Green Leaves

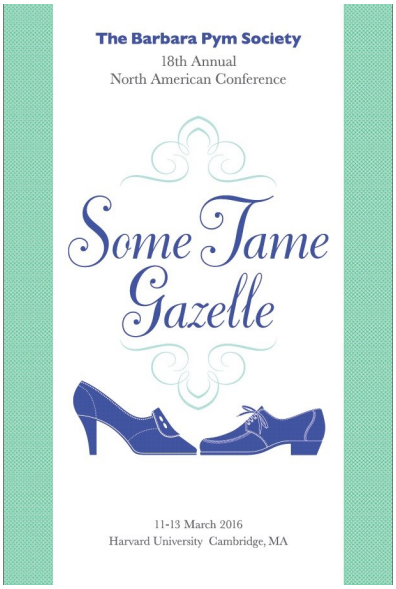
The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society **Vol. XXII, No. 1, Spring 2016**

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

North American Conference Report, 11-13 March 2016

by Mary Person

On the mild Friday evening of March 11, the 2016 North American Conference of the Barbara Pym Society got off to a delightfully Pymmish start at the beautiful Gothic Revival Church of the Advent in Boston. In the lovely atmosphere of the parish hall old friends and new acquaintances socialized over drinks until our host extraordinaire, Tom Sopko, rang the gong announcing the buffet dinner. Among the delectable dishes were roast loin of pork, artichoke-encrusted salmon, baby greens with gorgonzola and dried cranberries, and a delicious cauliflower cheese complete with green grape 'caterpillars'— *not* the kind that put Miss Prior off her lunch in *Some Tame Gazelle.* After a sinfully rich chocolate tiramisu torte and fortifying coffee, we made our way into the church to sing some of Barbara's favorite hymns, chosen by attendees from hymnbooks and *The Pymnal*. (One wonders how Pym would have described eager attendees jostling to have their favorite hymns chosen.) Throughout, resident church cats, Simon and Schuster, handsome and sociable black and white males, received much admiration. The evening closed with an enthusiastic rendering of the now customary 'Unsuitable Things', 'Land of Hope and Glory' and 'Jerusalem'.



Saturday morning dawned bright and crisp. Coffee, tea, pastries, and conversation were in abundance in Austin Hall at the Harvard Law School, where the full complement of attendees registered then settled in with anticipation for the morning's talks. The splendid Romanesque classroom was adorned with a cheerful arrangement of daffodils and tulips; decorative banners with black and white photos of Pym (with her tortoiseshell cat) hung from the high ceiling.

Tom Sopko had a warm welcome for all, including nineteen first-timers. (There was also a very young attendee, an infant occasionally heard to coo appreciatively.) Tom announced that, regrettably, BPS founder member and archivist Yvonne Cocking was not able to be with us this year. In her place excellent woman Isabel Stanley read Yvonne's paper 'Who's Who in *Some Tame Gazelle*', describing the literary use to which Barbara Pym put friends and acquaintances from her years at Oxford. Many of these friends recognized themselves and others, and encouraged Barbara's writing. Dr. Stanley was ably assisted by Ann and Dan DiPietro who read appropriate passages from *STG*. Mingled with our hearty applause for the readers were our thoughts and good wishes for Yvonne.

Adam Shoemaker spoke next, on 'The Conflicting Purposes of "Obscure Research" in *Some Tame Gazelle.*' He pointed out that there may be more quotations in this novel than her others, and noted that in the case of Belinda's love for the Archdeacon, obscure research and romantic suitability went hand in hand, and literature can provide a rich source of comfort.

Lunch consisted of sandwiches, chips, and cookies in the Law School's Wasserstein Hall — spacious, modern, comfortable and well-lit. This may not be a style that evokes Pym, but there was nonetheless much Pymmish conversation and observation. After lunch there was the option to see a perennial favorite, the video *Tea with Miss Pym,* or briefly stretch one's legs before returning to Austin Hall.

There we had the pleasure of hearing the first winner of the Ellen J. Miller Memorial Essay contest, Prashana Taneja, a Bennington College senior studying literature and foreign languages, present 'Sisters Together, Spinsters Forever: Resisting the Goblin in *Some Tame Gazelle*'. The reference here is to Christina Rossetti's poem 'Goblin Market', the goblins being the leering merchant men hoping to sell fruit to young sisters Laura and Lizzie. Similarly

Contents

2016 North American Conference Report	**1**
Summaries of Conference Papers	
Who's Who in *Some Tame Gazelle*	**2**
The Conflicting Purposes of 'Obscure Research' in *STG*	**3**
Rough Draft: Barbara Pym and the Nazis	**4**
Socks and Underthings...	**5**
Love in Her Own Peculiar Way...	**5**
The Ellen J. Miller student essay contest	**6**
The Second Annual Ellen J. Miller essay contest announcement	**7**
Women: a Cultural Review	**7**
***The Mirror Never Lies* (Review)**	**7**
Hazel Holt 1928-2015	**8**
Pym, Liddell and 'Groupism' in 1930s Oxford	**9**
Talk at the Woodstock Literature Society	**10**
Siegfried Sassoon	**10**
Did Ianthe inherit her furniture or did she have to buy it?	**11**
Thoughts on a Spiky Problem: the Monkey-Puzzle Tree	**11**
Members' Corner	**12**
Readers Recommend	**13**
Gleanings	**13**
Rambling Rose	**14**
Chairman's Chat	**15**
The Barbara Pym Society 2016–2017	**15**
Coming Events	**15**
Photo Gallery	**16**

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org

Belinda and Harriet Bede ultimately avoided marriage.

Laura Shapiro followed with 'Rough Draft: Barbara Pym and the Nazis'. Her experience at the Bodleian Library reading Pym's first draft of *Some Tame Gazelle* was chilling — and we felt chilled as she read passages. She described the writing as boring, bad, arch and insular; it was also horrifying to see in it Pym's early fascination with the Nazis, perhaps influenced by her infatuation with Friedbert Gluck, an SS officer she met during a trip to Germany. As finally published in 1950 the novel is the Pym we know and love, filled with food, household details, knitting, and curates. But the questions following Laura's talk pondered 'how could Pym have been so naïve?'

Tom Sopko

The next presentation was truly, as Tom put it, 'something completely different'. Victoria Patterson's 'Socks and Underthings: Desire, Seduction, and the Private Life of Spinsters in *Some Tame Gazelle*' was a light-hearted look at the role played by 'combinations', corsets (such as Harriet's, twice hidden in the sofa) and the 'powerful sock-darning scene' in a novel where seduction and sex are only obliquely suggested. Another lively Q&A was followed by coffee, tea, and cookies. For an afternoon with both Nazis and knitting, surely Pymmish refreshment was in order.

Sunday, the last morning of the conference, started with a continental breakfast followed by Michelle Huneven's talk 'Love in Her Own Peculiar Way: Barbara Pym, Useless Longings, and *Some Tame Gazelle* An Essay in Six Sections'. In the novel, village life was full of unrequited love, as was Barbara's own life. Dr. Huneven pointed out that both Pym and Proust craved 'love from a dry source'.

Singing 'Unsuitable Things'

The Mighty Pym Players closed out the conference with a delightful dramatic reading called 'Popping the Question: Marriage Proposal in Pym Novels'. Featuring six unforgettable (and often hysterical) proposals, it was a perfect ending to the conference. After a heartfelt rendition of 'Unsuitable Things' Tom thanked the board for all their help and announced the dates and theme for next year, attendees gave Tom an enthusiastic round of applause and another wonderful Pym weekend came to a close.

To all members: if you would like to volunteer to write a report for the UK conferences, or the Spring Meeting, please email the Editor:
roselittlesmith123@gmail.com

Who's Who in *Some Tame Gazelle*

by Yvonne Cocking

Barbara Pym used several of her friends from Oxford as models for characters in *Some Tame Gazelle*. Barbara and Hilary were to become Belinda and Harriet Bede, of course, Henry Harvey was the Archdeacon, Robert 'Jock' Liddell was Dr Parnell, John Barnicot became John Akenside, Honor Tracy was Hester Carey (later Edith Liversidge), Alison West-Watson was Agatha Hoccleve and Roberto Weiss was Count Piozzi (later Count Bianco). In the earliest draft Barbara used her characters' real names, but by November 1934 the characters had received their fictional names and the first version of the novel was completed.

Of Belinda, Harriet and Archdeacon Hoccleve I shall say little, as much is known about them anyway. I shall concentrate instead on several of the minor characters and their real-life models. First, however, you should understand how these people came to know one another, and to form a close-knit clique.

Henry Harvey first met Robert Liddell when he was only 18; Robert was 21, already at Oxford and reading Greats. When Henry went up to Oxford that autumn they became great friends, sharing digs in the Iffley Road, and later at 86b Banbury Road, by which time Robert had taken his degree and was working in the Bodleian Library. One of Robert's colleagues at the Library was John Barnicot. Though he was four years Robert's senior, he, Robert and Henry formed a close circle, which was widened by Barnicot's friend, Count Roberto Weiss, who also did a stint at the Bodleian.

Although John Akenside does not actually appear in *Some Tame Gazelle*, he is frequently referred to by his friend Count Bianco, who was engaged in preparing Akenside's letters for publication, and would sit for hours brooding over them. Edith Liversidge had also known Akenside in *her* 'Balkan Days' and it was rumoured that he had been very fond of her, but had been too shy to declare himself. The model for Akenside was

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org

John Barnicot, who specialized in Old Slavonic books at the Bodleian Library.

Barbara's friend Honor Tracy was the model for Hester Carey. I have to confess a complete failure to find out any more about her.

Hester Carey evidently had the means to travel quite extensively in Europe, and like many other travellers she adopted an eccentrically careless style of dress and behaviour which Belinda secretly envied. In spite of the interesting possibilities afforded by this strong personality, Barbara decided to tone down Hester Carey and make her into Edith Liversidge, 'a kind of decayed gentlewoman' according to Harriet, but Belinda disagreed. 'Nobody could call Edith decayed, and sometimes one almost forgot that she was a gentlewoman'.

Count Roberto Weiss, whose particular friend in the group was John Barnicot, is the model for Count Ricardo Bianco. Weiss, who already had a degree from an Italian university, arrived in Oxford in 1928. Hazel Holt says of him, 'Legend has it that he had originally gone to Cambridge, taken a dislike to the place and hired a taxi to take him to Oxford where he persuaded the startled authorities to accept him as an undergraduate.'

John Barnicot's daughter, Radmila May, says that she was sure that while her father found Barbara's picture of him in *Some Tame Gazelle* extremely amusing, the same could not be said of Weiss: 'According to my mother, Roberto never forgave Barbara for her picture of him, refused to meet her when she came to Henley to stay with us, and would not read any of her novels.'

Alison West-Watson, on whom Agatha Hoccleve is based, lived in Banbury Road, opposite No. 86. On 23 March 1934 Barbara noted in her diary, 'It seems that Lorenzo is really in love with Alison West-Watson, because she has not fallen into his arms straightaway as he expected she would.' Barbara's feelings for Alison are demonstrated without much rancour in the portrayal of Agatha as a clever, domineering and rather humourless woman, and a poor housekeeper who often irritated her husband, but was widely respected in the parish because her father had been a bishop.

Finally I come to John Robert 'Jock' Liddell, the model for Dr Parnell, the University librarian and old friend of the Archdeacon. If you have read AVPE and ALTA, you will know that Liddell played a big part in Barbara's life. It was largely through him that she kept in touch with Henry, who was not a frequent letter writer. Liddell and Barbara corresponded throughout their lives.

Barbara was not a good diarist. Weeks, sometimes months, would go by without her making any entries. Then she might go back a week or more and fill in the events of those days. So, unfortunately, it is not possible to glean from them any more than I have told you about these friends, especially the women, in whom she probably lost interest after she had made literary use of them. But we could wish her to have been more assiduous, for it would be fascinating to know on whom she based some of the other characters, like Mr Mold, Miss Aspinall, and above all, the Bishop of Mbawawa.

Yvonne Cocking *is our BPS archivist and historian. Formerly a colleague of Barbara's, she now spends countless hours sifting through the richness of the Pym archives at the Bodleian Library.*

The Conflicting Purposes of 'Obscure Research' in *Some Tame Gazelle*

by Adam Shoemaker

Given the trajectory of Barbara Pym's life, from her days at Oxford to her literary career and employment in the International African Institute, it's not a surprise that her first published novel is concerned with the value of 'obscure research,' and the ultimate worth of literary knowledge. The myriad literary references in *Some Tame Gazelle* outline an alternative life for protagonist Belinda Bede: devotion to pure literary research instead of to a frustrated love for Archdeacon Henry Hoccleve. Belinda's life is undoubtedly enriched by her appreciation of 'our Greater English Poets.' But could it have taken a more rewarding, more independent course had this appreciation been matched by ambition?

Belinda's love of literature is more than that of a casual reader, and her facility with English literature is easy and precise. Pym suggests that Belinda's passion could have been the foundation of a rewarding vocation — and an alternative to unrequited longing for Archdeacon Henry Hoccleve. Indeed, Belinda tells Henry and his wife, Agatha, that she wished she could have pursued 'obscure research'.

Belinda's thoughts about Olivia Berridge, Agatha's niece, reveal internal conflict and a hint of envy. Olivia's ability to obtain a research position at the University; propose marriage and be accepted by a curate; and keep her professional position as a married woman: all of these make an impression on Belinda, who in her life has managed nothing similar. Belinda sees, when looking at Agatha and Olivia, that she has missed some opportunity to dedicate herself to literary research. Pym stakes out the alternate path clearly enough for the reader to wonder — to see in Belinda if not a fading light, then at least the unrealized potential to achieve intellectual and emotional independence.

But if the pursuit of obscure literary research is a rival to romantic love in Belinda's heart, the two exist in a tangled knot. For, paradoxically, scholarly prowess serves as a measure of romantic desirability for Belinda and, she imagines, for Henry. Literature serves Belinda not only as a balm for unrequited love, but also as a language shared with the Archdeacon. For most of the novel, she believes that Agatha won his heart with erudition — not just appropriate references, but devotion to academic research. It's easy to see why Belinda would view literary scholarship as the field of play in which Henry's romantic affections could be won or lost. His typically insensitive remarks remind her that, indeed, it was on this field, many years ago, that he was won by Agatha. Through this lens, she sees Agatha as 'the efficient wife and good philologist'.

But Pym's university days show us another way to look at Belinda's love of literature. Pym's readings taught her how

much of English literature cannot be fully appreciated without romantic disappointment. Pym realized that appreciating, if not savoring, unrequited love also allows for truer communication with the literature she loved. As Belinda puts it: '[h]ow much more one appreciated our great literature if one loved … especially if the love were unrequited.' If Belinda hasn't moved on from loving Henry after all these years, she has turned this love into something valuable, at least to her. Henry, as a person, is not dominant, but merely a stand-in object on which Belinda can focus her literary appreciation. Her devotion to him hasn't prevented her from leading a life focused on literature, but in fact enabled it. Does it matter that it wasn't the life of a professional researcher or published scholar?

Belinda believes, or tries to believe, that her preferred state is a quiet, uneventful outward life matched with an active intellectual inner life. Certainly there are times when she wishes she was more engaged with 'obscure research,' and not just because of her innate sense of competition with Agatha. But for the most part, Belinda believes that it's possible to find contentment without achieving — or even really trying to achieve — life's potential victories. Belinda has reached this place of stasis in reaction to the paradox that she faces when contemplating her love of literature and admiration for obscure research, a devotion that creates a path away from Henry at the same time that it draws her back to him.

Adam Shoemaker *holds a Master's degree in Medieval Icelandic Studies from the University of Iceland, a BA in History and Art History from Williams College and a JD from Harvard Law School. He spent his junior year at Exeter College, Oxford. He practices telecommunications law in Washington, D.C., where he lives with his wife and son.*

Rough Draft: Barbara Pym and the Nazis

by Laura Shapiro

Barbara Pym was pleased and proud to have completed the first draft of *Some Tame Gazelle* in 1935, so much so that she sent it out to be professionally typed and bound into two fat volumes before she mailed it off to a series of publishers. To her disappointment, everyone turned it down. Finally she put the manuscript away, and when she went back to it after the war she gave it a deep, comprehensive revision. The two bound volumes themselves, however, were not touched; and to this day they sit in the Bodleian with her other papers, giving us a wide-open window onto her thinking and writing in the mid 1930s. For a devotee of Pym, to turn the pages of those volumes is one of the most disheartening experiences imaginable. This draft is just terrible.

First of all, it's laced with warm and loving references to Nazi Germany, all of them voiced by Belinda, the character based on Pym herself. Because Pym set the novel thirty years in the future, Belinda is able to look back sadly on the 'terrible revolution' in Germany in the 1950s, which resulted in the 'poor Nazis' being swept from power and sent into exile in Africa. Now they're struggling, and greatly in need of charity, so Belinda spends most of the novel knitting garments for them and making sure to use the most expensive wool: 'after all the Nazis were rather *special* people.' The reason for this tender regard, we learn, is that back in the 1930s Belinda had traveled to Germany and fallen in love with 'Helmuth,' a Nazi who remains dear to her in memory.

It's almost as startling to encounter the second major problem with the draft, namely the writing itself. Although many of the characters and situations will reappear in the published version of the novel, and some of the sentences are Pymlike, on the whole the draft has none of the wit, the economy or the perfectly shaped characterizations that would become hallmarks of her style. The manuscript reads like a long, tedious in-joke written to please a small circle of friends, and of course that's exactly what it was.

How on earth did this happen? At the time she was writing, Pym was experiencing one of her heady romantic crushes. In 1934 she took a trip to Germany with the National Union of Students, and fell in love with an SS officer who dominated her daydreams until they broke up four years later. Entranced by the scenery, the language, the music and her new swain, she swept all of them into the book. Meanwhile she had no trouble ignoring Hitler's early brutality, in part because it was reported only irregularly in the press, and in part because like many Britons she just didn't take it too seriously. Pym was living, and writing, with rose-colored glasses; and this dreamy detachment was reflected in the prose.

After the war, Pym moved to London and decided it was time to take herself seriously as a writer. She had emerged from the series of rapturous crushes and flings that characterized her Oxford and war years; now she knew what was going to be important in her life, and it wasn't men, it was fiction. She pulled out the manuscript and went back to work on it, this time with a clear head, cutting and shaping and refocusing. In the process she shook off the in-jokes that blanketed the text and unleashed her love for the real, observable world. The Nazis had been jettisoned in the course of some earlier tinkering. With this go-round a flood of domestic details poured into the manuscript, and her natural sense of irony found its level. She became the writer she wanted to be — and the Barbara Pym we know.

Laura Shapiro *is a journalist and culinary historian. She was a columnist at Newsweek for 16 years, where she covered food, women's issues, and the arts and won several journalism*

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org

awards. Her books include Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century *(1986),* Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America *(2004), and a biography of Julia Child (2007). She is at work on her fourth book, which will have a chapter on Pym.*

Socks and Underthings: Desire, Seduction, and the Private Life of Spinsters in *Some Tame Gazelle*

by Victoria Patterson

In Barbara Pym's *Some Tame Gazelle*, a subtext of desire and seduction is evoked through socks. Just as socks are hidden or half-visible when worn, Pym's church women express flickering, subterranean yearnings and desires through the ostensibly demure and domesticated actions of knitting, mending, and cooking for men. But it is the overt gifting of socks (and possibly a 'pullover') that signifies — in Pym's hands — a seduction, one that is risky and potentially shameful. Throughout the novel, socks — the knitting of them, the mending and giving of them, the knitters' varied and competing skills — form a motif with comedic, subversive and at times heartbreaking twists.

Other undergarments — specifically the curate's combinations and Harriet's corsets — similarly gather meaning and hilarity as, throughout the novel, these items are being obliviously exposed or stuffed under sofa cushions. Underthings also point to the powerful forces of loneliness and sexual desire peeking out from under the ostensibly chaste social relations between Pym's clergymen and 'excellent' laywomen.

Pym wrote her first novel, *Some Tame Gazelle*, in her early twenties, modeling the two main characters, the spinsters Belinda and Harriet Bede, on herself and her sister Hilary, projecting them into middle age and setting them in a country village. The surrounding characters were based on Pym's friends. Pym's early love obsession, Henry Harvey, whom she remained friends with her entire life, despite Harvey's prior cruel conduct toward her, became the prototype for Belinda's lifelong love obsession, Archdeacon Hoccleve. Early drafts of the novel reflect Pym's confusion (the novel had a fifteen-year gestation for Pym to work out the tone), with Pym commenting in a diary entry that her narrative offered 'an excuse for revealing' some of what she felt for Harvey. She was too close to the material but was already mining her experience of romantic rejection, which would become a propelling force in her work — and in her life, where she would continue to form attachments to unavailable men.

With fifteen years between inception and publication to brew, *Some Tame Gazelle* is a unique example of autobiographical fortune telling, wherein Pym was able to tamp her passions and confusions into a masterly comic creation.

Sexual inhibition and confusion is satirized in *Some Tame Gazelle*, but it is also clearly present in Belinda, as it surely was in Pym. The Bede sisters remain in an adolescent limbo, failing to develop beyond idealized romantic fixations, and socks and underthings form a channel of subtext. But just as one wears socks and underthings close to one's body as a form of comfort and protection, socks and underthings also take on a comforting metaphorical note. The sisters have made their own accommodations for happiness, and it is in their own private world where hand-knit socks and a tight corset form the channels for interacting with the opposite sex. Through the recurrent motifs of socks and underthings, Pym trains the reader to see the world of men and women as Harriet and Belinda do, and the effect is comic, endearing, and bewildering.

Victoria Patterson *is the author of three novels:* This Vacant Paradise *(2012),* The Peerless Four *(2014), and* The Little Brother *(2015) and a short story collection,* Drift *(2009). Her essay on Barbara Pym 'A Nice Hobby, Like Knitting' was recently published in the Los Angeles Review of Books. She lives in Southern California and teaches at Antioch University's Master of Fine Arts program.*

Love in Her Own Peculiar Way: Barbara Pym, Useless Longings and *Some Tame Gazelle* An Essay in Six Sections

by Michelle Huneven

Barbara Pym's subject was unrequited love, and all its useless longings. At age 22, to amuse her friends at Oxford — and get a handle on a distressing love affair — Pym wrote a short story about them all called *Some Tame Gazelle*. Praised, she vowed to make it into a novel. It would take her fifteen years.

1. Barbara

After the relationship with her first college boyfriend fizzled out, Barbara Pym sought a different kind of love. She fixated on Henry Harvey, whom she dubbed Lorenzo. 'I love Lorenzo,' she wrote in her diary months before they spoke. 'I mean *love* in my own peculiar way …' Pym's 'peculiar way' involved 'that kind of gnawing at the vitals sick feeling if that describes it at all – that is so marvellous …'

Henry Harvey became the focus of Pym's Oxford days; she befriended his close friends. They all advised her to treat the

affair lightly, which Pym pretended to do. Her fiction and her diaries suggest a far deeper attachment.

2. A Village of Useless Longings

In *Some Tame Gazelle* we glimpse Pym grappling with — and normalizing — unrequited love. The heroine, Belinda Bede, still loves the married archdeacon after 30 years. Belinda's sister Harriet adores young curates. Harriet herself is regularly proposed to by Count Ricardo Bianco, although his deepest affections probably belong to his deceased friend John Akenside who, in turn, is the lost love of spinster Edith Liversidge. With everyone's affections securely sequestered, our villagers carry on calm, happy lives. Threats to this homeostasis — interlopers trying to carry off a spinster or two — form the novel's plot.

3. Barbara Again

Love *in her own peculiar way* meant love on tenterhooks, love rife with the sick-making pangs of infatuation, adrenalized love. In her own life, Pym couldn't seem to progress past this stage, and in her pattern of brief, intense liaisons followed by months of heartbreak, she was clearly working out something deep and obscure, especially to her. Pym was not introspective or attracted to psychological analysis; she suffered in her love affairs, but evidently never addressed why she behaved as she did. Instead, she wrote novels.

4. The Oedipal Idyll

Belinda's struggle to relate to her adored archdeacon without offending his snappish wife has a whiff of the Oedipal: how do I get to Dad around Mom? Then, Agatha leaves town for a month and Belinda gets to play at being the chosen. In the book's closest version of a sex scene, Belinda darns the archdeacon's sock *while it is on his foot*. An Oedipal idyll, indeed.

5. The Agatha Piece

Agatha's power to disturb Belinda soon diminishes through a series of revelations. Agatha, Belinda discovers, is as vulnerable and disappointed as everyone else. Now pitying Agatha, Belinda lets Agatha win a skirmish or two. Thus, Belinda becomes an architect of her own happiness. The old primal story no longer works her; now, she works it. Which is what Barbara Pym did: she took her life with its embedded hungers and hidden patterns and forged it into art. This art she could own as no wife or husband can ever own a spouse.

6. Nothing, the Sequel

In 1962, Pym had this idea for a story or novel:'A woman living in the country who has had a hopeless love for a man (wife still living perhaps or religious scruples), then, when he is free she finds that after all he means nothing to her — is this the reward of virtue, this nothingness?' (VPE 206) This scenario could be the sequel to *Some Tame Gazelle*. With affections fastened to an unavailable lover, a woman is free to lead her own life. And the pleasures of the chase can be prolonged indefinitely. Remove the obstacle to that love — Agatha, say — and something else *will* happen. Possibly nothing. Belinda might find that the archdeacon, available at last, means nothing to her.

Epilogue: Pym meets Proust

While revising *Some Tame Gazelle*, Pym read Proust, and she shares his unabashed stance that unrequited love is human love. How someone loves is just another fact, like saying he has a finger or she a big toe. Pym holds a mirror to our oddest loves and longings without calling down shame or pity, her humor never curdles into derision. We do what we do for our own reasons, Pym tells us, even as those reasons remain a mystery, locked away.

Michelle Huneven *is the author of four novels.* Round Rock *(1997) and* Jamesland *(2003) were both NY Times Notable Books and also finalists for the LA Times Book Award and* Blame *(2009) was a finalist for both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the LA Times Book Award. Her fourth novel,* Off Course *(2014), was a NY Times Editor's Choice. Michelle teaches creative writing to undergraduates at UCLA and lives in Altadena, California with her husband, dog, cat, and talkative African Gray parrot.*

The Ellen J. Miller student essay contest

The first annual Ellen J. Miller student essay contest was won by Prashansa Taneja, a senior at Bennington College in Vermont, where she studies Literature and Foreign Languages. Prashansa's writing has appeared in print in the *Guardian* and on the online literary blogs Bookslut and The Millions. Her appreciation of English women novelists of postwar England naturally led her to Barbara Pym. Prashansa attended the North American conference for the first time in 2015 with her professor Dr. Brooke Allen. Her home is in New Delhi, India. She read her winning essay, 'Sisters Together, Spinsters Forever: Resisting the Goblin in *Some Tame Gazelle*' at the North American conference, and it will be posted on the BPS web site along with the other conference papers.

Prashansa Taneja

Ellen J. Miller was the Barbara Pym Society's first North American Organizer from 1999 until her death in 2009. In addition to single-handedly organizing the first ten North American conferences, she served on the Society's governing Committee, was editor of *Green Leaves* from 2006 to 2009, and served as our first webmaster. She produced the 1984 video *Barbara Pym: Out of the Wilderness* and co-edited *All This Reading: The Literary World of Barbara Pym* in 2003. The 2016 essay contest award was made possible by a memorial donation from her family.

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org

The Second Annual Ellen J. Miller Student Essay Competition

TOPIC: Barbara Pym's 1955 novel *Less Than Angels*, which will be the focus of the 2017 North American conference. The essay may be on any aspect of the novel, such as a specific theme, recurring motif(s), character development, the importance of place or setting, or any other subject that promotes a deeper understanding or appreciation of the novel. Comparison of themes, characters, or the like in *Less Than Angels* with their treatment in other Pym novels would also be appropriate.

The contest is open to any full-time undergraduate or graduate student at an accredited university or college. Entries must be submitted by 1 November 2016. The winner will receive a cash prize of $300 plus free registration and meals at the 19th annual North American conference at Harvard University on 17-19 March 2017, where the essay will be read. Complete rules are posted on the BPS web site.

Women: a Cultural Review Reassessing Barbara Pym: a Special Issue, Guest Edited by Nick Turner & Frances White (Volume 25, Number 4, Winter 2014)

by Libby Tempest

The special edition of this prestigious academic journal (published by Taylor & Francis) was put together and edited by Dr Nick Turner, following his most successful Barbara Pym Centenary Conference held at the University of Central Lancashire in July 2013. All the contributors to this edition were speakers at the conference and Nick and his co-editor Frances White have selected six first-rate essays and jointly written an excellent introduction.

Nick and Frances describe Pym as 'a literary enigma', highlighting the fact that she always had readers, even when she could not get published: since her 1977 renaissance her readership has continued to grow and is sometimes 'a cause of perplexity to literary critics, who find themselves hard put to find a formal mode of analysis to explicate the constantly engaging quality of her work'. A brief résumé of Pym scholarship from the 1980s onwards is given, demonstrating the development of Pym studies and showing how current academic, critical, analytical work is building on these foundations. 'The depth of the psychological and sociological impact of Pym's work is only beginning to be recognised beneath the surface of daily trivia (which she does not despise) and romance (which she slyly subverts)'. Pym unflinchingly examines the role of women, religion, attitudes to homosexuality, the challenges of human communication, the elderly, the welfare state and the breakdown of established communities – Nick and Frances have selected essays which address some of these issues and 'bring new angles of approach' and 'fresh perspectives' to the novels and to Pym criticism.

Perhaps the essay I most enjoyed was '"Most Delightfully Incongruous": Desire, Plot and Realism in *No Fond Return of Love*' by Kerry Sinanan from the University of the West of England in Bristol, in which Kerry re-examines a theme common in Pym scholarship, that of Pym's relationship with Jane Austen. Kerry cleverly parallels Dulcie and Aylwin's relationship with that of Edmund and Fanny in *Mansfield Park* with Aylwin hoping that Dulcie will not be too puzzled about his rather sudden change of heart when she recalls the plot of *Mansfield Park*.

This whole collection is a fascinating mix of wonderful personal reminiscence ('Remembering Barbara' by Paul Binding) and cutting-edge intellectual analysis ('Something Unsatisfactory: Queer Desires in Barbara Pym' by J.L.J. Kennedy). Truly heartening to observe so much interest in Pym at so many different levels and from such diverse starting points.

The Mirror Never Lies (Review)

by Triona Adams

It is tempting to imagine Barbara and Hilary, perhaps escorted by Philip Larkin, sitting down to a performance of *The Mirror Never Lies*. Might they, like us, have expected subtle irony, understated passion and pain, quick turns of wit and minute social observation? They would have been politely astonished by the wrist-slashing, high camp misery of this musical adaptation of *The Sweet Dove Died*.

This Leonora (a well-preserved Claire Malcolmson) is a dramatically bitter woman. Deploring the loss of her looks in the title song the music crashes into *Sunset Boulevard* with flourishes of *Phantom of the Opera* accompanying forced 'poetic' language such as 'a palate once pristine/now is slightly riven' that sits oddly with more mundane observations that eyes that once were limpid 'now need liner to correct them.'

To say that all the characters are broadly drawn is to be kind. Humphrey's frankly alarming rocky showstopper 'I Love Women' (those 'bouncing playmates for a boy') is fecund with risqué near rhymes: 'no matter what their size is / They're always causing rises.' Unfortunate then that Gareth James was woefully miscast as stolidly heterosexual Humphrey. Grinding his hips and proclaiming his love of 'Breasts!' one rather felt that the lady did protest too much ... Stuart Scott gave a good account of good-looking James without much else to commend him, which seems proper. Lewis Asquith left us in no doubt that Ned was an out-and-out evil queen, an even match in this case for a Leonora whose demented singing into a mirror takes on a Disney level of camp.

Kristel Harder, as Meg, was a standout performance both vocally and for her endearingly clumsy balancing act of heartbreak and comic self-deprecation. She managed to imbue even her clunkiest lines with sweet understatement and uncertainty that was quite at odds with the melodrama of the rest of the piece. 'Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out' is an agreeably authentic-sounding piece of upbeat hippy schtick.

This was a semi-staged, workshop performance of a work in progress. Created and developed over many years by American musical theatre pros Joe Giuffre and Juan Iglesias, *The Mirror Never Lies* is clearly a true labour of love. If it isn't the Pym that we know perhaps it's best to say that it's their 'truth' and we can respect that.

Hazel Holt 1928-2015

by Yvonne Cocking

In December 2015 we learned the sad news that Hazel Holt had died, having survived her friend Barbara Pym for thirty-five years. It is difficult for the Society to comprehend that this most prominent figure in Pym history is no longer with us.

Hazel Holt, biographer as well as friend of novelist Barbara Pym, was educated at the King Edward VI High School for Girls in Birmingham and then read English at Newnham College, Cambridge. In 1950 she joined the International African Institute in an editorial capacity and worked with Barbara Pym.

I first met Hazel when I joined the staff of the Institute as an assistant librarian in 1963. She was the link between the editorial department and the library so I saw her almost daily when she came down, primarily to ask me to check arcane references for *African Abstracts*, a quarterly publication for which she was responsible. I always enjoyed her visits as she had a gift for investing all her pieces of news, however trivial, with a dramatic quality.

After I left the Institute I did not see Hazel for many years. In the meantime, she and Barbara's sister, Hilary Walton, made two tours in the United States to publicize Barbara's novels, on one occasion flying by Concorde, and together edited Barbara's *A Very Private Eye: An Autobiography in Diaries and Letters*, published by Macmillan in 1984.

A one-day conference, 'Barbara Pym: her life and work', was held at St. Hilda's College on 5 July 1986. Barbara Everett chaired the conference, and papers were given by Victoria Glendinning, Hilary Spurling and the social anthropologist Edwin Ardener. Hilary Walton and Hazel Holt read passages from Barbara Pym's unpublished wartime diaries. Her old friends Henry Harvey, Elizabeth Barnicot, and Professor Robert Smith were present, as was our dear late friend Michael Macke.

Jean Harker writes, 'The Barbara Pym one-day conference was the inspired idea of the then Principal of St Hilda's, Mary Moore, who was herself a novelist (under a pseudonym). She was keen to celebrate St Hilda's most critically acclaimed writer, and asked me to organize the conference. First of all, I was empowered to take Hazel and Hilary to tea at the Randolph with the aim of ascertaining whether they were agreeable (they were), and then Mrs Moore herself recruited the speakers (for who can turn down an invitation from a Head of House?) We put the programme together, and then arranged an eve-of-conference dinner, with Pym quotations on the printed menu. The after-dinner toast was "Absent Friends – Barbara Pym, David Cecil and Philip Larkin"'.

Meanwhile Hazel had revised for publication two Pym unpublished manuscripts of which no final versions existed, *Crampton Hodnet* (published 1985) and *An Academic Question* (1986). Then she collected such of Barbara's other unpublished work as she considered worthy in a volume entitled *Civil to Strangers and Other Writings* (1987). Her biography of Barbara Pym, *A Lot to Ask,* was published, also by Macmillan, in 1990. After this Hazel thought that she had done all she could to promote Barbara's work and ensure her reputation as a novelist, so she embarked on her own career. Between 1989 and 2014 she wrote 21 highly successful Mrs Malory mysteries, published by Allison & Busby, a prodigious output for a late starter.

Hazel's last appearance at St Hilda's was at the 1993 Barbara Pym Literary Weekend (20-22 August), which was organized by Eileen Roberts and Jean Harker as part of the college's centenary celebrations. Hazel took part in an informal after-dinner discussion session with Hilary Walton and Henry Harvey. Papers were given by Dr Margaret Rayner, Dr Barbara Everett, Professor Peter Lloyd, Professor Robert Smith and Father Gerard Irvine, and Hilary Walton spoke about her fascinating research into Pym family history. The success of this conference led to the formation of the Barbara Pym Society, helped by publicity provided by the BBC Radio 4 programme about it, made by Sioned Wiliam and Elizabeth Proud, after which large numbers of enthusiastic letters arrived on Eileen Roberts's desk. Of course, Hazel and Hilary agreed to be Honorary Life Members of the Society.

Clemence Schultze recalls, 'One less well-known link between Hazel and Barbara was a love of Charlotte M Yonge's novels. Pym's choice of the name Wilmet for the heroine of *A Glass of Blessings* is evidence for this, and there are numerous references to the author's reading of Yonge. Hazel herself became a member of the Charlotte M Yonge Fellowship about eight years ago, though she (and we) regretted that by then she was unable to come to meetings. Her "comfort reading" she said, was "all the CMY domestic novels read in a loop"'.

Hazel and her husband Geoffrey, who died in 2010, had one

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org

son, Tom, who is now a renowned novelist. They lived for many years at the National Trust house Tivington Knowle. I visited Hazel twice there, and once at her last home in Chard, when I accompanied Linda MacDougall, who was making her film *We Knew Barbara*.

Linda tells how, when she joined the Pym Society in 2008, Hazel was a very important figure to all the members, 'She held the copyright on Barbara's work, had been her closest friend, and was one of the few people still alive who really knew Barbara. The Society had already begun planning for the centenary of Barbara's birth and I thought it would be a good idea to get to know Hazel. I started ringing and writing to her, and eventually made a trip down to Somerset to meet her. My son Jonathan who lived near Taunton would pick me up from the train and drive me to Hazel's place. We would call at a delicatessen and make up a picnic lunch with a bottle of wine. She enjoyed this enormously and really came out of her shell, telling us stories and jokes about her younger self and her friendship with Barbara. But age and pain began to take their toll, and, although I filmed three different interviews with Hazel, by the time the Centenary came in 2013 she was occasionally depressed and in pain. Her much loved cat died, which she found hard to bear, but she made a new friend Bella, a retired racing whippet, who was with her to the end.'

Barbara and Hazel

Michael Wilson writes: 'Hazel's funeral was held in the Church of All Saints in the picturesque Somerset village of Selworthy. A white-washed 15th-century building, it stands high on Exmoor but beautiful views were sadly obscured by mist and rain. Entering the Church Yvonne and I were greeted by a clergyman and his wife, her long macintosh and rain-hat dripping onto the cold stone floor. Both soon declared themselves Pym enthusiasts.

Unlike Barbara, Hazel was a woman of no particular faith, and the service was as she had wished it, short and simple, no hymns, a eulogy outlining her life, her love of family and her successful career in the world of literature. Her family, son Tom, his wife Kim and their daughter, Natalie, were supported by a small congregation of friends and neighbours. Two beautiful floral tributes, one from the Pym Society, were placed on the altar rail.

At the Reception afterwards I met a very old friend of Hazel's. They had met as young teenagers growing up in Birmingham, he at the boys' grammar school, Hazel at the girls'. Both went on to Cambridge and stayed close friends throughout their long lives. What a wonderful tribute to Hazel's gift for friendship.'

I wish to record my deepest thanks for the help and encouragement Hazel gave me throughout my research. I shall miss her good advice and warm appreciation of my attempts to continue her work of keeping Barbara's name alive. She also supported Clemence during her tenure as Chairman, especially in the centenary year. Although she was unable to attend Society meetings for many years, she took a very keen interest in all our activities and we shall all be the poorer without her guiding spirit.

Pym, Liddell and 'Groupism' in 1930s Oxford

by Clemence Schultze

In November 1935 Barbara Pym recorded in her diary 'a good Groups limerick' heard from her friend Frank Harding:

> There was a young man of Pretoria,
> Who said 'Things get gorier and gorier'
> But he found that with prayer
> And some savoir faire
> He could stay at the Waldorf Astoria. (*AVPE,* p.30)

The limerick references a now almost forgotten organization that drew an attendance of thousands at 'house parties' in Oxford in the 1930s ... was welcomed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and many other leading churchmen ... was mocked by Dorothy L. Sayers ... was endorsed by leading businessmen, politicians and academics as life-changing ... was criticized by W. H. Auden for its irrationalism, anti-intellectualism and appeal to the unconscious ... was regarded as an equal competitor with Communism for the hearts and minds of the élite. In the 1930s its leaders tried to win over top-ranking Nazis and even attended Nuremberg rallies, but in wartime the organization was banned in Germany and all occupied countries. It was avowedly a Christian movement yet was criticized for its concentration on the famous and rich, whose funding supported a very comfortable mode of life for its leadership – maybe even including stays at the Waldorf Astoria!

This was the Oxford Group. It has nothing at all to do with the Oxford Movement of the mid-nineteenth century – though Dick Crossman, editor of a fair-minded examination of its impact (*Oxford and the Groups*, 1934) noted a synchrony which fell in 1933:

> ... the centenary celebration of the Oxford Movement, and the great Group House-Party at which five thousand people came together intent on 'World Revival.' One hundred years ago the Movement which woke the Church of England from its slumbers was set in motion by the parish priest of the University church: to-day Oxford is again the centre-point of a religious awakening though this time imported from across the Atlantic. (p. xi)

The Oxford Groups grew from the missionary activities of Lutheran pastor Frank Buchman from Pennsylvania (1878–1961) whose evangelizing work in American and British universities after World War 1 led to the creation of spin-off missions that went around the globe. In 1928 one such cluster of Oxford students visited South Africa, where a journalist coined the convenient term 'Oxford Group' to describe them.

In Oxford itself, the phenomenon was impossible to ignore; in particular, chaplains and college authorities (at that period *in loco parentis* to their students) had to decide their attitude to it. Some were against (particularly Roman Catholics such as Father Martin D'Arcy, S. J.); others were keen adherents, notably Canon Burnett Hillman Streeter, Provost of the Queen's College and a distinguished New Testament scholar.

Individuals were termed 'Groupers' or 'Groupists', and membership came about by a quasi-conversion experience, known as 'being changed'. This entailed publicly revealing one's faults and shortcomings to the Group, and might also include expressing very negative feelings about other people. The process is satirized in Dorothy L. Sayers' Oxford novel *Gaudy Night* (1935):

> 'Miss Layton was "changed" once,' [said her friend] 'but she has now changed back. It was good while it lasted.'
>
> Miss Layton ... lifted a wicked little heart-shaped face alight with mischief. 'I did enjoy telling people what I thought of them. Too rapturous. Especially confessing in public the evil, evil thoughts I had had about that woman Flaxman.'

After 'being changed', individuals participated in Group meetings to seek Guidance as to major life decisions or even small details of behaviour. This met with ridicule from some (as if God cared what tie a man put on in the morning!) but more thoughtful critics doubted whether merely 'being changed' qualified untrained amateurs to advise people who might be in serious trouble or mental distress. Certainly some feared what would nowadays be termed the 'cult' aspects of Groupism; others deplored the lack of any coherent doctrinal underpinning.

Barbara Pym and her friends seem to have been aware of this movement while remaining unaffected by it. When Groupist adherent Canon Streeter and his wife were killed (together with their pilot) by the crash of their small plane in the Alps in 1937, Robert Liddell produced ten stanzas on the event. Wittily (though some might think heartlessly), Liddell applies his neat versification to the movement's own jargon:

> ...
> "Our route has been decided
> For us by Powers above,
> In short I have been guided,
> And that is that, my love".
> ...
> "Fly high", said Canon Streeter,
> "This guidance comes to me
> The upper air is sweeter –
> Nearer, my God, to thee".
>
> Then answered him the pilot
> Who had not changèd been:
> "It is not yours but my lot
> To pilot this machine".

But Canon Streeter is right, for the route taken by the pilot sends the plane crashing into the mist-concealed Jura. (The pilot is the 'He' of the next verse.)

> And as in earthly knowledge
> He took such sinful pride,
> The Provost of Queen's College
> And Mrs Streeter died.
>
> They rang the bells of Basel
> And gathered in their troops
> To share this sad reversal
> The Mournful Oxford Groups.

In Oxford the following year, Barbara recorded in her diary reading A. J. Russell's *For Sinners Only* (1932), a best-selling account of the Oxford Group:

> [This] brought a curious kind of consolation as well as making me laugh. I thought how nice and easy it would be to be 'changed'. (*AVPE*, p.64)

Too easy, she implies. One can only speculate how different her work would have been – or whether it would have existed at all.

The movement still survives. In 1938 it changed its name to Moral Re-Armament, then in 2001 it became Initiatives of Change. Since 1946 its headquarters have been in a vast edifice in Caux, Switzerland, a former luxury hotel ... shades of the Waldorf Astoria.

Talk at the Woodstock Literature Society (Oxfordshire)

by Martin Rush

The Woodstock Literature Society, founded in 2009 by Linda Glees, presents an annual programme of lectures from authors, critics and literary specialists on a wide range of contemporary and classic works. In March 2016, Clemence Schultze talked on 'Barbara Pym: Green Leaves and Golden Pavements' to an audience of 50 in Woodstock Library. Clemence outlined the notions of pastoral and anti-pastoral, showing how Pym's published oeuvre begins with the changeless lives and loves of the former genre (*Some Tame Gazelle*) and ends on a much bleaker note with the scarcely functioning village in *A Few Green Leaves.* The suggested book for advance reading was *A Glass of Blessings*, and so the talk concentrated on that very urban novel. Yet it too employs the pastoral themes of misplaced love and mistaken identity, and hints at a future with hope of some change for the better.

The hearers responded enthusiastically with questions ranging from Wilmet's clothes to Pym's depiction of homosexuality. One observation elicited much laughter: 'I thought there'd be more religion and more sex.' Regarding the former (as opposed to 'churchiness' and the details of services) Clemence cited the passage where Wilmet mentions 'one of those indefinite prayers which come to us if we are at all used to praying' – but admitted that Wilmet and Rodney's sex life remains totally mysterious. Some present were already committed Pymmites, but there were new converts too, asking which books to go on to. So hopefully Clemence's talk has brought some fresh readers to the enjoyment of Barbara Pym.
https://sites.google.com/site/woodstockliteraturesociety/home

Siegfried Sassoon at the Grave of Henry Vaughan

(published by Cecil Woolf in the War Poets series.
ISBN 978-1-907286-46-9)

This pamphlet by BPS member Deb Fisher, also of the Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship, explores the reasons for Siegfried Sassoon's interest in the 17th-century Welsh poet Henry Vaughan by discussing the parallels between their

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org

lives. Sassoon visited Vaughan's grave in 1924 and wrote one of his best-known poems, *At the Grave of Henry Vaughan*. Deb suggests that any BPS members who are interested could request it from a library rather than buying it at the cover price!

A new *Green Leaves* can make such a difference!

Receiving *Green Leaves* is only one of the benefits of membership in the Barbara Pym Society. Remember, annual memberships expire at the end of March. If you have already paid your subscription for 2016-17, thank you very much indeed. If not, please take a moment now to renew so you won't miss out on future issues.

You can also share *Green Leaves* with a friend ~ a BPS membership makes a lovely gift.

Details are on the web site, www.barbara-pym.org/Membership.html

Did Ianthe inherit her furniture or did she have to buy it? Antiques in *An Unsuitable Attachment*

by Deirdre Bryan-Brown

Readers may have noticed early on in *An Unsuitable Attachment* a short exchange between Ianthe Broome and her librarian colleague Mervyn Cantrell, during which he says:

'I remember you had a lovely Pembroke table – I coveted that ... And those dining room chairs – Hepplewhite, aren't they?'

'Yes, I believe so,' said Ianthe uncertainly.

As so often, Barbara Pym has skilfully slipped in some subtle social references. Ianthe knows all about her family furniture so admired by the envious Mervyn and finds the conversation a little embarrassing. (Some years after the book was published rumours circulated in London that one Tory politician had said of a colleague that the latter 'was the kind of person who bought his own furniture'.)

What were these interesting pieces which Ianthe seems to have inherited from her mother? The chairs, with their elegant shield backs, could well have been originals from the workshop of the celebrated mid-eighteenth century cabinet-maker George Hepplewhite, although his designs continued to be reproduced and sought after in varying degrees of popularity ever since. The Pembroke table is said to have been designed to order for an earl's wife by another eighteenth-century specialist, Thomas Sheraton. Both men worked with some of the exotic and beautiful woods that were imported from the recent colonies. Mahogany was often first choice but sometimes mahogany veneer would be applied to less substantial woods for economy as well as ease of movement.

The immediate popularity of the Pembroke table was due to its simple but convenient design, with drop leaves which could be folded down each side. The table comes in various sizes, some fairly small for use as a tea table or perhaps for correspondence and many large enough for a dinner party. In any case the folding leaves make for convenient storage in smaller rooms.

Should readers fancy seeing Hepplewhite and Sheraton furniture in London the Victoria & Albert Museum has first class examples, which can also be seen on their website, and in the States there are similar pieces by the great Duncan Phyfe, among others. The good news for those who are tempted to buy pieces like Ianthe's nowadays is that in recent decades, thanks to changing tastes, simpler interiors and self-assembly flat-packs, one can often find wonderful bargains in antiques for sale privately or at auction.

Thoughts on a Spiky Problem: the Monkey-Puzzle Tree

by Sandra Margolies

The Chilean pine (*Araucaria araucana*), introduced to the UK in the 1850s, was given its common English name by an early owner (in France it is called *désespoir des singes*). It soon became popular in Victorian parks and gardens, so it is not difficult to imagine one in the front garden of the house in which 'Lorenzo' (Henry Harvey) lodged at 86b Banbury Road. Perhaps, when Barbara Pym visited him there, or 'went on a Banbury Road crawl' (*A Very Private Eye*, 6 December 1933), the peculiar-looking tree, with its almost tubular branches, was recorded in the future novelist's notebook.

Monkey puzzle, north Oxford *Henry Harvey's door nowadays*

Certainly, one appears in the first pages of her early novel, *Crampton Hodnet*, set in North Oxford, which she began in 1939. Miss Morrow looks out of her bedroom window at 'the dripping monkey-puzzle tree, whose spiky branches effectively kept out any sun there might be'. And in the short story *So, Some Tempestuous Morn* (1950), which reworks the characters of *CH*, the spiky monkey-puzzle tree again drips rain and obscures the window.

Later in *Crampton Hodnet*, Miss Doggett echoes my favourite Jane Austen quotation, from *Sense and Sensibility* ('It is not every one,' said Elinor, 'who has your passion for dead leaves.'):

It was a lovely morning, when even the monkey-

puzzle was bathed in sunshine. She clasped a branch in her hand and stood feeling its prickliness and looking up into the dark tower of the branches. It was like being in church. And yet on a day like this, one realised that it was a living thing too and had beauty, as most living things have in some form or another. Dear monkey-puzzle, thought Miss Morrow, impulsively clasping her arms round the trunk.

'Now, Miss Morrow,' came Miss Doggett's voice, loud and firm, 'you must find some other time to indulge your nature worship or whatever it is. You look quite ridiculous. I hope nobody saw you.'

'Only God can make a tree,' said Miss Morrow unexpectedly.

Cultivation of the tree may have declined as Victorian shrubberies were dug out, but one sign of revival appeared recently at the Bricklayers' Arms roundabout, a little south-east of Elephant and Castle. When will it first be hugged? Crossword aficionados will recall that the notoriously challenging *Guardian* crossword compiler, the Reverend John Galbraith Graham, used Araucaria as a pseudonym.

For more photos of monkey-puzzle trees, go to the Monkey Map website: https://monkeypuzzletrees.wordpress.com

Members' Corner

Members are invited to write in before September with their memories of early conferences or their introduction to Barbara Pym (roselittlesmith123@gmail.com)

Pymmian Joy *by Ann DiPietro*

In 1978 I read a review of *A Quartet in Autumn* and *Excellent Women* in the New York Review of Books. At that time I was teaching English Lit. classes at a local university and I thought these books might be interesting pieces to introduce to my students. I loved both books, and they did make for many good discussions. Meanwhile, I had shared my find with my husband Dan who became equally enamored. In 1980 he gave me probably the best present I have ever received – on my birthday there arrived in the mail a huge box: the Dutton editions of Pym's works with all those beautiful Schuman book jackets!

We have always belonged to a number of book clubs and every year we would introduce one or two Pym novels to our friends. In 1999 at one of these gatherings, a fellow member who was ahead of the rest of us in her internet research skills mentioned that she had read an article online about a gathering of Pym fans the month before at Harvard University. Well, bitterly disappointed that we had missed it, Dan and I vowed to attend the next one … and we haven't missed one since. A highlight for us was in 2008 when we presented a joint paper, 'Marriage in the Novels of Pym' with our friends Charles Hansmann and Eileen Kennedy – a 'quartet in spring' of sorts. Now that we attend the St. Hilda's conference each summer, our year is indeed filled with Pymmian joy!

Funny, Witty and Cheeky *by Christine Gars*

I first came in contact with Barbara Pym in the same way as with Anthony Powell and E F Benson: my husband Ulf found them at Hatchard's. I love them all and I can see a bit of kinship among them.

My first Pym book was *A Glass of Blessings* and my first perception was, how very *very* attractive and how very English, at the same time so familiar and, to me, mildly exotic. But also a bit of consternation, how should it be read, what sort of book was it? My second book was *Quartet in Autumn*, which I then found a bit harsh. It wasn't until *Jane and Prudence* that I grasped how funny, how witty, how sometimes in a graceful way even a bit cheeky and disrespectful she is. I love the observations her characters make and I love the way they 'live a full life'. I find it absorbing.

It is difficult to pick a favourite. Like so many other good books they get better and more intense for every re-reading. It's a lovely joy and comfort — you just pick one of the books and step into Pym-landscape and dwell there. Since all the wonderful readings at the conferences I can hear the lines read out with a bit of ringing silence after to let it sink in. Thanks to Yvonne and all the lovely actors! How very happy we were when we found that there was a Pym Society!

Favourite Pyms *by Ron Wates*

I first read a novel by Barbara Pym in the late 80s. It was *Excellent Women*. I remember liking it though, inexplicably, I didn't read another Pym for thirty years, the second one being *Quartet in Autumn*. Interestingly, both books were bought by chance: impulsive purchases in second-hand bookshops, though by the time of the second one there was the internet and through it I found out about the Society. And the rest is history.

Excellent Women is the novel I first mention when asked for my favourite though that might be because it was the first I read. More rationally, I think it should be *Quartet in Autumn*. I feel that in it there is more depth to the characters and a greater understanding of them, although Pym's characteristically quiet humour and acute observation are there too.

I have only recently become aware of the worth of re-reading Pym. The first reading delivers the qualities we know and love in her writing. The second demonstrates a deeper level of understanding. While she is not a major novelist, she is, to me at least, a novelist of some significance.

The first Annual Meeting *by Diana Gulland*

A work colleague introduced me to Barbara Pym in the late 1970s. Karen and I were NHS librarians, working in the same hospital. She arrived at work one morning and told me that she had found a new author for us. First we read *A Glass of Blessings*, and we eagerly awaited the other five titles as they became available. We particularly enjoyed the portrayals of librarians and indexers in the novels! *Quartet in Autumn* came as quite a surprise to us as it was so unlike the other novels.

When, in 1993, following the Barbara Pym Literary Weekend held at St Hilda's, it was suggested that a society to

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org

foster the appreciation of Barbara should be formed, I immediately expressed an interest and became a founder member. Unfortunately by that time Karen had died of breast cancer, in her early forties, but I know that she would have wanted to join too. I still have Eileen's response to my application – she had been overwhelmed by the number of applicants and was delighted that there were 150 members already.

I attended the first Annual Meeting, on Sunday 14 August 1994. It was a beautiful day and having registered at the porters' lodge I went for a walk in the gardens and watched the punting on the Cherwell. Up in the Vernon Harcourt Room proceedings got under way. Eileen was joined by, amongst others, Elizabeth Proud (Chairman), Jean Harker (Editor) and Hilary Walton, looking remarkably like her sister. There was, as yet, no sign of Henry Harvey, but Eileen read a letter from him in which he said 'I don't know if I should accept but I will try to come'!

I sat between Kathy Ackley and a journalist. Behind me was Professor Robert Smith. In those early days of the Society discussion at the meeting concentrated on ways of getting Barbara's books more widely known. Attempts to get W H Smith to stock her books had been in vain and Macmillan had declined to publish the proceedings of the Barbara Pym Literary Weekend. *The Barbara Pym Cookbook* had been published in the USA and Hilary was trying to interest publishers here. Elizabeth Proud suggested we should all write to the BBC for copies of the recent broadcasts of *Jane and Prudence*, *Crampton Hodnet* and *Some Tame Gazelle.*

After tea a group of us gathered in the Common Room to watch two films. The first was *An Evening with Barbara Pym*, which was followed by *Tea with Miss Pym*, about the day that Lord David Cecil went to tea at Finstock. At the point in the film where Barbara was cradling her cat the door to the Common Room opened slightly, and in came a small puss who introduced herself to each of us in turn! We felt sure that Barbara would have appreciated the coincidence.

Readers Recommend

Readers are invited to email the Editor before September with their suggestions of authors who resemble Pym with a short extract from their work. Lorraine Mepham recommends ***Penelope Fitzgerald****, like Pym in her understated humour and her economy of words. This passage is from* **Innocence**. *'Lady Jones' (who is Lavinia Barnes' grandmother) leaps off the page as a typical Pym dame. Chiara calls her friend 'Barney'.*

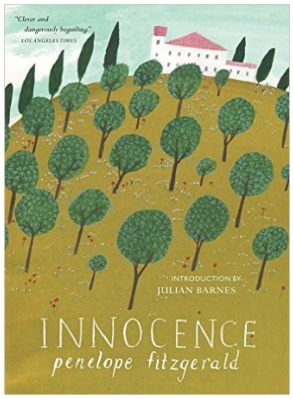
Barney's grandmother never knocked on young people's doors, because it might look as though she didn't trust them. She preferred to make some little remark, quite lightly. The door-handle turned and she came in, wearing a soft knitted suit with a Jaeger scarf signed Jaeger, and a Hermès scarf tucked through the belt and signed Hermès. This gave her an air of authenticity, but her expression was uncertain and discontented.

'This is Chiara Ridolfi, Granny. You weren't here when she arrived. Cha, this is my grandmother, Lady Jones.'

Chiara sprang up to shake hands, to apologize, to thank, and to take some small presents from Chiasso Cornino out of her suitcase.

'My dear, what pretty things, what pretty, pretty, things! It's astonishing what a trick the Italians have for making these pretty things. Not like those straw hats that we used to wear from the Far East that had to be made by little children, poor creatures, sitting under water. No, with these things you can tell there was joy in the making.' She held them to her breast and looked restlessly round the room in search of something that could be tidied or altered a little without giving offence.

'I hope you're looking after your guest, Lavinia. I hope you'll see that she has fun. Are you having fun, my dear?'



Lady Jones had an unwholesome craving for admissions from young girls that fun was being had. Indeed, time spent without fun she apparently thought of as squandered.

'You're both of you going out this evening, I take it?'

'No, we aren't,' said Barney.

'But wouldn't it be amusing to go out dancing? Of course, you'd have to find a partner for your friend. Italians are always so light on their feet. I might be able to help you, you know, if you couldn't think of anyone. I could telephone around a little.'

Barney said nothing, and Lady Jones, with a certain amount of hesitation, as though she was practising leaving the room, went out.

Gleanings *compiled by Yvonne Cocking*

Our own Maggie Lane, who writes on Barbara as well as Jane Austen, has an article in *Jane Austen's Regency World*, Mar/Apr 2015. 'Anyone for Pyms?' explores similarities between the writing of the two authors, and gives advice to newcomers to Pym's work. She recommends the novels best read first, and gives her own favourites, especially *A Glass of Blessings*, 'which bears fascinating parallels with *Emma'*.

In *The London Review of Books* on 8 October 2015, there is a review of Janet Davey's *Another Man's Son*, by Dinah Birch, who considers that

> Davey's work is allied to the tradition of novelists like Jean Rhys, Barbara Pym or Anita Brookner, who quietly insist on the persistence of alienation, domestic or otherwise, in women's lives. Breakdowns in communication between the sexes punctuate her dialogue.

and in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 16 October, on the back page NB slot:

> Some readers will remember – because we simply won't let them forget – that the TLS's seventy-fifth anniversary in 1977 had happy consequences for Barbara Pym, then in her terrible wilderness years. A number of wise heads accepted an invitation to name the modern writers they

considered most under-rated and over-rated; both Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil placed Pym in the first of these two categories ... the publisher Macmillan took the hint, and back into print she came.

Robbie Millen wrote an article in *The Times* on 31 October entitled 'The Only Good Novelists are the Dead Ones'. He thinks that

> Literary prizes are in thrall to the cult of the new – so let's have a prize for the late, great writers who stand the test of time. I have to confess that until this week when I picked up a reissued *Quartet in Autumn*, I had never read any Barbara Pym (d.1980). It's a low-key, superb piece of witty observational writing about four ageing clerks. I never knew that a milk bottle could cause such angst among genteel spinsters. There's so much good stuff, flattened by the steamroller of the new.

The actress Celia Johnson was the subject of Michael Newton's piece in the *Guardian* on 13 November:

> Johnson is no longer many people's idea of a movie star. She is thin, intense, long-limbed, feline-faced, a Barbara Pym heroine ready to solve all problems with 'a nice cup of tea'.

Hilary Mantel wrote in the *Guardian* on 30 January 2016

> In the 1980s, feminist publishing put them [books by women] back on the shelves. Elizabeth Taylor, after a period of neglect, has come back into fashion. Barbara Pym was neglected, rediscovered, consigned again to being a curiosity.

Several books came up with references to Barbara Pym, the longest from Samantha Ellis's *How to be a Heroine* (Vintage, 2014). Here is a sample:

> Barbara Pym is often called the patron saint of spinsters, and *Excellent Women* is hilarious. Her heroine Mildred Lathbury is so mordant and vinegary that it makes me weep. When she says she is 'not at all like Jane Eyre, who must have given hope to so many plain women who tell their stories in the first person', I feel the ice close around my heart. But I am being mean. There is much to love about Pym. She is as funny as Austen, employing the same delicious irony on the same tiny canvas.

Judy Astley in her *A Merry Mistletoe Wedding* (Black Swan, 2015) has one of her characters say

> Women of a Certain Age, rereading the classics they hadn't gone near since their schooldays, Anna thought as she took her glass into Miriam's sitting room. It was like something from a Barbara Pym novel; all they lacked was a shy archdeacon to simper at.

A book Barbara would surely have loved is *O Sing unto the Lord: a History of English Church Music*, by Andrew Gant, who writes

> Changes in society were reflected in changes in churchmanship. One development with distinctive results was the re-emergence of the high-church party. Among its leaders was Percy Dearmer, a dedicated young priest who was vicar of St. Mary's, Primrose Hill, from 1901 to 1915. The liturgical innovations he introduced there shocked many. We are halfway to the world of Barbara Pym whose tweedy heroines set out from their Pimlico mansion flats to sniff out the local smells and bells: 'I could imagine my mother, her lips pursed, shaking her head and breathing in a frightened whisper, "*Incense*"...' mews Mildred in *Excellent Women*.

Thanks for their contributions to Sheila Kane, Sandra Margolies, Rita Phillips, Iona Roberts, and Christine Shuttleworth.

Rambling Rose

by Rose Little

When I was a little girl my cousin played a trick on me. On a family visit, attracted by the marvellous cascading notes of Beethoven, I walked into the playroom and saw my cousin sitting at the piano. He turned, and with a huge grin lifted his hands from the keyboard — and the keys played on!

This was my introduction to the pianola and that sense of amazement has never left me. Perhaps this is what draws me to visit mechanical music museums whenever I can. Last month I visited Utrecht's Speelklok Museum with three floors of instruments; one that featured a violin (violinola, perhaps?) mounted above a pianola particularly took my fancy, but there were several traditional pianolas on display too, glossily polished, lovingly preserved.

On my cousin's instrument I had seen the winding paper roll but didn't understand how the miracle happened. It was now clearly explained: in the pianola a vacuum is created which sucks the roll to the tracker bar. When a hole in the roll passes the tracker bar the vacuum is released and the hammer strikes the string. We were able to hear the playing of Rubinstein himself through this pre-gramophone invention.

At the end of our tour we were treated to a demonstration of the *pièce de résistance*: a very beautiful, large Victorian street organ. It was prettily decorated and featured three figures on the front dancing and playing bells. The orchestral sound was impressively loud and we sat a little further back to listen, surprised, not to a contemporary Dutch tune but to the Beatles' number, 'All You Need is Love', which came over very well!

Hilary of course was the pianist, but Barbara was also very fond of music, constantly mentioning songs and pieces of music in her novels and journals. She attended concerts, musicals and dance halls, enjoyed the organ at the cinema, listened to music on the radio and played gramophone records. She obviously found solace and pleasure in music, as she said, (in January 1943) 'How satisfying is a phrase in music when it goes where you want it to go – you anticipate it ending confidently and fulfilment satisfies.'

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org

Chairman's Chat

by Michael Wilson

As a keen reader of the obituary columns, I was struck by two recent entries. The first was for award-winning novelist Anita Brookner who died in March aged 87. Brookner and Pym are, I think, my two favourite novelists. Pym's characters may seek solace from the Church and parish activities, Brookner's are totally secular: they certainly wouldn't know what a jumble sale was. Dulcie Mainwaring went to a literary conference to recover from a broken romance. A Brookner spinster would put on her raincoat and tramp for miles across the London parks, in the rain. Leonora Eyre is perhaps the closest to a Brookner character but she would not have suffered the fate Pym wrote for her: in Brookner's world it is the greedy and selfish who take all the prizes.

The other obituary with a Pym connection was that for the Reverend David Skeoch, a High Church Anglican priest, though he did 'go over' towards the end of his life. His relevance to Pym is that for over twenty years he was the Vicar of St Gabriel's, Pimlico, where Pym worshipped just after the War. How fascinated she would have been by this flamboyant character. Had their lives co-incided he would surely have found a place in one of her imaginary parishes, obviously in one of London's smartest districts. As he explained 'Anyone who is anyone in my parish goes to the country for the weekends'. We do not know if he ordered bouillabaisse to be flown in from Marseilles during Lent but think it quite possible.

Thanks to Sherrie Saint John
for many photographs in this issue
and also to
Jean Harker, Michael Wilson
and Joel Horn.

The Barbara Pym Society
2016–2017

Website: www.barbara-pym.org
E-mail and all general enquiries:
barbarapymsociety@gmail.com
On Facebook: search for 'Barbara Pym Society'
Chairman: Michael Wilson
Secretary: Alison Felstead
Treasurer: Eileen Roberts
Membership Secretary: Chris Rutherford
E-mail: pymmembers@btinternet.com
Editor,*Green Leaves*: Rose Little
E-mail: roselittlesmith123@gmail.com
Technical Editor, *Green Leaves*: Judy Horn
Archivist: Yvonne Cocking
Committee: Kathy Ackley, Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Jean Harker, Paul Howard, Sandra Margolies, Maggie Parsons, Tom Sopko
Merchandise (UK): Libby Tempest
Email: mildredlathbury69@gmail.com

In the United Kingdom

Official address:
The Barbara Pym Society
c/o Mrs Eileen Roberts
St Hilda's College
Oxford
Oxon OX4 1DY
Tel: 01865 373753
(Outside the UK) +44 1865 373753

In North America

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

Coming Events

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

2-4 September 2016
2016 AGM & Conference
A Tribute to Hazel Holt
St Hilda's College, Oxford

Sunday, 12 June 2016, 12:30 - 3:00 pm
Pym Potluck Luncheon, Advent Lutheran Church, Upper West Side Manhattan (New York City)

Sunday 17 July 2016, 2:30 pm
Garden Party in Washington, DC

17-19 March 2017
2017 North American Conference
Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA
Less Than Angels

Call for Papers
North American Conference, 17-19 March 2017
Less Than Angels

The organizing committee is seeking speakers for the 19th annual North American conference. Preference will be given to proposals on the featured novel, *Less than Angels,* but proposals on any topic relevant to Pym studies will be considered and proposals dealing with themes that span multiple novels are also encouraged. 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 14 November 2016** to Tom Sopko, North American Organizer, at barbarapymsociety@gmail.com with the subject heading '2017 Conference Proposal'.

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org

Shopping bag by Lloyd Miller

Austin Hall

Isabel reading Yvonne's paper

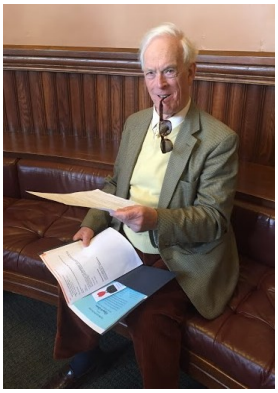
Merchandise sales

Ann Mason

Sarah Saville Shaffer, Nancy Macmillan

Simon

Andrew Sheranian

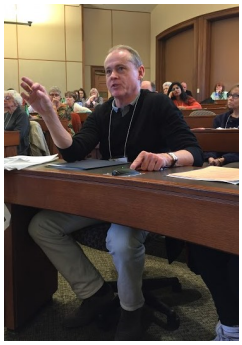


Tim Burnett

Gloria Nakamura

Hymn Sing

Saturday Lunch



Charles Gilbert

Denise Marois-Wolf, Cindy Lacey

Louise and Steve Hart

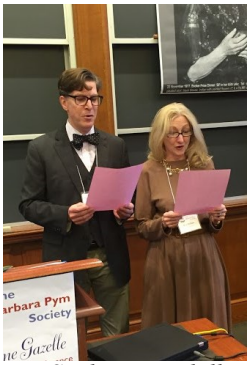
Stephanie and Catherine Nordstrom

Isabel Stanley, Ann Mason, Eleonore Biber

Bria Sandford, Barbara McClay

Donna Safreed, Judy Horn

Mary Beth Panneton, Beth Elliott, Elena Egan



Tom Sopko, Rita Phillips

Tim Burnett, Dan DiPietro

©2016 The Barbara Pym Society, www.barbara-pym.org