somebody' hadn't Virginia Woolf called it? – to which her early marriage had put an end.

[Of course 'student' should be 'former tutor' because it is Jane speaking.]

In the 19 April 2014 edition of *The Week*, the journalist and novelist India Knight cites as one of her 'best books' *The Pursuit of Love* by Nancy Mitford.

> Read and re-read since the age of 13. So fresh, so funny, so sparkling, so slyly skewering and beady. I could have picked *Excellent Women,* or any other Barbara Pym, for the same reasons.

Thanks to Tony and Mary Downs, Norma Munson, Diana Gulland, Christine Shuttleworth, Tom Sopko, Clemence Schultze and Stéphanie Kay for these contributions.

Chairman's Chat

by Michael Wilson

I think we can all agree that, on the whole, the men in Barbara's novels are a pretty feeble lot; and, in real life, while some men brought her joy and romance, too many caused her pain and disappointment. You will, perhaps, then understand the trepidation I felt in becoming the first man to be elected to the chairmanship of the Barbara Pym Society. Indeed, only a few men have even made it on to the Committee.

My lady predecessors have all been persons of distinction in a variety of fields and I hope I can carry on their good work. Let me now pay tribute to Clemence Schultze and thank her for all she did for us and the Society over the last six years. Her task was added to by the fact that she had to prepare for the Centenary celebrations. I believe the Society, its Committee and its North American Board rose splendidly to the challenge of keeping Barbara's memory alive and bringing her to the attention of a new generation of readers. I would like to add a special 'thank you' here to Devon Allison and Linda McDougall who used their specialist expertise with the media to secure us much welcome press attention at that important time.

I remember a few years ago when, according to the Rules of the Society, I had to retire from the Committee. Though of course a little disappointed I also felt 'Great. Now I can just sit back and enjoy it.' My retirement did not last long and now the buck stops with me. Like Edward Lyall, I feel the burden!

You know you are growing old when the Government writes to tell you how to claim your Old Age Pension. I was a very young man when I first discovered Barbara Pym and quite a young man when I became a Founder Member of the Barbara Pym Society. Now, all those years later, I enjoy her stories as much as ever, and the company and friendship of Pym Society members here and abroad. Long may we flourish!

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Coming Events

Visit www.barbara-pym.org for details.

2014 Annual General Meeting & Conference

A Glass of Blessings

29–31 August 2014, at St Hilda's College, Oxford
Confirmed speakers:
Maggie Lane (author of numerous books on Jane Austen and other topics)
The Revd Colin Oxenforth
Dr Nick Turner (UCLAN, Edge Hill and Salford) and Libby Tempest
Arthur Bostrom as after dinner speaker
Full details on the booking form, which will go out shortly.

Jumble Sales and Church Bazaars: the Novels of Barbara Pym
Study days at the Cathedrals of St Alban's (31 May) and Guildford (7 June)

The BPS happy to publicise these two days (which are the same event, repeated). They are organised by The Revd Dr Julie Gittoes, Education Canon at Guildford Cathedral, and
Dr Clare Coombe, Tutor in Language and Literature.
All enquiries and bookings should be made via the cathedrals' respective websites:

www.stalbanscathedral.org/learning/study-centre/study-days/jumble-sales-and-church-bazaars-the-novels-of-barbara-pym

www.guildford-cathedral.org/events/boxoffice/113

Fall Tea in Boston

Saturday 1 November 2014, 3:00 pm,. at the Church of the Advent on Beacon Hill.

The 2015 North American Conference

will be held at Harvard University on
13–15 March 2015
and will focus on ***Quartet in Autumn*.**

Call for Papers: The organizing committee is seeking speakers for the 2015 North American conference. Preference will be given to proposals on the featured novel, *Quartet in Autumn*, but proposals on any topic relevant to Pym studies are encouraged. Speakers receive an honorarium of $400, a waiver of the conference registration fee, and complimentary conference meals. Please send abstracts of 150–250 words, accompanied by brief biographical details, by Friday 21 November 2014 to Tom Sopko, North American Organizer, at **barbarapymsociety@gmail.com** with the subject heading '2015 Conference Proposal'.

Barbara's Tree in Bloom

Pymmites will recall that, on a snowy day just over a year ago, the High Sheriff of Shropshire, John Abram, planted a cherry tree in Barbara's memory in Cae Glas Park, Oswestry. The project was initiated by Bishop Lawrence Garner; Kate Charles represented the BPS, and various civic dignitaries were present. The tree was then small but already bore a few green leaves. Bishop Lawrence has kindly sent a photograph of it now, flourishing with blossom.

The Provincial Pymmite Looks Back

by Clemence Schultze

A quiet day arrives at last, so decide to sort through old Pym files and assign materials to four categories: Out, Keep, Archive, and Hand Over to Successor. I say to Husband that, really, in some ways the six years passed in a flash. Husband remains silent but his sceptical look plainly says that in other ways they didn't. Asked whether he recalls my coming back with news of the first suggestion that I should take on Chairmanly role, he tersely replies 'Rod for Own Back' – but has the grace to not to add that he said this at the time. Remind him that there was Backup and a Team and many Excellent Women and Men on my side, to which he retorts 'But the Buck Stops Here'. Feel that I cannot cope with all this Laconism, nor, indeed, with the sorting out. Am forced to add fifth category of Undecided.

File of printing estimates, however, goes firmly into the Out pile, for it represents dreadful Ordeal by Printer, when the UK edition of *Barbara in the Bodleian* was in production. Text and design were all embodied in impeccable PDF files, thanks to Noble Work on part of Tom and Lloyd, so the Printers had only to Print and Deliver. They preferred, however, to Procrastinate and Delay, diversifying this with a measure of Prevarication and Deceit. Shudder to remember the day when the books were delivered to our house, instead of Bodleian Shop – moreover, late. Already vexed by this, I opened the box just to check over one volume, only to discover that the final twelve pages (the Index) had been omitted from the whole run. Temper not improved when the person at the other end of the line Did Not Believe Me, assuring me that Everything was Checked before it left the printshop. He went off to see and returned slightly chastened, declaring with assumed

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geniality that Everything would be All Right and Not to Worry, My Darling. Informed him through Gritted Teeth that I was old enough to be his Mother, if not actually his Grandmother, and was certainly not His Darling. This seemed to make him realise that I had passed through Displeasure via Exasperation to Fury – or perhaps the phone line was actually transmitting the steam that was coming out of my ears.

A prosaic receipt for bottled water likewise goes Out but evokes a quite different form of disappointment. This was the day of the Centenary Boat Trip to Godstow, commemorating BP's first date with Henry Harvey at the Trout Inn. The river was so low that two other vessels had run aground and were being recovered, forcing our boat to turn back before reaching the Trout. We then landed at Binsey, intending to visit the Perch instead, but were thwarted: 'Closed for a Wedding', said a notice. Apart from one acerbic remark about People who Know no Better than to get Married on a Friday, the assembled Pymmites took this with great good humour, picnicking on the grass and observing that It was All the More Pym-like for Plans to change into Might-Have-Beens.

Old school friend arrives as I am sorting, makes one of those vague offers to help (plainly seeing that she cannot) but accepts a cup of coffee and watches me at work. She obligingly points out that the Undecided pile is much the biggest of the five. Having read some Pym, she is eager to know whether there was much Rome, Death and Umbrage over the years. I assure her that Rome, at any rate, has been in abeyance for some time. She suggests that the whole process must have been like Herding Cats. Not at All, I say, then add, rather weakly, that at any rate I Like Cats. What Regrets do I have, she asks. Not sure exactly what she is hoping for, but reply firmly that there is indeed one: I never managed to make everyone use 'Pym' or 'BPS' in the subject line of emails, to stick to one topic only, and to change the subject line when the topic changes. I am leaving that – and everything else – to my Successor.

Photographer wanted for BPS Conference: St Hilda's College Oxford 29–31 August 2014

The Society would like to designate a conference attendee as official Photographer to cover the August 2014 BPS conference at St Hilda's College, Oxford. The Photographer's role is to provide a visual record of all the events of the conference and to make the results available to the Society for use in *Green Leaves*, Facebook and other online vehicles.

Those interested should contact the new Editor of *Green Leaves*, Rose Little: roselittlesmith123@gmail.com

The Prime of Miss Barbara Pym

The series of Barbara's birthdays did not of course end with her hundredth, celebrated last year. On Sunday 1 June the Cock and Bull Pub in midtown Manhattan will see a gathering for her 101st birthday. This happy occasion will be reported in the next issue of *GL*, but meanwhile, here are some facts about 101.

Because its digits reversed give the same number, 101 is a palindromic prime. Since the next odd number (103) is also a prime, 101 forms one of a twin prime pair. 101 is a unique prime, being the only prime with period 4 (try dividing 1 by 101 and see what you get). It is also the fourth centred decagonal prime: put a dot in the middle of ten other dots and join those ten up to get a decagon; then around that twenty dots, paired and joined; then thirty; and so on. Finally, 101 is the sum of five consecutive primes (13 + 17 + 19 + 23 + 29).

As Mark Haddon's protagonist in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* said: 'Prime numbers are what is left when you have taken all the patterns away. I think prime numbers are like life. They are very logical but you could never work out the rules, even if you spent all your time thinking about them.'

Linda McDougall and Kathy Ackley

Fond Memories
Michael Macke, Judy Horn, Jutta Schiller, Ellen Miller, and Joan Drexler at Moya Restaurant in Oxford

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Barbara Pym Society Knitting Competition: Keith's Sweater

devised by Linda McDougall

Barbara Pym's novel *A Glass of Blessings* is much concerned with outward appearances. Its heroine, Wilmet, shares with her author a keen interest in fashion and clothes – but takes a naively snobbish view of what constitutes a proper job for the sort of people she knows.

> *'This having things in common,' said Piers impatiently, 'how overrated it is! Long dreary intellectual conversations, capping each other's obscure quotations – it's so exhausting. It's much more agreeable to come home to some different remarks from the ones one's been hearing all day.'*
>
> *'I'm sure you get* those*,' I said spitefully. 'What does Keith do for a living, anyway?'*
>
> *'Various things. At the moment he is working in a coffee bar in the evenings, and he sometimes gets modelling jobs.'*
>
> *'Good heavens!' I suppose I must have been unable to keep the note of horror out of my voice, for Piers said sharply, 'Well, hasn't it ever occurred to you that somebody must pose for those photos of handsome young men you see in knitting patterns and women's magazines?'*

Wilmet goes home angry and upset. After an evening watching her mother-in-law knitting, she goes off to bed with the pattern book and begins to search for Keith.

> *In bed I turned the pages of the knitting book, looking for Keith. I soon found him on the opposite page to a rugged looking pipe smoking man who was wearing a cable stitch sweater which took thirty ounces of double knitting wool. Keith was leaning against a tree, one hand absently playing with a low-hanging branch. He wore a kind of lumber jacket with a shawl collar, knitted crossways in an intricate and rather pleasing stitch. 'For Leisure Hours', the pattern said, 'to fit a 36-38 inch chest. Commence at right cuff by casting on 64 sts. on No. 11 needles …' It seemed as if he might have stood there patiently while some busy woman knitted the jacket on to him. The expression in the dark eyes was sombre and unfathomable, the lips unsmiling. If one ignored the slightly ridiculous setting, it was easy to see how he could become an object of devotion.*

Given that *A Glass of Blessings* is the theme novel for the 2014 AGM and conference at St Hilda's this summer, we want to know what Keith's jumper looked like! From the instructions given by Barbara Pym in the paragraph above (p. 199 of the Penguin edition) please knit a sample square 20 cm by 20 cm. You choose the pattern. Don't forget that Barbara describes it as an 'intricate and rather pleasing stitch'. You choose the colour and the wool you think would be suited to Keith. Then make a photo or drawing of how the completed sweater would look when worn by Keith.

An expert knitter has been invited to attend the conference on Saturday 30 August and judge the winner.

First prize:
The wool to knit the winning sweater and an original 1950s knitting book.

The competition is open to all and there is no entry fee. Entries are not returnable; all suitable samples will be sewn together to make rugs and donated to a charity. The closing date for receipt of entries is Monday 18 August. Please make a cardboard label with your name, address, phone number and email on it, and attach this securely to the sample by tying or stitching; and also write these details on the back of your photo or drawing. Send your sample, plus the photo or drawing, to:

The Barbara Pym Society (Competition)
c/o Mrs Eileen Roberts
St Hilda's College
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Secretary: Lorraine Mepham
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In North America

North American Organizer: Tom Sopko
Treasurer: Jordan Bach
Membership Secretary: Judy Horn
Merchandise (US): Jordan Bach
Board: Kathy Ackley, Barbara Boles, Denise Marois-Wolf, Donna Safreed, Sarah Saville Shaffer, Isabel Stanley

Singing Unsuitable Things

North American outgoing organizer Kathy Ackley and incoming organizer Tom Sopko

Cecilia Mendez Hodes and Yvonne Cocking

Tom Sopko and Triona Adams at hymn sing

Dan & Ann DiPietro and Sherrie Saint John (with cast)

Gloria Nakamura and Elena Egan

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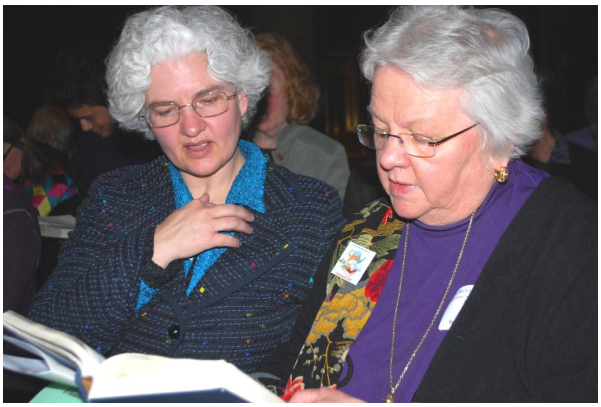
Nancy Macmillan, Tim Burnett and Ann Mason

Barbara Dunlap and Dorene Swanson

Louise Smith and Yvonne Cocking

Mothers and Daughters at the Conference

Lisa and Sandra Goldstein



Fran and Isabel Stanley

Denise Provost and Emma Forrest

Yvonne Cocking, Dan & Ann DiPietro, Tim Burnett, Rita Phillips

Flowers by Tom

Church of the Advent organist

Fran Baxter-Guigli and Pat Cowan

Jordan Bach, Lloyd Miller, Ted Poland

Gloria Nakamura and Charles Gilbert

Young Pymmites

An appreciative audience

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