

Barbara's First Oxford Romance

~OR~

'Life Before Henry'

Yvonne Cocking

*Paper presented at the Barbara Pym Society Annual General Meeting and Conference,
St Hilda's College, Oxford, 5th September 2010*

Barbara went up to St. Hilda's College in October 1931 but we have no record of her first term at Oxford. Her diaries in the Bodleian library begin in January 1932. The first of these is a fat hard-backed exercise book, containing spasmodic entries – Barbara was not a disciplined diarist – up to September 1933. On the first page Barbara has written 'A record of the adventures of the celebrated Barbara M.C. Pym during the year 1932', demonstrating, don't you think, that she was still very much the schoolgirl.

Although we have no record, it is clear that Barbara made many friends during her first term, at the end of which, incidentally, she failed Pass Moderations, the compulsory examination at the end of a student's first term. As well as Mary Sharp, Dorothy Pedley and Mary Topping at St. Hilda's, there were also male students, including Bill Thacker and Teddy, surname unknown, who both wrote to her during the Christmas vacation.

I'm looking forward awfully to going back but I simply must work hard. A new term in a new year – golden opportunities (and how!) to get a Moderator, a peer's heir, a worthy theological student – or even to change entirely! I'm really thrilled about going back, especially to see my darling Moderator.

Barbara had a crush on one of these Dons who set and mark examination papers, but whose names were not always known to the students. She called him Fat Babyface, and looked out for him whenever she was in town. One afternoon she saw him in the High and tried to shadow him, but she lost the trail.

Funny what a curious desire I have to see my Fat Babyface, too sweet in spite of other people's unfavourable opinions. Somehow I'm sure he's Kenneth B. McFarlane of Magdalen. Unfortunately I couldn't judge whether he'd come out of Queen's or Magdalen, so his name still remains rather an uncertainty. Really this is the queerest crush ever – I wonder if he has any inkling.

Later Barbara became disenchanted with him and transferred her admiration to another Moderator.

In *A Lot to Ask*, Hazel Holt says 'Even before she went to Oxford, Barbara had shown a remarkable propensity to fall in love with people she didn't actually know', and this diary has many such examples. As well as the Moderators, Barbara had her eye on two Scholars at St. Edmund Hall, to one of whom she referred as 'the green scholar', presumably from something he had worn; the other she called 'my secret passion from Teddy Hall. He has an interesting face. I'm sure he must be worthwhile.' She also noted that he looked 'very heavenly in plus fours.' Whenever she was returning to St. Hilda's she contrived to go via New College Lane and Queen's Lane. Once, just as she was passing Teddy Hall 'someone came out with a bicycle. It was my pet scholar. I traced him up Iffley Road, so it should be quite easy to find his name.' She made notes of her sightings of him, and eventually discovered that he was Geoffrey Walmsley, doing a diploma in theology.

This habit of observing and trailing people was one which she would continue throughout most of her life.

Names of other men that she did know appear in bewildering profusion in her diary. Gary, who is merely named; Bill Thacker, a frequent escort; Harry Harker, who was infatuated with her and later asked her to marry him; Ross: "He really is angelic and great fun"; Aidan: "I think he's a bit too curious for my taste"; Wells: "Sweet, but too intellectual"; Harlorin: "An amusing creature"; John, in his pink shirt and tie. "It would amuse me to see him again"; and Teddy, who sent her a letter beginning "Darling Barbara!" "Poor man – but I've just got to be firm with him." Nevertheless she continued to go out with him quite often. Still she went on collecting.

Went on the river this afternoon. Got to know Leslie Fearnough (Queens) and Michael Rabone (Univ), because we wanted to borrow a match. I hope they didn't think we were deliberately trying to make a pick-up – really I do some unfortunate things – but how can you smoke a cigarette without a match?

But Barbara did work hard in spite of her hectic social life, turning in essays on time, and enjoying lectures by such notable scholars as Edmund Blunden, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, and passing her P. Mods at the second attempt.

For the rest of the term, and during the vacation, Barbara concentrated her attention on Geoffrey, and in Trinity term she confided to her diary

Oh, Geoffrey, how I love you! And I suppose nothing will ever happen about it. And I'll just forget when you go down.

And on 18th June

I saw Geoffrey for the last time – he had a most beautiful smile on his face when I saw him. Sweetheart, good-bye! 'Auf Wiedersehen my dear.' But even now I can't believe that I've almost certainly seen his dear face for the last time ever!

On that same day Barbara received a letter from Rupert Gleadow, the first of very many. Rupert had come up to Trinity College in 1928 from Winchester, and was working for his final examinations in Classics and Egyptology. He shared rooms with George Steer (Christ Church). His letter confirmed an invitation to tea for

26th May, 4 o'clock, 47 Wellington Square. I haven't yet asked anyone else on Thursday, I hope you don't mind? Did you intend a flattering suggestion when you said you had done no work since you saw me in the Bod? Probably not, but Bill Thacker complains he has not heard of you at all for a number of days! I also have done almost no work but that was partly because I had to arrange our gaudy on Trinity Monday.

Yours till Thursday (and after, I hope). Rupert".

Barbara mentioned the occasion in her diary.

Today was an important day. I went to tea with Rupert Gleadow whom I had formerly met at Bill's in Michaelmas term, and also at a flick with Bill on May 10th. In the Bod on Wednesday 18th he invited me to tea and I accepted, wanting to see more of him. I went at 4 – we had tea in George Steer's sitting room – it was littered with books and we had tea off a table covered with a skin. On his sofa were lovely leopard skins. The leopard skinned couch was to play more important parts later. We ate a large tea and talked much. We got on amazingly well – Rupert was far more human than I thought. It surprised me when he put his hand on mine – and when he asked me to kiss him I was even more amazed, but I refused!

On 28th May '32 Rupert wrote again.

Dear Barbara

It was so nice having tea with you on Thursday. I suppose the University would not allow me to come and call on you, otherwise they'd have all sorts of Don Juans getting in

Yesterday every street I came out of I looked carefully round to see if you weren't in sight! Today I am going to look for you in the Bod at 12.45 and 6.30...

Hoping to see you soon, Your Rupert.

And in a second letter later that day

My dear Barbara

I've been trying to work, but it's no good – no good at all. The Egyptian sage whom I was reading kept on putting [here he gives the Egyptian hieroglyphs for 'Barbara'] in the most ungrammatical places in sentences, and finally...I gave it up."

They met again on the Saturday and spent most of Sunday together.

After spending that whole Sunday morning with you I felt so impressed by my wickedness that I sat down and did almost 5 hours work without stopping; but it needed OH such a lot of strength of mind, I was quite tired afterwards – so that the next morning I had such a nice time lying in bed more than half asleep and dreaming about you.

With all my love, Rupert.

The following Thursday was Barbara's 19th birthday:

Barbara Darling

It occurs to me that I haven't got you a present yet for your birthday and wouldn't you like to come with me to choose it? And also further that if you aren't going out on Thursday you really ought to, you know, and we might go to *Rookery Nook* or *Frankenstein* (since you've seen *The Constant Nymph* – hope it was good) – and if so I ought to get tickets beforehand.

With all my love, Rupert.

And in yet another letter on Wednesday he said:

My dearest Barbara,

I am sending this by post just so that it shall reach you first thing tomorrow morning to wish you a very happy birthday, and lots of happy birthdays, and may they all come after one another as slowly as possible, so as to make you stay young and jolly like ever so – and I do hope I meet you again when we're both far older, and hear that it's all come true and that you've had a lovely time always...

Love from your Rupert.

On her birthday Rupert took her to Elliston's and bought her 'a heavenly scarf, royal blue and orange'. They had dinner at Stewarts with Rupert's friend and fellow Egyptologist, Miles McAdam, and then went to see the film *Frankenstein*.

The following day (Friday) Barbara went to tea with him again.

After much pleading I let him kiss me, though I didn't enjoy it as much as I was to later – at this time I had not forgotten Geoffrey.

On Saturday morning the infatuated Rupert wrote again.

Barbara Darling,

I just can't face any work just now so I'm writing to you instead ... it's a comfort to think we shall meet tomorrow at 10.15. . Yesterday and you were a marvellous pair, and so will you be tomorrow.

With lots of all my love, Rupert.

On Sunday, 5th June they went to Boars Hill

We went into a wood and sheltered from the showers. He was very Theocritean [pastoral, idyllic] and loving. I got a wee bit sick of it, but tried to please him as I was determined to treat him as kindly as possible as he had Schools on the 9th.

Afterwards he wrote to her:

Barbara Darling

It's been the most marvellous day, and I haven't stopped thinking about you the whole time. Boars Hill really has some very nice uses, particularly in its more obscure glades ...but what I'm looking forward to most are those lovely days after term ... Darling, my memory is going to take special care of today, and never forget how lovely you have been, and how kind. Goodnight – and now to dream about you.

My love to you always, Rupert”.

In the evening we had a last do before Schools. Miles came too and it was great fun. Dinner at Stewart’s, plus liqueurs, then *The Case of the Frightened Lady* at the Super. I felt sad but happy saying good-bye to Rupert. Sad because I thought I wasn’t going to see him for ages, happy because I liked him so much.

Schools were from 9th to 14th June, with the viva on 16th. They did manage one evening together, the three of them, on 13th June, at the Queener to see Goodnight Vienna.

We sat at the back in the corner and I had two arms around me for the first time in my history.

After his viva:

I met Rupert at the corner of the Turl and he told me the joyous news that they’d both got Firsts!

As his mother was to be in Oxford for the weekend, Rupert and Barbara did not meet again until Monday, but from then until the vacation started – only five days – they were inseparable, and usually accompanied by Miles. There was no need for letters during this period, but Barbara noted some of their doings in her diary.

“20th June. Rupert and I drank chocolate at the Queener, and went on to no. 47. Oh blessed George Steer and his lovely leopard skins – I hope he gets a First!”

He did! After lunch at Elliston’s the next day they drove to Ramsden, Great Tew and Charlbury, and back in Oxford drank sherry, ate at Stewart’s and went to the Super.

22nd June. We dined at Stewart’s and I felt in a very sentimental mood – mainly because the radio played *Auf Wiedersehen*. Then we went to 47 and finished up George Steer’s port. We all behaved rather appallingly.

23rd. Rupert and I went to buy some things for lunch as we intended to take it with us on the river. Rupert quoted to me Marvell’s ‘To His Coy Mistress’ and ‘Definition of Love’ – I had never heard them before. The more one talks with him the more one realises that he really is brilliant. Then on to the river. Getting in to the punt I half fell in, and Miles got his trousers entirely wet trying to rescue me ... I rushed back to St. Hilda’s and changed, then we went to The Spreddeagle at Thame. We ate a marvellous dinner at which everything ordinary, like fish, tasted extremely good.

24th June. Rupert and Miles came and we went off for lunch at Stewart’s where they played *Wien du Stadt meiner Träume* – I heard it for the first time there. At the station I held Miles’ and Rupert’s hands tightly and gazed in to their blue and brown eyes respectively. Then we said good-bye and I settled down to a sober journey home. A marvellous ending to a marvellous term – Geoffrey, Rupert and Miles – everything. My first Trinity term has set a perilously high standard for the others to keep up to.

At this time, Barbara had no idea when, or even if, she would see him again, but he continued to write from London, where he said ‘I suffer from atrophy of the emotions owing to boredom’, and seemed to find his mother irritating.

Barbara my darling

I’m alone in the new flat with my mother, and oh, what a change from Oxford. Miles stayed with us two nights, and went to the air display with us.

This is the first we hear of Rupert’s interest in flying.

I can give you as yet no better idea of my plans for next year than before; I may still go into the Air Force.

I rather spend my spare time wondering what parts of that last week I shall remember best.: those lovely nakedish times by the Cher, and Miles with his trousers on a paddle, and you upside down; or Charlbury and Great Tew; or Thames; or Goodnight Vienna, and certain hours, particularly

one Monday, one 21st June, on a leopard-skinned sofa in Wellington Square. 'But what has been is past forgetting'. Also a lovely time in a wood on Boar's Hill. It's all been very marvellous, and for an end to one's last term uniquely and most appropriately charming. Miles and I thought of you a lot while we were together, and wondered whether you were merrily chattering to your family about the events of the last few weeks, or inventing activities to account for the time which really went in flirting...

I have a great deal to thank you for, which I here and now do. I hope we meet again.
With all my love, Your Rupert.

Barbara did not keep up her diary for the first part of the long vacation though she has a general entry for July:

At first I was bored but gradually settled down – letters from Rupert and Miles helped ...but I was always thinking of Geoffrey – there were some days when he was never out of my mind. He got a distinction in his theology diploma – he was the only one who did! On July 9th Rupert sent me *The Weekend Book*, most charmingly inscribed – and a long letter – one of the nicest I've ever had from him.

I have a copy of the first edition of *The Weekend Book*, edited by Francis Meynell and published by his Nonesuch Press in 1924. Rupert had previously written to her:

I have been reading the Great Poems in *The Weekend Book*, particularly the more modern ones, Flecker and Brook and Francis Thompson, and enjoying them a lot, and it occurred to me that possibly your family has been so slack as not to have a copy: in which case I will give you one as perpetuum monumentum Ruperti S. Gleadow BA because it is always useful and amusing. In case you don't know it I subjoin, as they say, a list of contents.

This he does in some detail, illustrating how his long letters were not always confined to the subjects of love and his career.

...the advantage of this kind of book is that you don't just read it and put it away on a shelf and forget about it, but you read it in little bits at all sorts of times afterwards. I have just learned Vaughn's "The World" and "Helen of Kirconnell" out of it – but then I learn poetry so very easily.

As well as being bored, Rupert was concerned about his future, and seemed permanently short of money despite the fact that the family owned a 51-acre estate in Surrey.

On July 2nd, Rupert had written from Bakeham House, Englefield Green, the family home, which was to be sold later that month. There are various indications that his father had recently died. Rupert had gone there to clear it up before the auction, and in doing so had 'destroyed hundreds of old letters of my grandparents and their relations, going back to 1839'.

My Darling Barbara

Thank you for your lovely long letter, and the photographs ... the one I am most glad to have is the one of you. Your letter I got on Thursday evening on coming in rather late, and when I got rid of my tiresome family I took it to bed and read it straight through twice ... When I am alone, and have got free from the depressing keeping up of appearances that the company of my mother always entails, then I always seem more, and more naturally happy than I used to before; and I think that must be the result of all the happy times we had in Oxford and I do miss you, you know. I'll tell you in my next letter why the arguments are so strong that I should go into the Air Force.

Rupert had some problem with his eyesight, and the result of his visit to the oculist might make a difference to his thoughts about flying.

I somehow think the D.Phil is more probable, though I'm rather afraid of not being able to get thro' the subject in 2 years... Maybe I'll go to Germany instead of Greece, but they do seem to be killing an awful lot of people there these days with street riots and all that.

On 17 July.

Barbara Darling

...so many things have happened since I last wrote. On Friday July 8 I made up my mind; on Saturday July 9th I bought an aeroplane!!!! Till last Friday I was occupied in getting my licence out of the Air Ministry, and yesterday I flew it myself for the first time. Of course, I am broke henceforward. The machine is very old and 2nd hand, a special Moth with a racing fuselage whereby it goes faster than the ordinary of its kind ... and by the way my eyes are much better: I had no difficulty in landing an aeroplane! ...I'm still as vague as ever about my plans: yesterday the D.Phil took a turn for the worse ...

Rupert vacillates between the Air Force and returning to Oxford, and considers a few other career possibilities

Being bored so much in London...makes me think I must be very susceptible to boredom; and, as I'm very much afraid I should be bored in the Air Force, I've more or less decided not to go in to it. Then as far as going in to His Majesty's service in the Levant, that means learning languages for a year, and after that I'm very much afraid there's an examination, which is unthinkable. As for Egyptology, all the intrigues about the Readership at Oxford have shown me what to expect there, and what sort of people academic people are. So that's not very attractive either...I don't want to take up Egyptology professionally, so to come to Oxford and take a D.Phil. for 2 years would be a sheer swank and probably a waste of time. So I've decided probably not to do that – certainly not if I don't get the Derby Scholarship.

The Derby Scholarship was awarded by the University for 2 years to a candidate of sufficient merit offering a subject connected with the languages and literature of ancient Greece and Rome.

So we have now gone all the way round the circle and come back to the Air Force, which is the quickest way of getting paid (one begins at about £350 a year), and where I should have to amuse myself by writing in my spare time – which would be plentiful... Stop Press! I may come to Oxford to learn modern Greek from Professor Dawkins concurrently with, or instead of, the D.Phil., with a view to becoming a Professor of Modern Greek! (a much more humane and less competed-for study than all this squabbling Egyptology)... I think, after my D.Phil. (if any) I shall give up being called an Egyptologist...and be called a linguist. After all, I ought to know by then Arabic, Greek (ancient and modern), German and/or French, Egyptian and Coptic, besides Latin and English, possibly some Italian or Spanish – preferably the latter...

Rupert wrote frequently in July – constantly complaining of lack of money. I can only suppose that his mother paid his expenses, for example for the cruise he was to take in August, but did not give him a generous allowance; perhaps she was not able to do so until Bakeham House was sold, and there were no takers for it when it was auctioned in July 1932. His letters to Barbara were often very long, highly romantic, recalling the times they had spent together, and reiterating how nice and charming she is.

The cruise, from 12th-24th August, was aboard the steam yacht Killarney, from Liverpool to the Scottish Fjords. His letters to Barbara contained vivid descriptions of the hills and islands through which he sailed, as well as events on board.

At the end of the cruise he went to Newport, Pembrokeshire with the intention of spending some time walking in Wales.

Further thoughts on his career prompted him to tell her

About three days ago I started learning Arabic – anywhere from Algeria to Persia I may want to speak it – but it's so complicated I can see I shall have to go almost all through the grammar before I begin to understand it ... Egyptian was like that in the early days. I am now definitely going to go in for the Derby Scholarship and so unless something else turns up I shall be in Oxford from the

beginning of term until the award is announced. Then if the award is not to me, I shall go away again.

Somewhere along the line Barbara invited him to stay at Morda Lodge, where he proposed to arrive on 15th Sept. Miles was to join him later for a tour of the Lake District.

There were no letters, of course, during Rupert's stay in Oswestry, but Barbara takes up the story in her diary:

Sept 15th. Here follows a perfect week which must be recorded and remembered as about the best of my life. On this day Rupert came. I went to meet him at 3.23 wearing a summer frock and a yellow jersey. I was feeling very shy and very excited. I was pleased to find him about 20 times nicer-looking than his photos. We had tea with Hilary and afterwards talked a lot till supper time. After that we went for a walk down Weston Lane and sat down on the edge of a bridge and talked a lot. Our shyness wore off and we came in at 11.10.

Sept 16th. Seeing me run down a hill Rupert gave me the name of Atalanta. We stopped to have some farewell kisses before going to tea at Ack's, [her aunt, her mother's sister, real name Janie, who lived nearby] and enjoyed some moment of rapturous, most ecstatic madness ...

18th. Went for a walk up to the Racecourse where we looked at the scenery. On our way down we stopped several times – many romantic kisses.

21st. We talked a lot – or rather Rupert talked and I listened – about his father and Trinity and lots of things. Before we went out he made the suggestion that we should go to bed – we had much fun and a fight over that. We went down Weston Lane and looked at the stars. I said that the happiness one got out of love was worth any unhappiness it might (and generally does) bring. I can't remember what Rupert said but he wasn't so sure about it not having had the experience I suppose.

22nd. I helped Rupert to pack. I would have loved to go to the Lakes with him and Miles. It was seriously rather awful parting from him. We'd had such a heavenly week together. I never imagined it would be so good. I actually wept a bit!

Rupert wrote to her in much the same vein:

My darling I never realized what it was going to be like parting from you. As soon as you were out of sight I very nearly wept ... it was awful....I've called Miles 'Darling' several times ... and told him I wished he was you, which he didn't take very kindly ... Darling, what can a man say in a case like this? 'Thank you for making me fall in love with anyone so charming as you? Or, for making me realize that I have?'... To me Morda Lodge is the centre of a radiating golden star of happiness, and it must always be marked in gold on my mental map.

Many more letters passed between the two while Rupert was in the Lake District – his very loving, hers too by inference.

Because of all the letters that passed between them, it is easy to forget that the actual time they had spent together was very short – only a few days in May and June, and this week in Oswestry.

At Michaelmas Term they returned to Oxford and resumed their friendship, though its nature was beginning to change. Without Barbara's side of the correspondence, it is difficult to know how interested in Rupert she really was. Their acquaintance in Trinity Term was short, if intense, and much of the time they had been a threesome, when they behaved rather like children happily playing in the sunshine. In the vacation that followed Barbara had been thinking more about Geoffrey than Rupert. She was bored in Oswestry, and Rupert was the only one of her friends who had kept in touch, so his visit probably assumed a greater importance than it deserved. For his part, Rupert's letters were becoming more personal, and he was clearly wishing to take their relationship to the next level.

On her first day back she met him at his new digs in 90 St. Mary's Road – and later they dined at Stewart's with Miles, who was back in Oxford with a Senior Scholarship to New College. 'A happy reunion' she recorded. 'It was marvellous.' And at the end of the month they were still very attached to one another.

Just as I was feeling very bored sweet Rupert called for me. We went first to Trinity and walked in the gardens, then to Iffley, and finally we landed at Miles's digs where we had tea. We spent a most happy, peaceful, loving and lovely evening until supper time.

But three days later she was back to her old tricks:

I think it was on this day that I first saw the charming scholar. He is heftily built, indeed inclined to be fat – features Byronic – hair dark and thick – face interesting. He intrigued me.

The next day she appeared to be abstracted when she met Rupert, perhaps by thoughts of this new interest, who turned out to be a putting and weight blue from Balliol -- who is never mentioned again.

Rupert called for me and we went for a long and energetic walk it being such a fine afternoon. We ate at Stewart's, I think, and went back to Rupert's digs – where we had a pleasant time I imagine.

On 6th November, Barbara wrote that she spent a few pleasant hours with Rupert in his digs but there are no more entries in her diary until the beginning of the following term.

Rupert now had a growing interest in astrology.

I've just been lent some books on Astrology, which are very interesting, though here and there one of them is absurd ; but on the whole amazingly true; you should read what it says about Gemini people (I'm Gemini, and so to some extent are you). What time of the day were you born? Do let me know next term. I am now in all sorts of astrological and diary-keeping throes. This morning the post brought me some astrological manuscript notes to copy out, which a lady is lending me, and I've been engaged on them most of the day.

It was in November that Rupert heard that he was not to receive the Derby Award.

They gave no reason for their decision, but it was because they didn't think the subject was classical enough ...However, I merely went and saw Prof. Griffith to ask him about ancient Egyptian astronomy and astrology in case of doing that for a D.Phil.

However, it appeared that there was a Don who had already adequately covered those subjects.

Anyway, I shall not be leaving this University just yet. I don't really want to leave Oxford with you here.

During the Christmas vacation, both were taking stock of the situation, though we only have Rupert's letters to go on. He was intent on seducing her next term:

My intentions are strictly dishonourable. But it's a difficult art, having a mistress, and Oxford is one of the most difficult places to practice it in. Hence, darling, your still lasting immunity...

while she, unwilling to go to such lengths, was trying to distance herself from him. Oscar Wilde said, 'The very essence of romance is uncertainty', and now that she knew Rupert well perhaps his charm was beginning to fade. She encouraged him not to think of her as his exclusive girl-friend. By the end of the vacation he had taken her at her word.

By the way, darling, you'll be sorry to hear that at last I've stopped wasting my time; at last I've found...someone with whom I can fulfil my promise to you not to be *strictly* faithful; but as I only made the discovery 2 days ago it's only two days kissing I've been able to have – and I did need it.

On 17 January 1933, back after the winter vacation, Barbara writes

Rupert called in the afternoon and I found myself remarkably glad to see him. We went on to his rooms in Trinity where we indulged in some very pleasant caresses both before and after tea – but I stuck out against having a real necking party. But really he is charming, and I couldn't be cross with him.

I think it was on this same day that Barbara had caught sight of Henry Harvey for the first time. Perhaps that is another reason why she was so coy with Rupert. From this time on her thoughts were increasingly on 'Lorenzo', and she detached herself gradually from her relationship with Rupert.

For some days Barbara did not know the name of 'the pale scholar' whom she kept seeing at lectures and in the Bodleian, and whom she thought of as 'Lorenzo.' Soon she was writing 'This diary seems to be going to turn into the Saga of Lorenzo.' Certainly Rupert appears in it less and less frequently.

Rupert is as uncertain as ever about his future.

The mere mention of your rather vicious collections next term made me feel all hollow about my own damn thesis, which I ought never to have started at all. I'm feeling rather tired through lying awake half the night thinking out my future. It's no good. I've got to go down. There's no point in staying on fatuously up here and taking a fatuous D.Phil. I'm too old for the entrance to the consular and other services, but I'm not too old for the diplomatic and foreign office, and I'm damned if I see why I shouldn't try to go into that if there's an examination next August. I ought to be able to learn lots of French and German before then.

And he added, prophetically as it turned out, 'No doubt in the end I shall find Astrology is the only profession left.'

On 23rd February 1933 Rupert wrote to Barbara asking her to lunch, and saying, 'After inspecting Harvey, Miles and I decided that various other people look like that – in other words, the face did not seem altogether strange. Well, well!'

So Barbara must have told him of her interest in Henry. In March she went to 'a delightful lunch party at Trinity', which included Rupert, of course, and she saw him again in his digs on 22nd April

But, on 29th April Barbara wrote in her diary, 'Oh, ever to be remembered day! Lorenzo spoke to me!'

Some days later Henry took her on their first date to dinner at the Trout, where he told her his name was Gabriel. On the following Sunday 'Rupert came to see me in the morning, but I couldn't possibly kiss him because the last mouth to touch mine had been Gabriel's.'

Rupert had finally to accept that Barbara was not for him. As Hazel says in *A Lot to Ask*, 'He tactfully made a comfortable joke of the whole affair', and he bowed to the inevitable with good grace. They continued to correspond and remained friends throughout their time at Oxford, and beyond, though perhaps there was a touch of bitterness in one letter where he suggests that this is what Barbara would say of him in the future:

There was that poor dear Rupert Gleadow – quite mad about me he was, but my dear he really was terribly trying, so lascivious – never would leave me alone! What did I like him for? Oh, I don't know, I suppose he was rather pathetic – of course an awful poseur – he would make you think he was acutely miserable when all the time the man was devoured by a positive flame of sexual excitement. It was most indecent.

By 20 Apr 33 there is no doubt at all that the romance was over. In his last letter to her from Oxford Rupert wrote, 'Barbara dearest, Who have you fallen in love with this time?' And he sent her the horoscope he had drawn up for her:

I don't know whether it is really very good, seeing as how it's the first one I ever did. Really, I think your marriage prospects are quite excellent. I think it's an extremely fine horoscope and I wish you luck with it.

Years later, Rupert, widowed after a few months of marriage to his Parisian wife, Marguerite Rendu, wrote to Barbara

One learns to love, you know, and I began learning in 1932. It seems incredible to realise that in those lovely days none of the tragedies of life had yet happened. But if we had not had those wonderful times together probably I should not have known those sublime heights of love which Marguerite and I together achieved and which will always remain a light of my life. So you see you have made a difference to my life which I shall not forget.

With love, Rupert.

References

Bodleian Library. MSPym 149, 150; Pym diaries, 1932-1943.

Holt, Hazel. *A Lot to Ask: a life of Barbara Pym*. London, Macmillan, 1990