Green Leaves

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society **Vol. XX, No. 2, Autumn 2014**

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

2014 AGM and Oxford Conference Report

by Maggie Parsons

The 2014 AGM and Conference of the Barbara Pym Society started for me on the afternoon of 29 August as I joined a group of members waiting outside the Porters' Lodge of St Hilda's College. We wondered anxiously if umbrellas and raincoats would be needed for the walk to the Story Museum in Pembroke Street. Fortunately, the showers were brief. Led by Sandra Margolies, we met other Pymmites in the courtyard to begin our tour.

The building had in its most recent incarnation belonged to the Post Office, but the exhibition we were visiting, '26 Characters', had transformed the rooms and spaces into imaginative installations that had photographs of authors dressed in costumes as the story characters they had most loved as children. I particularly liked Badger's cosy sitting room complete with tree roots and a blazing fire and I was enchanted to be able to enter Narnia through a wardrobe, pushing past fur coats to find myself in the snowy woods. Our guide from the museum gave us a very convincing explanation concerning the historic provenance of the Heath Robinsonesque Story Machine that turned out to be totally fictitious. The power of good storytelling indeed!

Statue of Jacqueline du Pré (Glynis Owen) in the JdP

Later, after a delicious meal in the dining room, Eileen took the opportunity to introduce the new Principal of the college, Sir Gordon Duff, to the Barbara Pym Society and he wished the Conference well. We made up teams for the annual quiz, fiendishly compiled and organised by Deb Fisher. There were three fiercely contested rounds entitled 'People like Pym', an audio round to identify poets reading their own work, and 'Twentieth Century Fictional Characters'. The victors were 'The Editors', with 'Cenerentola' and my own team, 'Remembering Scampi', coming a close joint second. The booby prize for the most ridiculous answer to a question was a framed montage of black and white photographs of male and female models of 1950s vintage sporting a variety of knitted scarves in 'P and B' (Paton & Baldwin) wools. This was won by Gordon Duff's team and presented by him to a very appreciative Kathy Ackley.

On Saturday morning we assembled in the Jacqueline du Pré building for the AGM and our new chairman, Michael Wilson, welcomed us to the conference very aware of the burden he has taken on and the excellent women in whose footsteps he follows. 'None of you could understand how busy I am,' he said, with a fair impression of Father Thames, before reminding us of the many wonderful events that had taken place to celebrate Barbara's Centenary year and thanking all those involved in making them happen.

This was followed by the society's archivist Yvonne Cocking's lively and amusing presentation of her research on 'The History behind *A Glass of Blessings*' with quotations from Barbara's papers, diaries, notebooks and reviews of the novel read by Christopher Nankivell and Lorraine Mepham. I was now fully prepared to be immersed in Wilmet's world. The next speaker was Maggie Lane, the author of ten books about Jane Austen, her most recent being *Growing Older with Jane Austen*. In her paper she considered the many resonances and parallels to be found between *A Glass of Blessings* and Jane Austen's *Emma*. Her stimulating talk

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provoked much discussion, including Pym's reintroduction of characters from other novels: Maggie said that although Austen did talk about the lives of her characters within her own circle, she never placed them in other books. Tom Sopko said that he felt that all Pym's characters take on a life beyond the page and Clemence Schultze had noticed a semi-parallel between the fussy and demanding Mr Woodhouse and 'old' Mrs Beamish, the latter being disturbingly only just over seventy. However, Mrs Beamish loved her meat, whereas Mr Woodhouse was frightened of food. No such fear was displayed as we tucked into a buffet lunch in the marquee.

Lunch over, our next speakers, Libby Tempest and Nick Turner, gave thoughtful papers on the historical context of attitudes to homosexuality in 1950s Britain, and how it is covered in Pym's novels and other literature of the period. Hearing the experiences of men at a time when homosexuality was a criminal offence in the UK was shocking and moving. My appreciation of the 'autumnal currents under the surface' in *A Glass of Blessings*, as noticed by Philip Larkin, was intensified by their examination, as was my admiration for Pym's inclusive depiction of homosexual characters when they were so persecuted in society. I agreed wholeheartedly with Nick Turner's conclusion that 'In a climate of fear Pym gives a message of tolerance and hope.'

Christopher Nankivell and Lorraine Mepham

Next, Colin Oxenforth shed light on an aspect of *A Glass of Blessings* that had previously mystified me; namely the vexed issues with the Church of India. Colin both enlightened and entertained us with his extremely thorough presentation. We were invited to join Colin in singing 'The Vicar of Bray' and were grateful that this did not extend to all eight verses …

The rain held off in the evening but there was an unseasonal chill in the air as we sipped our pre-dinner drinks on the lawn and I wished I had put on more layers, perhaps even a woolly vest! A group of us headed very promptly for the warmth of the dining tent. Arthur Bostrom, the actor, was the after-dinner speaker; he is best known for his role as the policeman in the TV drama *'Allo, 'Allo.'* Pym has been his favourite novelist for thirty-five years: he was delighted to accept the invitation to speak and attended the whole conference commenting, 'I have met other people who like Barbara Pym but not to this extent.' His speech showed the depth of his affection and knowledge of the novels as he quoted extensively and showed the quietly devastating way that Pym ends many of her chapters. Everyone's bosom responded to the sentiments expressed by Linda McDougall: 'such a treat to find someone who loves Pym as much as we all do.' *[An interview with Arthur Bostrom by Libby Tempest will appear in the next issue of GL, Ed.]*

Arthur Bostrom

Sunday brought bright sunshine and it was lovely to be able to sit outside before our morning session, when Linda McDougall announced the winner of the knitting competition and showed the update of her film 'We Knew Barbara'. Miriam Margolyes, filmed in her sitting room reading from the diaries and novels, was a joyful addition to the film, and it is wonderful to have her 'Miss Doggett' recorded.

Unfortunately Michael Macke was taken ill just before the film and was driven to hospital. He received excellent care at the John Radcliffe Hospital and was then flown back to Germany where he remains unconscious. Our thoughts are with him, his family and friends.

Clemence Schultze and Michael Macke

The Conference concluded with Yvonne Cocking's sparklingly witty dramatisation of *A Glass of Blessings* entitled 'Oh, Any Sex, Any Sex', where the cast magnificently portrayed their characters to the audience's great pleasure, making a happy and suitable ending to a memorable conference.

Our first paper, entitled 'What is My Next Novel to Be?' was by Yvonne Cocking. It was also given at the 2010 North American conference and a synopsis can be found in *Green Leaves*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, Spring 2010, p 6.

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Handsome, Clever and Rich: Emma Woodhouse and Wilmet Forsyth

by Maggie Lane

Philip Larkin may have written to Barbara Pym, '*Some Tame Gazelle* is your *Pride and Prejudice',* but my contention is that *A Glass of Blessings* is her *Emma*. This paper sets out to examine the multiple echoes and parallels in theme, character, plot and tone between the two novels, written about one hundred and forty years apart. This is not to suggest that Pym was consciously moulding her story on Austen's, of course – that was not her way of working, and there is no suggestion in her notebooks, as she began to create a new novel, that *Emma* was particularly present in her consciousness. Austen's novels were, however, certainly part of Pym's well-stocked mind.

Pym, who favoured quotes from English poetry for her titles, is known to have changed the title of this novel from *The Lime Tree Bower* (Samuel Taylor Coleridge) to *A Glass of Blessings* (George Herbert). It may be a coincidence that her second thought echoes the opening sentence of Austen's novel, but it certainly announces a heroine in a similar situation, the woman who seems to have everything and who is a little too pleased with herself and her situation: 'Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.' With the exception of her age, this description could apply equally to Wilmet Forsyth. But there is something beyond character in the prominence given by both authors to the word 'blessings' – it characterises the imaginative worlds in which the heroines have their beings, worlds replete with material ease and comfort in which, if happiness eludes them for a while, it is never far away. Though both heroines have their moments of despondence, and have to encounter threats to their equilibrium which they hardly saw coming, these are, in tone, both happy narratives.

There is even an echo *outside* the respective texts, in the personal letters of the authors. 'I am going to take a heroine whom nobody but myself will much like,' wrote Austen to a niece clamouring for another novel. 'I may as well warn you that the heroine is not very nice,' wrote Pym to her publisher in submitting *A Glass of Blessings*. Generations of readers have proved both authors wrong about their own creations, however, for in their self-delusions and struggles to identify and live a good life, both Emma and Wilmet are very endearing indeed.

Each woman is beloved and indulged in her family circle, is financially free from care, and, living in a smooth-running household which makes few demands on her, enjoys a great deal of freedom as to how she spends her time. Priding herself on her elegance and social suavity, each imagines that an attractive man is in love with her, and toys with the idea of being in love with him. Such delightful imaginings, and flirtatious yet innocent encounters, bolster their respective egos and fill voids in lives and minds with very little to occupy them. The truths which are eventually forced on them are characteristic of their times. Emma finds that Frank Churchill is secretly engaged to another, and using her as cover. Wilmet finds that Piers Longridge is gay, and lives with Keith. Neither woman is heartbroken, but both are jolted out of their smugness.

Both plots feature a mysterious and anonymous gift. Both contain demanding aged parents and explore different sorts of female friendship. The time-frame of both novels is notably similar, beginning in the autumn, proceeding through winter plans and complications until high summer brings a crisis, and closing at the most fruitful time of the year with a clutch of weddings or – in Wilmet's case – almost a renewal of her wedding vows.

Wilmet tells us that she married Rodney partly because as a young officer he embodied 'those peculiarly English qualities which had seemed so lovable when we had first met in Italy during the war and I had been homesick for damp green English churchyards'. The repetition of the word 'English', the stress on the greenness of England, are anticipated in *Emma*. Visiting Donwell Abbey, the home of Mr Knightley, Emma looks around to refresh her memory and reflects, 'It was a sweet view – sweet to the eye and to the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort … ' Both Mr Knightley and Rodney Forsyth are models of the English gentleman, reserved, honourable, socially assured. Having to converse with both Keith and Wilfred Bason in the coffee bar, an alien haunt for the Forsyths, the unruffled Rodney speaks 'smoothly' and 'evenly'. Later he speaks 'calmly' when encountering Bason again in the Devon tea-shop. Neither Emma nor Wilmet ever has to blush for the man she marries. For both women, the true hero has been present from chapter one.

Maggie Lane *is the author of many books including the most recent* Growing Older with Jane Austen. *She is the Editor of the Jane Austen Society News Letters and Annual Report.*

We would like to thank Chris Rutherford, Jutta Schiller and Clemence Schultze for their photographs in this edition of Green Leaves.

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'Not Named Among Christians'

by Libby Tempest

The novel at the heart of this year's conference, *A Glass of Blessings*, was written during the mid-1950s at a time when homosexual acts between men were against the law and gay men were mostly viewed with hostility and abhorrence by the general public. Yet in the novel, when Wilmet's 'little romance' with Piers is thwarted by the fact that he is homosexual, she is disappointed rather than disgusted; the delightful and obviously gay Wilf Bason is accepted with affection by the society in which he lives, not ostracised. My paper set out to explore the legal, social and historical background against which the novel was written and to put into context Barbara Pym's own quietly radical views on 'the issue of homosexuality'.

The law under which gay men were arrested dated back to the 1880s but was still being actively enforced in the 1950s: in 1955, 2,322 men were prosecuted for 'indecency between males' – of these, 1,065 were sent to prison. *Gateway to Heaven* is a collection of oral history reminiscences edited by Clare Summerskill – it contains some powerful memories from that period:

'Jeffrey – "In the fifties of course the police were a threat then, because they could bang on your door and arrest you for having sex with your partner. And that did happen on many occasions ... you were dreading they would notice that there was a double bed and two men were living in one bedsitter."'

This was the reality of life for thousands of men like Piers and Keith.

In 1954 police arrested Lord Montagu of Beaulieu and two friends and charged them with 'improper acts and unnatural offences' against two young airmen: this case caused a scandal because the two airmen turned Queen's Evidence against Lord Montagu and his friends in return for immunity from prosecution for themselves. Public opinion was beginning to change and later, in 1954, Sir John Wolfenden was asked to head up an enquiry into homosexuality: the Wolfenden Committee published their report in 1957. Their recommendation was that 'all forms of consensual homosexual behaviour between adult males in private should be decriminalised'. Peter Wildeblood was one of Lord Montagu's friends in the Montagu case, and after his release from prison he wrote a book about his experiences, *Against the Law*, in which he argues for the basic human right 'to choose the person whom I love.' It was to be another ten years before this could become a reality.

***Libby Tempest** has been a Chartered Librarian for many years, working most recently as Cultural Services Manager at Manchester Central Library. Besides her role on the BPS, Libby is currently on the National Committee for the Elizabeth Gaskell Society.*

Homosexuality in *A Glass of Blessings*

by Nick Turner

The amount of gay characters in *A Glass of Blessings* makes it an ideal novel for considering Barbara Pym's presentation of homosexuality. Compared to other writers of the 1950s, who were notable for the lack of homosexual characters in their fiction, Pym is unusual in presenting not only a happy couple who are gay, but other characters, such as Wilfred Bason and Father Thames, whose sexuality is not seen as an issue.

Compared to Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*, for example, which was published the same year and is famous for the central depiction of a gay character's consciousness, *A Glass of Blessings* is not a tragedy and does not taint its gay characters with criminality, nor locate them at a distance from contemporary society. Also, unlike many works of the period that 'discuss' homosexuality, *A Glass of Blessings* is a comedy: Pym has the confidence to treat her gay characters in the same way, and expose them to the same gentle ridicule, as her straight ones. This is partly because Pym is a very *personal* writer: at ease with homosexual men, fascinated by them, she naturally made them an important part of her fictional world.

Nick Turner, Libby Tempest and Simon Rennie

I don't think there is a conscious agenda at work here in terms of homosexuality and society, and the paradoxical outcome of this is that Pym's fiction has dated less and appeals far more than other more consciously political work of the period (e.g. the novels of Angus Wilson). Nonetheless, subtle things reverberate: Wilmet is required to take part in a kind of charade when shown Piers' and Keith's flat and must view the rather deliberate two-bedroom presentation without comment. Keith is also linked by Wilmet to the Retreat she visits, when she imagines him in its garden. This might suggest the marginal life Keith has to lead, although that is contrasted by his work at what is in effect a 'gay coffee bar',

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La Cenerentola, a name shared by the villa in Italy to which Father Thames is to retire.

In the end, sexuality does not matter to Barbara Pym, and whether Father Thames is 'gay' or 'straight' must remain a mystery. What Barbara Pym does offer through Wilmet Forsyth is, however, a symbol of contemporary England: narrow, inward-looking, self-obsessed and unaware of incipient change but, when it has been understood, tolerant, inclusive and ready to embrace what is new.

Nick Turner *is an Associate Lecturer at the Universities of Edge Hill and Salford, and the author of* Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon *(Continuum, 2010).*

The Church of South India – Very Thoroughly

by Colin Oxenforth

Father Thames is going to begin a course on this knotty problem that hangs over some of the more Catholic members of the Church of England. Or is he? *A Glass of Blessings* explores issues behind the question, and sees that it is important to some, and really too much hard work for the vast majority. To understand the problem we need to look at past Church history in England, going right back to pre-Reformation times and especially looking at the High Church/Puritan/Catholic Revival movements, and how thought and practice were various, and views held with alarming ferocity at times. We sang a few verses of *The Vicar of Bray* to humorously point up this fact.

The Apostolic Succession was extremely important to some. The Apostles, including St Paul, consecrated the first bishops by laying on of hands, and those bishops passed this on to others down the years. The Nonconformist churches had no access to this tradition, but just appointed their own ministers, bishops and so on. Those who opposed the unification of Churches in Southern India did so on the grounds that the lack of genuinely ordained and consecrated bishops and priests in the Nonconformist sections made union impossible, even though the union was confirmed by all parties in 1947. Validity of the Apostolic Succession was seen to be absolutely vital to some Anglicans on the Catholic wing of the Church. That is the direct line of continuity of the laying on of hands in consecrating bishops and their subsequent ordination of priests.

This outlook goes back to the High Church: William Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes and William Laud in the eighteenth century (High Church), and also John Keble and John Henry Newman in the Catholic Revival from 1833. This was associated with the Gothic Revival, both in art and decoration of churches and the furniture within.

In the novel, the expected course does not happen as it is seen as too hot a potato by Father Thames. His curate, Marius Ransome, has to lodge with a fellow priest as his landlady dies and he couldn't possibly stay with her single daughter in the house. Father Edwin Sainsbury, the friend, does have serious doubts and has a letter published in the *Church Times*. This creates real fear at St Luke's. What if Father Ransome goes over to Rome as well, and how will they manage with only two clergy? It really is terribly difficult to find a new curate! Father Thames even fears that some of the congregation may 'go over' especially after Father Sainsbury is received at Farm Street, a Jesuit church. In typical Pymmish style, this drama is followed by a banal meal of egg and chips.

Exactly what being a Catholic in the Church of England is, or is not, is dealt with in a witty way, but the divisions within Anglicanism, fear of Rome, and personal security of faith are very real. The conclusion for Father Thames is to ignore it in the hope it will go away. In fact Father Ransome decides to marry Mary Beamish, so he is out of the running anyway, certainly if he wanted to be a priest in the Roman Church.

The question of boundaries and safety within relationships is a key part of the plot line for the major characters in *A Glass of Blessings*. Wilmet has a ridiculous flirtation with Piers Longridge, who is gay, though it takes time for her to work this out, even though the reader may have seen it coming for ages! Her husband, Rodney, has a flirtation with Prudence that comes to nothing. Sybil, his mother, decides to remarry and so throw Rodney and Wilmet out of her home, so the story ends with a new beginning and understanding of personal boundaries that is far more secure and realistic than at the beginning.

These issues continue in fact to this day within the Church of England. Issues over the ordination of women to the priesthood – and more recently consecration as bishops – have given the journey Romeward a new impetus, especially after Pope Benedict created a new section of his church called the Ordinariate. People who always looked for union with Rome saw this as a step forward, as they could keep their own liturgy.

The issues of Church and State often conflicted with personal views, and taste in worship was the most important factor for many rather than legality. I think this was Barbara's own position. Attitudes and reality are shown in the Cenerentola Coffee Bar when so much of the plot comes together. Father Thames may be quoted as thinking things are 'too bad, too bad', but South India is ignored by all except one.

Colin Oxenforth *is a retired Anglican priest who has worked in a variety of parishes in London and Liverpool. Discovering Barbara Pym was both a delight and an affirmation.*

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Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society
Saturday 30 August 2014, 11.00am

Committee members present: Michael Wilson (Chair), Kathy Ackley (NA Representative), Yvonne Cocking (Archivist), Jean Harker, Rose Little, Lorraine Mepham (Secretary), Linda McDougall, Sandra Margolies, Maggie Parsons (ALS Representative), Eileen Roberts, (Treasurer), Chris Rutherford (Membership Secretary), Christine Shuttleworth, Tom Sopko (NA Organizer), Libby Tempest.

1. **Apologies**: apologies were received from Kathleen Elliott, Hazel Holt, Rita Phillips, Martin Rush and Ruth Taylor.
2. **Minutes of the Previous AGM:** the minutes had been circulated, and were accepted without amendment. There were no matters arising.
3. **Financial and Membership report**
   The UK account as of 31 July 2014 stands at £8,766.21 (an increase of £49.57 from this time last year). The London Meeting resulted in a loss of £77.50; the printing of *Green Leaves* cost £706.00 (an increase on previous issues due to 400 copies being printed because of the Centenary rather than the 300 normally printed, and the fact that the Autumn issue carried 24 pages instead of the usual 16) and the cost of the Centenary short story competition was £450.00, which was covered by the entrance fee and the kind donation of Kelvin Carr in remembrance of his wife, Jean. Mailing continues to be a significant expense but is considered to be the better option rather than electronic copies. Meeting booking forms and membership renewals are emailed, which does help to reduce the cost.
   UK membership stands at 183 paid-up members (142 individual members, 8 senior joint members, 33 Honorary and Life members), down from 199 last year. This excludes 20 members who have not paid for the last two years.
4. **Chairman's Report**
   Michael quoted the Aims of the Society: 'To foster the appreciation and wider knowledge of the life and works of Barbara Pym', as being behind all that we did in 2013, Barbara's centenary year.
   'Remembering Barbara' was the theme of the Annual Conference. Of its many highlights one of the most memorable was the première of the film 'We Knew Barbara', written directed and produced by Linda McDougall and her son Jonathan Mitchell. This included interviews with the now dwindling band of people who knew and loved Barbara in her lifetime, including, somewhat amazingly, Richard Roberts ('Skipper'), not heard of for fifty years but tracked down by Linda. Earlier in the year we had launched the Barbara Pym Short Story Competition, mainly funded by the generosity of Kelvin Carr in memory of his late wife, Jean, a graduate of St Hilda's and a member of the Society. The competition attracted 72 entries, and there were two joint first prize winners, Tanya Aydon and Nemone Thornes, with Fran Baxter taking third place. Thanks were recorded to all who helped organize the competition, especially Rose Little, Kate Charles and the other judges, and to Triona Adams and Miriam Margolyes, who read the winning stories. Miriam had earlier entertained us by reading at the Annual Dinner; we are so lucky to have her in the Society. On the Sunday morning we gave thanks for Barbara's life at a special service in her church at Finstock, conducted by the Society's unofficial chaplain, Colin Oxenforth, and we laid flowers on her grave. Other speakers were Paul Binding, Laura Shapiro, Alison Felstead and Catriona Cannon. As is our tradition, the Conference concluded with a performance,by the Mighty Pym Players, arranged as ever by Yvonne Cocking, of 'Mothers and Fathers', to great applause.
   This has been Michael's first year as Chairman, taking over from Clemence Schultze as Chairman. Much-deserved and glowing tribute was paid to Clemence for all her work for the Society. Another leading light in the literary society world is Deb Fisher. Deb's term on the Committee also expired, and we were pleased to welcome Sandra Margolies to the Committee in Deb's place. Other events in the past year to note were the Spring Conference at St Alban's, Holborn, where Dr Kerry Sinanan from the University of the West of England spoke on 'All those loose ends: Austen, love and pain in the writings of Barbara Pym'; the exhibition at the Bodleian of items from the Pym archives; and a talk given by Triona Adams to the sixth form of Francis Holland School in London.
   Sadly death can rob us of members over the course of a year. This year we record the passing of two regular attendees at our Conferences, Maureen Lenk and Sheila Garforth.
   Finally Michael thanked all the members of the Committee for all they have done over the past year. Special thanks went to Christine Rutherford who looks after membership, Libby Tempest for sales merchandise, to Lorraine Mepham, our Secretary, Eileen Roberts, Treasurer and Conference Organizer, and to Martin Rush, who has been editor of *Green Leaves*. Thanks went also to Martin's assistant Editor, Judy Horn, and to Rose Little, who has been shadowing Martin in preparation for taking on the Editor's role, to Clemence for wise counsel and heroic battles with incompetent printers, and to Yvonne, for her wonderful dramatizations, for safeguarding the archives, and for her book, *Barbara in the Bodleian*, which is about to be reprinted. Thanks to everyone who runs the North American Branch, especially Kathy Ackley and Tom Sopko, and particular thanks to Tom for maintaining our website.
5. ***Green Leaves***
   Two issues of *GL* appeared (Autumn 2013, Spring 2014). Rose Little now takes over as Editor. The next issue is on schedule to appear in autumn 2014.
6. **BPS in North America**
   Tom Sopko and Kathy Ackley reported on NA

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matters, with a financial report by Jordan Bach. Their report summarizes membership (232 paid members, plus 113 who paid in 2013 but have not yet renewed, an increase of 37 over total membership one year ago, and including 48 new members); and finances ($18,124 cash in hand as of 31 July 2014, an increase of $1751 from last year). In addition, Tom recorded the generous donation of $1000 from Martin Rush, who received and redirected this sum from an online retailer.

The 2014 NA conference (featured book *Excellent Women*) was once again a huge success, this year selling out more than nine weeks before the event. Speakers included Beverly Bell, Hope Howell Hodgkins, Orna Raz, Triona Adams and Amaret Johnson. Other memorable presentations were the expanded version of Linda McDougall's video *Remembering Barbara*, and Triona Adams' moving dramatization of the Pym–Larkin letters, read by Triona and TV actor Jack Gilpin.

The BPS website averages approximately 257 visits and 1000 page views per week, and the BPS Facebook page has 980 followers.

7. **Archivist's Report**

   Yvonne Cocking reported that committee member Rose Little is currently researching the correspondence between Barbara and Joy Vines, concerning Elizabeth Taylor. This correspondence will probably be passed eventually to the Bodleian, but will not form part of the BP archive, as that is closed.

   Yvonne also proposes to deposit material relating to the foundation of the BPS to Elizabeth Boardman, St Hilda's Archivist, who has expressed an interest.

8. **Elections**

   The committee recommended the election of Rose Little as editor of *Green Leaves* and of Alison Felstead to fill Rose's position as Ordinary Member. These were taken together, and both candidates were unanimously elected.

The meeting closed at 11.35am.

Margot Schnorr, Jutta Schiller and Michael Macke

Obituary of Fred Holman

by Anne Holman

Fred Holman was born in London in 1935. His father was a World War One veteran and civil servant. Fred entered University College, London, where he read philosophy under A. J. Ayer and Richard Wollheim. This was the start of a lifelong fascination with philosophy. Always very sociable, Fred made a wide circle of friends, some of whom were in a group called the Sceptics.

After graduating from UCL, Fred entered the Inland Revenue Department. He continued his philosophical pursuits and taught WEA classes in philosophy. He also joined an amateur theatrical group, where he met his Canadian wife, Anne. They married in 1964 and had three children, Nina, James and Rupert, and made many lifelong friends in Battersea.

In 1974 Fred became a District Inspector in Taunton, where the family was quick to appreciate the advantages of country living. His next posting was to Hereford, and Fred put down roots in the beautiful countryside of the Welsh Marches.

Fred enjoyed Trollope, Tolstoy, Tolkien and above all Jane Austen. After the rediscovery of Barbara Pym, Anne introduced him to her novels. He appreciated their humour and ambience, and the couple joined the Society early on. Fred very much enjoyed the Oxford conferences of the Barbara Pym Society and would attend them most years after he retired. He made a notable figure, with his height and dignified bearing, and members will recall his many illuminating contributions to discussions.

He was treasurer of a number of societies and parishes and was generally involved in local charities and cultural activities. He played golf, explored inland waterways with Anne, spent holidays in Provence and further afield. He also enjoyed having his children and grandchildren to stay.

When he retired, Fred started to teach himself Ancient Greek with the aim of reading the Greek philosophers in the original, and he found a retired schoolmaster who wanted to read Homer again, who was a great help.

In the summer of his fatal accident Fred had several projects lined up: another holiday in London, a trip to the Scottish Highlands to research a writer ancestor, and then the Barbara Pym conference. He is greatly missed by his family and friends, who feel thankful, however, that he lived with his usual verve and interest almost to the very end.

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Austen, Love and Pain in the Novels of Barbara Pym

by Dr Kerry Sinanan

In 1954 Pym wrote the following:

> Perhaps to be loved is the most cosy thing in life and yet many people, women I suppose I mean, know only the uncertainties of loving, which is only sometimes cosy when one accepts one's situation (rarely, perhaps). Wouldn't unrequited love be a good subject for a novel? (MSPym 40-45)

In the man's world depicted by Pym, men have the choices and prerogatives while women must wait and bide. With acceptance and submission, a degree of 'cosiness' may be attained. The timing of this entry suggests the early seeds of *No Fond Return of Love* (1961). In the end, there is, *perhaps*, a return of love for the novel's heroine, Dulcie, but not before she, like many of Pym's female characters, has felt the pain of unrequited love.

Of course it is Pym's depiction of such common and everyday situations like broken engagements, infidelities and romantic disappointments that makes her so appealing. In *Quartet in Autumn*, Letty is unable to find David Lydell's 'change of mind' about Marjorie and his preference for Beth Doughty shocking – even though David is a clergyman. Letty knows that, despite Marjorie's pain, this is a typical pattern: the man has selected the woman who best displays her ability to ensure his domestic comfort. It is the very commonness of the kind of pain that Pym depicts in such disappointments and broken trysts that perhaps makes us underestimate the characters' sufferings. Indeed, this pain can become 'cosy'. Bob Smith ends his 1971 article, 'How pleasant to know Miss Pym' with, 'Meanwhile, bad days come to us all, and we cannot anticipate their ever not coming. Let us hope that Miss Pym will begin again to help us deal with them.' (*A Lot to Ask*, 223) As Yvonne Cocking notes in her survey of responses to *No Fond Return of Love*, readers found the story very cheering and delightful. One reader in particular says that it has cured her, if only for a while, of a depression clearly associated with the drudgery of her life: 'I am in the middle of a spell of feeling particularly overworked and under-appreciated … Thank you for lifting me out of my mild depression and drawing my attention once more to the endless fun of life'. (Cocking, 8) I want to suggest that we are in danger of only partially appreciating Pym's achievement if we wrap ourselves up, so to speak, in the cosy blanket of her novels and fail to take full cognisance of the rather more disturbing and painful elements. We should worry about this reader who has found in Pym's writing a tonic that will enable her to carry on. She will be better able, now, to endure being overworked and under-appreciated because she has been reminded of how to see humour in her situation. This is both comforting and disconcerting for it requires a sublimation of pain and suffering to carry on being useful, a Beth Doughty.

It is the very familiarity of the scenarios and the characters' coping mechanisms that I feel Pym wants us to scrutinize more deeply, rather than merely nodding and smiling in comfortable recognition. Pym's novels present us with a satire that exposes the patterns of painful endurance and perpetuation that embed women in patriarchal structures for which the denial of their own happiness and the sublimation of their own desires is essential.

As we all know, Pym is often compared with Jane Austen. In *Persuasion*, Austen's most meticulous account of love's pain, the love and pain are tightly interwoven at the novel's culmination. Anne Elliot's moving words to Captain Harville about painful, unrequited love – women have the privilege of 'loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone' (Austen, 222) – are overheard by Captain Wentworth and cause him to write his passionate claim of love for her, thus bringing about an 'overpowering happiness' for Anne who finally, after years of intense suffering, wins her true love.

I think that Pym is asking us to consider the quiet, unheard but extreme pain that, in this case, women go through when they cannot have their desires fulfilled. It was a pain that her diaries show she experienced deeply, as in her record of her acceptance of Gordon Glover's rejection of her in October 1943:

> A very melancholy day, but in some ways a satisfying one. Because I've really faced the fact that Gordon doesn't really love me as I love him and will never ask me to marry him when he is free … (MSPym 109, 91)

Hazel Holt, Pym's closest friend, writes of this moment, 'Perhaps it would not be too fanciful to say that she had at last grown from her Marianne phase into that of the more thoughtful and ironic Elinor.' (*A Lot to Ask*, 112) I find this a truly sensitive appreciation of the situation: Pym's novels are reflecting patterns of self-inurement and sublimation that do not change the structures within which women's feelings and needs are, at best, secondary.

Kerry Sinanan *is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of the West of England. Her interest in Pym emerges out of her love of Jane Austen and other women novelists of the period.*

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A Few Pymmish Moments: The Spring Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society, 18 May 2014

by Sandra Margolies

As I got up, BBC Radio 4 was forecasting temperatures that would make this 'the first day of summer'. What to wear, then? I decided on a Liberty-print dress and my new straw hat, bought in preparation for an Italian holiday – suitably Pymmish. The route from Farringdon Road led through the deserted streets of the jewellery quarter, until the Gothic revival spire of St Alban's Holborn appeared.

Upstairs, for the morning committee meeting. Much hilarity during the discussion of the 'Knit Keith's Sweater' competition, but it was agreed that, if advertised in knitting magazines, it might raise the profile of the Society, as the short-story competition did last year (see last Autumn's issue of *Green Leaves*, Vol. XIX, No.2).

Downstairs to the hall, where around 40 more members of the Society had gathered, ready for lunch. Among the offerings that could have come out of a Pym gathering were coronation chicken sandwiches and sausage rolls. Houmous and samosas might have been a bit exotic in the 1950s, but all the food was eagerly consumed, as we juggled our glasses of wine and paper plates. A small group settled in the shady courtyard, where literary anecdotes were exchanged and capped enthusiastically.

Then Michael Wilson welcomed us back into the hall and introduced Dr Susan Jones (Barbara Pym Fellow at St Hilda's College), who in turn introduced the afternoon's speaker, Dr Kerry Sinanan. Since her talk, 'Austen, Love and Pain in the Novels of Barbara Pym', appears elsewhere in this issue**,** I shall restrict myself to a few notes and quotations:

> Although 'comedy is realistic' and books may be cheering, we should not overlook the darker elements.
>
> We are coerced by Pym into laughing at the pain of unrequited love, but also into recognising the sorrow of parting when 'the evenings began to lengthen and the birds sang'.
>
> Wives suffer much in Pym. This theme was brought up in some of the questions, for example, about Wilmet's 'hollow life'. And one questioner (a man) asked, 'Do women today have the time to suffer?'

Finally, tea and more cakes, and more conversation, before people drifted off, looking forward to meeting again at the Annual Conference in August. But for me, there was one final Pym moment. In my work as a copyeditor, I had recently come across mention of a former priest at the church, Charles Mortlock, who worked as an archaeologist in Palestine and 'is depicted in a mural in St Alban's the Martyr, Holborn'. Seeing the church was still open, I went inside. Amid the heavy pall of incense, I found a table on which the leaflets displayed told me nothing – but coming down the aisle was a verger-like figure, carrying a censer! He gladly identified all four clerical figures in the mural on the east wall. I could not have asked for a more apt encounter.

When I got home, I searched through *A Very Private Eye* for this appropriate quotation from her diary (p.184):

> *Wednesday 19 May* [1943] ... Gloriously hot weather. I am firewatching in a cotton dress and in the light. Well, summer's here now. Spring has not waited.

Chairman's Chat

by Michael Wilson

September is one of my favourite months and this year's, so far at least, is proving to be a memorable one. Yesterday I enjoyed a long walk along the coast of the Isle of Wight in glorious sunshine. But I always find there is a touch of melancholy to it. At the end of spring I promise myself that I am going to savour every summer's day and hold it precious in my memory, but somehow the days slip by too soon, August comes and goes and then it's September already and we are heading inexorably to autumn. And the older one gets, the more bitter-sweet the feeling becomes. Those golden days are gone and will never come again.

But every season brings its consolations. Autumn is when the harvest comes home, and chrysanthemums, late roses and dahlias, and Michaelmas daisies bloom in our gardens. Fallen leaves rustle underfoot and bonfires smoulder.

And as the evenings draw in we have more time for reading, cosy by the fire perhaps with a cup of tea, or a glass of wine. Some of Pym's characters seem especially suited to this time of year. Miss Doggett would be overseeing work in the garden, and bottling plums in the kitchen, her own method of course, never known to fail. The new academic year would see new faces at the Sunday afternoon tea parties. Harriet Bede would be busy sorting out her wardrobe, ordering a new winter coat in the latest style, and of course looking forward to supper parties with handsome young curates.

After Maggie Lane's talk at our Conference on the resonances between *A Glass of Blessings* and Jane Austen's *Emma* I have resolved to renew my acquaintance with Miss Woodhouse. I wish you much joy in your autumn reading.

Alliance of Literary Societies

Members of the BPS are automatically members of the Alliance of Literary Societies and can receive a free copy of the ALS journal, *ALSo*, by email from Linda Curry on ljc1049@gmail.com. The printed version of the journal is available at £4 from 59 Bryony Road, Birmingham B29 4BY.

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Rambling Rose

by Rose Little

My eyes smarting from the unaccustomed activity of intense editing I escaped into my green leafy garden, past the composter (minus bees) to the shady corner with its heap of leaves and cuttings.

Our cat, Poppy, loped ahead of me and leapt, almost flew, up the trunk of the apple tree, where her tabby camouflage merged perfectly with the dappled grey bark. The autumn sun shone warmly through the branches and I strolled about, past the (Victoria?) plum tree. Coming to the greengage I began to reach for the elusive fruit.

Memories of my mother, making jam, like Jane, and of my father, the tireless gardener, resurfaced and gave some stillness to my restless thoughts. But it wasn't long before I was compelled back to my computer – ten more exciting contributions had come through!

After more feverish editing, I decided I needed an outing. So I drove to nearby Avebury Manor where I was entranced by the dazzling show of dahlias, got lost in the encircling lawns and gardens and eventually arrived in the 'Keiller Parlour.' This was furnished in the style of the 1930s, when Barbara was a young woman. Sitting down on the sofa I felt perfectly at home next to the black bakelite telephone and the walnut desk complete with fascinating little drawers. The enormous wireless played contemporary dance music and the art-deco screen shut out other eras.

It had been lovely to time-travel to Barbara's world and I returned home refreshed, still thinking about her in the preparation of this journal.

(Send contributions intended for Green Leaves *to roselittlesmith123@gmail.com)*

Bookcrossing

by Janice Markey

Bookcrossing.com is an international online book swap and wild release group. Members discuss books, swap books, hold bookish conversations, but first and foremost we are known for our habit of registering our books with a Bookcrossing identification number and wild-releasing it for a member of the public to find. Typically we would leave the book on a park bench but many books are more imaginatively released and can be seen hanging from trees, balanced on statues or even floating down the river in a plastic bag.

We hold an annual convention somewhere in the world and in 2015 it is to be held in Oxford at St Hilda's College in the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building (JdP), from 10 to 12 April.

We enjoy author talks, and my first thought was to see who was an alumna of St Hilda's College. This in turn led me to the Barbara Pym Society who, I am very pleased to say, were delighted to offer us a speaker, Clemence Schultze.

Members of the Society are welcome to visit our convention on the day of the talk (Saturday 11 April 2015).

'Women: A Cultural Review'

by Nick Turner

Women: A Cultural Review is a highly rated academic journal published by Taylor & Francis, and their last issue of 2014 will be devoted to Barbara Pym (date as yet unclear).

It will include the following: Introduction (including discussion of Pym scholarship and overview of Pym's writing) by Nick Turner and Frances White; 'Knowing Barbara' (Paul Binding); '"Uneventful lives"? Links Between Charlotte M. Yonge, Ivy Compton-Burnett and Barbara Pym' (Julia Courtney); '"Something Unsatisfactory": Queer Desires in Barbara Pym' (Joseph Kennedy); '"A Carefully Worded Postcard": Epistolary Economy in the Novels of Barbara Pym' (Kym Brindle); '"The Priest and the Doctor": Medical Mystique as a Substitute for Religious Authority in the Work of Barbara Pym and Philip Larkin' (Pamela Osborn); '"Most Delightfully Incongruous": Desire, Plot and Realism in the Novels of Barbara Pym' (Kerry Sinanan).

The journal is normally free to access via universities, or people can purchase individual issues here: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/.VAOhjo10zcs#.VAcCVo10zcs

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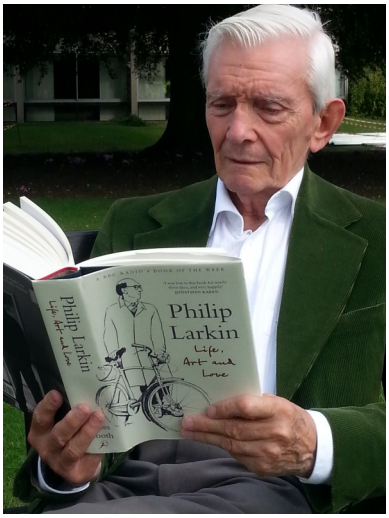
LibraryThing

by Alison Felstead (Bodleian Library)

I am still adding copy-specific details (inscriptions, dates, etc.) from the books from Barbara Pym's library to the catalogue of her library on LibraryThing (see http://www.librarything.com/profile/Barbara_Pym). I would be delighted to hear from any BPS members who own books from Barbara's library but have not yet got in touch. Please contact me at alison.felstead@btinternet.com.

Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love



Phil Bacon with James Booth's recent biography of Philip Larkin. Phil knew Larkin well during the last decade of his life at Hull University and his review will appear in the next issue of Green Leaves.

Pym in Japanese

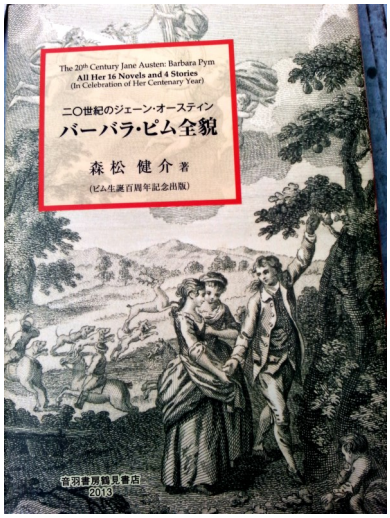
by Michael Wilson

Prolific Japanese author and Pym admirer Kensuke Morimatsu has just published a collection of essays on Barbara's works in Japanese. The English title of his book is *The 20th Century Jane Austen, Barbara Pym: All her 16 Novels and 4 Stories*. (ISBN number 978-4-7553-0277-0 C3098)

Kensuke describes his essays, full of extracts in Japanese translations, as critical though laudatory.

His chief intention was 'to let the reader notice her insights into the realities of human nature and appreciate her humorous narrative devices dexterously mixed with satirical comments on the Condition of England in her time'. He goes on: 'I know full well *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings* enjoy the highest estimation of all her works but I paid more attention to the funny satire of *Jane and Prudence*, the biting criticism of the unsubstantial research system and dishonest behaviour patterns of the new generation in *Less than Angels*, the enticing narrative techniques in *No Fond Return of Love*, the poetical delineations of old age in *Quartet in Autumn*, the harsh caricature of an elegant lady and trickiness of an academic American in *The Sweet Dove Died*, and the gentle but inexorable look at approaching Death in *Quartet in Autumn* and *A Few Green Leaves*.'

Kensuke has had a long and distinguished career, including lectureship at Kobe Municipal College of Foreign Languages, Chuo University in Tokyo, and Hosei University, Tokyo. He is now Professor Emeritus at Chuo.



His chief academic work has centred on the poems and novels of Thomas Hardy, but he has also written on, among others, Shelley, Larkin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. His latest book, to be published in December 2014, is *Translations of Selected Poems of John Clare*.

Centenary Connections

by Deb Fisher

It will not have escaped anyone's attention that the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War is being widely commemorated at the moment – not just in the UK, but in countries throughout the world, including most of Europe and the Commonwealth. I don't think any of our members will yet have forgotten last year's splendid centenary events marking the 100th 'birthday' of Barbara Pym and you will all therefore have deduced that the war broke out when she was a year old.

Although Barbara played an active role in the Second World War as a member of the WRNS, she was obviously far too young to be aware of what was happening in 1914. Like most small children, she would have been protected by her parents from any hardship that might have arisen from the circumstances, and the war certainly did not have as much of an impact in rural Shropshire as it did in Britain's major cities.

Oswestry did, however, become a garrison town, and far from immune to what was going on at the Front. Oswestry General Cemetery holds the graves of 52 servicemen, most of whom died at nearby Park Hall (a Tudor mansion that sadly burned down in 1918), where there was a military hospital. In November 1914, it came as something of a shock to local residents to read in the paper that 14,000 troops were shortly to be stationed at Park Hall, though no work began on the new camp until the following year. The site continued to be used by the military until the mid-1970s, and the young Barbara must have grown up with it.

When asked to write something about the First World War for *Green Leaves*, I struggled for a moment to think of any direct connection with Barbara. Then I recalled that

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other great writer, born in Oswestry twenty years before the Pym family's elder daughter. I refer, of course, to Wilfred Owen.

Admittedly, Owen left Oswestry at the age of four, a move prompted by a change in the family's circumstances. His father being a railway worker, he grew up in Birkenhead and later Shrewsbury, and it was in these two towns that he obtained his education; thus it is with Shrewsbury that he remains most closely associated. As with all the best stories, the story of Owen's life is governed by chance events with remarkable consequences.

Owen's experiences as a writer were quite different from those of Barbara Pym, and he enjoyed no literary success at all during his lifetime. (He was only 25 when his life ended in France, on the Western Front, ironically only a week before the Armistice was signed to end the war.) Yet Wilfred and Barbara have one important thing in common in that they owe their posthumous reputation largely to the support they received from their friends. The role Philip Larkin played in restoring Barbara's career as a novelist was significant. In the case of Wilfred Owen, it was another poet, Siegfried Sassoon, who brought out the best in him.

I am lucky enough to have in my possession Barbara Pym's own copy of Sassoon's selected poems, which I bought at the famous Blackwell's sale following the death of Hilary Pym Walton. The inscription on the flyleaf reveals that it was not her own choice but a gift from 'Simon' in 1931. The book is in such good condition for its age that I have no doubt it was not one of her favourites. The cutting, satirical poetry it contained is perhaps the wrong sort to have appealed to the young Barbara. I wonder if she even knew of the close connection between Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, of whose work she could not have failed to be aware. (Her sister Hilary owned an edition of Owen's letters, which I also have in my possession.)

In brief, Owen's meeting with Sassoon was a complete accident and one of the most fortuitous events in the history of literature. Owen was undoubtedly the more talented poet, but had done nothing notable in 1917, when he became a patient at Craiglockhart Military Hospital in Edinburgh – after some particularly traumatic experiences in the trenches – and took up the role of editor of the hospital's magazine, *The Hydra*. You can see copies of the magazine online in the Oxford First World War Poetry Digital Archive, among other places.

When Siegfried Sassoon arrived at Craiglockhart a few months later, having been diagnosed with war 'neurosis' after making a public protest against the continuation of the war, it was natural for Owen to approach him to seek a contribution to the magazine and to ask advice about his own work. The result was a subtle change in Owen's style, leading to the creation of masterpieces like 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (we know that Sassoon gave Owen considerable help with this poem because the manuscript, in both their handwriting, still exists). Many have speculated on the nature and depth of the relationship between the two men, but only one thing is certain: without Sassoon's advice, Owen would not have been the poet he was, and without Sassoon's intervention, his poetry might never have been published, even after his death.

You will have gathered by now that my interest in Siegfried Sassoon equals my interest in Barbara Pym in its intensity. In 2017, we will celebrate the centenary of that momentous meeting, and one of the events in the programme will be the Alliance of Literary Societies AGM and annual conference which will take place in Edinburgh, on the Craiglockhart campus of Napier University. The Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship and Wilfred Owen Association are hosting the event jointly (as the Barbara Pym Society did in June 2013). Members of all societies will be eligible to attend.

It is likely that we will run a bus to Scotland from London, calling at other destinations linked with Owen and Sassoon. It will be an ideal opportunity to access a literary conference about non-Scottish writers at minimal cost. 2017 may seem a long way off, but it will be here before we know it!

The 'Other' Elizabeth Taylor

by Lorraine Mepham

It must be a writer's worst nightmare to share one's name with someone far more successful. Elizabeth Taylor (no, not *that* one), born in 1912, was an almost exact contemporary of Barbara Pym. She published eleven novels and four collections of short stories between 1945 and her death in 1975; a twelfth novel was published posthumously in 1976. Unlike Pym, she suffered no period in the unpublished wilderness and, although she never seems to have been a wildly popular writer with the public, she attracted much critical acclaim from her peers, including Elizabeth Bowen and Ivy Compton-Burnett, who once said that she looked like someone who never had to wash her own gloves. Barbara Pym, of course, was a great admirer of her works, as well as a personal friend – Rose Little will speak on the friendship and similarities between Taylor and Pym at the UK spring meeting in London next year.

Virago have now reissued all the novels, with forewords by Sarah Waters, Philip Hensher and Hilary Mantel amongst others, and she is the subject of an excellent biography by Nicola Beauman (*The Other Elizabeth Taylor*, Persephone Books, 2009). Antonia Fraser described her as 'one of the most underrated novelists of the twentieth century'. I first discovered Taylor when Virago republished them in the late 1980s - I found their collection of (to me) unknown women writers a revelation, and devoured Taylor alongside Rosamond Lehmann, Margaret Kennedy, MJ Farrell and many others (and, of course, Barbara Pym, though not in Virago). I supplemented the Virago editions with second-hand editions, and read her entire *oeuvre* within two or three years. Then, I'm afraid, I abandoned her, and only came back to her very recently, after a conversation with Rose. I was interested to see if my first impressions of the novels and short stories, gained while reading her in my twenties, were repeated on second reading – I remembered finding her somewhat bittersweet, some of the short stories, indeed, almost unbearably sad.

What I had forgotten was, first of all, the elegance of the writing. Her evocation of the domestic and social detail of the post-war world is exact and poignant, and she has a nice turn of phrase – streams of oily rain ... run down the glass like gin'; an old woman's hands 'lay on her lap as if they

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were separate from her body, two little sleeping animals.' She is also good on children, a subject on which Pym is somewhat deficient. Edward Foyle (*A View of the Harbour*), away at boarding school, writes to his mother: 'I hope you are keeping quite fit I am ... If you come to the school concert it would be best not to wear that hat with the red currents [sic].' In the same novel Stevie Cazabon gives her father a bunch of gulls' feathers to use as a shaving brush. '"You see how soft it is!" Stevie said, entranced by her own generosity and the loveliness of the gift.' Later, as Edward's mother Tory leaves with her fiancé, Stevie stands on the kerb waving them off, 'wearing on her head a battered aluminium jelly-mould which Tory had thrown away.'

And that also illustrates another aspect of Taylor's writing which I had forgotten, or missed first time around – the humour. Isabella Godden (*The Sleeping Beauty*), in an irresistible echo of Edith Liversidge in *Some Tame Gazelle*, bakes a cake with a cigarette in her mouth – 'Oh damn, now the ash has dropped into the mixture. Never mind, perhaps he will think it's a seed cake.'

There are vicars, daily helps and bazaars – the social settings of the novels and stories have clear parallels with Pym's world. But there is a darker heart to Taylor, and the wit is sharper, sometimes even savage. She is excellent at depicting social discomfort; her novels, unlike Pym's, could never be described as 'light social comedies'. While Pym's characters, however apparently dreary their lives might be, may find that 'life is full of infinite possibilities', to Taylor's characters, while she nearly always shows sympathy, she offers few happy endings. There is a beautiful, but almost unbearable portrait of Jasper, the immigrant 'Tall Boy' of the eponymous short story, sending himself a birthday card, and eating baked beans out of a pan in his lonely London bed-sitting room, looking at the photograph of his little sisters back in the West Indies. There is also violent death, passion, poison-pen letters, and the abduction of children for sexual abuse, not the sort of subjects one would expect of a highly respectable middle-class novelist in the mid-twentieth century.

In short, while I can't guarantee that, as the bookshops might say, 'If You Liked Barbara Pym, Then You'll Love This!', I'd still urge you to give Taylor a try. I'm enjoying my re-reading, and in the words of Elizabeth Jane Howard, 'How deeply I envy any reader coming to her for the first time.'

We Knew Barbara - A Work Still in Progress

by Deirdre Bryan-Brown

For some time, Linda McDougall and her son Jonathan Mitchell have been filming those who knew Barbara Pym. Introducing the latest version, Linda said that we are now indebted to Miriam Margolyes for the narration. Adjustments will be made to background music and Jonathan is hoping to add more shots of St Hilda's.

The film opens with Miriam reading extracts from Barbara's Oxford diaries, with many family photographs. Actor Julian Glover and his sister Prudence Anderton (happily present again this year) recounted their childhood memories of Barbara staying with them and their mother Honor Wyatt in Bristol during the war, and how they later learned of Barbara's relationship with their father, C. Gordon Glover, who was separated from their mother by then. Hazel Holt, great friend and literary executor of Barbara, is interviewed alongside Yvonne Cocking, the Society's archivist, who found more material in the Pym papers at the Bodleian Library recently. The next interview, with Frances Kendrick, covers her friendship with Barbara in the wartime Women's Royal Naval Service. Frances had an aunt working at the International African Institute who was Barbara's first contact there.

Miriam Margolyes goes on to describe the Sixties, with the arrival of pop music and Larkin's 'Sexual intercourse began in 1963 (which was rather late for me) ...' and publishers rejecting Barbara's novels until the famous listing of her in the Times Literary Supplement as the most underrated 20th-century novelist by both Philip Larkin and David Cecil. Luke Gertler and his partner are interviewed in the London house bought from Barbara and her sister Hilary, with entertaining details of the sale and the very plain post-war décor of the time.

The longest interview is with Richard Roberts, known as Skipper. He agrees that he was probably the last great love of Barbara's life and the inspiration for part of her 1978 novel *The Sweet Dove Died*. Richard Roberts goes on to describe Barbara as a romantic novelist, someone herself looking for love, 'who invariably chose the wrong man'. He never discussed this with Barbara but did try to indicate he himself was not right for her.

Those of us who have followed the creation of this video are aware that Linda and her son, both media professionals, have invested an enormous amount of time and their own resources in this enterprise so far. We now have all this marvellous material and there is the possibility of availability via the website or maybe a DVD in future.

['We Knew Barbara', with Miriam Margolyes, produced by Jonathan Mitchell and Linda McDougall, was shown at the 2014 Pym Conference in Oxford. An article by Linda on the background to the making of the film will appear in the next issue of GL, Ed.]

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Study Days at Guildford and St Albans

by Michael Wilson

If only Barbara could have known when writing *Excellent Women* around 1950 that Mrs Bonner's thoughts on sin would be quoted from the pulpit of Guildford Cathedral over 60 years later. The preacher was the Rev. Julie Gittoes. It so happened that in the congregation was her friend Clare Coombe. Neither knew that the other was a Pym enthusiast.

Julie is the Rev. Dr Julie Gittoes, Education Canon at Guildford. Clare is Dr Clare Coombe, Tutor in Language and Literature at St Albans. Once their shared pleasure in Pym was discovered they decided to organise Study Days on the theme 'Jumble Sales and Church Bazaars: the Novels of Barbara Pym'. The first was held in the crypt of St Albans Cathedral one Saturday in June, the second a week later in the Chapter House of Guildford Cathedral.

I was warmly welcomed as Chairman of the Pym Society and was grateful for the opportunity to tell those attending something about Barbara and the Society.

Once the Day got under way it was immediately apparent that both Julie and Clare had a thorough understanding of the various themes explored in *Excellent Women*. I made a mental note that both would make excellent speakers at a future Society conference. The audience was mainly made up of ladies of a certain age, looking as one imagines Pym ladies do. The evening before, while wandering around St Albans Cathedral, I had spotted one of them at work on a splendid flower arrangement. Nearly all of them had read some of Pym, most enjoyed her, one or two were hoping to be persuaded. It was a pleasure to see a Society member at both events – Jennifer Aitken at St Albans and Jill Stevens at Guildford. I am hoping that we might gain some new members as a result of Julie and Clare's initiative but I am sure everyone present went away with an increased knowledge of Barbara and her work.

Gleanings

compiled by Yvonne Cocking

In *Waitrose Weekend* of 1 May 2014, India Knight picked her six favourite books. One was *The Pursuit of Love*, by Nancy Mitford:

> So fresh, so funny, so startling, so slyly skewering and beady. I could have picked *Excellent Women*, or any other Barbara Pym, for the same reasons.

India also took part in BBC Radio 4's *A Good Read* on 24 June. She and Alvin Hall discussed *Jane and Prudence* with Harriet Gilbert.

> India: Rich interior lives and the strange disconnect between (in this case) being a vicar's wife and having the ongoing appropriate internal monologue. Barbara Pym's books are slyly subversive while appearing entirely correct.
>
> Harriet: Barbara Pym's books are like some sort of cuddly furry animal with teeth that sink into you every so often – [a] bleak view of women's lot and human nature.

The Lady is proving a good source. On 9 May, in the 'Her Indoors' slot, Mary Killen writes:

> My old friend Anne was furious when I arrived on her Kensington doorstep with a young man from Marks and Spencer's food hall in tow. 'No-one has ever offered to carry my bags back … how did you do it?' We might have been characters in a Barbara Pym novel. Pym's just the ticket when you fancy a witty read about civilised middle-aged spinsters developing passionate crushes on young curates or antique dealers, crushes, they secretly hope, will never progress to the unseemliness of full-on coupling.

On 11 July in *Save Our Libraries* by author and ex-librarian Michael Arditti:

> … the library was a hive of activity. My fantasy of sitting at an enquiries desk, occasionally interrupting work on my first novel to direct a tweedy lady to the latest Barbara Pym or a retired gent to the new Kingsley Amis, was quickly dashed

and on 8 August Mildred Lathbury was cited by Anna Savva as No. 41 of her '50 Great Literary Ladies'.

On a similar theme, in the *Sunday Times* magazine on 29 June, Dulcie Mainwaring was cited among the 'perfect 10' lesser-known literary heroines.

Two of our own members have, as Sheila Kane said, 'spread the word'. Sheila did this in a good introduction to BP for new readers in her article in *Insight*, the lively magazine of two parishes in Minshull, Cheshire, and Libby Tempest recalled her first introduction to the author in 'So Lovely to Read Miss Pym', an article in *New Books Magazine*, issue 82.

The *Guardian's* D. J. Taylor wrote on 10 May of the rise and fall of literary reputations in his piece 'From Hero to Zero':

> … the real desideratum, when it comes to reserving your place in the Pantheon, is an influential sponsor to plead your case ... The modestly successful career pursued by Barbara Pym crashed into the buffers the moment Cape turned down her seventh novel, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, in 1963. There followed a decade and a half of near obscurity, and plaintive letter writing, until in 1977 the TLS advertised a survey bent on determining the most underrated writer of the 20th century. Both Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil weighed in on her behalf, publishers found their interest mysteriously renewed, and Pym's next novel, *Quartet in Autumn*, made the Booker shortlist.

Another 'rise and fall' reference was in the *New Yorker* on 21 April, in Adam Gopnik's review of *The Dream of the Great American Novel*, by Lawrence Buell:

> … the community of readers has an existence outside the literary marketplace ... and is responsible for the slow but irresistible rise and fall of reputations ... no one biography, no one critical text, no one 'reading', and certainly no one publisher altered the view; readers altered it by reading and then talking to one another. It was the suffrage of ordinary readers that rediscovered Barbara Pym and remade Trollope a classic alongside Dickens. The literary marketplace turns profits; the community of readers makes reputations.

The *Daily Telegraph*, as usual, provided us with a couple of Pym quotes. On 5 July Laura Thompson, writing about Anita Brookner, mentions her:

> [The] European hinterland gives to Brookner her

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singular outsider's voice, sets her apart from other elegant analysts of female melancholia, like Barbara Pym.

And on 22 August, in his review of *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love,* by James Booth, Michael Deacon noted how Larkin adapted the tone of his letters to suit the recipient:

> Writing to Kingsley Amis he was cruelly funny and robustly philistine ... to genial Barbara Pym, the novelist, he was genial ... and to his dull mother he was dull.

The merest mention of Barbara appeared in the first line of Bharat Tandon's review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 September, of Howard Jacobson's latest novel, *J*:

> Writing about Barbara Pym, Philip Larkin suggested that 'the first thing a novelist must provide is a separate world'...

An article on Cath Kidston was a surprising place to find a mention of Barbara Pym. It was in the *Daily Mail* on 24 July, where Jan Moir suggested that Cath 'sounds like a heroine from a Barbara Pym novel'.

Lastly, from the novel by Steven Rigolosi, *The Outsmarting of Criminals* (Ransom Note Press, 2014):

> You recall Barbara Pym from Mama's bookshelves? In *Excellent Women* Miss Pym makes it clear that indexing is the expected task of a helpmeet, though she also implies that indexing becomes obligatory only when one has accepted the inevitability of the relationship.

Thanks to Devon Allison, Diana Gulland, Sheila Kane, Norma Munson, Iona Roberts, Paula Sutcliffe and Michael Wilson.

The Barbara Pym Society 2014–2015

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Coming Events

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

2015 North American Conference

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
13–15 March 2015
Quartet in Autumn

Bookcrossing Convention

10 – 12 April 2015
St Hilda's College, Oxford (JdP)
Saturday 10 April
'Barbara Pym: an "Unashamed Reader"'
Speaker: Clemence Schultze
Chairman of the BPS, 2007 - 2013

Spring Meeting in London

17 May 2015, St Alban's Centre, Holborn
'Barbara Pym and Elizabeth Taylor: A Friendship in Letters'
Speaker: Rose Little
The Barbara Pym Society.

2015 Annual General Meeting & Conference

4–6 September 2015
St Hilda's College, Oxford
'Partners in Pym'

Call for Papers

The Committee is seeking speakers for the conference on the theme 'Partners in Pym'. Partners may include spouses, siblings, lovers, friends, business associates or even cats! You may interpret as you wish.

Please send an abstract of 150-250 words, accompanied by brief biographical details to:
barbarapymsociety@gmail.com
by Monday 5 Jan 2015, with the subject heading '2015 Oxford Conference Proposal'.

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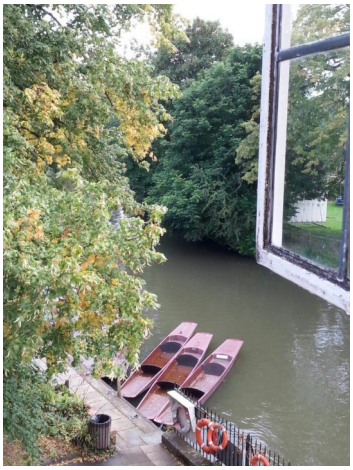
Walk round Oxford

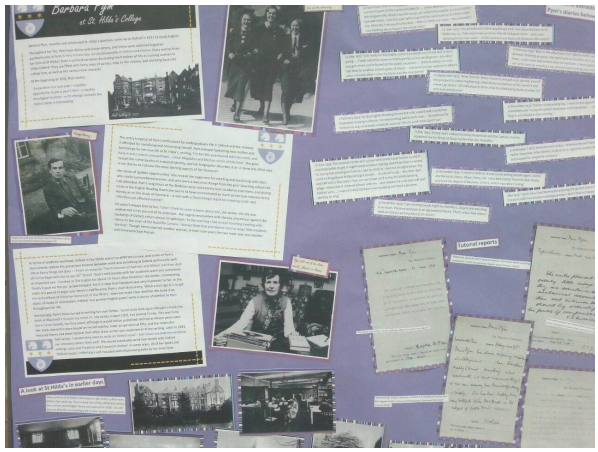
Isabel Stanley, Rose Little and Maggie Lane

Rose Little and Deb Fisher at the Story Museum



View from bedroom window of Milham Ford

Tim Burnett, Rita Phillips, Ann & Dan DiPietro at Queen's College



Display of BP's photos and letters

House of cards in the Story Museum

Machine at Story Museum

Yvonne Cocking with the Pym Players

Drinks before dinner Saturday night

Phil Bacon and Mary Curran at lunch

Charles Gilbert, Christina & Ulf Gars

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