Green Leaves

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society **Vol. XXII, No. 2, Autumn 2016**

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

Conference Report, Oxford, 2-4 September, 2016

by Deirdre Bryan-Brown

The annual weekend in Oxford started on Friday 2 September for those members who had the luxury of arriving in advance of the main meeting the following day. Some of this year's participants have been coming frequently over the last 23 years, so throughout the weekend there were many cheerful greetings to long-standing friends, but we were also delighted to welcome eight new members, some local, several from the States and one domiciled in Spain. During the afternoon groups enjoyed a special demonstration of historic printing techniques kindly arranged by the Bodleian Library.

The college gardens stretching by the water were looking gorgeous as always. We enjoyed supper, and indeed all meals, in the college's large dining hall, overlooked by portraits of past Principals, currently joined by St Hilda's first male Head of House, as they are termed in Oxford. Fortified by excellent college wines, we then gathered in the Senior Common Room, where we were offered the customary literary quiz, cunningly devised this year by member Deb Fisher. Ingenious use being made of Pym references, teams of four named themselves: The Unsuitable Attachments, The Green Leaves, Remembering Scampi and The Glass of Blessings; our Swedish members were The Bjorn Borgers, the winners being The Tame Gazelles.

Hazel Holt and her son, Tom

As well as literary questions, some related to filmed novels, we were presented with a sheet of 16 photographs of famous authors, over which we conferred, but some of whom we really struggled to identify. One of our patrons, Alexander McCall Smith, was quickly spotted, as were Julian Barnes and Hilary Mantel, with earlier writers Henry James and Conan Doyle, but several others were a real challenge.

Next morning more members arrived, swelling our numbers to sixty. We crossed the lawns, still green in spite of the unusually low rainfall and glorious sunshine enjoyed in England recently, to the Jacqueline du Pré concert hall where Chairman Michael Wilson conducted the Annual General Meeting (see following item), later opening the Conference itself, which for this year only was to be devoted to the life and work of Barbara Pym's great friend and literary executor, the late mystery writer Hazel Holt. Michael specially greeted Hazel's son, Tom Holt, also a successful author, who had known Barbara Pym well, together with his daughter Natalie.

The Chairman said how sad it was that our long-serving archivist, Yvonne Cocking, was not with us due to a hospital admission; fortunately she had now returned home and although she could not be with us this year, Yvonne's contributions would once again feature at the meeting. Cards were available for members to send their good wishes to Yvonne and also to Chris Rutherford, who had recently resigned after several years of service as membership secretary of the Society.

After lunch film maker Linda McDougall showed her fascinating Interview with Hazel Holt, whose generously shared memories of her long friendship with Barbara Pym gave new insights into the work of both as successful novelists. This was followed by 'An Appreciation of Hazel Holt's Novels' by Clemence Schultze, whose comprehensive knowledge was illustrated with readings by Sandra Margolies.

Next on the programme was Yvonne Cocking's meticulous work 'Hilary and Hazel visit the USA' based on detailed research into the publicity tour which Barbara Pym's sister Hilary had made with Hazel Holt, with readings by Charles Gilbert and Kathy Ackley.

Throughout the day tickets had been on sale for a charity raffle organized by committee member Paul Howard, which proved so popular it was agreed that it should feature at future Conferences. £150 was subsequently donated to Cancer Research, which was

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considered appropriate, the illness having been the cause of the death of Barbara Pym.

After dinner Triona Adams read an informative paper by Hazel Holt's agent Laura Morris, reproduced elsewhere in this newsletter. Once again our knowledge of Hazel and her role as literary executor to Barbara Pym was expanded.

After dinner, wine and conversation were enjoyed in the Senior Common Room before members retired to nearby St Hilda's rooms or accommodation in other colleges and hotels, most of which would have been well-known to Barbara and her friends.

On Sunday morning members had time to attend church services or visit bookstores in Oxford before coffee at the 'JdP' building, where the new canvas bags decorated with the much loved Cat and Teapot design by Lloyd Miller were selling fast, together with a selection of books, mugs and other Pym offerings, to be cherished by the purchaser or offered as presents for Christmas and birthdays.

The Conference resumed and Kathy Ackley read 'My Memories of Hazel', a paper by Jan Fergus, who had known Hazel Holt for 30 years, offering reminiscences and insights into the work of Hazel and her great friend Barbara Pym.

Tom Holt and daughter, Natalie

Michael Wilson then chaired a session in which Tom and Natalie discussed with previous speakers Hazel and Barbara and their work. Michael described the interesting career of Tom himself, who qualified as a lawyer and practised as a solicitor for seven years. Tom himself modestly claimed not to have been a very good lawyer but felt he had acquired understanding and tolerance of human behaviour, no aspect of which would ever subsequently shock one!

He developed a writing career under three different names. Notes were being taken by his listeners as some of Tom's work and titles were *Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Sausages,* two novels following up the work of E.F. Benson and a satirical biography of Lady Thatcher, *I, Margaret*. He has had great success as a fantasy writer, but credited his mother Hazel's contacts in the world of publishing as having given him a start.

During the course of the meeting Tom told people how much he and his daughter had appreciated being part of the weekend and how they hope to join us at future Conferences.

Throughout the weekend Chairman Michael Wilson thanked the many contributors and organizers who had made this another successful meeting. We wound up as usual with a dramatized reading by archivist Yvonne Cocking, ably produced by Triona Adams, this time of a Hazel Holt mystery novel, *The Cruellest Month*, entitled *The Body in the Library*, appropriately for the Society centred around a murder in the nearby Bodleian. As usual the Mighty Pym Players, numbering eleven this year, delighted the members, many of whom were already promising to return in 2017, both for the Spring Meeting and the Conference.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society Saturday 3 September 2016, 11.15am

1. **Chairman's Opening Remarks:** Michael welcomed members – in particular those attending for the first time – to the AGM and Conference. He reported that, very sadly, Yvonne Cocking was unable to attend following major surgery. She was just out of hospital but required complete rest. A card was available for members to sign and the Society would send her flowers with their very best wishes for a speedy recovery.
2. **Apologies**: Yvonne Cocking, Shirley Dex, Colin Oxenforth.
3. **Minutes of the Previous AGM:** Accepted without amendment. No matters arising.
4. **Chairman's Report:** Michael started by recording the death last November of Hazel Holt. The Committee decided to make 'Remembering Hazel' the theme of the 2016 Conference to acknowledge her importance in Barbara's life and to the Society. He thanked those that arranged the Conference programme and gratefully acknowledged the support and assistance of Hazel's son Tom Holt, whom he formally welcomed.

   Michael continued by summarizing the events of the past year. Attendees at the Spring Meeting heard Christine Jenkins' talk, 'Excellent Women's Excellent Women' on domestic service in the pre- and post-Second World War years. The theme of last year's UK Conference was 'Partners in Pym' and featured tributes to deceased members Michael Macke, PD James and John Bayley, and papers by Isabel Stanley, Deb Fisher, Yvonne Cocking and Catríona Cannon. The after-dinner speakers were Dr Clare Coombe and the Reverend Canon Dr Julie Gittoes, and the closing session was a dramatized reading of an unpublished short story found by Yvonne Cocking in the Barbara Pym archive entitled *Back to St Petersburg*, with narration by Miriam Margolyes.

   Outside of the Society, a new biography was published entitled *Barbara Pym: A Passionate Force* by Anne Allestree. In October, some BPS members attended the premiere of *The Mirror Never Lies* – a new musical based on *The Sweet Dove Died*, written by Joe Giuffre with music by Juan Iglesias.

   Michael reported on the work of the Committee over the year, which included reviewing the Society's Rules, and thanked Committee members for their work. He noted the unexpected resignation of Membership Secretary Chris Rutherford and reported that he had written to her to express sadness and thank her for all she had done for the Society. (Libby reported at the end of the AGM that the Committee planned to send flowers to Chris, with a card signed by Conference attendees.) The North American Chapter was congratulated on another successful year, with thanks conveyed to all NA Board members and to Tom Sopko in particular for maintaining the website.

   Michael concluded his report by thanking 'the

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irreplaceable Eileen Roberts' for her year-round work for the Society, especially for her organization of the Annual Conference.

5. **Amendments to the Constitution:** Amendments to the Rules, circulated in advance to members, were approved unanimously. These related to the make-up of the Committee, the methods for informing the membership about elections and future changes to the constitution, and the timing of communications on these matters.
6. **Financial and Membership Reports.** As of 31 July 2016 the UK account stands at £8,589.55, an increase of just over £500 on the 31 July 2015 total of £8085.37. Major expenses for the year were the Pym canvas bags (£380), the printing and postage of newsletters (£514 and £357 respectively) and £512 on the Chairman attending Pym Society funerals. Income included a £500 donation and merchandise sales of £150. Eileen asked members to let her know if they would be happy to accept *GL* in electronic (PDF) form, to reduce costs.

   UK membership stands at 148 paid UK members and 4 Overseas (non-US) members. Overseas members can now pay via the website using a credit card. Three new membership applications are currently awaiting processing.
7. ***Green Leaves*:** The Autumn 2016 issue is on course for publication and Rose thanked Jutta Schiller for photography and Christine Shuttleworth for copy-editing and formatting. She encouraged members to submit contributions for the regular 'Members' Corner' and 'Readers Recommend' features. Contributors for future conference reports and articles are also sought.
8. **BPS in North America:** Tom Sopko reported on NA matters, including a financial report from Jordan Bach. The NA Chapter has 228 paid members as of 1 August 2016 plus 94 who paid in 2015 but have not yet renewed – an increase of 23 from one year ago, and including 30 new members. Cash-on-hand at 31 July 2016 was $18,067, a decrease of $789 from one year ago due to lower-than-expected conference attendance.

   The 2016 NA Conference on *Some Tame Gazelle* received a record 13 proposals for talks. Returning speakers Laura Shapiro and Isabel Stanley (who read Yvonne Cocking's paper in her absence) were joined by newcomers Victoria Patterson, Michelle Huneven and Adam Shoemaker. The first Ellen Miller Memorial Student Essay Prize was awarded to Bennington College senior Prashansa Taneja. The conference moved to a larger venue at Harvard Law School, but attendance (93) was down on recent years. This led to a net loss of approximately $800, but it is hoped that numbers will rebound to 120 or more at next year's conference, also to be held at Harvard Law School on 17-19 March 2017. The featured novel will be *Less Than Angels*. The BPS website averages 230 visits and 688 page views per week, and the BPS Facebook page has 1,256 'likes.' Members are encouraged to post on this page to increase the Society's visibility.
9. **Archivist's Report:** No report.
10. **Elections:** With no other nominations the following were declared elected: Secretary: Alison Felstead; Membership Secretary: Libby Tempest; Committee Members: Sandra Margolies (for a second term), the Rev Colin Oxenforth. The Chairman reported that Maggie Parsons would now be responsible for merchandising.
11. **AOB:** This included information on Paul Howard's raffle of Pym-related prizes for Cancer Research, and the new BPS canvas bags. Literary events were advertised by Deb Fisher (2017 Conference of the Alliance of Literary Societies, jointly hosted by the Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship and Wilfred Owen Association in Edinburgh, 2-4 June) and Triona Adams (repeat performance by her and Oliver Ford Davies of the Pym/Larkin letters in the Bodleian on 10 December 2016).

Meeting closed at 12.15pm

Memories of Hazel Holt

by Jan Fergus (Summary by Jean Harker)

Jan Fergus's title for her memories of Hazel Holt was *Finding a Voice*, a deliberate echo of the radio piece which Barbara Pym wrote and recorded in 1978. Jan's friendship with Hazel goes right back to the 1984 publicity tour, when they met at a reception in Penn State University. They exchanged letters and then emails for more than thirty years, spoke daily on the telephone, and sent each other manuscripts of work in progress. Jan made annual visits to Hazel and her husband Geoffrey at Tivington Knowle, when she came to England to do research for her books on Jane Austen.

Jan was unable to present her memories in person because of commitments elsewhere, and her paper was read charmingly by Kathy Ackley, who (of course) supplied an authentic American voice. Jan should also be given credit for supplying the photographs which were on display in the Jacqueline du Pré Building, showing Hazel with various companions — on tour with Hilary, with Geoffrey, with their son Tom, and with their Siamese cat Flip.

Jan's paper, written straight from the heart with obvious affection, began, 'First, I want to say that Hazel Holt was one of the kindest and most loving people I have ever known ...' She gave a brief account of Hazel's career (as recounted by Hazel) from her schooldays in Birmingham — when she and her friend Barbara Siggs wrote to the theatre critic James Agate and tried their hand at writing novels — to her close friendship with Barbara Pym as they shared the editorial office at the International African Institute.

Hazel's route to finding a voice, Jan reckoned, began with teenage attempts at novels. Her work at the African Institute as

Barbara Pym's junior colleague provided a training in editing and publishing which would stand her in good stead when, as one of Barbara's literary executors, she found herself working from notebooks and incomplete manuscripts to prepare the unfinished novels for publication. Thus Hazel had to develop a seamless 'Pym' voice.

Then there was the biographer's voice which Hazel adopted to write A *Lot to Ask*. Even before *A Lot to Ask* appeared in print in 1990, Hazel had found her third voice, which was very much her own voice, as a detective novelist. Her first 'cosy' mystery, *Gone Away*, was published early in 1989. It featured, as do twenty following novels, the indefatigable sleuth Mrs Sheila Malory, who lives in the small West Country town of Taviscombe (a fictional version of Hazel's own local town Minehead in Somerset), which shares its name with the town visited by Dulcie and Viola in *No Fond Return of Love* as they pursue their researches and check out Aylwin Forbes's mother's hotel.

It was through Hazel's connection with the publisher Macmillan, over the Pym literary estate, *A Very Private Eye* and *A Lot to Ask*, that *Gone Away* came to be published. The reaction to the manuscript was every writer's dream. Hazel delivered the manuscript to Macmillan on a Tuesday and was telephoned the following Sunday by the head of their crime fiction department, Hilary Hale (wife of Hazel's agent, James Hale), speaking from her home to tell Hazel that they would take the novel. She wanted Hazel to write a series, which she felt would go down well in America.

Some years later, though, in what Jan calls an unfortunate parallel between Hazel's and Barbara's literary careers, the publishers dropped Hazel from their list after thirteen Mrs Malory novels (this was at a time when they were shedding mid-list authors). Fortunately for Hazel, though, there were no wilderness years, and publishers Allison & Busby were pleased to welcome her to their list for another eight Mrs Malory novels.

Hazel wrote one other novel, which is very close to her and Jan's hearts, *My Dear Charlotte*, an epistolary mystery novel set in the early 1800s and written 'with the assistance of Jane Austen's letters', with a foreword by Jan Fergus. Hazel could not find a British publisher for this novel, but it was gratefully taken by the Seattle publisher Coffeetown Press, managed by a fellow cat-lover, who published it in 2009. Coffeetown Press now also publish the first seven Mrs Malory Mysteries and Tom Holt's Lucia novels (continuations of E F Benson).

Hazel's distinct voice as Sheila Malory is, Jan said, 'observant with an eye for detail, domestic, intensely curious, kind, compassionate, highly aware of people's foibles and her own, sympathetic, ironic, cheerful and ordinarily lighthearted, but disguising irritation under politeness, with a wonderful ear for dialogue and for the ways people reveal themselves through it, amused, amusing — all working toward the deepest possible appreciation and enjoyment of the everyday'.

Hazel always reckoned that Sheila Malory was nicer than she was, but, Jan said, Hazel shared Mrs Malory's best qualities and much more.

***Dr Jan Fergus**, a long-standing friend of Hazel's, is a retired Professor of English at Lehigh University, and has published books and articles on Jane Austen and on the 18th century reading public.*

Hilary and Hazel Visit the USA

by Yvonne Cocking (Summary by Jean Harker)

Yvonne Cocking once again delighted her audience at the UK conference with a paper based on her researches in the Barbara Pym Archives in the Bodleian Library. This time her very appropriate subject was the visits which Hazel Holt and Hilary Walton made to the USA in the first half of the 1980s, when Barbara Pym's novels were achieving huge sales there and when, in addition, Hilary and Hazel were working on *A Very Private Eye*, establishing the groundwork for Hazel's biography *A Lot to Ask*, and considering the best way to preserve Barbara's legacy.

Sadly, because of ill health, Yvonne was not able to give her paper in person, but it was admirably presented on her behalf by Deirdre Bryan-Brown, with the able assistance of Kathy Ackley and Tom Sopko as American Voices (publishers, literary critics, etc.).

The first foray into the US was made by Hilary in September 1982, a private visit, possibly connected with her researches into her father's family. Paul de Angelis, senior editor at Dutton, Barbara's American publishers, held a private literary lunch in New York in her honour. Guests included colleagues from Dutton's, representatives from *Harper's*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* magazines, and some American authors.

The connection with Dutton's was now established, and Paul de Angelis, who had already jubilantly observed in a letter to Hilary, 'The Pym boom continues!', was enthusiastic about the forthcoming *A Very Private Eye*. He corresponded with Hilary and Hazel about various finer points of the manuscript, and at one stage even asked Hazel presciently, 'Are you certain you don't have some novels of your own tucked away in a drawer?'

A US publicity tour for Hazel and Hilary, timed to follow the American publication of *A Very Private Eye* in 1984, was organized by Paul de Angelis with a certain amount of negotiation as to exactly which expenses Dutton were prepared to pay (publishers never change). Then on 15 September Hilary and Hazel flew to New York on Concorde (journey time: 3 hours 20 minutes), and stayed for a few days at the Algonquin, a famously literary hotel, before embarking on their tour.

They began in Boston, where they were met and looked after by Ellen Miller. Their Boston programme included two lunches (one at the Ritz with columnists from the *Boston Globe*, the other at the Harvard Faculty Club with a group from the Business School), tea at the English Speaking Union, and a public library event.

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Their tour continued in this vein, including visits to Philadelphia, where they were looked after by Charles Burkhart, and to Rochester in New York State, where they were looked after by Lotus Snow, already a friend from her Pym researches in the Bodleian. They had tea with the local American Association of University Women book group — Lotus told them, 'Everyone in town will be there.' Then they went on to Pennsylvania, where at a reception at Penn State University they met Jan Fergus, who was to become a firm friend of Hazel's.

When Hilary and Hazel returned to New York, the most densely-structured part of their programme awaited. They were guests on the daily Pegeen Fitzgerald Radio Show, which was noted particularly for the garrulousness of its hostess, who broadcast from her own apartment. Later that day they attended 'A Celebration of Barbara Pym' hosted by Dutton's at the Gramercy Park Hotel. Paul de Angelis chaired the proceedings. Gail Goodwin, Joyce Carol Oates and Shirley Hazzard gave papers which were later published in *The Life and Works of Barbara Pym*, edited by Dale Salwak, then also present.

Hilary and Hazel had two more days in New York, with more appointments — an informal reception in the Faculty lounge at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, book signing at the Corner Bookstore, and, lastly, they were guests at Tom Rogers' class at Stony Brook on Austen and Pym. The day after, they flew home on Concorde.

The 1984 US tour was a triumph for Hazel and Hilary. They made literary contacts and lasting friendships which ensured a warm welcome and a roster of literary and social events on all their subsequent privately organized visits, and their own delight in Barbara's work, together with their personal knowledge and enthusiasm, ensured that the novels reached a wide readership and that transatlantic Pym studies flourished.

Yvonne Cocking would like to thank everyone for all the good wishes and cards she has received.

Mrs Malory Disposes: Some Problems of an Amateur Detective

by Clemence Schultze

Considerable difficulties arise for the crime fiction author who opts to make her / his detective an amateur. This was Hazel Holt's decision with her Mrs Sheila Malory novels, where the protagonist is a lady of a certain age – and provincial too. How, then, to make it credible to readers that a purely amateur detective of this type could possibly be engaged in investigating major crimes such as murder?

The non-specialist author often shies away from the expert knowledge demanded by almost all the other options. The career policeman, for example: what pitfalls about rank and procedure, investigation methods and handling of evidence, computerization and technologies, lie in wait for a writer lacking up-to-date knowledge of the milieu! The same is true when the detective is a scientific specialist or medical investigator, or another professional person in the broad forensic sphere (lawyer, or crime journalist). Successful novels have centred around such characters – but their authors normally have first-hand experience of the particular expertise. Private eyes might seem to be a bit easier, because they nowadays come in all shapes and sizes: not just the traditional gumshoe, but the athletic female PIs who prowl the streets of many a great city in the US or UK. And the final option is to make one's detective actually a criminal, embedded in the culture of street crime or fraud.

But none of this applies, of course, to Sheila Malory. A vicar's daughter and solicitor's widow with a student son who himself goes into the law, she is already getting on for 50 in the first of Hazel Holt's 21 books. Sheila has lived all her life in Taviscombe in Somerset (the name borrowed from Barbara Pym's *No Fond Return of Love* as the location of the Eagle House Hotel). Most of the books are set there, with occasional forays elsewhere: Oxford (*The Cruellest Month*), and a small college in the USA (*Murder on Campus*). The settings are intimately related to small-town life: arts centre, charity shop, local vets' practice, doctors' surgery, riding stables. Or Sheila gets involved in such activities as genealogical research, or helping compile the history of a nearby village, or running an arts festival. Her Oxford degree was in English, and she writes books on lesser-known Victorian authors. From all this it will be clear that Sheila Malory could not be more of a stranger to police work, forensic expertise, or crime in any way, shape or form.

The less like a professional detective the protagonist is and the more she's a little old lady or middle-aged housewife or retiree, the more ingenious (or far-fetched) must be the author's methods in providing her with access to the crime, the criminals and the means of investigating. This is precisely the difficulty that Hazel Holt faces in creating so Pymmish a heroine as Sheila Malory.

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The first solution is to give the amateur a friendly policeman, with whom an interview can become an informative exchange. Sheila benefits from several of these, notably her best friend's son-in-law. He, most fortunately, is keen on Victorian fiction, so he and Sheila often wander into a chat about our greater novelists. Sometimes this cosy relationship extends to the policeman calling upon the amateur as a sort of consultant. In the American campus novel the investigating police chief (a great Shakespeare fan) asks Sheila to help him as an uninvolved and unbiased outsider.

Another favourite device is the unrecognized crime, allowing the amateur untrammelled opportunities for investigation. It can be a death that passes as accident or suicide; or a crime such as fraud or blackmail. The perceptive amateur knows that something is wrong, and deploys her forces and contacts to ferret out the truth. Hazel Holt often employs this expedient, and also its further development: unrecognized crime plus undisclosed criminal – that is, where the detective so disposes matters that the criminal is not publicly revealed. They may be dead already, through suicide or accident, or have undertaken some other expiation. Hazel Holt's detective fiction is full of cleverness, humour and charm. She is admirable at the minutiae of small-town life; at the kindness and concern of the 'excellent women' and the bossiness and snobbishness of the less excellent but more assertive. The Church is there (King James Bible and *Book of Common Prayer*); there are some memorable priests, one unfashionably fond of amontillado: 'My wine merchant in St James's sends me down a case of that. The fino I buy locally.' When wearied, Sheila (like Hazel) loses herself in Charlotte M Yonge's novels. And she always has her demanding but beloved animals, particularly the elegant and exacting Siamese cat Foss. He, I understand, was the only character to be drawn from life.

Clemence Schultze, *Chair of the Barbara Pym Society from 2007 to 2013, is a retired Roman historian. Her research now centres on the reception of the classical world, and textiles.*

Working with Hazel

by Laura Morris

When I first took over representation of the Pym Estate, we had very few papers, just a handful of documents handed to us by Barbara's sister, Hilary, before her death. Hazel had become Barbara's Literary Executor, and as such was the fount of most of my knowledge. Gradually I assembled the history of Barbara's previous publishers, both here and in the US – quite a daunting prospect with almost no formal documentation, but Hazel's memory was astonishing and voluminous – and key.

She would say 'I have a feeling there might have been an Italian translation of *Excellent Women* in 1960' or 'Philip Larkin made special mention of that hat' and she was invariably right. Of course Hazel knew Barbara's work as well as her own, and appreciated every social nuance, every tiny, observation in the same way. She was the perfect guardian of the Pym flame. We began to piece together the publishing jig-saw, first reverting rights in the Pym titles originally published by Jonathan Cape. In 2006 we found ourselves in the intriguing position of having interest from both Penguin and Virago for their respective Modern Classics Series. Crucially, Virago was prepared to republish each novel with its own individual jacket and new Introduction, which we felt would make maximum impact, both with booksellers and reviewers. And so it proved – the first trio were quickly followed by the second, and then the third. All book sales exceeded expectations, and were reprinted, some several times.

Hazel knew exactly who should write the new Introductions: she nominated Alexander McCall Smith for *Excellent Women*, Jilly Cooper for *Jane and Prudence*, and Paul Binding for *No Fond Return of Love* – they were delighted to oblige, and wrote them beautifully. And so it continued for all nine books Virago republished, with Hazel herself penning the Introduction to their ultimate volume, *Civil to Strangers*. It was thanks to Virago's brilliant repackaging of the books, with their sparky, idiosyncratic covers, that there was a great resurgence of Barbara's reputation and popularity, even to the extent of *Excellent Women* featuring as a 'Virago Classic' mug! And this success was not just confined to the UK. Through Rosie and Jessica Buckman, who handled translation rights on behalf of the Estate, Pym is now being read not only in France, Italy and Spain, but Russia, Portugal and China too. Also in the US, new editions and e-books began to make their mark. Hazel monitored all these developments with her usual eagle eye. She felt Barbara would have been especially proud to see *Quartet in Autumn*, again introduced by Alexander McCall Smith, appear as a Picador Paperback Classic.

Hazel had impeccable judgment and instincts. We had to read several screenplays by aspiring scriptwriters – if she said 'this one will never get made', you knew it wouldn't. Sometimes the writer would add some unnecessary plotline or twist that had no basis in the novel itself, which Hazel would have none of. Script and writer were sent packing. We had invigorating chats about our fantasy casting, and Hazel always had strong views about her ideal Pym heroines. So I'm delighted to say that the most recent option on *Excellent Women*, which we signed to young producer Steve Mates, now has the backing of Colin Firth's production company 'Raindog', and BBC Films. We felt this one might really

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happen.

Hazel applied the same rigour to her own Mrs Malory series. The books were written exactly as she wanted them published. There was one occasion when a young editor at Penguin USA had the temerity to offer Hazel some 'notes' and had to be quietly told that Hazel's text was not to be altered in any way, apart from Americanization of the spelling. You didn't mess with Mrs Malory!

It was an absolute privilege to work with Hazel over the last twelve years and to have the benefit of her clear eye and calm patience in times of stress or difficulty. I am sure Tom, her devoted son, will keep the Pym flame burning for many years to come.

Hazel Holt

by Linda McDougall

There's a panel game on Radio 4, 'It's not what you know', hosted by Joe Lycett. The celebrity participants invite the person they think knows more about them than anyone else on earth to answer questions. If it had been around in Barbara Pym's day I am sure she would have chosen Hazel Holt to give all the answers.

Barbara and Hazel were lifelong friends. They shared an office at the African Institute. They shared their lunch breaks and their family lives. They talked about anything and everything, and they certainly shared all the triumphs and tragedies of Barbara's writing career. After Barbara's death Hazel wrote two wonderful books about her close friend and hero, *A Very Private Eye* (with Hilary Pym) and *A Lot to Ask*.

When I first attended Pym meetings Hazel was mentioned all the time. What would Hazel think? Would Hazel approve of articles that had been written, biographies in progress? Committee members wrote respectful emails asking for her views and got speedy and thoughtful replies. But Hazel was in her eighties, she was recently widowed and she didn't attend meetings any more. I so very much wanted to meet her, I wanted to see what she looked like and hear what she had to say.

I began to write to her agent Laura Morris and ask if I could visit Hazel. I had a long wait. First she moved from her old family home to be near her son Tom and his family in Chard, then she was settling in and unpacking. Hazel and I started chatting on the phone, and I think, with her impeccable judgement that made her so good in revealing Barbara to others, she sensed that I was determined to meet her.

In the spring of 2011 I made the journey to Chard. Hazel and I got on immediately. She told me stories about her friendship with Barbara and I felt privileged that such a gentle and friendly woman was prepared to share all this with me. Somehow the personal relationship with Hazel brought Barbara closer. She was no longer a novelist from far away. I could relate my experiences to Hazel and Barbara's.

'Barbara much preferred Pepsi to Coke,' said Hazel in an anecdote about a hot day on the train to Oxford.

'Barbara would have loved the TV Gold Channel,' said Hazel who now spent a lot of time watching it. She adored 'To the Manor Born' and 'The Good Life.' She praised Penelope Keith and Felicity Kendal. But she never lost sight of the truth about Barbara. She was firm with me when I called Barbara a satirist. 'Barbara was always kind, her humour was always gentle, never cruel.'

Hazel firmly believed that she and Barbara belonged to a different world where what was left unsaid was just as important as what was said.

'How Barbara would have hated Facebook,' she reflected on film.

Discussion Session

by Ros Cleal

For everyone who has read *A Very Private Eye* or *A Lot to Ask*, or indeed come to the many BP conferences over the years, Hazel Holt is a familiar character, but not, for most of us, familiar in person as she was for many years, sadly, unable to attend conferences. So it was a treat to hear about her life from her son, the author Tom Holt. Our Chairman, Michael Wilson, gently encouraged Tom to describe his mother and her work, and we received a touching and vivid impression of the woman who was a friend of Barbara Pym's for so long and who promoted her writing so faithfully and well after her death.

It was perhaps a surprise to learn that when Hazel left the International African Institute, her first paid writing was in the magazine *TV Today*. This was not so surprising when Tom explained that his mother had early on wanted to be a journalist. Much later, she began a career of her own in crime fiction, which she developed over many books with her amateur detective, Sheila Malory. Tom remarked that his mother was thoroughly soaked in Golden Age crime fiction and a great admirer of Dorothy L Sayers.

A fascinating question was whether Hazel's writing had been influenced by her long friendship with Barbara Pym and familiarity with her work. Tom explained that his mother had worked to develop a distinct 'voice'. Kathy Ackley and Clemence Schultze then joined in the discussion, which turned to how Hazel developed her characters, and Tom gave us some insight into how he himself wrote.

I found the session fascinating, partly because Tom painted such an attractive portrait of his mother, and partly because it seemed to bring into sharper focus a woman whose life was so inextricably linked to Barbara Pym's and who rendered her such service after her death.

'How can I then return in happy plight'? * Report on our Printing Session

by Rose Little

It's always a little shocking to be taken behind the scenes, not only in church but in the Bodleian library. Members of the BPS had that privilege (thanks to Alison Felstead) when we visited the printing workshop on Friday afternoon for the opening activity of the conference.

Behind the ornate 'Schola Musicae' door in the Bodleian's Old Schools Quadrangle is a highly efficient but, at first

glance, cluttered room, the workshop of Richard Lawrence, Superintendent of the Bibliographical Press. Here we settled down and with Richard's expert guidance looked around us at the remarkable printing presses of former times. Made of cast iron they were pleasingly decorated: the Columbian Press had a most dramatic eagle perched on top while the 1835 Albion Press had enjoyed the honour of printing the works of Lewis Carroll.

Chase, printing press

Printing existed from ancient times in Eastern lands, and wooden blocks were used. The breakthrough came with Gutenberg in the mid fifteenth century. His invention of movable metal type revolutionized printing as before this you had to chisel bits out of wood and thus could only print that one page.

Richard explained to us laymen that the principle of printing is to take away the bits you don't want and leave sticking up the bits that you do – just like 'Smart Lasso' in editing programs nowadays, I reflected.

We learned that a space has a physical reality! A teasing concept, I thought, similar to grasping that a straight line in maths has no real existence. So, we would have to fill up space when we did our typesetting or the gap we left would make an impression on our printed page.

After this warning, the moment we had been eagerly anticipating arrived – we were let loose on the composing frames! We were allotted an impressive oak frame each, dating from the 17th century with two cases of letters, an upper and a lower. These were divided into many separate compartments. In the upper case the letters were naturally the capitals and in the lower case ...

Columbian printing press

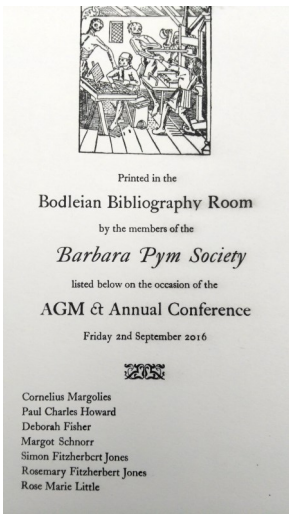
Composing Frame

Each compositor in the past would have his own frame and would work extremely fast, not only thanks to dexterity and familiarity but also because he was on piece-work. A compositor could set 1500 characters an hour, which would be about three-quarters of a page of a newspaper.

Richard demonstrated and instructed us to set our names, or invent a name (only one of us was imaginative enough) by selecting the letters and placing them upside down and left to right on our composing sticks. Later, with a deft manoeuvre, we transferred the letters all of a piece into the 'chase', the holding frame from which the item would be printed.

The quoins (screws) were tightened to secure the type into the chase, and next we moved over to the printing press, where we inked the letters by passing the seamless (this was an important innovation) rubber roller over the top, inserted a sheet of paper into the press and pulled on the bar to make the impression. Hey presto! Out came a beautiful clearly printed sheet!

Ros at printing press



Members' Poster

'Cornelius' *aka* **Sandra Margolies** recalls her 1960s experience in the field ...

In 1965, in Baltimore, Maryland, I began working in a company that had both a publishing and a printing division, as did Oxford University Press until 1989. The books and journals that I edited were still set on Monotype and Linotype machines, and the company took great pride in the quality of its printing. For each job, the machines cast new pieces of type from a supply of hot liquid metal (lead, tin and antimony), either single letters/punctuation/spaces in the case of Monotype or a 'line of type' in the case of Linotype. Once the material had been made into pages, using similar techniques to our hand-set work in the Bodleian, and these had been used to print the book, the metal might be melted down or the pages could be stored ready for a reprint, or second edition. The individual letters would not be distributed back into the cases and re-used, as is done when hand-setting, but the materials and techniques were similar.

Back in London, from 1971 I worked for fifteen years as a freelance editor, without involvement with printers. When I returned to full-time work, typesetting had been dramatically transformed. Gone was hot metal. Whole pages were produced by photosetting, but each pair of pages had to be stuck on a sheet of cardboard, to be sent to the printer. We judged typesetters by how much of a mess they made with the Cow Gum. Then came computer setting, and complete books were speedily prepared from floppy disks, then from files sent by internet, and arrived as a PDF. No longer the manuscript typed, more or less accurately, by the author or his 'wife, without whom . . . ' but a text helpfully corrected by spellcheck. No longer the typesetter copying the manuscript on a machine's keyboard. No longer page proofs, revises,

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second revises — stacks of paper filling shelves — but words on a screen.

What next? Well, I have read of a version of *Ulysses* in emoticons. Just the first line, I think.

** During 2016, the Bodleian Libraries will be producing and collecting newly printed copies of each of Shakespeare's sonnets* http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/csb/sonnets2016

Though Mildred preferred to read a cookery book when she woke in the small hours, others with insomnia might like to see this sonnet, beautifully set out (printed) here:

http://www.shakespeares-sonnets.com/sonnet/28

The Spring Meeting paper

The Excellent Women's Excellent Women: an exploration of domestic service in the novels of Barbara Pym

by Chris Jenkins

A feature of the lives of Pym's heroines is the supportive labour of working-class women. The servant situation changed radically between the 1930s and 1960s and these developments run quietly though Pym's novels, never drawing attention to themselves but subtly colouring the lives of her characters.

The affluent middle classes of the 30s expected to rely on a full residential staff, as do Cassandra and Adam (*Civil to Strangers)* who employ a maid, cook, gardener and 'Woman for the Rough', and Miss Doggett (*Crampton Hodnet)* whose household, it is implied, would have been similar. The Hoccleves too have residential servants while Count Bianco has a full complement of indoor and outdoor staff including a personal manservant … a very expensive employee *(Some Tame Gazelle)*. Both Agatha and Cassandra leave their undeniably trying husbands to the care of their servants, indicating a high degree of staff loyalty.

Most of Pym's servants, however, are Maids-of-all-Work, to whom even Mrs Beeton offers sympathy! As domestics became ever rarer, middle-class families employed only one servant, and the least affluent frequently only a very young girl; but status depended on having a servant and particularly on one to open the front door. The Clevelands' Ellen *(Crampton Hodnet)*, Mrs Bone's elderly maid *(Excellent Women)*, the Bedes' Emily *(Some Tame Gazelle)* and Sybil's Rhoda *(A Glass of Blessings)* all fall into this category, while Mrs Sedge *(No Fond Return of Love)* is a particularly unaccommodating version of it. Mrs Greenhill and Wilf Bason, in the clergy house *(A Glass of Blessings)* certainly clean and cook, but, being housekeepers, are neither so deferential nor so available.

Once a residential maid has become a rare luxury the Daily Woman becomes the domestic mainstay for many, and especially for bachelors such as Everard Bone, Fabian Driver, Alaric Lydgate and Rupert Stonebird. They are addressed respectfully as Mrs – not by first name alone as earlier servants were. As spectacularly unskilled domestically as any bachelor is Jane *(Jane and Prudence)*, who has to rely on Mrs Glaze to run her home, and, unusually late, the Dagnalls *(A Few Green Leaves)* employ a Mrs Dyer.

Although both had been brought up in servanted households, Dulcie *(No Fond Return of Love)* and Mildred *(Excellent Women)* now manage with just a weekly or twice weekly cleaner. While social status is maintained, both nevertheless share coffee breaks with their respective employees. Similarly the Malorys *(Excellent Women)* rely on their Mrs Jubb to supply their occasional and modest needs.

Au Pairs, the last incarnation of the residential maid, feature in only two novels, briefly in *A Glass of Blessings* and as Caro's domestic help in *An Academic Question*. Their usual function being childcare, few of Pym's heroines would require them.

The novels that make no mention of servants are interesting for that very reason. Leonora *(The Sweet Dove Died)* cannot be imagined doing the rough work, but possibly any servant is relegated to spaces not required by Leonora! Ianthe *(An Unsuitable Attachment)* would have grown up with servants but is possibly the first of her family to manage without. The four protagonists of *Quartet in Autumn* are barely economically middle class; and while Mrs Swan regrets the lack of servants, the younger Catherine *(Less than Angels)*, and Emma *(A Few Green Leaves)* don't even consider hiring domestic help.

But intrinsic to middle class life is that much bullied employee, the Companion. Although her origins lie in the medieval lady's gentlewoman, the modern Companion's career choice was based on lack of other opportunity and reluctance to lose caste. The Companion shared her mistress's life and was waited on by domestics, but was in no doubt about her low relative status. Both incarnations of Jessie Morrow (*Crampton Hodnet* and *Jane and Prudence)*, and Connie *(Some Tame Gazelle)*, subordinate their own interests and needs to their employers but are rewarded with reasonable comfort and middle-class status.

Barbara Pym seldom comments on the role of servants or Companions, accepting them as part of the fabric of middle class life, changing through the years as opportunities for working-class women develop, but still the unsung and frequently unseen underpinnings of leisure and privilege. But she would have been aware of the dearth of servants after the Second World War and the consequent problems for the middle classes. Politicians became very exercised about this 'problem'. How, they asked, was the middle-class lady to pursue the life of the mind without domestic help? How was she to perform her charitable duties and organize her community and church without servants? Or, to put the question another way ... how were the Excellent Women to continue with their excellence without the support of their own Excellent Women!

Report of the Spring Meeting, St Albans Centre, London, May 2016

by Paul Howard

Once again the day of the Spring Meeting in London was blessed with warm, fine weather. Busy trains and buses brought the crowds to a bright and sunny capital where, only days earlier, there had been chilly winds and snow showers.

I arrived at King's Cross station to an area which could only improve and which is, fortunately, doing so. Eventually a number 45 bus arrived to take me to Chancery Lane – it stopped, but no doors were opened, and I was carried around the corner to get off outside the old Prudential Assurance building, worth a look inside when open; Betjeman would be proud – a plaque in the courtyard marks the site of Dickens' Furnival's Inn. This slight delay made little difference to the journey and I headed for St Albans Centre, glancing back to the Fetter Lane junction. The lane is virtually unrecognizable from Barbara's day but, like the whole area on this fine day, thronged with visitors to the City.

Shorts, T-shirts and tattoos were much in evidence. This happens in summer – though they were less evident on my arrival at the Centre. I walked, along with worshippers, to the church porch, grabbing an Order of Service for the Ascension for reference, 'The Lord goes up with trumpet blast ... ' Members unable to attend the service will be interested to know that the congregational hymns were 'At the Name of Jesus', 'Alleluya, Sing' and 'The Spirit lives'. St Albans is famed for music and works by Mozart, Bach and Gibbons ('O Clap Your Hands') featured. The robust delivery of the hymns reached the 'East Seminar Room' outside of which the Pym Committee met; the reassuring incense pervaded the building. The thurifer confirmed that, as identified by a fellow member, the incense was 'Basilica'. This is a Good Thing, produced by Prinknash Abbey.

Members foregathered in the Meeting Room or the shady courtyard. There was a good turnout of friends old and new, including visitors from Austria, France, Germany and Sweden. One local member arrived hotfoot from singing Morning Service at her own church, the living of the Rev Richard Coles of Radio 4 and 80s pop duo Communards fame. The buffet was served, consisting of a variety of delicious sandwiches and cake, accompanied by wine. Members took their places. Only minor adjustments to the sound system were required.

Our speaker Christine Jenkins was introduced and presented her paper 'The Excellent Women's Excellent Women'. This in-depth and sensitive examination of domestic service as described in Pym's work proved fascinating – from 'Mrs In-by-the-Day' to do the 'rough' to the Companion, who might be even 'a sort of relation' not distressed enough, perhaps, as to require the ministrations of Mildred's charity. We met Miss Lord, Mrs Morris, Mrs Jubb, Mrs Sedge, Rhoda and other treasures. It was a delight to hear the nuances of relationships with their employers unpicked. Of male staff there are few – we can only presume that when it became necessary to 'get a man in' they would join the shadowy gardeners in the potting sheds, there to clutch pouches of shag.

This paper was greeted warmly and sparked many questions, observations, memories and anecdotes. Perhaps the 'master/mistress/servant' relationship continues. It was pointed out that the British, indeed the Western European hospitality and service industries, rely enormously on migrant workers. For many it is a chosen career path and not associated with subservience. I regularly go to the hand car wash where I am greeted with 'The usual ... ?' I am, of course, electing to have someone else do 'the rough' (with so many stamps on my loyalty card I qualify for a free car-wash next time).

It was interesting to be reminded that, with or without undue deference, the purchasing of 'service' has run through all society, the poor paying the poorer to perform various tasks. It was comforting to hear a member's anecdote of how a contemporary lady of the manor objected to the worthy, well-intentioned ladies of the Women's Institute busy in her grounds Doing Good ... and unfortunately spoiling the view with their wheelie-bins! Maggie Parsons delivered the vote of thanks. Christine received enthusiastic applause and continued to field questions on cooking, the gentle art of gardening and the ambiguous role of the dressmaker.

The JdP Journey

by Eileen Roberts

The Jacqueline du Pré Music Building was built in the early 90s and as far as we know is the only memorial to Jacqueline du Pré. It is the first purpose-built concert venue to have been built in Oxford since the Holywell Music Room was built over 200 years ago. The idea was born from a concern of Jacqueline's that Oxford did not have a good modern music facility. In the early 80s she was offered and accepted an Honorary Fellowship of the College and loved to come and sit by the river and talk to St Hilda's students. She often talked about her dream of a new music building. St Hilda's agreed with Jacqueline and initial plans were drafted. In 1987 a joint fundraising campaign by St Hilda's College and the Musicians' Benevolent Fund was launched which raised over £1 million for such a concert venue and a fund for disabled young musicians.

Photograph of Jacqueline du Pré in the foyer of JdP building

Designed by van Heyningen and Haward, with acoustics by Arup Acoustics, the JdP Building has a 200-seat auditorium, four practice rooms and an electro-acoustic studio, all with excellent disabled access and is air-conditioned, a boon in hot summer months. The Music Building was opened in September 1995 with a gala concert given by the English Chamber Orchestra and the Medici Quartet in the presence of HRH the Duchess of Kent, who had been a close friend of Jacqueline's. The cellist Steven Isserlis became the patron of the Building in 1998 and in 2001 the Belcea Quartet became the Quartet in Residence. An elegant glass foyer across the front of the Building, which complements beautifully the

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original construction, is a recent addition.

I feel extremely lucky to have seen and heard Jacqueline play Elgar's Cello Concerto with the Cleveland Orchestra just after I moved to the USA in 1970, and to be a part of the JdP journey means so much to me.

Fiction *see* diary

by Hazel K. Bell

'Here in this book are the original lengths of material from which she fashioned her novels', Hazel Holt tells us in the preface to the compilation of extracts from Barbara Pym's diaries and letters, *A Very Private Eye (VPE*). Pym endorses that statement in her diary entries for June 1964: 'How full of fictional situations life is! I am now making fuller use of all this'; and February 1976: 'Could one write a book (a sort of novel) based on one's diaries over about 30 years? I certainly have enough material.'

Indeed, she wrote not just one 'sort of novel' based on her diaries, but many accomplished works of fiction. The sources of specific incidents in the fiction can be traced by comparing indexes to her diary and to her fiction.

I have compiled an index to all her published novels and stories, and added references to *VPE*, underlining references to the latter to differentiate them visibly from the entries to works of fiction. The index can be seen on the Barbara Pym Society website, at

http://www.barbara-pym.org/GL_Index_Jun15.pdf

References of the two types lie alongside many other topics: canteens; cemeteries, driving examiners, fleas, furniture depositories, Orvieto, pigeons, and station bookstalls. Then, some more specific examples:

The entry 'evening classes' leads to Wilmet and Sybil studying Portuguese with Piers as lecturer in *A Glass of Blessings* (*AGB*), Chapter 5, and Pym studying German in Southend Municipal College in 1943, describing the enrolment in September and a college lecturer in November in her diary.

flowers / in ladies' cloakroom leads to *No Fond Return of Love*, Chapter 4,

and to Pym's embarrassment at the censorship office in Bristol in May 1943.

'Keats's house' in the index has references to Leonora's visit there in *The Sweet Dove Died,* Chapter XIX; Ned's reminiscence in the story, 'Across a crowded room' (Pym 1987);

and Pym's own visit in August 1963.

'Nigerians in London' leads to the 'bursts of hymn-singing and joyful shouts' of Letty's fellow-tenants in *Quartet in Autumn (QA),* Chapter 7, and to those attending Pym's church in October 1963, with fervent baptismal celebrations.

'Retirement party' leads to Marcia and Letty's leaving their office in *QA*, Chapter 12,

and Barbara's departure from the IAI, recorded in a letter to Philip Larkin, 1 December 1974.

'Suicide, thoughts of' leads to Letty walking in woods, 'wondering if it could be the kind of place to lie down in and prepare for death when life became too much to be endured' (*QA,* Chapter 17), and Pym in Addison's Walk, Oxford, in November 1972, reflecting, 'a good place to lie down waiting for death covered in leaves by the still streams'.

'Teashops/decor' leads to Edwin's regular place of refreshment that 'changed distressingly ... so much trendy orange and olive green, and imitation stripped pine' (*QA*, Chapter 2) and Pym's noting in March 1972, 'The ABC café ... the smart orange and olive green and beige and stripped pine decor'.

My index to the works of Pym also shows how closely her work resembles that of Angela Thirkell, whose works I have also indexed (Bell 1998). Both these English ladies wrote wittily and satirically of their own social class in their period, including the effects on English home life of the Second World War. Both feature the Anglican clergy, with casts including scholars, members of the professional classes, and gentlewomen. Both make much use of literary quotation and allusion, not always identified. The novels of both may be taken as light social history of the 20th century, closely observing its clothes, food, behaviour and relationships. They each cast on the world around them the outsider's eye of a woman lacking the support and social status of a husband/escort. Both have been compared, for their subject range and style, to Jane Austen.

The similarity likewise shows up in the indexes to the works of the two novelists. Church, the clergy, clothes, food, hymns, languages, libraries and literary quotations loom large in both. Both indexes open with the entry, 'abbey', and include entries for ageing, air raid precautions, Army, Balliol, BBC, bedrooms, bicycles, books, boys' clubs, cakes, canteens, cats, Chelsea, Civil Service, cooking, death, dressmakers, evacuees, films, flirtation, funerals, gardens, gas masks, hair, hotels, indexing, knitting, makeup, marmalade making, names, parish magazines, reading aloud, restaurants, Roman Catholics, schools, sewing, sherry (copious entries in both!), shops, songs, Sunday, *The Times* and its announcement columns and crossword puzzles, torches, typewriters, vicarages, washing up, widows, wine, writers and writing, as well as for Matthew Arnold, Jane Austen, the Brontës, the Brownings, Keats, Milton, Tennyson and Charlotte M Yonge.

There is much to be learned from an index, rightly read. The one to Pym's works shows in particular how closely she drew on the events of her own life to create fiction to please readers resembling herself.

An article, 'Indexing (and) Pym', about an earlier version of my index to Pym's works, is in *Green Leaves* Vol. 5 No. 2, page 9, on the Barbara Pym Society website at

http://www.barbara-pym.org/Vol05_No-2_Nov_1999_.pdf

Quartet in Autumn – A Stage Adaptation

by C P Hallam (Theatre Director)

I discovered Barbara Pym through *Jane and Prudence*, and instantly fell for her distinctive voice: witty, sharp, velvet-covered knives hitting their marks. Then I read *Quartet in Autumn* and was blown away.

Quartet in Autumn is essentially very theatrical, not in the obvious way of sweeping plots and characters railing at the universe (very un-Pym) but found in the minutiae of simple lives: the apparent insignificances of these lives become monumental. *Quartet in Autumn* is a precise study of character (I believe one of Barbara Pym's best) and *that* is the very

essence of theatre and why I wanted to bring an adaptation of it to the stage.

However, making the transfer from novel to stage is rarely straightforward. I was very lucky to get the playwright Amanda Whittington on board and we both agreed research and development was needed. We had to demonstrate the novel's theatrical potential and had specific areas we wanted to explore: 1st/3rd person storytelling, theatrical form, Pym's voice and how to do it without resorting to a narrator. We also needed to discover whose story it was: through whose eyes were we going to see this play unfold?

York Theatre Royal generously gave us space for three days and we employed four actors. We used script drawn from the first two chapters, changing it, allowing the actors to improvise, and exploring fresh ideas. We experimented by handing the actors the actual novel and asking them to play the scene any way they wanted. These three days answered many questions and raised a whole lot more.

So where are we now? York Theatre Royal would like to produce it in association with another theatre and/or producer and I am currently having conversations to that end. Bringing a new play to fruition can be a long process. However, I am confident you *will* be able to see *Quartet in Autumn* brought to the stage.

This project was made possible with the support of Pan Macmillan and the Barbara Pym Estate, the Arts Council of England, York Theatre Royal and Nottingham Playhouse. For more details you can visit my blog at

http://www.cphallam.co.uk/quartet-in-autumn-2/

Excellent Gloves

(Thanks to Jutta Schiller for this piece from a shopping feature in the German magazine, 'Viva')

From the end of the 19th century, a lady was not properly dressed unless she was wearing gloves. She changed her gloves several times a day, and it was not the done thing to take them off in public. This has changed.

I wear gloves only when the weather turns nasty. Above all, they must be warm. I ordered these crochet-backed leather gloves in England. And quite honestly, I never want to take them off again, because they give me any number of Barbara Pym moments. What am I talking about? Read *Excellent Women* – then you will know what I mean.

Gloves: women's cotton crochet driving gloves, model 'Lesley', from www.dents.co.uk, c. €70; book: *Excellent Women* by Barbara Pym, Little, Brown Book Group, 304 pp, c. €19.

(Kristin Pötschke, *Viva. Reif fürs Leben* magazine, December 2015/January 2016. Translated from the German by Christine Shuttleworth.)

Members' Corner

Joe and Maggie's wedding

Maggie Parsons says:

I have been a member of the BPS since 1994 and have only missed one conference, when my car broke down en route to Oxford! I started reading Pym as she was one of my mother's favourites, and I am always reading or listening to one of the novels. I used to feel more like Dulcie, but as I got married this summer I think I have more in common with Jane these days! I was given a charm from the Alliance of Literary Societies meeting at Haworth Parsonage in May which I attached to my wedding flowers: it said in tiny writing 'Reader, I married him'.

Maggie's brother Jon and friends gave her an exciting surprise on her wedding day: they had filled a set of decorative boxes with details of her main interests, a major one being Barbara Pym. Jon opened the box and told everyone about Pym's novels. He also mentioned how in May 2013, at the newly opened Birmingham library, Maggie organized a dramatized reading of *An Unsuitable Attachment* to mark Pym's centenary year. The show was a sell-out and, needless to say, included tea and scones. Maggie, said Jon, would echo Mrs Mayhew's opinion that 'a cup of tea always helps'.

Meeting Barbara and Hilary

by Alex Ward

I am not much of a novel reader and only heard of BP some months after her 'rediscovery' in 1977. Even then I would probably have done nothing about it, save for an earlier coincidence.

On a cold, wet Saturday afternoon at the end of June in 1977 I had trudged into the meadow at St Hilda's, where the Gaudy garden party was being held, looking for tea. I had discovered that no-one I knew was coming to any Gaudy events that day and as I and my tray looked for a free seat, I was wishing that I had not come either. Each time I approached a table with an empty chair I was fiercely repulsed and told that the seat was taken. Finally, however, two women with well-cut dark hair and elegant navy-blue coats invited me to join them. They were, it turned out, sisters and the elder, taller sister had been at St Hilda's before the War. They were not staying for the Gaudy dinner that evening, but going back to their cottage in an Oxfordshire village. As we talked I felt that the younger woman was being very protective of her sister.

After tea I went to the College Library. There was an exhibition of works by members of the College – though I was more interested in checking whether the Library still had its set of the Yellow Book, which I had discovered there as a student. I went up to the gallery to find out. Looking down I

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saw the taller of my tea companions standing by the card catalogue and looking through the cards in one of the drawers. I wondered if she had hoped that something she had written would be in the exhibition. Presumably it had not been there and I assumed that she was checking the catalogue to see if the Library actually had a copy? From her back-view though I sensed resigned disappointment.

A few weeks later, at my desk, I was checking the broadsheet newspapers for anything relevant to the office, when I saw – I think in the *Guardian* – a photograph of a woman whom I recognized as the one I had seen checking the Library catalogue in St Hilda's. So I read the article. And then I attended the BP conference at St Hilda's that led to the founding of the BP Society, which I joined. And over the years I have actually read the books.

I have also asked the Librarian of St Hilda's if my assumption that the College did not have any of BP's books in June 1977 was correct. She said the College Library only had 'post-rediscovery' editions. I think College Libraries rather expect senior members to give them copies of their publications. This makes me wonder why BP did not give copies of her novels to St Hilda's when they were published. Modesty comes to mind – I can imagine BP saying that the College would not be interested; or maybe she did give them copies, in which case she would have been right in assuming that such works would not be considered suitable for an academic library to keep.

Blast from the Past

Kathy Ackley has provided this photograph taken at the Pym conference in 1998 by Eleonore Biber. The people in it, from left to right, are: Kathy Ackley, Kate Charles, Michael Wilson, unidentified woman, next Louise Ross (possibly), and then Hilary Pym Walton.

Readers Recommend

This time our recommended author with similarities to Pym is ***Angela Thirkell,*** *chosen by Norma Munson:*

Sometimes Thirkell's writing is compared to Pym's and there is overlap when readers provide lists of favorite authors. Both are known partly for their subtle wit, numerous literary allusions and observations of certain segments of English society and social history. These two selections from Thirkell's ***August Folly*** remind me of Pym's occasional gentle melancholy tone and a female character's analysis of a weak male character.

> 'Of course,' Betty was saying, 'Laurence is a good example of repressions. He wanted to be a musician, but my father wanted him to go into the business. As you have probably noticed, he is always playing his little guitar. It is a kind of release.'

Margaret's heart melted at the thought of Laurence, his soul in music, his body in the office, solacing himself with an occasional chord on the guitar. No wonder he was rather thoughtless with such turmoil in his being. And she had thought him so happy.

> 'If he'd gone in for music,' Betty continued, 'he would probably have met some Real woman. Laurence ought to have married by now, or at least engaged, but the kind of society girls he goes about with are not what he needs, and he has never thought seriously of one of them. He is an example of an extremely unhappy man, ruined by repressions, but unluckily he does not realize it.' [Page 234]
>
> When [Margaret] had seen them [her friends] all off she came back to the drawing-room to turn the wireless off. A record of dance music was being played and Margaret suddenly felt very sad and neglected. She turned the music lower and its sad throbbing made a background for melancholy thoughts. If Laurence did not come and find her, how could she ever tell him what she thought of him, or find out what he really thought of her. Her conscience smote her for having been both priggish and unkind. As she slowly turned the knob and the dance music gently melted away, she felt it was an allegory of her life; joy and pleasure departing, nothing to come. Her father was still in great difficulties over his lecture, so she went and did some typewriting for him, but whenever she came to the word Outlaw, or Outlawry, it made her think of Laurence, who was an outlaw from her heart; a conceit which blurred the page before her eyes. [Page 243]

Members are invited to email the Editor with their recommendations and extracts for this feature and also their memories and thoughts on BP for Members' Corner
roselittlesmith123@gmail.com

Kathy and Charles

Rambling Rose

by Rose Little

I recently found an unobtrusive advert in the back of a woman's magazine that reminded me of Mildred and her Distressed Gentlewomen: a request for 'relief' for people in need. So, this kind of thing was still happening! Mildred, in *Excellent Women*, was on the committee of 'an organization which helped impoverished gentlewomen' while Dulcie, in *No Fond Return of Love*, gave the shabbiest of her late mother's clothes to the Scouts, saving the best for 'the Distressed Gentlewomen'.

When I visited the Geffrye Museum of the Home in Shoreditch this spring I naturally thought of Pym's excellent women, for as well as period rooms and informative displays the Geffrye preserves two original rooms built for the 'distressed': the poor and elderly.

On the day I was there it was raining, and I got off the bus, turning thankfully away from the roaring traffic and the splashing tyres into the 'front garden' of the museum. Its spacious lawns with plane trees and benches, its unexpectedly beautiful building, were restful to the eye. I was grateful it had been saved from demolition and was now a Grade I listed building. Built as almshouses in the early 18th century, it was opened a century later as a museum of furniture through the ages.

Geffrye Museum in autumn, Jane Lloyd

I strolled fascinated along the displays of ancient furniture and plans of town houses. I had to miss the renowned gardens (chronologically arranged), as from the peaceful Garden Room window I saw the drenched wisteria drooping sadly over the pretty courtyard. So I walked on in a pleasantly attentive reverie through the rooms, particularly enjoying the 1870s drawing room with its gracious furniture, the upright piano with inviting sheet music on its open keyboard, the table with welcoming tea things, and drifted onward into the central hall – where I saw a notice announcing that the almshouse rooms were open today, 'first come first served'! I quickly joined the group of people following the guide into the carefully restored almshouse section.

1880s almshouse, Morley Von Sternberg

Although spartan in contrast with the elegant rooms in period style, the almshouse had provided shelter for 50 poor and elderly men and women through two centuries. The 1780s room seemed remote in its bare minimum of necessary fittings, but in the more luxurious 1880s room I could imagine my Grandma (born in 1884). There was her kettle, set next to the blazing coal fire in the grate with its black fender, poker and bellows; her table with its protective chenille cloth beneath and lacy white cloth on top, china ready for tea; her pretty brass bedstead. In a little alcove I found her shelves, neatly stacked with crockery and also Dickens.

Mildred's distressed gentlewomen were not grand, she tells William, but children of professional people. What kind of people would have lived in this room? I asked the helpful custodian. Women teachers, he replied, poorly paid, respectable (*plus ça change* ...). It was sad to imagine these dedicated excellent women without family, living their last days here after their useful lives, but at least they would have been saved from destitution. They were held in high enough esteem to find shelter here and enjoy some comfort.

Information about the Geffrye Museum of the Home can be found at: http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/

Hazel and Geoffrey Holt on Brooklyn Bridge, New York

Punting at St Hilda's

Libby at the knitted urn

Ann and Dan

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Chairman's Chat

by Michael Wilson

An article in the 'Health Features' section of a recent *Daily Telegraph* suggests that learning to play the piano at 65 is good for your cognitive health and may keep the dreaded Alzheimer's at bay.

I find that very encouraging because that is precisely what I have done. I started learning a couple of years ago and now, at 67, still have a weekly lesson. I have to confess my progress is slow, but I can play *Daisy Daisy* pretty well. My first teacher was Sarah, whom I found via an ad in a local magazine and who lived just twelve minutes' walk away. Sadly, some months ago I had to find a new teacher, Sarah having decided she wanted a complete change of career. Piano teachers are rather thin on the ground but after some Googling I found Liz, not as close as Sarah, but a manageable 40-minute bus ride away.

Some time during my second lesson Liz mentioned a novel she'd been reading. Aha, I thought, a reader of fiction. 'Do you know Barbara Pym?' I asked. Imagine my surprise and delight when she told me she had read all the novels. Not only that, she had also read *A Very Private Eye* and *A Lot to Ask,* and many of Robert Liddell's novels also. Apparently her late mother had been a big Pym fan too.

Liz says her favourite Pym is *Less Than Angels*. She identifies with Catherine, and enjoys the portraits of Mark and Digby. Also, because after university she worked for several years at the London headquarters of a professional institute, she feels at home with the Learned Society.

I always do my best to promote Pym whenever I find myself talking to someone who enjoys fiction. After Mass last Sunday the church organist came up to me and said 'Thank you for introducing me to Barbara Pym.' She had taken *Excellent Women* to read on a long journey and loved it. I'm sure she will now go on to read the rest, and may, perhaps, join the Society.

The Barbara Pym Society 2016–2017

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Coming Events

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

Saturday, 10 December 2016, 6-8 pm
Letters of Pym and Larkin
Friends of the Bodleian special event to mark Philip Larkin's memorial in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey. Blackwell Hall, Weston Library, Oxford. 'We used to correspond': Reading of the letters of Philip Larkin and Barbara Pym by Oliver Ford Davies and Triona Adams, with introduction by Anthony Thwaite, OBE.
For tickets including refreshments (at £20 each) please contact the Administrator of the Friends of the Bodleian on 01865 277596 or fob@bodleian.ox.ac.uk.

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

7 May 2017
Spring Meeting
St Alban's Centre,
Baldwin's Gardens,
London EC1N 7AB
'Anglicanism and Women Novelists:
A Special Relationship'
Professor Alison Shell (University College, London)

1-3 September 2017
2017 AGM & Conference
St Hilda's College,
Oxford

Doug and his bookstall

Michael speaking at dinner

Some of the Pym Players

Deb, Christine, Clemence and Betty

Rita and audience

Dessert

Mohinder

Friends in the Foyer

Eileen

Lorraine with printing poster

Libby & Simon winning the condensed mushroom soup

Margot, Clemence, Betty and Jutta

Raffle table

Kathy and Tom

Betty and JdP audience

Michael and Keith

Ulf and Christina Gars with Libby

Hazel's house at Tivington

Many thanks to Jutta Schiller for most of the photographs in this issue and also to Jan Fergus, Keith Armstrong and Paul Howard.

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