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 (13–15 March 2015)

by Isabel Stanley

The Barbara Pym Society's 17th annual North American Conference, which was held at the Barker Center, Harvard University, was well attended, with a capacity crowd of 102 that included 27 first-time attendees as well as many long-time friends of the Society. Our dear archivist, Yvonne Cocking, was sorely missed, but we look forward to seeing her again under more felicitous weather conditions.

The Church of the Advent graciously welcomed us back for our opening dinner Friday evening. The tables were decorated with bunches of spring flowers in small glass milk bottles, which reappeared at Harvard the next day and were distributed as souvenirs after the conference. Amidst much hugging of old friends and greeting of new ones, a delicious dinner was enjoyed by all. North American Organizer Tom Sopko devised a fiendishly hard but amusing quiz for our entertainment. Winners and losers were a bit uncertain, but all participants certainly had a good time.

The conference commenced in earnest on Saturday morning with a continental breakfast followed by a welcome by Tom Sopko and greetings from Michael Wilson, Chairman of the Barbara Pym Society, who had travelled from England for the occasion.

Tim Burnett set the stage for the discussion of our focus book, *Quartet in Autumn*, by examining the class system as represented in the four main characters in the early pages of the book. He also reminded us of the goings on in Britain in the 1970s, which provide the backdrop for the book. Tim's usual good humor suffused a talk containing much good information.

Kathy Ackley continued to elucidate the milieu of the novel by examining the failure of all of the four characters to connect – to each other, their neighbors, the social welfare system, and the church. She saw them all as dislocated and living in another time – the past as remembered vaguely or the present through a very dark glass.

After an enjoyable box lunch, there were showings of the videos, *Tea with Miss Pym* (1977) and *Miss Pym's Day Out* (1991). A detailed synopsis of scenes and key to the many Pym quotations and characters in the latter video was provided to help make it easier to follow; the synopsis and a link to the video on YouTube have been added to the BPS web site.

In his presentation Nick Turner examined tone and indeterminacy in *Quartet*, and helped us to see Pym's connection to late Modernism. Negation and conditional tenses set the tone early in the novel. He noted Barbara Tuchman's comment that the artist Edward Hopper catches characters in an unresolved moment and noticed that Pym uses the same technique especially in scenes like Marcia and Letty's retirement party.

Raina Lipsitz continued the theme of failure to connect in her paper. In focusing on the women's retirement party she highlighted the Deputy Assistant Director's pretentious bloviating about Letty and Marcia, about whom he knew nothing. She shrewdly observed that part of Letty's failure to connect was due to other people's limited perspectives of her.

On Sunday morning Emily Stockard examined 'Pym among the Moderns' in her treatment of Marcia. She cited Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* as saying that each new book builds on the old ones already in existence. She sees Pym as exploiting the shifts in cultural mores in the 1960s in depicting characters living out of their own time in a world which sees them as redundant.

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The conference concluded with a dramatized reading from The Mighty Pym Players: *Infinite Possibilities for Change*, adapted by Tom Sopko. The histrionic talents of the actors were much appreciated by all, and the conference adjourned on a distinctly mirthful note as some participants dashed off to the airport or train station while others lingered for mimosas and brunch.

'Here's to us, then': The Difficulties and Rewards of 'making contact' in *Quartet in Autumn*

by Kathy Ackley

A colleague tells voluntary social worker Janice Brabner: '*Make contact*, by force, if necessary. Believe me, it can be *most* rewarding' (32). The statement is amusing with its startling suggestion that force might be necessary, but the advice represents one of the novel's major themes: making contact with others can be difficult, but it can also be enriching. As the novel demonstrates, almost everyone who tries to make contact with others benefits to a certain degree, but ultimately the novel is most interested in the kind of heartfelt and genuine interrelationship that we see developing among its central characters. Marcia, whose resistance to all overtures results in her permanent disassociation, is a study in the *failure* to connect, while Letty, Norman, and Edwin move from a relatively superficial interaction to a stronger, more personal and decidedly beneficial connection with one another.

Each of the four characters lives alone, and their isolation is intensified by their feeling of being out of place in the new culture of the 1970s, with many reminders of their age and the difficulty of adjusting to change. Their isolation is linked to the theme of failing to connect, which is first articulated when Letty fails to make contact with a woman at her lunch table. Not only Letty, but Norman, Marcia, and Edwin fail to connect when opportunities arise. All of them avoid seeing each other outside of the office, despite their loneliness.

The lunch at the Rendezvous after the women retire begins the transition for Letty, Norman, and Edwin from being acquaintances who once worked together to being friends with a meaningful connection with one another. The foundation was laid in their daily interaction in the workplace, where even Marcia looked after her appearance and engaged in small talk. Once she retires, she stops looking after her appearance, stops making small talk, forgets to eat, and becomes increasingly irritated by any thought of her former coworkers.

One of the many admirable aspects of this novel is Pym's skill in moving people toward Marcia at the moment that Marcia is at her weakest: Edwin, Father Gellibrand, and Janice all converge as she nears death. Office mate, representative of the church, social worker, and neighbor have all shown some degree of willingness to reach out to Marcia, have all made an effort to 'make contact' or 'keep an eye on' her. All feel that they have done their duty by Marcia, but their efforts to 'keep an eye on her' have been as useless as cheerful good wishes for a speedy recovery to a dying woman.

The collapse and death of Marcia provides the catalyst that strengthens the ties among Letty, Norman, and Edwin and leads to a bonding that previously had been missing. The people who really benefit by 'making contact' are Norman and Letty, but even Edwin seems to recognize that they have transcended their earlier relationship. Their isolation from one another in the beginning is replaced by their identity as friends.

Marcia's stunning gift of her house to Norman gives him a feeling of well-being and even importance. When Letty, Norman, and Edwin gather to go through Marcia's things, they decide to open a bottle of sherry, this being an 'exceptional' day that is strikingly different from 'that day' that opens the novel. Now Norman makes an exuberant toast: 'Here's to us, then' (217), emphasizing their connection, not their separation. Like Norman, Letty also now has a feeling of power over her own life. Sitting in Marcia's kitchen and encouraged by Norman and Edwin, she ends the novel with her life-affirming thought that 'life still held infinite possibilities for change' (218).

Pym views the lives of these four ordinary people with an unflinchingly detached yet compassionate eye, writing with that familiar undercurrent of gentle understanding, what Philip Larkin calls her 'level good-humoured tender irony' (*VPE* 247). Marcia's death is inevitable, yet the conclusion is cautiously optimistic. Letty anticipates a pleasant future different from her past. She does not know exactly what changes might occur, just that they surely will and that they are likely to be good. The conclusion suggests that hope and the feeling of well-being experienced by Norman, Letty, and Edwin come from their having made meaningful connections with one another, and that is why Letty believes in the infinite possibility for change, and why Norman toasts the three of them with such confidence.

Dr Kathy Ackley, Professor of English Emerita at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, is author of *The Novels of Barbara Pym* and editor of two collections of literary essays. She is a founder member of the BPS. She has made more than 30 trips to England to lead over a dozen summer crime and mystery tours.

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‘Change and decay in all around I see’

by Tim Burnett

Quartet in Autumn opens with a description of the four characters’ hair; it ends with three of them selecting canned food from the storeroom of the recently deceased fourth character. As Pym says in the novel: ‘In some subtle way this reflected their different characters’.

In the same way, her eye for detail allows her to paint the society in which they live. In parallel with life in Britain as a whole, the novel is less ‘churchy’. The centre of the action is no longer a parish, but an office. In Britain the 1970s, the setting for *Quartet*, was a decade of financial crisis, social unrest and industrial strife, very different from the decades in which Pym’s early novels are set. There were two periods when a strike or the threat of a strike by the miners caused the government to enforce a three-day working week to save energy, and another period when the Arab reaction to American support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War caused oil prices to rise fourfold. At the end of the decade Britain enjoyed the ‘Winter of Discontent’ when even the gravediggers went on strike, leaving the dead unburied. Pym’s characters are approaching their seventies, growing old in a harsher, noisier world. The National Health Service, the Welfare State, large-scale immigration, even the EEC (which was to develop into the European Union), had created a world very different from that of *Some Tame Gazelle*.

How does Pym, with her gift for observation, work the society that was Seventies Britain into the texture of her novel? The answer comes in six categories: the Welfare State, Immigration and Race, Nutrition, Class, National Health Service, and lastly, Lifestyle, covering fashions, aspirations, prejudices and sensitivities.

There are some twenty references to the Welfare State in the novel. Early on Marcia is described as spending her lunch hours in the public library where she picks up ‘leaflets and pamphlets setting out various services available for the elderly in the Borough of Camden’.

Immigration impinges directly on Letty’s life. Her landlady, Miss Embrey, sells the house. She is evasive in describing the new owner. ‘He is black, then?’ asks Marya, the Hungarian. ‘Certainly his skin is not what is usually regarded as white, but which of us, for example, could say that we were *white*?’ replies Miss Embrey.

In the seventies there began to be more interest in nutrition. Janice is appalled by Marcia’s diet, consisting as it does of tinned food. ‘Fresh vegetables, even if only a cabbage, would be better than processed peas, and apples or oranges than tinned peaches.’

Pym continues with her interest in social class. She has already divided the Quartet into two groups based on their hair; Edwin and Letty (very posh names) are definitely what she would call ‘gentlefolk’, Norman and Marcia are definitely not. At lunch break in the office Edwin has Earl Grey tea, Norman and Marcia instant coffee. Letty has water, but then she has had her lunch out.

The National Health Service is mentioned in few places, given Pym’s own experience of it. It first appears when Norman visits his brother-in-law Ken. Pym recalls a lot of hospital detail, the bottle of Lucozade beside the regulation plastic water-jug and glass, the metal bowl for vomiting, the curiously shaped ‘vase’ of a grey, cardboard-like material which he suspected was something to do with passing urine.

Lifestyle is a large section. A few of the items typical of the Seventies are: Edwin’s teashop given a trendy olive green and orange make-over; Gamage’s, a ramshackle department store where you could get anything, if you could only find it, had been pulled down; the Georgian house where Letty had worked replaced by concrete structure; changing fashions, the horror of mini-skirts; a church locked due to thefts and vandalism; a shop full of loud music and badly finished eastern-style garments which makes Marcia feel confused.

As always, Barbara has perfectly captured the flavour of a particular time and place – in this case, Seventies Britain.

***Tim Burnett**, from London, read Medieval Languages at Trinity College, Cambridge. Formerly Keeper of Manuscripts in the British Library, he has written on Byron, Shelley, Browning, Swinburne, and Scrope Davies.*

The Experience of 'not having': Failure to Connect in Barbara Pym's *Quartet in Autumn*

by Raina Lipsitz

‘She had always been an unashamed reader of novels, but if she hoped to find one which reflected her own sort of life she had come to realize … that the position of an unmarried, unattached, ageing woman is of no interest whatever to the writer of modern fiction’, says Letty Crowe in *Quartet in Autumn.*

Fortunately for her readers, Pym's writing rendered this untrue. Unlike so many other books of her time, and even of ours, Pym's novels foregrounded the stories of women like Letty, and like Pym herself, whose lives were generally considered of little importance. In her own quiet way, Pym was advancing a radical view of society: one in which everyone's, and particularly women's, lives matter, whether or not they marry or have children – and one set of circumstances is not necessarily or unqualifiedly superior to the other.

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Pym grants her readers an unusual degree of access to and perspective on women's inner lives. Many of *Quartet in Autumn*'s most poignant moments come from Letty's often painful self-awareness, and the degree to which she understands how the world sees her. Her friend Marjorie's suitor thinks of her as 'Miss Something, a not very interesting person whose name he hadn't caught.' For her part, Letty 'knew that she was not a very interesting person, so she did not go into too much boring detail with the young people ...' Like the rest of the novel's protagonists, Letty grapples with missed connections: 'Somebody had reached out towards her. They could have spoken and a link might have been forged between two solitary people ... Once again Letty had failed to make contact.' Yet in spite of this, she is more or less content: 'It was a comfortable enough life, if a little sterile, perhaps even deprived. But deprivation implied once having had something to be deprived of … and Letty had never really had anything much.'

Pym shows us a variety of ways in which the protagonists of *Quartet in Autumn* fail to connect, as well as their attempts to address the still-resonant question posed by Letty: 'might not the experience of "not having" be regarded as something with its own validity?' Pym's real and fictional worlds are 'populated by women with the emotional resilience and resourcefulness required to live alone, or to care for themselves while sharing space with others.' When their worlds are upended, Pym's women do not fall apart. Instead, they fix a strong cup of tea and pull themselves together. Furthermore, they are either 'excellent women' ('excellent' being shorthand for proper, well-behaved, and virtuous) or trying very hard to be, and full of the virtue John Updike praised in *The New Yorker* in 1979: '*Excellent Women*, arriving on these shores in a heyday of sexual hype, is a startling reminder that solitude may be chosen, and that a lively, full novel can be constructed entirely within the precincts of that regressive virtue, feminine patience.'

Pym made heroines of socially marginal women in spite and even because of their mundanity, imbuing their lives with meaning, relevance, and a quiet sort of heroism. For a woman whose most enduring characters are solitary misfits, and one who could easily have felt like a failure by the standards of her time, Pym showed determination in her perseverance. Her novels remind her readers that 'having it all' is fleeting, and that it is the small, everyday experiences that lend most lives their meaning.

***Raina Lipsitz** holds degrees from Columbia University and Yale and writes about feminism, politics, books, and pop culture. See* Ploughshares*, where she wrote about Barbara Pym in 2013. She lives in Brooklyn, NY.*

'Some indefinite music': Tone and Indeterminacy in *Quartet in Autumn*

by Nick Turner

This paper stems from my personal journey of discovery with this novel: at first, it seemed contrived and colourless, and I felt that it would have been better if it were bleaker or sadder, with a stronger tone. I came to realise that *Quartet in Autumn* has strong formal qualities, which its title alerts us to, and that Pym worked hard to achieve a unified tone and was deliberately advancing on her earlier methods.

A damning criticism of the novel, which argued that its whole point was an old lady trying to return milk bottles, turns out to be, without intending it, the key. In some ways, it is a novel about nothing. Building on work by Robert J Graham and Deborah Donato, I examined the lexis of Chapters 1 and 12 in detail and was fascinated to discover a vocabulary of constant negation, information that is withheld, and an overall effect that is more poetic than narrative. The best example is the opening line, so deliberately vague and telling us so little: 'That day the four of them went to the library, but at different times.'

To illustrate this tone and effect, the talk included a summary of each chapter of the novel and the tiny events within each, showing how the book as a whole works like a piece of music, using echoes, fading of voices, symmetry and balance. Pym, rather than using the neat circular narratives of her early novels, uses a timespan of around eighteen months and only gives time markers some way into the novel. I also argued (supporting Robert J Graham) that the 'eventlessness' links Pym to artist Edward Hopper, and that his famous picture *Nighthawks*, if reimagined with British subjects and setting, would be a perfect illustration of *Quartet in Autumn.* The sense of pointlessness, and (figurative) journeys without meaning, link Pym's work to modernist writers such as Samuel Beckett, Joseph Conrad and T S Eliot. While there are delightful comic moments here, above all we should read the novel as an essentially serious piece: it is, perhaps, the real Barbara Pym, with the masking laughter stripped away.

I quoted extensively from Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' in the *Four Quartets* to show how Pym and Eliot share tone and language. They see time as fluid and use language of negation or speculation, the 'might have been'. My conclusion is that the mysteriousness of Marcia is the key to a novel about emptiness, and that *Quartet in Autumn* should be seen as a masterpiece of minimalist writing, formally perfect. Pym on several occasions has her characters hear 'some indefinite music' when they arrive in church: these words, suggesting both consciously arranged art and a tone of the indistinct, sum up the wonderfully perplexing novel that is *Quartet in Autumn*. It is the greatest work of art by Pym, artistically unlike much other fiction of the time, and for this we should praise it.

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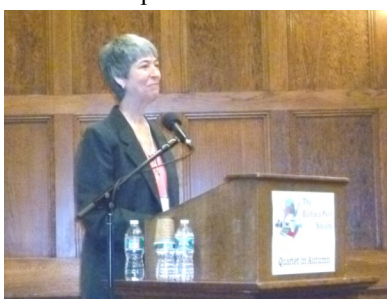
Barbara Pym Among the Moderns: The Case of Marcia in *Quartet in Autumn*

by Emily Stockard

Reading Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, as Barbara Pym certainly did, one is struck by the prescience with which Woolf seems to have predicted Pym's calling as a novelist. Clearly Pym fulfills the project set out by Woolf for female novelists who are uniquely placed to record, for example, 'infinitely obscure lives' and the importance of 'small things.' But in fundamental ways Pym departs sharply from Woolf's view of cultural progress, particularly as it pertains to women. In *Quartet in Autumn* Pym looks pointedly at the dire results of the disjunction between the ongoing movement of a culture – progress, as Woolf describes it – and the rhythms of the individual human lives lived within that culture. For a modernist like Woolf, cultural shifts imply the gradual loosening of restrictions placed on women; for Pym they imply a loosening of moorings that, for the individual, results in a restrictive isolation, both literal and spiritual.



In *Quartet in Autumn*, Pym explores how cultural contexts, within which individuals find meaning and identity, have shifted and vanished entirely, leaving the ageing quartet to perform increasingly futile or even meaningless gestures. In contrast to Woolf's argument that the passage of time results in the accumulation of perspectives, each of which enlarges one's understanding of the truth, time for Pym's individual is far from a medium of accumulation; it is a medium of loss – of narrowing rather than enlarging. Edwin, for example, has become almost a parody of the church crawler, and while this habit certainly gives him a way to organize his time, his actions have become somewhat robotic. Unable to track the cultural shifts that have left her completely dislocated, Letty clings to her lifelong habit of dressing suitably. Although there is no question that she would attempt the 'cruel fashion' of the mini-skirt, the act of buying new clothes is the one thing she looks forward to, almost reflexively.

In the character of Marcia, Pym portrays the merely gestural life writ large. Marcia's life has become a parody of the common domestic actions that once held for her a secure communal meaning. Even stockpiling one's cupboard and collecting milk bottles would have had meaning in the context of the wartime and immediately post-war years. Now that Marcia lives alone, her activities have become obsessive gestures, often of a purely illusory nature, and she imagines that she performs actions that she clearly does not. Janice, a volunteer worker for a nameless 'Centre,' may represent cultural progress, a method of seeing that the vulnerable members of the population are cared for, but Marcia has no intention of adjusting her thinking to accommodate such social change and resists the young woman, whom she views as a condescending intruder.

Critics often diagnose Marcia's cause of death as anorexia nervosa. But although Marcia may obsessively hoard tins of food (an action that she considers the mark of a good housekeeper, a social role), she is not obsessive in her refusal to eat; rather, the opposite – the actual act of eating comes to mean little to her, and she has lost the capacity as well to understand its significance as a social gesture. Her death by starvation is symbolic of her inability to exist within a culture that, figuratively, no longer feeds her.

The passing of time in Pym's novel does not necessarily bring about an increase in one's understanding of truth. Cultural and personal alterations come in ways for which human beings sometimes have no adaptive capability. It is a credit to Pym's fictional prowess, steely sensibility, and strength of vision that she can create four very different characters, subject them to all the inevitably isolating forces of life, and show them bearing up even so. Marcia dies exchanging smiles with Mr. Strong, and the remainder of the quartet begins to form a new feeling of community that can restore lost meaning to their lives.

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Interview with Arthur Bostrom

by Libby Tempest

Most of us 'of a certain age' will remember with fondness a comedy series called *'Allo 'Allo* which hit our television screens between 1984 and 1993: the whole nation got hooked on the mishaps of the small French Resistance group based around René's café during the German occupation of France in the Second World War. One of the most popular and enduring characters was Officer Crabtree, brilliantly played by Arthur Bostrom as an idiotic English undercover officer disguised as a French gendarme. Much of the character's humour derived from his supposed inability to pronounce French words correctly in conversation – his attempt to say 'Good morning' came out as 'Gid Moaning' and became a national catchphrase.

Arthur has gone on to have a very successful stage and TV career and moved up to live in Manchester in 2006. I met him last year at the beautiful Portico Library where we have both recently become Trustees – I was organizing a celebration centenary Barbara Pym event there for the Manchester Literature Festival and the Librarian, who had discovered that Arthur was a Pym fan, introduced us. Arthur kindly agreed to play a major part in our dramatization of a Pym short story, and this led to me inviting him to be our after-dinner speaker at this year's conference.

Libby: Arthur, you became a household name as Officer Crabtree – how did you get the role?

Arthur: David Croft (who wrote *'Allo'Allo*) used to try you out in smaller parts and observe how you performed: he was particularly interested in how good a team player you were. I was given a very small part in *Hi de Hi!* as the idiotic boyfriend of the Su Pollard character Peggy. David just really liked the way we did the scene. When they were shooting the

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second series of *'Allo 'Allo* in 1985, I received a phone call at 1pm on a Friday afternoon asking me if I was free for the next ten weeks and would I come for an audition? I went along, took one look at the script and thought 'YES! YES! This is the one!' The audition went well, I fitted the part physically (I am very tall and I have a big nose!) and at 6pm that evening they rang to offer me the part. Out of the blue, between 1 to 6pm on a Friday afternoon, my life changed.

Arthur Bostrom

Libby: How do you feel now about *'Allo 'Allo* ?

Arthur: I am still in touch with many of my fellow cast members and some have become lifelong friends. There was a sort of family feeling among us because we acted together for nine years and then many of us appeared in the stage version which toured the UK and abroad.

I am enormously proud of *'Allo 'Allo* – time has been kind to it. There have been revivals and re-screenings, and the stage version is performed frequently by amateur dramatic groups. But I did get to the point where I needed to distance myself from it and to an extent, re-invent myself.

Libby: Arthur, you told me in Oxford that you greatly prefer stage to film and TV and, reading your biography, your career since *'Allo 'Allo* seems to reflect that. What have been the highlights?

Arthur: I loved every minute of being in *See How They Run* at the Royal Exchange in Manchester – and then we took it on tour so that was a real highlight. We combined it on tour with *Twelfth Night* and I played Malvolio – I seem to remember that we were in cricket gear and I somehow wore my yellow cross-garters over my cricket whites! I also loved working with Kate O'Mara – she had her own theatre company and I was in her production of *The Rivals* and I did *Twelfth Night* with her, but this time I was Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Kate was the consummate professional – a joy to work with.

Libby: How did you come to be a Barbara Pym fan?

Arthur: I had a really good friend from university days who said to me, 'I'm going to do you a favour, I'm going to give you a novel that I think you might enjoy.' That novel was *Excellent Women* and it was love at first read! This set me off reading all her novels – I was particularly intrigued by the titles. I was vaguely aware of the name Barbara Pym and of the renewal of interest in her – I'd read David Cecil's endorsement of her. But I think back now to the gift my friend gave me – what a gift to give someone! And made all the more poignant by the fact that he was terminally ill at the time and died shortly afterwards.

Libby: Which is your favourite Pym novel?

Arthur: For many years, it was *Jane and Prudence*, but more recently I think I would have to say *No Fond Return of Love*.

Libby: What do you love about her novels?

Arthur: I think her appeal changes for us as readers as we age. When I first read the novels, I assumed that 'heroines' like Mildred and Dulcie were in their fifties – it was a shock to realise that they're usually in their early to mid-thirties but it is already considered too late for them. I love the unlikely friendship of Dulcie and Viola: when Viola invites Dulcie for a meal, she says it will be 'nothing much' – and it isn't. I enjoy the way she uses detail to explain an action or a character – the bottle of Gumption, the packet of Tide. It's the way Pym sees the world and the minute comic details that make up our lives – she is the supreme observer. As an actor, I observe people constantly in a similar way – only she does it so much better! But her writing spoke to me from the first word I read – the way she looks at people and asks questions about their lives.

Libby: If any of the novels were going to be dramatised, which character would you like to play?

Arthur: Ooooh! What a delicious thought! Wilf Bason would probably be top of the list, but I would love to play Everard Bone (and not just because he's tall and handsome!) I'm exasperated by Tom in *A Few Green Leaves* but I feel I understand his worries … (*Libby suggests Archdeacon Hoccleve and Fabian Driver*).

Libby: What's next for you?

Arthur: I do panto every year and this year, it's *Cinderella* in Lichfield – there's a foodie theme and I'm playing Count Dandini de Tartare! I'm reminded of how often in my work I experience Barbara Pym moments – when I was in *'Allo 'Allo* I was asked to open a new Asda superstore in Nuneaton. I had to appear in character, so I was dressed as a gendarme and I was then taken to the in-store bakery where there was a girl dressed as a baguette, 'Babette Baguette' – French theme! By this time, the store had opened to the public and we waited for shoppers to come and have their photograph taken with us. As people walked down the aisles towards us, I watched their embarrassed, slightly horrified faces when they saw us – people literally dived down side aisles to avoid us, they were in complete denial of what they'd seen. 'I have NOT just seen a gendarme and a human baguette in the bakery, I must look at these interesting tins.' I thought of Barbara, as I so often do …

We Knew Barbara – The Documentary

by Linda McDougall

I discovered Barbara Pym in the 1980s when I bought a house in Brooksville Avenue, Queen's Park, in northwest London. My life was hectic then with four teenagers and a full-time job as a television documentary maker. I was often abroad for weeks at a time, so it was quite a while before I checked out the plaque on number 40.

Barbara Pym 1913–1980
Novelist
Lived here
1960–1972

I'd never heard of Barbara Pym, but I was a keen novel reader so off I went to the Queen's Park library. I can still remember my delight when I read *Jane and Prudence* and *Excellent Women* for the first time. Barbara Pym wrote about an England I had never known, but dreamed of obsessively in the southernmost girls' high school in the world in

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Invercargill, New Zealand. Nearly all the books we read were imported from England. We all wanted to get to London as soon as possible.

I arrived in the UK in 1961 to study for three years at the Central School of Speech and Drama in Swiss Cottage. I was living then, if I had only known it, within a mile of Barbara.

As a student I was watching Britain slowly recovering from the war. An old and faded notice in an old and fading Hampstead sweet shop announced the end of rationing. Bombsites were rubble strewn but jaunty with rosebay willow herb. Every cheap bedsit I rented was a museum of forties and fifties décor: worn lino, a gas ring behind a curtain, and a grubby cupboard with sparse chipped crockery.

Two decades later when I discovered Pym, my London student years sprang alive. When Mildred hand-washed her stockings and put them out to drip-dry in her kitchen, it was as if I was back again in my own time of renting other people's dreary accommodation. I loved Barbara's wit, her wry eye and her acerbic observations. I always popped a Pym in my pocket when I went abroad. They were little oases of delight and safety in a tough and dangerous world. The Ethiopian famine, the bombing of Tripoli and the first Iraq war – she came with me to them all.

Barbara and Hilary's house in Brooksville Avenue

Later, I bought every copy of Pym I could find. But it wasn't until 2008 that I discovered the Pym Society on the web. I joined immediately and then in 2010 discussions began about plans to celebrate Barbara's centennial in 2013. What about a documentary? I suggested bravely, thinking of the BBC. It took them over a year to say no, but I'd become hooked so my son Jonathan Mitchell and I set out to remember Barbara on tape.

I checked the BBC library and found that it was a good two decades since anyone had made a TV programme about Barbara. 'Miss Pym's Day Out' in 1991 starred Patricia Routledge as Barbara, Henry Harvey was there, and so was Barbara's sister Hilary. I felt that Patricia Routledge was not the right actress to bring back Barbara. It didn't strike any chords at all with the Barbara I knew in my head.

I set out boldly to try and find out as much as I could about the real Barbara from those of her friends and colleagues still alive. By 2012 Henry had gone, Hilary had gone too and I knew I had to be quick. The best-known and closest friend of Barbara's still alive is Hazel Holt. They had worked together at the International African Institute and become lifelong friends. Hazel is Barbara's executor and biographer. *A Very Private Eye* is a wonderfully edited collection from Barbara's letters and notebooks and *A Lot to Ask* is a great biography. Hazel is still writing at 86. Her 21st West Country crime novel *Death is a Word* is now out.

I made several visits to Chard in Somerset to talk with Hazel. I loved her from the start because the Barbara in my head turned out very much to be the Barbara Hazel remembered and talked about. I went back to Brooksville Avenue to meet Luke and Francis, who had been my neighbours. They were the people who had bought their home from the Pym sisters and were able to describe the women they knew, and the lifestyle they had lived at 44 Brooksville.

Our chairman, Michael Wilson, had followed up a *Guardian* mention and discovered Frances Atkin in her home in South London. Frances is now in her nineties. She still lives alone and she's in excellent health, doing the *Guardian* Crossword every morning and driving her little car to the supermarket. Frances and Barbara met and became friends in Whitehall as Wrens. They took holidays together and shared almost everything. Frances married in her forties and she lost her husband and Barbara within weeks of each other as the eighties began. Frances had been brought up in the grounds of the British Museum (her father, Sir Thomas Kendrick, was the Director). Between us we discovered new facts about Barbara and her friendship with Frances's father.

Then I went to visit Prudence Glover in her home in Kent, and her brother, the actor Julian Glover, in Barnes. Julian and Prudence's parents, Gordon Glover and Honor Wyatt, were friends with Barbara and Hilary, and Barbara often stayed with them. I was able to discover fresh facts about Barbara's life and her relationships with men as she got older.

I spent almost two years searching for 'Skipper', Barbara's deliciously handsome friend Richard Roberts, who hailed from the Bahamas where his father was the Speaker of the Bahamian parliament. I discovered that in 1991 Richard Roberts and Shelley Malone had edited a small volume of postcards of the Bahamas. I found an address in Miami for Shelley Malone and handwrote a letter. Months later I got an email telling me that the letter had been passed on and arrived with Skipper in the Bahamas. I was in Edinburgh that day filming a piece about Scots independence. I danced with delight down Princes Street at the thought of meeting Richard Roberts.

It took a long, long time! He didn't use electronic media at all and we began a scrappy correspondence through a travel agent in Esher. A year later, searching through all the people called Roberts living in the Bahamas I made telephone contact with Richard's brother's widow. She gave me his phone number and at long last we spoke to each other. Richard was charming and agreed reluctantly that we might meet, and so Jonathan and I took our filming equipment to Hampshire, and Richard told us about his friendship with Barbara and her love for him. He painted a wonderful picture of English life at that time and the difficulties he had had as a gay man in London. Barbara of course wrote their story in *A Sweet Dove Died*.

Early on in 2014 the actress Miriam Margolyes, a terrific Pym fan and member of the Society, offered to redo all the commentary and add two readings from Barbara Pym's novels to the documentary. It has made all the difference.

('We Knew Barbara', with Miriam Margolyes, produced by Jonathan Mitchell and Linda McDougall, was shown at the 2014 Pym Conference at St Hilda's College Oxford. DVDs will be on sale from the Pym Society via the website.)

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Meeting Barbara Pym

by Jennifer Hedges

In the late 1970s I was a young librarian in a branch of the London (Ontario, Canada) Public Library. As one of my responsibilities was collection-building, I spent much of my time reading book-reviewing journals. I don't remember exactly when I became aware of Barbara Pym's renewed career but suddenly she was a favourite.

In 1979, on holiday in England, I wrote Barbara Pym a letter, asking if she would sign my copy of *Excellent Women*. I addressed it simply 'Barbara Pym, Barn Cottage, Finstock, Oxfordshire'. I envisioned knocking on her door with the book and a pen, and her signing the book, after which I would return to Oxford.

Bus service from Oxford to Finstock was infrequent. I arrived early in the afternoon, planning to leave a couple of hours later. If she weren't home, it would be enough just to walk about. The bus driver did not know where Barn Cottage was but I soon got directions from a passer-by. I knocked on her door and there she was. Not only did she invite me in, she insisted on feeding me – a cheddar sandwich on thick brown bread.

She and her sister Hilary had spent the morning making jam. I didn't know she was ill and might have been looking forward to a nap. Hilary announced that she was leaving us 'to discuss novels' and went upstairs. We did talk about novels and writers but I don't remember the specifics. There was a Scrabble game in the room and it was easy to imagine her and Hilary playing. A cat (possibly Mother) came and sat with us for a while.

She seemed very impressed that I had managed to get to Finstock from Oxford without renting a car. I told her there was a bus back at 3.00. She signed my book and I gave her Tillie Olsen's *Silences*, which discusses 'literary "silences" in the careers of both the acknowledged great and those who ceased to write'. She then left the room and returned with a 1955 reissue of *Jane and Prudence,* which she signed and gave me.

She showed me where the bus stop was and we said our goodbyes. I waited at the stop but no bus came. After a while Barbara joined me. She went back to the cottage and a few moments later a car backed out of their garage. There *was* no return bus to Oxford. Hilary and Barbara ended up driving me to Witney where I would be able to get a bus to Oxford. After they had dropped me off and were pulling away, Barbara turned around in the passenger seat and waved at me through the rear window until they were out of sight.

Six months later she died. Another librarian read it, I think in *Publisher's Weekly,* and called to tell me. Looking back, I can't believe I had the nerve to seek her out. She could have sent me on my way but she welcomed me. Perhaps I benefited from the wonderful reception her books were getting in North America, where they were being published for the first time.

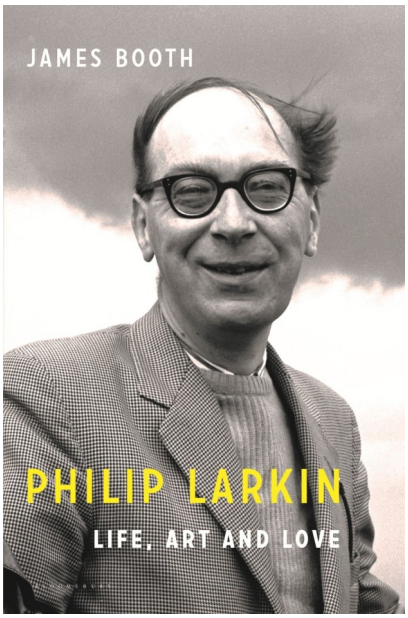
I am now older than she was when she died. I retired from the library in 2001 and now have a part-time freelance career as a proof reader and indexer. I derive great satisfaction from knowing I am leading a life similar to those lived by her characters.

Jennifer Hedges *has published short fiction and poetry in Canadian literary journals. She lives in Port Stanley, Ontario.*

Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love by James Booth (Bloomsbury 2014)

by Philip Bacon

Writing a third biography of Larkin following major works by Andrew Motion and Richard Bradford is a challenging task, and James Booth is to be congratulated on this new and engaging account of Larkin's 'Life, Art and Love'.



Able and conscientious in his work, scrupulously fair-minded and considerate of others, Larkin could be regarded as a model citizen and administrator, so how did he come to be judged, by *The Times* for example, as 'not a nice man' when Booth makes clear this is the reverse of the opinion held universally among the diverse group of people who knew him well? Larkin's posthumous reputation was damaged by the publication of the *Select Letters* in 1992 and of Motion's biography in 1993. Motion's study was assiduously researched and widely acclaimed – except by Larkin's friends and colleagues, among whom it generated much adverse comment. This book offers another version of Larkin's life and character which differs from Motion's in significant respects.

Larkin's early years in Coventry and his life in wartime Oxford, where he wrote poetry, made friends with Kingsley Amis and others, and wrote girls'-school stories under the pseudonym 'Brunette Coleman' are well summarized by Booth. Larkin's first job was in a municipal library in Wellington, Shropshire. He wrote two novels and some poems before leaving in 1946. Booth describes Larkin's struggle to write a third novel, which occupied much of his time until he abandoned his novelistic ambitions in the early 1950s.

Larkin's first published collection of poems appeared in 1945. Booth finds much to commend in it, though later Larkin dismissed these poems as 'drivel'. It was only after years of application that Larkin was able to produce poetry to his own satisfaction. After leaving Wellington, Larkin worked in university libraries in Leicester and Belfast, and around 1950 his poetry began to attain the quality he sought. Many passages throughout the book are devoted to detailed analysis

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of Larkin's poems. Booth has expert knowledge of these and is a huge fan, expressing his admiration with unbridled enthusiasm. 'Sublime', ' exquisite' and 'masterpiece' are all terms he uses repeatedly. He surveys the whole range of Larkin's mature poetry and offers numerous observations regarding intertextual allusions and sources, literary and biographical, for ideas and images incorporated in the poems.

The tortuous course of Larkin's love-life is fully covered by Booth. The story is related, in parts, by Larkin himself in several poems: *Wild Oats, No Road* and *Talking in Bed* among others. Larkin was often strongly attracted to women, but he shrank from any commitment to matrimony, fearing its incompatibility with his first priority: his poetry.

Other aspects of Larkin's life are considered, including his love of jazz, his 'pornography' (harmless stuff by all accounts) and his many friends, including his friendship with Barbara Pym, which he greatly valued. Booth occasionally gets Larkin wrong. He claims that 'in paying for rounds of drinks … he was loudly stingy'. As a regular drinking companion for twenty years, I know that this is not just wrong, but defamatory. However, a few minor quibbles aside, this is an interesting, informative and welcome addition to the 'about Larkin' literature.

BookCrossing Convention

by Rose Little

'Read, register, and release' are the watchwords for BookCrossers: after reading a book, they give it a unique label and release it into the wild (a park bench, a shop, a restaurant table ...). Then when the book is 'caught' by some other reader it can be tracked via the website. Nearly 1.5 million members belong to this international organisation, and some 200 booklovers gathered for their 2015 Convention, held at the JdP, St Hilda's College, Oxford on 9–11 April 2015, to discuss authors, books and reading practices.

Clemence Schultze (past Chairman of BPS) spoke about Pym's own wide-ranging literary tastes and the reading habits she attributes to her characters. Following the spirit of Alexander Pope's words 'What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd', Pymmian people turn to books or draw upon remembered quotations to reflect, amuse, and console themselves. Emotions are deepened, slights rendered less sharp, fantasy can disport itself – all mediated through reading and memory. The earlier novels are on the whole more sympathetic to the value of reading, although even there some characters (like Dulcie's Miss Lord, with her scornful remark 'All this reading!') render it problematical.

Later, however, Pym puts heavier stress upon the gap between real life and literature, suggesting that the latter raises expectations incapable of fulfilment. The certainty that there is consolation in books is challenged when, for example, Letty, seeking a present for Marcia in hospital, eschews a book of poetry ('nothing modern, of course'!) in favour of lavender water. Reading, the author appears to suggest, is no answer to the question of finding one's identity and asserting self-worth. But what a tribute it is to Barbara Pym's artistry that she can, through her literary skill, raise questions such as these that relate reading to life.

Web Archive

Our website is to be archived in the UK Web Archive (http://www.webarchive.org.uk/), intended to make it available in perpetuity. This will include back issues of *Green Leaves*.

We are making every effort to acquire copyright clearance for the contents of *GL* from the contributors to Volumes 1 to 16 (subsequent issues already contain copyright statements). If you are a contributor who has not yet been contacted, and you wish to register written consent, do please contact Lorraine Mepham, secretary (l.mepham@lineone.net).

This is an excellent opportunity for the BPS. Among other things, it will give us a historic record of our website which will be available for future researchers.

The Weston Library

by Yvonne Cocking

The New Bodleian Library (Giles Gilbert Scott, 1936–40) closed in 2011 for major refurbishment, and reopened on 21 March 2015 as The Weston Library, named to honour the Garfield Weston Foundation, a major donor. The cost of the renovation, designed by Wilkinson Eyre Architects, was £80 million, part-funded by private donation.

The shell of the old listed building has been largely retained, but the façade overlooking Broad Street has been opened out to admit the public into Blackwell Hall, an imposing space 13.5 metres high. Much of the interior of the building was gutted, and replaced with a new 'floating stack', and three storage floors below ground level, plus reading and conservation rooms, were created or refurbished.

The Geneva Bible (15th-century)

Blackwell Hall, so called in honour of another donor, contains the 16th- century Ascott Park Gateway from an estate in Stadhampton, Oxon, on permanent loan from the V & A, the Sheldon Tapestry Map, display cabinets, a café, and a shop. Doors lead into two exhibition areas which at present house the *Marks of Genius* exhibition, open until 20 September, where treasures of the Bodleian, including Shakespeare's First Folio, The Gutenberg Bible, a 1217 Magna Carta, and relics of P B Shelley, are displayed.

During the weekend nine talks were presented in the 117 seat state-of-the-art lecture theatre, beginning with an address by Bodley's Librarian, Richard Ovenden, *The Weston Library:*

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a new chapter for the Bodleian. Other presentations were given by the architect, curators of special collections, an authority on Giles Gilbert Scott, and by Professor Diarmaid McCulloch on the Bay Psalm Book.

Members attending our conference in September should not miss the opportunity of visiting this beautiful building.

Further details of the Library and its contents are to be found online.

Pym in the Provinces – Exbury Gardens

by Michael Wilson

Any Pym enthusiast who enjoys a beautiful garden – and who does not? – should make a point of visiting Exbury on the edge of the New Forest, magnificent gardens with a Pym connection.

Barbara was stationed at Exbury House from March to September 1944, just after getting her commission as an officer in the Wrens. The House had been requisitioned by the Admiralty for the war effort and renamed, as was the practice. First it became HMS *Mastodon*, later HMS *King Alfred* and then HMS *Hawke*. Third Officer Pym would have been involved in administrative duties to do with victualling and the arming and training of the crews who took part in the amphibious assaults on mainland Europe at the close of the Second World War.

In May that year Barbara wrote to Henry Harvey that she was working 'in a large country house, with beautiful grounds full of camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons. It belongs to the Rothschilds and before that the Mitfords – Unity's family, you know, lived there. It has quite an imposing façade, mock Palladian, with a good sweep of grass and a view over to the Isle of Wight.'

As at Oxford, Barbara found herself in an environment where women were heavily outnumbered by men. She told Henry there was plenty of social life, with the Wrens getting so many invitations they hardly knew which ones to accept. The night before she had been to a big Anglo-American dance at the Village Hall, though she protested that she would have preferred a quiet night in, reading. I would love to know if she went into Southampton, my home city, the nearest large town, and if she was aware of its connections with Jane Austen. Austen lived there when it was a fashionable spa. Her house disappeared long ago, but the Dolphin Hotel, where she attended balls, still stands. I like to picture Barbara dining there with a dashing naval officer. Sadly, Barbara got no time for writing while at Exbury, though she told Henry she had 'a fine idea for a novel about this place and all the queer people in it'. These included the Captain, 'a great personality with a silver headed stick and a Great Dane'.

The Exbury estate had been purchased by the banker Lionel Nathan de Rothschild in 1919. He set about creating a large garden, which involved the building of a water tower, three large ponds, and 22 miles of underground piping. The gardens, covering 200 acres, were opened to the public in 1955 and are considered the finest of their type in the country. Features include a Hydrangea Walk, Rock Garden, Iris Garden and, US members please note, an American garden. I expect the camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons are even more magnificent than in Barbara's time, as the Rothschilds have been great collectors.

The gardens, now run as a charitable trust, are open most of the year and many would say that spring is the best time to visit, when the grounds are ablaze with colour. The house is not open to the public.

Another splendid attraction is a steam railway that runs through one corner of the garden. The Queen is a personal friend of the Rothschilds who currently occupy the estate and there is a photograph of her enjoying a ride on the train during a stay with the family.

Barbara is not the only writer with a connection to Exbury. The novelist Nevil Shute was billeted there several times and one of his novels, *Requiem for a Wren* (US title *The Breaking Wave*), is partly set there. Barbara's presence in Exbury and Taranto, Italy, is mentioned in a WRNS history site online at http://www.unithistories.com/officers/WRNS_officersP.html.

News from the Winners of the BPS Short Story Competition, Two Years On

Fran Baxter *(USA, 3rd place* – After the Fire*)*

Fran at the 2013 conference at St Hilda's

I was a graduate student and too poor to buy any copies of Barbara Pym's novels that had recently appeared in the bookshops in Berkeley, California, but when I completed my degree in 1980 I splurged on *Excellent Women* as a treat for myself. There was no turning back after that, and in the months that followed I read everything by or about Barbara Pym I could lay my hands on, though *Excellent Women* will always be my favourite.

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Thirty years later, an arson fire that destroyed a Sacramento food bank became the unlikely subject of a story I thought could best be told by Barbara Pym – rather, by a literary descendant of Mildred Lathbury. When 'After the Fire' was selected as a finalist for the Centenary short story competition, my husband Jim encouraged me to attend the announcement of awards, so I splurged again for Barbara Pym, this time on a plane ticket to the UK for the Annual General Meeting and Conference.

Arriving in Oxford, I entered the familiar and reassuring world of Barbara Pym, where I understood the language and customs of the 'learned society' and immediately felt at ease in a room full of strangers. I loved every part of the programme (I knew I would), but other highlights of the weekend were unexpected: a festive wedding party on the lawn of St. Hilda's College, and watching punters from my room overlooking the river; the 'vicars' at the champagne reception; having tea in the churchyard at Finstock and spotting Lathbury Road on the ride back to St Hilda's; making new friends that I hoped to meet again.

Now back at home, 6,000 miles from Oxford, I am working on the sequel to 'After the Fire' just for fun, and to 'solve' the mystery of a fire that remains unsolved in real life.

Nemone Thornes *(UK, Joint 1st place* – Open to the Public*)*

Many people believe that a writer is not complete until she has 'found her voice'. They think there is only one, and that this is the 'true' or 'real' voice.

I disagree. I have written stories in a great number of different voices, from experimental ultra-modern to deliberately archaic, and from highly polished literary to basic commercial. I regard all these stories as authentically mine, because each reflects something of my interests or my personality – although some of my styles contain much more of me than do others.

A competition for stories written as Barbara Pym would have written them was irresistible to me, both because I love writing in varied styles and because I have loved Barbara Pym's work for my entire adult life. During the writing of my story, I analysed her style for the first time, rather than merely reading for pleasure. I realised that it is actually rather like one of mine, and one of which I am the fondest and to which I feel the closest. In my attempt to replicate Miss Pym's style, I didn't change very much at all. In a few places, I used a slightly more old-fashioned phraseology than would have come to me naturally, and I added an extra sprinkling of adjectives. That was all.

Of course, this does raise the question of just exactly why one of my favourite writing voices seems (to me, anyway) quite like Barbara Pym's. Did it happen naturally, or did it develop because I have been unconsciously influenced? I think the most likely reason is unconscious influence. That, if it is true, makes me wonder how many writers Barbara Pym has influenced, without their being aware of this influence. Just how much unconscious, unacknowledged Pym-ness is still being published, even today?

Tanya Aydon *(UK, Joint 1st place* – Unexpected Flowers*)*

Seven months after the 2013 Barbara Pym Centenary Conference in Oxford, I self-published my first novel, *All Desires Known,* under my Dutch maiden name, Tanya van Hasselt. It was wonderful winning joint first prize in the Barbara Pym centenary competition – the best bit was meeting all the delightfully friendly and fun members of the Society and my fellow writers.

It was that day in Oxford that gave me the confidence to risk publishing my novel. The chapters I enjoyed writing the most are comic scenes involving two definitely Pymmish characters, a public school headmaster, Clement Hunstrete and his wife Eleanor. The title of my next novel was inspired by Mildred Lathbury and her biography of Cardinal Newman in the string bag – it's *Those Angel Faces Smile.*

Unexpected Treasure in Tunbridge Wells *by Tanya Aydon*

Sometimes by some extraordinary piece of luck – or kind act of providence – something precious falls into your hands when you are least expecting it. Two hardback books were lying on the table in Hall's, our second-hand bookshop in Tunbridge Wells, clearly just brought in by someone: *A Very Private Eye* and *A Lot To Ask*. Barbara Pym! Books about the author my mother and I loved above all others waiting there for us … Inside *A Very Private Eye* was an inscription in blue ink which read:

> *Viola Shorey Salter*. I met Barbara Pym during the last war when we worked together in the Censorship Div. of the Ministry of Information, Bristol Unit. (1941–1945)

Tucked inside the pages was something even more precious, a folded notelet written by Hilary Walton in black ink dated '14/X/84' with the address 'Barn Cottage, Finstock, Oxford':

> Dear Miss Salter,
>
> Many thanks for your letter, and I apologise for not replying sooner, but it arrived while Hazel Holt and I were on an American tour. (Barbara's novels are very popular in the States and she has become almost a cult there!)
>
> I was very interested to hear that you knew Barbara in the Bristol censorship days, and that you heard the Radio 4 broadcasts and are reading *A Very Private Eye.* It was a labour of love for Hazel and me, and you can imagine how much we both miss Barbara.

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We have not quite reached the end of publications, because next year we are going to publish an early novel of about 1940 called *Crampton Hodnet,* and after that a sort of anthology of pieces including some of the short stories.

I never met Lord Arthur Salter, but the name is very famous in Oxford.

With best wishes,
Yours sincerely,
Hilary Walton

Stuck underneath the inscription was a cutting from the *Radio Times* giving the details of the 'Bookmark' programme, *Miss Pym's Day Out*, with '1993' in blue ink at the bottom. It's good to know that Viola would have enjoyed watching it ... and was Viola Dace in *No Fond Return of Love* called after her?

(All six winning stories from the BPS Short Story Competition can be read on the Pym website.)

Gleanings

compiled by Yvonne Cocking

In 'A flat sole is the secret of long life', in *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 2014, Anna Murphy quotes the cancer specialist David B Agus: 'Uncomfortable shoes cause inflammation ... linked to some of our most troubling degenerative diseases.'

> Thankfully, the humble flat has been transformed into something that even the most committed fashionista might covet ... wearing flat shoes does not turn you into a Barbara Pym character …

'Keep the Booker British', wrote Matthew Walther in *The Spectator*, 20 September 2014:

> The Booker has given well-deserved attention to many excellent novelists over the years ... Kingsley Amis and Penelope Fitzgerald wrote books that belong to a distinct tradition of British fiction. It is the tradition of the five Ms: morals, manners, money and marriage written about by (usually) middle-class novelists. It is impossible to imagine *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* or *Quartet in Autumn* being nominated for the Pulitzer Prize...

In an article in *The Mail on Sunday*, 5 October 2014, Rachel Johnson expressed surprise when Charlotte Green, the recently retired newsreader, revealed that she was chased around the BBC studios by a sex-pest in the Seventies:

> Not the sex-pest/Seventies/ BBC part, obviously ... no, the bit that surprised me is that Charlotte Green is the last person I can imagine being the victim of a sexual assault at her place of work. Green is very Barbara Pym: sensible skirts, blouses, mousy bob and cardies. Of course, sex-pests are indiscriminately awful, or awfully indiscriminate, when it comes to their victims ... but Green's 27-year career, was never front-of-house ...

The regular back-page columnist of *The Times Literary Supplement*, J C, told us in the 10 October issue of a misuse of the TLS, a favourite topic of his:

> John Blazina writes from Toronto to alert us to ... an 'abhorrent' occurrence in Barbara Pym's novel *No Fond Return of Love*. Dulcie's cleaning woman, Miss Lord, arrives, having just had lunch. Dulcie inquires as to the menu:
>
> 'Egg on welsh and a Russian cream'.
>
> 'It sounds ... delicious ... What exactly is Russian cream?
>
> 'It's a kind of mousse with a sponge base and jelly on the top' said Miss Lord. 'The jelly can be red, yellow or orange'. She finished her coffee. 'Were you going to throw these flowers away? Unsightly, aren't they?' She bundled up some slimy-stalked zinnias *in The Times Literary Supplement* and went out to the dustbin with them.

India Knight's 'Point of View: Chick lit is in its death throes', appeared in *The Guardian,* 24 October 2015

> '... A single woman is a complicated thing, for society and for novelists ... A single woman of a certain age – a spinster – is more alarming still. Spinsters! All desiccated and withered, all lonely, all weird. Whiskery, probably. Cat-loving, stout shoed, possessed of unusually intense and unsettling internal narratives ... What's odd is that the spinster has a perfectly respectable literary history, from Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*, resisting wedlock with every iota of her being, to Barbara Pym's contentedly solo heroines ... It doesn't surprise me at all that my first proper literary crushes were on Pym's heroines. Almost all of these are spinsters, or widowed, or firmly on the shelf (at 29, in one case), but far from leading dusty, cat-rich existences, they take infinite delight in the minutiae of everyday life, especially if it involves curates … They are terrifically funny, self-aware, pleased to exist, and not at all sorry for themselves. They love food, books, and, usually, church ... Perhaps [her] books would be considered boring now, or self-indulgent ... or somehow too quiet. But it is precisely this quietness I find so deeply satisfying in Pym, and that sends me hurtling back to her three or four times a year.

Thanks to Maggie Jameson, Sheila Kane and Christine Shuttleworth.

Chairman's Chat

by Michael Wilson

No excuse to scratch my head and wonder what to write about this time, as I have recently returned from the North American Conference and my first ever visit to the USA, so masses of memories to look back on. There was the Conference itself of course, with stimulating papers on *Quartet in Autumn*, one of my favourites, and the chance to catch up with old friends and make new ones. Special thanks to Tom for organizing everything so efficiently, and to an Excellent Woman, Judith Robinson, who not only picked me up from and dropped me off at the airport, but also drove me to Concord where, trudging through the snow at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, I saw the graves of Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Louisa M. Alcott. So much to see in Harvard and Boston, galleries, museums, lovely parks, the Harbour - I do hope my first Conference will be the first of many.

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Obituary

Michael Macke, 1959–2014

by Yvonne Cocking

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Michael Macke, who was taken ill just before the Sunday morning showing of Linda McDougall's film 'We Knew Barbara' at the annual conference last August. After a short stay in the John Radcliffe Hospital he was repatriated to his native Germany where, sadly, he died on 24 November without ever regaining consciousness.

Michael with the Pym Players, 2004

Michael Wilson, our Chairman, travelled to Mülheim to represent the Society at the funeral and was joined by one of our German members, Jutta Schiller from Berlin.

His funeral was held in his hometown, Mülheim, the service being conducted by his great friend Pastor Krauss from Romania, who gave a deeply moving and personal eulogy, kindly forwarded to us by Moyra Forrest and translated by Christine Shuttleworth. He said: 'Michael meant so much to us because of his joyous, friendly and charming nature. As a teacher he knew how to pass on his love of language and literature. Students appreciated this and he enjoyed the certainty that he had made an enormous contribution to their lives. His colleagues loved him because he was sociable, polite and well-mannered.'

Michael with Margot and Jutta at 2014 conference at St Hilda's

Michael had studied at Münster University, and trained as a teacher at Lüneburg. In 1982 he went to Aberdeen as an assistant teacher and frequently visited colleagues in Edinburgh. He always maintained a special love for Scotland. Later he taught in a school in Headington, Oxford, where he also tutored Jaguar workers in German. After some years teaching English in Germany he got the chance to teach in Romania through a special programme promoted by the German government and was very happy there, forming a deep attachment to the country and its people.

Moyra Forrest, whom he had met in Edinburgh, became his earliest connection with the Barbara Pym Society, though it was actually Michael who introduced her to Pym's work. He and Moyra met frequently, in Scotland, and enjoyed holidays in Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Berlin and Bistritz, Romania.

Michael attended his first Barbara Pym Conference at St Hilda's in 1986. It had been organised by a past editor of *Green Leaves*, Jean Harker, and the then Principal of St Hilda's, Mary Moore. When the Barbara Pym Society was launched in 1994 following another very successful conference in 1993 at St Hilda's, he was one of the founder members, as was Moyra.

Hazel Holt, whom he met at the 1986 conference, became a close friend of Michael's, and as well as teaching his students the novels of Barbara Pym, he also introduced them to Hazel's novels and those of her son Tom Holt. Michael told me that he sent Hazel flowers on the publication of each of her novels.

Michael adored coming back to St Hilda's and the Oxford Conferences, missing only the very few which clashed with his school term. He much enjoyed taking part in dramatised readings, notably as an authentic Dr. Apfelbaum in *Parrots' Eggs*, and an unlikely Gabriel in *Crampton Hodnet.* Jutta recalls that she and Michael, with Margot Schnorr and Gertrud Weidner, formed a team at one of the annual quizzes, calling themselves 'The German Gang'! He was one of the earlier contributors to *Green Leaves* with his article 'Barbara in the German Classroom' (vol. 5, no.2, 1999).

With his exceptional height and beautifully tailored, if unconventionally styled, suits, Michael was probably the most easily recognisable of the attendees at the Pym conferences, but he was best known, as Kathy Ackley put it, for 'his warmth, wonderful humour and general cheerfulness'. Jutta said: 'He was a man who knew how to enjoy life. And how to do it in style'. As attested by these and the many other tributes sent to the Editor, there is no doubt that he was greatly loved, and will be sorely missed, by all Society members.

Our deepest condolences go to Michael's mother, his sister Lucia, and his great friend Ulla Fuhrmann, who came to the UK to be with him during his time in the JR and provided generous hospitality to Michael and Jutta during their stay in Mülheim.

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Obituary

P D James: An appreciation

by Kate Charles

When P D James died on 27 November 2014, at the age of 94, that sad event was reported around the world. Her massive contributions to crime fiction were widely mentioned, as well as her public service as a Governor of the BBC, a member of the House of Lords, and Patron of the Prayer Book Society. All of those things are undeniably true, but on that day the Barbara Pym Society also lost a great friend and champion.

Photo: Smalltown Boy

Phyllis Dorothy James did not have the easiest of lives. Born in 1920, she married during WWII. Her husband, an army doctor, came back from the War with mental health issues and she cared for him for the rest of his life. As a carer, a mother of two and a full-time breadwinner, she was unable to begin her writing career in earnest until her 40s. But she soon made up for lost time and became the pre-eminent crime novelist of her generation. In 1987 she received the Diamond Dagger for Lifetime Achievement from the Crime Writers' Association.

Her first visit to the Barbara Pym Society was a number of years ago, when she was the after-dinner speaker at the annual conference. She spoke very movingly of her admiration for Barbara Pym's novels, and in 2014 she delivered the opening lecture for the Barbara Pym centenary exhibition at the Bodleian Library. An Honorary Fellow of St Hilda's, she was a regular visitor to the college, attending and speaking at the annual Mystery and Crime conference on a regular basis.

It is difficult to capture in a few words the impact this woman had on so many. Always gracious, she was generous to other writers as well as to her readers and admirers. I was all of those things! Along with many others, I will miss her hugely.

*(*False Tongues*, fourth in Kate Charles's Callie Anson series, will be published in June by Marylebone House.)*

Obituary

John Bayley

by Jean Harker

Professor John Bayley, Honorary Life Member and great friend of the Barbara Pym Society, died on 12 January 2015, aged 89. He was a distinguished literary critic, author and teacher, with a long Oxford career, from undergraduate days at New College, with Lord David Cecil as his tutor, to a Fellowship at New College, to the Warton Professorship of English Literature.

His admiration for Barbara Pym was well known. He wrote widely and appreciatively about her work, making frequent comparisons with Jane Austen, and praising her ability to achieve a 'unique marriage of art and life'.

The first Pym novel that he read was *A Glass of Blessings* (a 'highly effective and original form of domestic drama'), as revealed in his introduction to Virago's 2009 edition. He recommended it to Lord David Cecil, who had not previously come across the writer, but read it, loved it, and promptly bought all the Pym novels he could find, an appreciation which culminated in the celebrated 1977 *TLS* article.

Happily, John Bayley and Barbara Pym did meet, in late 1977 in Paul Binding's house, when he and his wife Dame Iris Murdoch called in for a drink. 'John Bayley is just as I had imagined,' wrote Barbara. 'Very pleasant and, of course, knowing what he feels about my books made him even nicer to talk to.' (Letter to Robert Smith).

Bayley's obituarist in the *Economist* remembers his devoted care of Dame Iris in their famously chaotic North Oxford house. Having put her to bed, he would retire to the kitchen, pour himself a drink, and search among the piles of papers and unwashed crockery for a book to read. 'That book would be a Jane Austen or a Barbara Pym, well-worn and ever welcome.'

How pleased Barbara Pym would be to know the comfort that her work provided.

Obituary

We report with much regret the deaths of two of our long-standing members, Mary Passande and Miss B M Harris. Daphne McCord, a member who only recently discovered the joy of Pym membership, has sadly also died. We send our condolences to all the families and their friends.

Mary and Martin Passande

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Rambling Rose

by Rose Little

'Not one of all those ravenous hours, but thee devours,' but as Jane Cleveland decided, it matters less on a spring morning, and like her I have wandered out into the garden among the Easter daffodils and primroses. The sun is shining brightly with its new-found strength and I am looking forward to my holiday in Holland, seeing the colourful tulip fields, a long-held ambition.

View from the Weston Roof Terrace

I can find no reference to Barbara going to the Netherlands, but we have a letter from Robert Liddell, about meeting Henry and Elsie Harvey in Groningen. The Pym archive is now happily settled in the Weston Library, where I am often to be found, poring over the letters between those lifelong friends of a vanished time. I take a break by walking along the terrace and gazing at the breath taking view of Oxford roofs. It is comforting to know that their eyes too rested on this gracious scene.

The Barbara Pym Society 2015–2016

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Coming Events

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

2015 Annual General Meeting and Conference

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

Many kinds of 'partnerships' in Barbara Pym's works will be considered, including spouses, siblings, lovers, friends, colleagues or even cats! Full details of the conference and booking details will be circulated over the summer.

The Mirror Never Lies

Monday 19 October 2015

One performance of this show, based on *The Sweet Dove Died* (book and lyrics Joe Giuffre, composer Juan Iglesias), will take place at The Lost Theatre, 208 Wandsworth Road, London SW8 2JU (7 minutes' walk from Stockwell tube station, which is on the Victoria and Northern lines).

2016 North American Conference

11–3 March 2016
Some Tame Gazelle

Call for Papers

The organizing committee is seeking speakers for the 18th annual North American conference, to be held in the Boston, Massachusetts, area. Preference will be given to proposals on the featured novel, *Some Tame Gazelle,* but proposals on any topic relevant to Pym studies are welcome. The audience will be mostly non-academics who are very familiar with the novels of Barbara Pym.

Speakers receive an honorarium of $400, a waiver of the conference registration fee, and complimentary conference meals.

Please send an abstract of 150-250 words, accompanied by brief biographical details, by **Monday 16 November 2015** to Tom Sopko, North American Organizer, at barbarapymsociety@gmail.com with the subject heading '2016 Conference Proposal.'

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Scenes from the 2014 US Conference

Thanks to Judy and Joel Horn and to Jutta Schiller for many of the photos in this issue.

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