Green Leaves

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society **Vol. XXI, No. 2, Autumn 2015**

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

2015 AGM and Oxford Conference Report, 4-6 September 2015

by Alison Felstead

The 2015 BPS Annual Conference weekend started with a guided tour of Oxford Castle for one Pym party, while others took advantage of attractions such as the Ashmolean Museum or the Weston Library, or punting on the Cherwell from St Hilda's for the more adventurous. After dinner, we were intellectually teased by the annual pre-conference quiz in St Hilda's SCR.

'Prisoners' at the Castle

The AGM on Saturday morning began with a special welcome to new members and to those who had travelled from overseas. Then Michael Wilson presented his Chairman's Report. He recalled the untimely death of long-time BPS member Michael Macke, who collapsed at last year's conference and died some weeks later without regaining consciousness. He read out a letter from Michael's sister which referred to the 'happy and joyful time at Oxford' that Michael had enjoyed on his numerous visits over the years.

In his report on the BPS in America, Tom Sopko reminded members of the wealth of material available on the Society's website, including conference papers from previous years, links to other websites of interest and the archive of *Green Leaves*. Tom also announced the recent launch of the first annual Ellen J. Miller Student Essay Competition and that the North American conference will have a new venue next Spring. Please see Coming Events on page 15 for details.

After the AGM, the sombre mood returned as Miriam read out three 'Tributes to Absent Friends' written by Society members. Michael Macke, P.D. James, and John Bayley were remembered and their lives celebrated by, respectively, Michael Wilson, Eileen Roberts and Jean Harker.

Following a buffet lunch in St Hilda's Dining Hall, the Annual Conference with its theme of 'Partners in Pym' began in earnest. Dr Isabel Stanley spoke first on 'The novels of Barbara Pym: a dance of many partners,' which examined the many different types of partnerships in Pym's novels, ranging from the two sisters in *Some Tame Gazelle* to the various partnerships in village life of *A Few Green Leaves*. She concluded that whilst Pym believed that partnerships are essential, she cautioned against expecting too much from them. In the discussion that followed Isabel's talk, the partnership between Sophia and her cat Faustina ('... but she's all I've got.') was highlighted, and the suitability of John Challow as a partner for Ianthe was debated, with his practical skill in putting up shelves identified as rare amongst Pym men.

After tea and biscuits in the foyer of the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, we reconvened to hear Deb Fisher speak on 'A suitable attachment – partnerships in *Excellent Women*.' Deb explored the changing partnerships found throughout the novel, and noted that they illustrate Pym's understanding of human relationships. There followed a lively discussion about these partnerships. It was noted that Pym's life partner was her sister Hilary, to whom we owe a great debt; a husband might not have been so supportive of her writing.

The afternoon concluded with 'Pym partners and poems,' which comprised readings of unpublished poems from the Barbara Pym archive at the Bodleian Library curated by Yvonne Cocking. These included poems from the 1930s and 1940s in which BP celebrates some of her real-life and imaginary partners in verse. The poems were read with verve and empathy by Rita Phillips, Libby Tempest, Lorraine Mepham, and Triona Adams, with the context to each of them being supplied by Yvonne, demonstrating her rigorous research. She had unearthed thirty-six poems in the Pym archive.

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After the Drinks Reception came the highlight of the weekend – the Annual Dinner. The starter was a delicious concoction of honey-smoked duck, followed by sea bass with roasted carrots and mash. For dessert we had cheesecake decorated with dragon fruit, with chocolates and fruit to finish. It was a memorable meal. I sat next to a first-time conference attendee, and alarmed him at one point by asking if he would be attending the post-dinner disco.

The Castle

The after dinner speakers were Dr Clare Coombe and the Reverend Canon Dr Julie Gittoes of St Alban's and Guildford Cathedrals respectively. Michael explained how he had avoided the problem of giving offence by inviting one and not the other by inviting both – and thereby neatly continuing the conference theme of 'Partners in Pym.' Clare focused on *A Glass of Blessings* and Julie on *Excellent Women*. Julie has published the text of their talk on her blog at:
juliegittoes.blogspot.co.uk/2015/09/barbara-pym-still-holding-up-mirror-to.html.

Dr Clare Coomb & Dr Julie Gittoes

Many of us repaired to the cosy SCR to drink more wine, catch up with old friends and find out about new. The birthday of committee member Libby Tempest fell on conference Saturday this year and was marked by an affectionate rendering of 'Happy birthday to you!' and a toast.

Sunday dawned clear and sunny, a perfect September morning. I continued my search for Tealeaf, the newest college cat, while others attended the customary church service in St Hilda's Chapel led by the Reverend Colin Oxenforth. Still others explored Oxford.

The final speaker was Catriona Cannon, Deputy Librarian of the Bodleian Libraries. Catriona led us on a journey through the collections of the Bodleian from a Pym perspective in a fascinating talk entitled '"Whatever we hereafter write, 'tis thy Posterity": Oxford library collections through the novels of Barbara Pym'.

She examined the literary references and quotations in the novels and related these to items in the collections, including the archives of authors, literary manuscripts, first editions, printed ephemera and advertisements, printed music and private press books. The presentation ranged from Middle English verse to the poetry of Larkin, demonstrating the breadth of Pym's reading.

The final treat of the conference was an adaptation by Yvonne Cocking of an unpublished story written by Pym in the mid-1930s. The intriguing title was 'Back to St Petersburg.' The story, narrated by Miriam Margolyes, involves a girl who goes to Germany to become a governess, falls for her employers' son, enjoys a 'gratifyingly successful honeymoon' in the Black Forest in spite of no marriage ceremony having taken place, and then returns to England pretending to be his widow, the Countess von Bohl. It was performed with their usual gusto by the Mighty Pym Players, and made a most enjoyable end to the weekend.

Announcing
The First Annual
Ellen J. Miller Memorial
Student Essay Competition

Open to any full-time undergraduate or graduate student at an accredited university or college.

Entries must be submitted by 1 Jan 2016.

Barbara Pym's first published novel was *Some Tame Gazelle*, which will be the focus of the 2016 North American conference and is the topic for the competition. The essay may be on any aspect of the novel, such as a specific theme, recurring motif(s), character development, the importance of place or setting, or any other subject that promotes a deeper understanding or appreciation of the novel. Comparison of themes, characters, or the like in *Some Tame Gazelle* with their treatment in other Pym novels would also be appropriate. For details and rules please see www.barbara-pym.org

The Novels of Barbara Pym: A Dance of Many Partners

by Isabel Stanley

In Barbara Pym's day, as in 2015, the term 'partner' meant many things to many people, from an intimate partner to an acquaintance at work. Pym is clearly examining the nature of partnership from her early days as a writer.

Belinda and Harriet Bede of *Some Tame Gazelle* reflect the early sisterly partnership of Barbara and her sister Hilary Walton. Harriet has a lingering crush on Archdeacon Hoccleve and Belinda enjoys encouraging a number of suitors, but the sisters are clearly partners for life.

Pym's books look at many types of partnerships from a variety of angles. In both *Crampton Hodnet* and *Jane and Prudence,* the formidable Miss Doggett is the senior partner of her companion Jessie Morrow, but Jessie exerts her own sense of agency in exposing the charming curate, the Rev Stephen Latimer in *Crampton Hodnet,* and snaring the charming widower Fabian Driver in *Jane and Prudence*. Simultaneously, other partnerships are being established and collapsing from the first page to the last. Pym uses would-be partnerships, incomplete partnerships, bosom-buddy

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partnerships, broken partnerships, and highly problematic partnerships to show how complex the relationships can be between men and women of all sorts and conditions.

Much of the underlying humor in *Excellent Women* arises from the fact that Father Julian Malory has so many would-be partners, from scheming women to the much more congenial denizens of the Boys Club and the men of the parish. The novel's protagonist, Mildred Lathbury, is seen as a likely wife for Malory, occasionally by himself, by Mildred, and by the other women in their parish, but she is content to be an 'excellent' single woman and enjoy a 'full life' correcting Everard Bone's proofs and peeling his potatoes.

During Barbara Pym's middle period, anthropologists and their partnerships begin to substitute for those of the Anglican clergy and their minions. *No Fond Return of Love*, published in 1961, is a story of broken partnerships, missed partnerships, and incomplete partnerships. The novel does not have a permanent partnership within its pages.

In *The Sweet Dove Died*, written during Barbara Pym's wilderness period, antique furniture and valuable objects substitute for human partnerships, as they did to a lesser extent in *An Unsuitable Attachment* and *A Glass of Blessings*. Leonora Eyre's stunted capacity for intimacy has rendered her incapable of a real partnership with living people.

Quartet in Autumn examines the tenuous partnerships between elderly co-workers toiling away in jobs so insignificant that when they retire, no one can even remember what they did. The fates of the quartet differ, but Pym shows the importance of the novelist E M Forster's maxim 'only connect' found in *Howards End*.

Barbara Pym wrote *A Few Green Leaves* in the sure knowledge of her own impending death and worked very hard both to finish the book and to make it a final statement of her world view. Just as a few green leaves perk up a tired flower arrangement, the many relationships and activities of a small village confer meaning on everyday life. For those of us who love the novels of Barbara Pym, this ability to make a lot, or at any rate enough, of a little and to show gratitude for the warmth of imperfect relationships is one of her most endearing qualities.

Does Pym believe that meaningful partnerships are possible? I believe she would say they are essential. Then I believe she would laugh a bit ruefully, and say, but don't expect too much from your partners. They may not understand the steps you think are essential to your understanding of the dance, and they may step on your toes from time to time. If you pair up with your sister like Harriet and Belinda, you will sometimes get on each other's nerves. If you marry, you may not end up with Prince Charming but with a kindly, ineffectual clergyman like Nicholas Cleveland or Tom Dagnall. If you become an excellent woman like Mildred, you will have many friends and acquaintances, but they often won't meet your needs while expecting you to meet theirs. If you think having a Pembroke table or a Hepplewhite chair for a partner will make you happy, you will lead a sterile life like Leonora Eyre or Mervin Cantrell. But, if you avoid partnerships altogether like Marcia Ivory, you are likely to die alone with your dozens of empty milk bottles.

Fortunately, Barbara Pym leaves us with more hopeful portraits than her depiction of Marcia, and these imperfect partnerships, like a few green leaves among fading roses, do make a big difference in Pym's books and in our lives.

Isabel Stanley *is Professor Emerita of English at East Tennessee State University. She particularly treasures the writing of Barbara Pym and her membership in the Pym Society.*

A Suitable Attachment: Partnerships in *Excellent Women*

by Deb Fisher

When I learned of the theme of this year's conference, my first thought was of the collaboration between Helena Napier and Everard Bone, which plays a significant role in *Excellent Women*. On consideration, I realized that I need look no further than *Excellent Women* for every type of partnership one can imagine: professional partnerships between academics or churchwardens, personal alliances between flatmates or cleaning ladies, and romantic entanglements, one-sided or mutual, are to be found throughout. What this says about Barbara Pym is that she was an immensely sociable person who interacted with people on many levels and understood human relationships of all kinds.

Heroine Mildred Lathbury is attracted to Helena's husband Rocky from their first meeting, but she is pragmatic; her brief fantasy of involvement with Rocky is a daydream. The relationship between the Napiers goes deeper. Although we seldom see them together, there is a sense of collusion between them – almost as if Rocky were toying with Mildred's affections and reporting back to Helena. The sharing of the bathroom and the overhearing of raised voices cause Mildred to imagine she can see into the couple's relationship. Yet Mildred ultimately finds herself excluded, as Rocky and Helena make an effort to mend their marriage and move away, leaving Mildred to wonder why one can 'never stop trying to analyse the motives of people who have no personal interest in us, in the vain hope of finding that perhaps they may have just a little after all'.

Mildred has immediately realized that she and Helena are not destined to become friends. Mildred's ordinariness deceives Helena into thinking she has no part to play in the

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couple's lives ('What will you do after we've gone?' she asks, as she and Rocky prepare to leave), but it is Helena who introduces Mildred to the man who will one day become her partner in more than one sense, Everard Bone.

What saves the Napiers' marriage may be the fact that Rocky is prepared to indulge Helena's interests and to put them before his own career. In many ways, Rocky is a 'new man', receptive to the idea of role reversal and feeling no obligation to be the breadwinner. Rocky recognizes Mildred as potentially attractive, but Helena does not imagine that Everard could be interested in this unacademic, mousy woman. It is not *entirely* clear what Everard sees in Mildred, except that she is a considerate and understanding young woman who shares his religious beliefs and is unlikely to put her own interests before his; her claim to be 'rather plain' is over-modest.

Julian Malory has never needed to consider marriage seriously because his sister Winifred runs the household for him; he is a plum ripe for picking at the hands of glamorous widow Allegra Gray. At first friendly towards Winifred and Mildred, Allegra gradually gets her claws out, and her engagement to Julian never looks like a serious contender for the description 'partnership', more a status symbol for her. You can tell that he isn't going to be teaching table tennis to teenagers for long if Allegra has anything to do with it. She will not be a vicar's wife who mucks in with the rest of the excellent women, but one who smiles benevolently and does 'good works' from a distance.

In the end, it is his sister whom Julian chooses as his life companion. In expelling Allegra from the vicarage, he makes a choice that confirms both himself and Winifred in a permanent state of celibacy. As a partnership, their relationship has already proved both successful and durable. Although Winifred says longingly that she wishes he had married Mildred, it seems unlikely that the friendship between the two women, itself a kind of partnership, could survive their sharing a house *and* Julian.

Academic collaborations frequently end in rivalry and betrayal, as Pym reveals in other novels like *Less Than Angels* and *An Academic Question*. Everard's colleagues Apfelbaum and Tyrell Todd, if his comments are anything to go by, appear to be despised by him. The President of the Learned Society has a partner who feels able to support his career without giving up her own interests. She goes to the meetings and sits knitting, clearly uninterested in the subject but giving up a proportion of her time, which is all that is expected of her. The husband and wife, despite being in the same room together, are actually going their separate ways. Many would say this is a recipe for the perfect marriage.

We do not know how Everard came to collaborate with Helena; he seems to have no prejudice against her as a woman and no issue with her professional expertise. It is only when she begins to make amorous advances towards him that he seeks to disentangle himself from her. Mildred, by contrast, appears a sensible, reliable sort, and he can see the advantages of becoming intimate with a woman who is not only free but is capable of being trained to become an indexer.

***Deb Fisher** has been a member of the Pym Society since the first AGM and has been at every annual meeting. This is the first paper she has presented.*

Partners in Pym

by Yvonne Cocking

Today I am going to speak, not of the partnerships in her fiction, but of four of Barbara's real-life 'partners' whom she celebrated in unpublished verse.

As Hazel Holt tells us in *A Lot to Ask*, Barbara was disposed to fall in love with young men, with some of whom she was unacquainted, but for whom she nurtured an unrequited, if temporary, love. One of these was a bank clerk and lay reader, perhaps her first crush, when she was only 17 and still at school. She must have often noticed John Trevor Lloyd in the Oswestry branch of the Midland Bank (now HSBC), and in St Oswald's church.

To him she dedicated two poems extolling his superiority, unacknowledged by his colleagues in the work place. In the first she compares 'one who has a soul' with others who are 'pale fishes in a tank', and in the second with 'a tame donkey' who finally breaks free from its cruel master.

This last was written in August 1931. A few weeks later Barbara was at Oxford and Lloyd forgotten. She soon found another desirable subject for her devotion in one of the Moderators, i.e. the Dons who set and invigilated Pass Moderations, an examination which all undergraduates had to sit in their first term. Their names and affiliations were often not known to the students, who could only guess their identities, in Barbara's case by following them furtively to see which college they entered or emerged from. She set her sights on one she called her 'Fat Baby Face' – not, perhaps, the generally accepted ideal of masculine beauty. In December, after she heard that she had not passed Mods, declaring of one of the set books 'Tocqueville was my downfall', she wrote a poem, dedicated *To LMF before I knew his name.* He was finally identified, and she wrote another poem to him as Lindley Macnaughton Fraser, a Fellow of Queen's.

Barbara appeared not to be moved to celebrate in verse any other lovers until she met Julian Amery in December 1937. This was when she was on a visit to Oxford while she was still stunned by Henry Harvey's marriage to Elsie. They went back to his rooms in Balliol, where they listened to records of European music. To her surprise he kissed her. 'It was the first time anyone so much younger than I was had done such a thing, for he was only eighteen and I was twenty-four'. More than a year later she confided to her diary 'Oh how absurd and delicious it is to be in love with somebody younger than yourself! Everybody should try it – no life can be complete without it'.

Barbara returned to Oxford in late February 1938, and on 4 March she wrote in her diary: 'I met Jay by the Ashmolean

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and we leaned up against it and stood looking up at the Randolph and the blue sky behind it. Then we parted, he to write an essay and I to write him a Betjeman poem'. She entitled it *Frivolous lines inspired by looking up at the Randolph Hotel, Oxford,* March 1938. Barbara was well aware that their romance could be but short-lived.

Hazel Holt said that they had spent only 20 hours together, but these provided 'twenty years of memories'. Barbara could not easily forget Julian. She kept writing poems: '*Lines to a Dear Young Friend on his Nineteenth Birthday'; 'A Fragment inspired by a walk in Eaton Square knowing that he was far away in Oxford'; 'A Sonnet written to a Dear Friend on the Third Day of December 1938, it being the First Anniversary of our Meeting'.*

At Yvonne's Presentation — Libby, Maggie, Triona, Rita

On 3 April 1940, Barbara wrote in her diary: 'This morning I polished up an old box I found upstairs. It is of walnut with black and yellow inlay and a brass crest on the lid. It makes a beautiful box for relics – so in went all the letters, pressed flowers, Niersteiner corks, handkerchiefs, Tilia platyphyllos etc. It will still hold a few more letters, though it is quite nicely filled.'

Some time in the 70s Barbara gave the box (though not the contents) to Kay Phelps, a writer herself, wife of the author and broadcaster Gilbert Phelps, fellow residents of Finstock. Kay passed it to the Society when she talked to us after the conference dinner in 2007. To accompany it, Barbara composed an *Elegy on the Reliques of Love shut up in a Box.*

To end this talk I shall read the last piece of verse from Barbara's pen that I have yet found, a Valentine to her last love, Richard Roberts.

O, Sweet Bahamian, cruel Fate
Has sent you to me much too late
Tormenting me with many a Scene
Of Happiness that might have been...
Yet I must love you, Dearest Boy –
My Jewel, my Treasure and my Joy –
For though you never can be mine,
At least you'll be MY VALENTINE!

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

'Whatever we hereafter write, 'tis thy Posterity': selected items from Bodleian Libraries' collections through the novels of Barbara Pym

by Catriona Cannon

Henry Vaughan addressed the founder of the Bodleian Library, Thomas Bodley:

> 'Th'hast made us all thine *Heirs*: whatever we
> Hereafter write, 'tis thy *Posterity*.'

This was certainly true of Barbara Pym – reading in the Bodleian played a big part in developing her love of English writers, whom she quotes a lot, and whose writings enrich her novels. Literary and cultural references in her novels serve to highlight some items from the Bodleian Libraries' collections.

Pym acknowledges the influence of nineteenth-century novels in the tradition of social comedy in the talk she gave for the BBC, 'Finding a Voice'.

In the novels, there are several references to Austen: the phrase 'excellent women' which first appears in *Civil to Strangers*, then becomes the title for Pym's second published novel: this comes from Austen's *Sanditon* (I am indebted to Professor Kathryn Sutherland for pointing this out). In *Jane and Prudence*, Prudence is Miss Bates; Jane is more like Emma Woodhouse. In *Less than Angels* Pym quotes Anne Elliot from *Persuasion*, and in *No Fond Return of Love* Aylwin justifies his turning to Dulcie with an analogy to *Mansfield Park*. The name of the heroine of *A Few Green Leaves* is Emma.

The Bodleian holds two Jane Austen manuscripts, *Volume the First* and *The Watsons*, as well as five first editions of her novels.

Anthony Trollope's *The Last Chronicle of Barset* is quoted in *Excellent Women* – the women doing the flowers were 'as irreverent as if they were two curates' – and in *Jane and Prudence*, when Jane laments that she is not a splendid wife as in Trollope.

Bodley's American Friends funded the Bodleian's purchase of a first edition of *The Last Chronicle of Barset* in 1966, a century after it had been published. The novel came out in serial numbers with the *Cornhill* magazine, published by Smith and Elder.

The Bodleian also holds Trollope's working papers: correspondence with publishers, schedules of work and money earned.

In the novels, hymns are quoted by characters antipathetic to the heroine, for example, Bishop Grote in *Some Tame Gazelle* and Mervyn in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, and the heroine is indignant or disapproves. Hymns keep Pym's characters going in difficult times.

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A line from Isaac Watts' 'O God Our Help in Ages Past' – 'Time like an ever-rolling stream / bears all its sons away' is quoted in *Excellent Women* and *An Unsuitable Attachment*. The Bodleian is actively collecting eighteenth-century editions of Isaac Watts' works including some unique survivals.

There are many references to songs in the novels. The Bodleian has a very rich score collection thanks to its legal deposit privilege, but also thanks to the Harding Collection, a bequest from Walter Harding of Chicago in 1975, covering English secular music, English and foreign opera scores and American nineteenth- and twentieth-century song material.

Bodleian holdings quoted by Pym include *Aunt Judy's Song Book* by Alfred Scott Gatty, in which 'The poodle' (*Some Tame Gazelle*) and 'Going to School' (*Less Than Angels*) appear; 'Believe me if all those endearing young charms' (*Some Tame Gazelle*); and Parry's 'Oh love they wrong thee much' (*Excellent Women)*. The Bodleian also has a substantial collection of Parry manuscripts.

Also in *Excellent Women*, Julian quotes 'Palm Sunday, Naples'. The Bodleian has the score of the song, as well as those of *Rose Marie* and *No, No, Nanette*, the shows that Deirdre's father had liked when he was taking her mother out (*Less Than Angels*).

Ephemera complement the vivid image Pym gives of the time in which her novels are set. The Bodleian's John Johnson Collection of printed ephemera is one of the largest in the world: it is rich in materials relevant to Pym's early novels in particular.

Elliston's shop in Oxford, where ladies hurry to buy spring fashions in bright colours (*Crampton Hodnet*), is illustrated in the Elliston and Cavell spring collection for 1938.

The Morris-Cowley high two-seater, which the curate buys himself to escape from north Oxford (*Crampton Hodnet*), is pictured in a catalogue from the 1930s.

The Kardomah café, which is a location in *Less Than Angels,* is not mentioned by name but we know from Pym herself that she was describing a particular branch she knew. The John Johnson collection includes copies of a Kardomah campaign between 1925 and 1935 to advertise their tea.

Jane says she'll go to Mowbray's and 'buy suitable books for confirmation presents and perhaps even […] get some Christmas cards in *really good time*' (*Jane and Prudence*): an image of the Oxford branch of Mowbray's is included in a souvenir booklet issued by the Randolph Hotel.

This small selection of literary and cultural sources held by the Bodleian enriches our understanding of Pym's allusions as well as giving a taste of the collections themselves, their depth and range.

Catriona Cannon *is Deputy Librarian and Keeper of Collections of the Bodleian Library. She is responsible for coordinating the Libraries' public engagement strategy and oversees the academic and public services of the Bodleian Libraries.*

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society Saturday 5 September 2015, 11.10 am

Committee members present: Michael Wilson (Chair), Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary), Lorraine Mepham (Secretary), Yvonne Cocking (Archivist), Alison Felstead, Jean Harker, Rose Little (Editor, *GL*), Linda McDougall, Sandra Margolies, Maggie Parsons (ALS Representative), Chris Rutherford, Tom Sopko (NA Organizer), Libby Tempest

1. **Apologies**: apologies were received from Kathy Ackley, Shirley Dex, Charles Gilbert, Hazel Holt, Iona Roberts, Christine Shuttleworth, Ruth Taylor and Alex Ward.
2. **Minutes of the previous AGM:** the minutes had been circulated, and were accepted without amendment. There were no matters arising.
3. **Chairman's remarks:** Michael began his annual report on a sombre note, as over the last year a number of distinguished Members and Supporters have died, in particular Michael Macke, who collapsed at last year's conference, and who will be very sorely missed. Michael had attended his funeral. He thanked those Members who did their best to help Michael when he was taken ill, and particularly Eileen Roberts, who acted as liaison between Michael's family and friends.

   In November 2014 we heard of the death of PD James. A great champion of Pym, she had been a conference speaker, and delivered the opening lecture at the Pym Centenary exhibition at the Bodleian. Another loss was Professor John Bayley; he too had been a conference speaker and had long been an enthusiastic Pym supporter. Michael also remembered other members who died over the last year – Daphne McCord, Mary Passande, Miss B Harris and Kelvin Carr. It was Kelvin who provided most of the sponsorship for our Short Story competition in 2013.

   The UK conference last August, although marred by Michael's collapse, was otherwise highly successful, on the theme of *A Glass of Blessings*, and included a showing of Linda McDougall's wonderful film, *We Knew Barbara*. Arthur Bostrom proved a hugely entertaining after-dinner speaker. In April St Hilda's hosted the Annual Book Crossing Convention, at which Clemence Schultze gave a well-received paper on Pym. At our Spring meeting in May, the Speaker was our own Rose Little, who delivered a paper on the friendship between the novelist Elizabeth Taylor and Barbara Pym, their correspondence and their similarities as novelists..

   Michael thanked Rose, who has just completed her first year as editor of Green Leaves, with the technical assistance of Judy Horn. Our members in the US have had another very successful year; Michael thanked Tom Sopko and the rest of the NA Board, and Tom for all that he does in maintaining our online presence.

   Finally Michael thanked all the members of the Committee, especially Christine Shuttleworth, Linda McDougall and Lorraine Mepham, all of whom are standing down from the Committee this year. Special thanks went to Christine Rutherford for her work as Membership Secretary, Libby Tempest in charge of sales, Yvonne Cocking, archivist and dramatist, and particularly to Eileen Roberts, without whose knowledge and dedication the Society would struggle to function.
4. **Financial and membership report**

   The UK account as of 31 July 2015 stands at £8085.37 (a decrease of £680.84 from this time last year). The 2014 conference and 2015 London meeting resulted in losses; attendances were down at both. Eileen also announced that an anonymous member had very generously donated £500 to the Society.

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UK membership stands at 165 paid-up UK members (including 13 joint members) and 6 European/Australian members, i.e. 171. There are also 30 Honorary or Life Members. There were 8 new members this year.

5. ***Green Leaves***
   Two issues of *GL* appeared (Autumn 2014, Spring 2015); the Autumn 2015 issue is on course. Rose thanked Christine Shuttleworth for her work in copyediting, and made a plea for members to send in conference photographs for *GL*.
6. **BPS in North America**
   Tom Sopko reported on NA matters, with a financial report by Jordan Bach. The NA Chapter has 235 paid members as of 1 August 2015, plus 64 who paid in 2014 but have not yet renewed, giving a total of 299, a decrease of 46 from one year ago, and including 32 new members. Cash in hand stands at $18,856 cash in hand as of 31 July 2015, an increase of $732 from last year.
   A capacity crowd of 103 members attended the 17th annual NA conference (featured book *Quartet in Autumn*). Synopses of the speakers' talks follow in this issue and have been posted in full on the BPS website. Next year's conference (11–13 March 2016, *Some Tame Gazelle*) will return to the original conference home, Austin Hall at Harvard Law School.
   This year the NA Chapter are launching the Ellen J Miller memorial essay competition, for undergraduate or graduate university students. [See 'Coming Events'.] The BPS website averages approximately 255 visits and 800 page views per week, and the BPS Facebook page has 1134 followers.
7. **Archivist's report**
   Yvonne Cocking had nothing to report.
8. **Elections:** Christine Shuttleworth's term as Ordinary Member has expired, and Linda McDougall, having served one term as Ordinary Member, is not standing for re-election. Two nominations for replacements have been received: Dee Bryan-Brown and Paul Howard; they were duly elected. Lorraine Mepham retires as Secretary; no replacement has yet been found.
9. **AOB:** Miriam Margolyes raised the question of declining UK membership of BPS, and suggested that everyone try to enrol one member over the course of the next year. This sparked a discussion in which various suggestions were made: to give membership of BPS as a gift; to leave BP bookmarks in second-hand bookshops; to share BP book covers on social media; add BPS details to your email signature.
   Clemence noted the death of Stephen Shell, a long-term member, in May 2015.
   Eleonore Biber announced that she will shortly give a talk on Elizabeth von Arnim in Cambridge; Barbara Pym was a big fan of von Arnim.
   Maggie Parsons is our ALS (Alliance of Literary Societies) representative. All BPS members are automatically members of ALS. The ALS AGM in 2016 will be at Howarth.
   The dates of next year's UK meetings were announced: Saturday 8 May in London, and 2-4 September at SHC, on the theme of *No Fond Return of Love*.

Meeting closed at 12.05pm.

The Spring Meeting Report

by Tanya Aydon

Sunday 17 May 2015: the Spring Meeting in London and one of the best days in the year for all Barbara Pym Society members!

Chancery Lane on the way to St Alban's Centre in Baldwin's Gardens in Holborn was a dusty mass of scaffolding. For a moment I felt like Mildred Lathbury observing London's damaged buildings after the war. And I was an Excellent Woman, going to join others …

'I always think *Nor What Soft Incense* would be a splendid title for a novel' – Mildred's remark came back to me as I arrived at the centre, for there was a distinct smell of incense coming from St Alban's Church next door, where members had been invited to attend High Mass earlier that morning. Now it was nearly lunchtime, and an array of delicious food was being laid out. It looked a great deal more appealing than some of the meals Barbara loved to describe with such telling detail: sandwiches with succulent chicken in lemon or curried mayonnaise, cucumber and salmon, tasty drumsticks and sausages, followed by some rather nice puddings and fruit. A very far cry from the disappointing experience of poor Mrs Grandison dragged into a cheap tea-shop by Lady Selvedge on the day of the bazaar when she had been hoping for something with *funghi* or sole in an exquisite sauce ...

Soon after 2pm, we settled into our seats. A few minutes of Pymmish hilarity while the loudspeaker system levels were tested to make sure we could all hear, and then Michael Wilson introduced the lecture.

Barbara Pym and Elizabeth Taylor: A Friendship in Letters was the title of the lecture to be given by Rose Little. She has spent the past two years reviewing Barbara Pym's letters in the Pym Archive of the Bodleian Library, particularly her correspondence with the author Elizabeth Taylor.

If anyone listening to the fascinating talk that followed was not already a fan of Elizabeth Taylor's novels and short stories it's likely they were converted by the end. Rose described how Barbara Pym was introduced to Elizabeth over tea at Fortnum's early in 1950, the year that Barbara's first novel *Some Tame Gazelle* was published. Elizabeth was already an established author of several novels, the first being *At Mrs Lippincote's* in 1945, the story of a disillusioned young wife so resigned to her lot that she does not care about her husband's trivial infidelities.

Their meeting in Fortnum's was the beginning of a friendship that lasted the rest of their lives. They exchanged letters, met for lunch or went together to occasional literary events and PEN, the writers' club. It was a surprising friendship; Elizabeth was a comfortably well-off wife and mother living in Buckinghamshire, a lifelong atheist with

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communist views; Barbara was unmarried and childless, worked at a demanding job and had a deeply-held religious faith. But writing wasn't the only thing they had in common. Both loved cats and clothes, with Elizabeth especially enjoying hats. In their letters they exchanged comments on these cosier matters as well as about inspiration and the difficulties they faced. They commiserated with each other about the lack of time for writing, although for each of them it was for different reasons.

To the accompaniment of relevant photographs on the screen, Rose very cleverly wove together extracts from their letters and novels, with Libby Tempest and Clemence Schultze acting as readers. The effect was to bring out the links between the two authors; the understated irony, the small, silent sadnesses and triumphs of life, the sly humour.

There are twelve novels and four volumes of short stories by Elizabeth Taylor, published today by Virago. *A View of the Harbour* and *In a Summer Season* are probably Rose's favourites, but with great skill she avoided giving away the plots of any of them, concentrating instead on how Elizabeth, like Barbara, 'made it her business to explore the quirky underside of so-called civilization' – as the American novelist Anne Tyler remarked.

Since Elizabeth Taylor wasn't subjected to a period in the literary wilderness we have more of her work than we do of Barbara Pym's, but she was never given the recognition during her life that might have been expected. Nor has she been given it in full measure since, despite various efforts by champions of her work. Nicola Beauman, the founder of Persephone Books, who published her highly readable biography of Elizabeth Taylor in 2009, says that her insistence on keeping out of the public eye might partly account for this. *The Other Elizabeth Taylor* offers a wealth of new and revealing information about a woman who kept her life and loves tightly secret, even destroying most of her papers in the last months before her death.

Barbara Pym is now acknowledged as an outstanding writer of human comedy. But humour is not the first thing that strikes readers of Elizabeth Taylor. I had always found those of her novels which I had read disconcertingly bleak and occasionally too angry in their depiction of loneliness, grief and failing relationships. Now I realized I'd been missing something: how incredibly funny she can be. One example cited by Rose which resonated strongly, is from *A View of the Harbour* where the novelist Beth is absorbed in writing a moving scene about a dying child. Her own child appears in the doorway, home from school. 'But with the dying child still on her mind, Beth could not bring herself to welcome this living one.'

In a letter dated 20th November 1975 Barbara Pym wrote to Philip Larkin: 'in *The Times* I saw that dear Elizabeth Taylor died yesterday.' Elizabeth, born in 1912, was only a year older than Barbara; Barbara herself was to die, also from cancer, less than five years later.

Questions after the lecture picked up on Ray Russell, the man with whom Elizabeth had an extra-marital affair; her letters to him still survive and are extensively quoted in Nicola Beauman's biography. Further comments centred around some interesting little details or incidents which appear in both authors' books, but just how much they shared or influenced each other cannot be known.

Angel, Elizabeth's novel about a novelist with a monstrous ego, came under discussion; it was suggested that this strange novel is not typical of her work and could almost be seen as something of a joke about what being an author can mean. Elizabeth wrote in letters how she was reduced to tears by some of the cruel reviews she received; Barbara knew what it was like to be rejected. It is likely the two of them gave each other a good deal of comfort over the whole sorry business of unkind critics and fickle publishers.

A vote of thanks was given by Alison Felstead for a truly inspiring lecture. On the train I imagined other members travelling home equally determined to sample more of Elizabeth Taylor's work. She might not be as wonderful as Barbara Pym, but she clearly has a touch of Hawaiian Fire.

'How I have loved reading your book!' Elizabeth Taylor and Barbara Pym: A Friendship in Letters

The Spring Meeting Paper

by Rose Little

'I hope a new era is opening up for us and that we might face it together.' So writes Elizabeth Taylor (1912–1975) to her friend, Barbara Pym, in 1952.

In January 1950 the two novelists were brought together by a mutual friend, Maud Geddes (née Eaton), after which they met often for lunch or to attend PEN meetings together.

On several occasions in the late 60s they visited Athens at the same time, attending gatherings at the home of their mutual friend, Robert Liddell. Their correspondence continued for nearly 20 years. Elizabeth's letters to Barbara, now in the Pym archive in the Bodleian Library, throw light on their work, their ideas about women's place in the world and their lives and personalities.

Rose Little with readers Clemence Schultze and Libby Tempest

Barbara must have spoken to her friend about her love for Henry Harvey because in her letter of July 1952 Elizabeth remarks that she is feeling 'flustered' about meeting him (she was about to undertake some lecturing for him on Ivy Compton-Burnett). It would be wonderful to have Elizabeth's thoughts on Henry, but she must have saved them all for a face-to-face talk with Barbara. It is equally frustrating that we do not have Barbara's side of the correspondence, either with

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Elizabeth, or with Robert. While working in the Bodleian, Robert had found hundreds of letters carefully preserved which had been marked 'burn' by their writers but this wish had evidently not been honoured. Elizabeth and Robert both agreed that the letters they received should be destroyed.

'Women, in the end, are always disappointed by men,' Maud observed (Nicola Beauman, *The Other Elizabeth Taylor*, p.188) and this fact is often illustrated in Elizabeth's and Barbara's novels. Both had had difficult personal relationships, and dealt with this pain through humour and irony. For example, Dulcie (*No Fond Return of Love*), who, according to Robert Smith and Hazel Holt, closely resembles Barbara herself, thinks that 'It seemed … so much safer and more comfortable to live in the lives of other people – to observe their joys and sorrows with detachment as if one were watching a film or a play'.

In Elizabeth's *A View of the Harbour,* Tory asks, why is society so organized that women live with men and accept their subservient role? '[Men] implant in us, foster in us, instincts which it is to their advantage for us to have, and which, in the end, we feel shame at not possessing.' Barbara is in agreement when, in *Some Tame Gazelle,* she has Belinda turn down a bishop and Harriet a count as they prefer to go on living with each other instead.

Both novelists are concerned with women in a post-war world and explore this in various ways. Their beliefs were very different, yet their concern for women taking their rightful place was identical. They also explore what it is that makes a relationship.

To take just one example from each: *In a Summer Season* portrays the passionate but problematic relationship between Kate and Dermott with their antipathetic cultures; in *Less than Angels* Barbara makes it clear shared interests are not necessarily significant – Catherine briskly dismisses Tom's plea that they had never really understood each other with: 'No, I suppose we didn't sit by the fire in the evenings doing fretwork or poring over our collections of butterflies.'

Elizabeth writes to Robert: 'I think loneliness is a theme running through many of my novels and short stories, the different ways in which individuals can be isolated from others' [Robert Liddell, *Elizabeth and Ivy* p.103].

Later on Elizabeth was fortunate to number Elizabeth Bowen and later still Elizabeth Jane Howard among her friends, but for a long time after the war, after her affair with Ray Russell ended, she lacked a close friend with whom to discuss her writing. Meanwhile, Barbara was in a better position, working with Hazel Holt at the Institute of African Studies. They spent many hilarious afternoons in breaks from work, inventing stories about the anthropologists there, and Barbara scribbled notes for novels on old galley proofs. Irony and laughter are never far away, even in the darker books of both novelists.

This is true also in Elizabeth's letters, for example when she jokes to Barbara about a serious problem – getting enough writing done. Apparently her latest novel, *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont*, is only 'moving slowly' due to her fondness for her grandchildren and especially since her husband John has retired (at 58) and is at home all the time. She also uses this situation in her novel, *A Wreath of Roses.*

Elizabeth's letters to Barbara are gentle and controlled with humorous touches, not outpourings of emotion but calm, with an informative, entertaining intent: testimony to a friendship important to both. They shared many things in their novels, but here we will let their cats have the last word –

From *A View of the Harbour*:

> The cats lay against [Prudence's] shoulder, their gentian eyes wide, their silken nostrils quivering a little at the hated outdoor air, the wind blowing their fur into little divisions.

And from *An Unsuitable Attachment*:

> [Sophia] decided to meditate on Faustina … various little scenes came into her mind so that she could almost smell her fresh furry smell and her warm sweet breath.

'Teabag' at St Hilda's Lodge

Indexing *Green Leaves*

by Hazel Bell

On becoming editor of *Green Leaves*, in 1999, I set about compiling an index to all its previous editions – volumes 1-5. I am a professional indexer (like Dulcie Mainwaring), and this is a great way for an editor to become familiar with what has been covered in a publication before, and by whom, when looking round for potential contributors. This first *Green Leaves* index was printed on the back page of *GL* Vol. 6 No. 1, May 2000.

Remaining editor of *GL* from 1999 to 2005, I continued to update the index regularly, for my own editorial benefit. Easy for the editor to index a newsletter, knowing the contents so well – and the indexing itself constitutes a useful extra proof-reading operation. And how fitting it is that the Barbara Pym Society newsletter should be indexed, in view of Pym's own indexing of the journal of the International African Institute (*see GL* Vol. 5 No. 2 pp 7-8: Holt, Hazel: `No thankless task: Barbara Pym as indexer').

But what a change in technology came about in those years! In 2001, Ellen Miller set up the BPS website. The *GL* index, by then cumulative, and extending to volume 9, was put on the website in 2003, and thereafter replaced as the entries for successive issues were added.

In November 2005 my term as editor of *GL* ended, with vol. 11 no. 2, and I stopped indexing it. Then, in July 2010, the

committee asked me to resume continuous updating of the cumulative index. Without the editorial familiarity with the contents, and with the newsletter so expanded, it became a more laborious task. But the index is indeed now complete to date, including the Spring 2015 issue.

As the index has grown, threatening to become unwieldy, I have selected entries in less close detail, omitting minor mentions. Originally I entered all sources of Pym Gleanings; now I select from that section only significant names and the most prestigious publications – the *Guardian, Spectator, TLS.*

Some index entries have been collated into lists: dramatizations of Pym's novels, and obituaries appear together under those headings, as well as under the novel titles and people's names. Book reviews at first appeared listed under that heading as well as individually under the authors and titles of books, but I gave up this duplicate entry system at Vol. 16 no. 2.

There were only three photographs in the first issue of *GL* that I edited, in 1999 – a rarity. At first I gave no special indication of photographs in the index; later, as many more were included, I gave italicized page references to indicate them; then placed such italicized references together at the end of people's entries, and also included a section headed 'Photographs' in which all these references were repeated, together. Now, overwhelmed by the sheer number of photographs in each *GL* issue, I no longer indicate them in the index. Those in volumes 1-18 remain indicated at the end of entries, but there have been no further additions.

There is much to be learned from a cumulative index besides the pages on which items appear, for example, what have been most featured. The longest entry in the index for an individual is Yvonne Cocking's, which runs to a full 10 inches, listing her reports as BPS Archivist, articles, books, conference talks, dramatizations and photographs. No other entries exceed half that length; from 4 to 5 inches long are entries for Hazel Bell, Hazel Holt, Philip Larkin, Ellen Miller, Oxford, radio and Clemence Schultze. For Pym's novels, *Less Than Angels* is in the lead at 4 inches; *Excellent Women* and *Some Tame Gazelle* each around 3 inches; *A Glass of Blessings* and *Jane and Prudence* each 2.5 inches; *The Sweet Dove Died*, 1.5 inches; *A Few Green Leaves* and *Quartet in Autumn*, one inch each.

The index to *Green Leaves* is now to be found, continuously updated, on the Newsletters and Archives page of the BPS website:

www.barbara-pym.org/Homepage.html

'A card index may be a noble thing', declares Edwin Pettigrew in *An Unsuitable Attachment.* What would he and his creator have thought of such a virtual, online, searchable index, one wonders?

Barbara on the Boards

by Hazel Bell

Enjoyment of Barbara Pym's novels and short stories has extended through the media beyond mere reading. The BBC broadcast radio dramatizations of *Some Tame Gazelle* (serialized in 1995), *No Fond Return of Love* (2000), *Excellent Women* (serialized in 2002) and *Jane and Prudence* (2013) – mostly adapted by Elizabeth Proud. Readings of the novels, dramatized by Yvonne Cocking (St Hilda's) or Tom Sopko (Boston) have become regular features of the BPS annual conferences. Initially these were listed on the Playwrights' site, doollee.com, where Pym has her own page, complete with photograph and biography:

www.doollee.com/PlaywrightsP/3PlaywrightsPdata.htm

This shows, as well as the first readings at the conferences, including a reading of Pym's unbroadcast radio play, *Parrot's Eggs,* in 2003, a performance of *Crampton Hodnet* **(**described as **'**The stirrings of suburban emotions in Victorian Gothic houses of North Oxford') by members of the Cathedral Library staff at Lincoln Cathedral Library in 2002, and of *No Fond Return of Love***,** adapted by Adrian Benjamin. This was produced in Chelsea in 1992, at the Man in the Moon Theatre, Australia, in 1994 and at All Saints Church, Whetstone, North London in 1988 and again in 1997 (reviewed in *Green Leaves* Vol. 4 No**.** 1, March 1998).

Now Pym's writings are to extend further into the world of musicals, as Joe Giuffre (lyrics) and Juan Iglesias (music) have written a musical based on *The Sweet Dove Died* called *The Mirror Never Lies*. A concert version was performed, free, last year in New York and Los Angeles – alas, unknown to the North American BPS.

This year, however, a performance will take place on Friday 27 November 2015 at RADA, 16 Chenies St, London WC1E 7EX. Tel.: 020 7307 5061. See Coming Events.

For a synopsis of *The Mirror Never Lies*, biographies with photographs of Giuffre, Iglesias and Pym, a list of the musical numbers and more besides, see:

www.themirrorneverlies.com

You can even listen there to the title song. Next stop Hollywood?

Kemp Hall

'*I'm beginning to enjoy my pose of romantically unrequited love. Jockie was in Kemp Hall …'*

by Tim Burnett

Down an alleyway, just off the High, this reliably classy Thai – quirkily housed in a very attractive, if crowded and noisy, Tudor building – remains an oasis in the Oxford desert'; thus *Harden's Restaurant Guide*. All of the above is true, except for the period of the building. There is, however, more to Chiang Mai than meets the eye, especially the eye of an admirer of Barbara Pym.

The 'Tudor' building is none other than Kemp Hall, built by Alderman William Boswell in his back garden in 1637, and said by the antiquary Anthony à Wood to be an early university hall named for John Kemp (1386–1454), Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal, and successively Chancellor of Normandy and of England under Henry V and Henry VI. This claim must surely refer to an earlier building

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on the same site. Kemp was a politician first, and hardly at all a bishop, but as a diplomat he worked for peace between England and France and was a faithful servant of Henry VI.

Rita Phillips by the fireplace at Chiang Mai

The present Kemp Hall is listed Grade II*, and has been described as 'one of the best preserved, least altered of the sub-medieval buildings in Oxford' despite having received a certain restoration in 1930. It is a timber-framed house with a long rectangular plan and faces east across a narrow passage. It has two storeys with cellars and an attic with five gables. The front doorway is framed in wood with a four-centred arch in the spandrels of which is the date '1637'. Over it is an elaborate hood with carved pendants. The interior has a magnificent carved staircase and many of the original doorways and fireplaces — enough architectural splendour to distract anyone from their *tom yum po thek*.

Chiang Mai

Ann & Dan diPietro at Chiang Mai

In 1870 Kemp Hall was altered for use as a police station, and after the police moved out into purpose-built premises in 1897, it was occupied from 1906 to 1925 by the Kemp Hall Press. In 1928 Mrs Daisy Hoare opened her tearooms in the building. By 1947 it had become an 'Anglo-Chinese' restaurant and by 1962 it was an Indian one called the Moti Mahal. In 1966 André Chavignon opened La Sorbonne here, his chef in the early days being none other than Raymond Blanc, now proprietor of the Manoir au Quat' Saisons. La Sorbonne closed in the early 1990s, and the Chiang Mai was set up in 1993.

What is important to us, however, is that the Kemp Hall tearooms were a favourite haunt of the undergraduate Barbara Pym and her friends, and a setting for her complicated love life. In her diary entry for 3 October 1933 she writes: 'this morning lunched off steak and kidney pie at Kemp Hall cafeteria. Jockie Liddell came in, wearing a grey suit and navy blue overcoat. He gave me a poisonous look, but I didn't mind.' Only two days later she writes: 'I'm beginning to enjoy my pose of romantically unrequited love. Jockie was in Kemp Hall. I had no tea, and supper in Kemp Hall with Rosemary '. On 24 January 1934 she writes: 'An exciting thick fog in the evening – Sharp and I took the opportunity to sleuth round the Bodleian. I had all the luck. I followed Lorenzo to Balliol – then Jockie down the snicket and we all of us met at Kemp Hall. Poisonous looks from Jockie, and amused ones from Lorenzo.'

After coming down from Oxford, Barbara found herself back there again in November 1935, surrounded by 'strange young faces'. But some things were still familiar. On 2 December she writes: 'After tea with Hilary today at Elliston's we went on to Martin Watkin's sherry party at 99 Botley Road ... There was nobody I passionately wanted to know. After it we had some food at Kemp Hall Cafeteria and then I called at 30 Banbury Road to see Mr Barnicot'.

Towards the very end of her life, when her cancer had recurred, Barbara is found in the Kemp Hall Cafeteria again. On 29 August 1979 she writes: 'I went to the clinic and they have decided to take me off the thiotepa ... They have lots of other things they can try, [the doctor] said. We had lunch at Quills in Oxford in the rather hushed, net curtained atmosphere (the restaurant used to be the Kemp Hall Cafeteria, scotch eggs, etc).'

The name 'Quills' is at first sight something of a mystery but thanks to Stephanie Jenkins, creator of excellent websites about Oxford streets, all is made clear. In 1934 the Kemp Hall Cafeteria relinquished the building but not the name, moving to Boswell House in Broad Street where it remained until 1964, being known as The Kemp. According to an advertisement placed in Kelly's Directory by the 'Proprietress Miss Ruth Adams':

Quills later occupied the same building, but apparently did not last very long. There is still a cafe upstairs.

Nowadays lovers of Thai food, architectural history, and Barbara Pym – not necessarily in that order – would be well advised to make their way to the original Kemp Hall at 130A High Street.

BPS merchandise makes splendid holiday gifts!
Visit
www.barbara-pym.org/Merchandise_main.html
to see our excellent selection.

Barbara Pym: a Passionate Force
by Ann Allestree (Book Guild Publishing, 2015)

by Maggie Lane

Rather than researching in dusty archives, as many a Pym character does so memorably, Ann Allestree (pen name of Penelope Ann Craig) shares Barbara's own preference for following her quarry on the ground. Consequently much of this book consists of describing visits to places associated with the novelist – many of them inevitably much changed in fifty years. Such descriptions are certainly not without interest, but they make for an intellectually flimsy account of Barbara Pym's life.

Any excuse to revisit the world of Barbara Pym must be welcome, but admirers who have read Hazel Holt's magisterial biography will learn little new, while those to whom the life story is unfamiliar will soon find themselves becoming confused. This is because Allestree adopts a largely thematic approach to her material with individual chapters on, for example, boyfriends, or on churches, in which we find ourselves whisked almost from one end of Barbara's life to the other in a few paragraphs. Worse still, the chapter 'Gorgeous Gordon' comes before a more general look at romantic attachments, so that having read about Barbara's love interest of 1942, we begin the next chapter in 1937. Even more disconcerting, several chapters later Allestree forgets about the Gordon episode altogether and suggests that from being a stay-at-home daughter, Barbara went straight into the Wrens in 1941. There is nothing wrong with thematic chapters *per se,* and the approach was probably chosen to distinguish this book from others, but for the reader's peace of mind, it would have been better to establish a stable chronology first.

As an example of the lack of authorial clarity which suffuses the text, she refers several times with inappropriate familiarity to 'Jay' before giving him his proper name, Julian Amery. The Coppice is *not* in 'Clifton, a pretty suburb of Bristol' but in Leigh Woods, on the other side of the Suspension Bridge. (This is no doubt why she fails to find and describe it, one of her few omissions of important Pym places.) There is a reference on page 5 to 'Barbara's young Bahamian admirer' (Richard Roberts) and his effect on *The Sweet Dove Died*, but he is not named until p. 33 and therefore the earlier reference is not picked up in the Index.

That the book makes no pretence to being scholarly is evidenced from the complete lack of source notes, so no assertions can be checked or followed up. The bibliography is extensive, though – perhaps to pad it out – it contains some oddities such as GASCOIGNE, Bamber, *Encyclopedia of Britain.* Contrary to usual practice, in the selfsame alphabetical sequence THE BRITISH LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE University Library and CORNHILL Magazine appear without amplification, typographically just as I have represented them here. I suspect from this and other evidence that the author has had no professional editor to guide her.

I could quote many a sentence which makes little sense, and her vocabulary is eccentric – she writes 'discomforted' when she means 'discomfited', 'transmitted' when she means 'transmuted', and entitles one chapter 'Encounters Encore' when she surely means 'Encounters Galore'. And on the subject of titles, what is the subtitle of the book supposed to signify? It seems designed to hook in book-buyers rather than to say anything meaningful about Barbara Pym.

For all its faults, this is evidently a book that its author enjoyed writing over many years, and it would be churlish not to enjoy reading it – even as one groans. But this is not the best introduction to Pym for a novice.

Castle dungeon

Gleanings

compiled by Yvonne Cocking

In *The Writer's Almanac* (Minnesota Public Radio) for 2 June, Barbara is remembered on her birthday as 'the author of comic novels about English upper-middle-class life'.

There was a long article ('Lecherous. Racist. But my friend Larkin deserves his spot in Poets' Corner') by A N Wilson in the *Daily Mail* on 20 June. Wilson recalls his friendship with Larkin, who exhibited signs of racism and bawdiness, but who could also be amusing and self-deprecating. After a TV programme which played a recording of Larkin and Monica Jones 'singing a ditty ... calling for black people to be thrown out of Britain' Wilson asked:

> Could this be the same amusing and gentle man who had sat in my house trying to make polite conversation with my children, and who spoke to my wife, a literature don, about their shared passion for the novels of Barbara Pym?

Rachel Cooke in the *Guardian*, 3 July, wrote about 'The 10 best ... spinsters', one of whom was – guess who?

> Barbara Pym, clever, witty and frequently underrated as a writer, often fell for unsuitable (gay) men, but she never married, living instead with her sister Hilary in a succession of London flats and then in an Oxfordshire cottage. As the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography records, together 'they passed much time in parish work and keen social observations'. Her novels ... reflect this life to a degree. But they are more subversive than they seem. Her 'excellent women' would rather remain spinsters than submit to the limitations imposed by pompous husbands.

Writing of Harper Lee's new book In the *NY Times* on 10 July, the reviewer comments:

> Though it lacks the lyricism of *Mockingbird*, the portions of *Watchman* dealing with Scout's childhood and her adult romance with Henry capture the daily rhythms of life in a small town and are peppered with portraits of minor characters whose circumscribed lives can feel like Barbara Pym salted with some down-home American humor.

and in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 16 July, Victoria Patterson has an article entitled 'A Nice Hobby, Like Knitting':

> I became interested in English author Barbara Pym after the author Michelle Huneven told me about a sock-darning scene in Pym's first novel *Some Tame Gazelle*, which, Huneven claimed, was 'sexier than most explicit sex scenes'. The heroine, Belinda, has been in love with the archdeacon since college, but he married a woman with

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better connections. Belinda lives with her sister near his church, and when his wife goes out of town the archdeacon seeks out their company. Noticing a hole in his sock, Belinda offers to darn it, and does so while the archdeacon is still wearing it – his foot on her lap ... it's the most intimate she's ever been with him, and afterwards it takes her a while to cool down.

Two items of Pymmery surfaced in the Angela Thirkell Society of North America's summer newsletter. Kate Macdonald asks:

> Are there authors in the genre that Thirkell readers might not know about but you think they might enjoy?

and answers

> Only the usual suspects that [we] already know: Barbara Pym would be the main one.

The other is by Victoria Best in her article *The World of Angela Thirkell*:

> She has been compared to Barbara Pym, but Pym had a great deal more to say, of a sharply insightful nature, about loneliness.

The Scotsman of 12 September carried a review of Alexander McCall Smith's latest, *The Woman who Walked in Sunshine*, which the reviewer David Robinson thought

> owes almost nothing to noir but an awful lot to the rather wise social comedies of Barbara Pym. Like Pym, McCall Smith believes that the small stuff in life matters ...

Last, and least too perhaps, an extract from Penelope Lively's *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* (2013):

> Sixty years or so of fiction reading now, for me. A torrent of story poured in, much of it forgotten entirely, a good deal half remembered, some so significant that I go back again and again. I have had fitful relationships with some writers ... I can't abide Barbara Pym – enjoyed her once.

Thanks for their contributions to Moyra Forrest, Sandra Goldstein, Sheila Kane, Norma Munson, Christine Shuttleworth, Tom Sopko and Libby Tempest.

Libby's birthday

A North Oxford Sunday afternoon Tea Party – Stateside

by Judy Pollard Smith

The Barbara Pym book club, which meets at the Westdale Library in Hamilton, Ontario, had a fun evening in early June at the home of a Pym Society member, Judy Pollard Smith, and Revd John Smith.

It was too chilly to sit out on the back porch, which was festooned with Union Jack bunting and pots of peonies, but lots of fun was had inside. We tried to do a mock-up of a 'North Oxford Sunday afternoon tea party'. It was not raining and there was no dripping monkey puzzle tree, but we did the best we could considering that it wasn't even a Sunday.

Two of the members came dressed as Pym characters with hats flowing with flowers (rather than stuffed birds' bodies) and gloves. We weren't sure who they were meant to be but they looked pretty much like so many of the women who represent those 'chinless aristocrats' in Pym's novels perhaps, except both of them have chins.

Photo by Jennie Dunlop

Judy put out a few Pymmish things in her house beforehand: the *Book of Common Prayer* and on top of it the *Hymns Ancient And Modern*, a plant that she was babysitting for a neighbour was labelled as 'an aspidistra', a slice of Stilton cheese, some Carr's biscuits, cheddar cheese, HobNobs, grapes and pots of tea. June and Roger Baxter, also members of The Barbara Pym Society of North America, baked a Victoria sponge. Had it been a village fete it would have won for 'Best Cake.'

There were eleven of us at the party with our tea and Stilton. We laughed a lot. None of us knew one another before we started meeting to discuss Pym's books three years ago. We meet only twice yearly so that we can make her books last longer. When we have read them all we'll be adrift on a sea of missing her. If only she knew! Our next meeting is on October 28th when we will discuss *No Fond Return of Love.*

Those of us who attend the Pym Reading Circle have many shining ribbons that weave together the common elements in our lives. Pym-lovers are not to be found everywhere but when they do meet, the friendships stick.

Chairman's Chat

by Michael Wilson

I have just finished a novel by Robert Liddell, *The Last Enchantments*, first published in 1948. Liddell was a great friend of Barbara's in her student days at Oxford and they corresponded until the end of her life. She fictionalised him in *Some Tame Gazelle* as Dr Nicholas Parnell. Like many of Barbara's novels the book is set in North Oxford, though he calls Oxford 'Christminster', as Thomas Hardy did in *Jude the Obscure*, and the landscape is very Pymmian, though several shades darker. Liddell also turned to a poet for his title, which is taken from Matthew Arnold's description of Oxford ('Steeped in sentiment … she lies, spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the last

enchantments of the Middle Age'), and I was struck by how many Pym names cropped up, such as Shrubsole, Crampton, Denton and Barnicot.

I enjoyed the humour and the characters. One, a grotesque skinflint, will stay in my memory longer than I would wish: he serves guests stale milk and cakes, and tries to lure a young man into going on holiday with him with the promise they would share a whole bottle of Vichy water.

The book ends at the outbreak of the Second World War, as large numbers of refugees arrive from Europe. A clergyman's wife finds it thrilling, 'The Jews, my dear! the Poles, my dear!' But the narrator's cleaner takes the opposite view, 'The neighbourhood has gone down so, with these foreigners, sir.' The narrator comments, 'Of course they are both right, and it is all very difficult. One would like the good and learned from all over the world to come to Christminster, but if they come in too large numbers, and stay too long, then it will no longer be quite the same Christminster to which they have come.'

These are thoughts for our time too, as they were for Robert Liddell, when he – based in North Africa – wrote about Christminster responding to distressing events abroad.

Phil Bacon & Maggie Parsons

Ann diPietro's dog, Oberon

Stephen Arthur Shell 1930–2015

by Clemence Schultze

Stephen Shell died in May, after a long illness during which he was nursed devotedly by his wife Jean, supported by family, friends, and fellow church members. He lived to the full a life which might to some seem fairly uneventful, but yet was filled with quiet doings, with work performed with his whole heart, with family activities so planned and cherished that his two daughters and his son all remember a childhood of extraordinary richness, and with numerous concerns and pursuits to which he gave time and whole-hearted care.

One of these was the BPS, where he was well known to all as a constant and committed member. Many of us will remember him taking part in the dramatizations, throwing himself into his role with intense enjoyment. He was a keen participant in discussions, he always had a perceptive question or offered a fresh insight into any topic; the scope of his information was enormous.

London born and bred, Stephen did National Service in the Education Corps. He then took up a scholarship at Lincoln College Oxford to read History. He was a good athlete, with a half-Blue in running, and was actually a member of the same team as Roger Bannister. In his career as a teacher, he worked particularly in schools where the children came from disadvantaged and deprived backgrounds, and he put every effort into giving them consistent and faithful support.

Stephen was a devoted reader, and belonged to several literary societies, including that for Charlotte M. Yonge (an author also much loved by Barbara Pym). As a poet himself – for he wrote well over a thousand poems – the poetry of Edward Thomas was one of his chief enthusiasms. Always a lover of music, Stephen in retirement took up singing. He had a deep appreciation of the particularity of things, both natural and man-made: sharing the beauty of a leaf or a pebble, investigating with intellectual rigour the purport of a poem. Above all he cherished the individuality of all those with whom he came into contact.

Stephen's faith sustained him throughout a life for which he felt wonder and gratitude, as expressed in the last line of the 'Evening Hymn' by the 17th-century bishop William Fuller, which was played at his funeral:

'Then to thy rest, O my soul; and, singing, praise the mercy that surrounds thy days.'

Catriona, Clemence, Eileen & Martin

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Rambling Rose *by Rose Little*

Not having a telephone of our own in the 50s, I was fascinated by my grandmother's heavy black Bakelite instrument and I can still hear her contralto voice intoning, 'Ladbroke 1436?'

But we didn't understand that, intrusive and inconvenient, a phone call can come at the wrong moment. In *A Glass of Blessings* Piers phones Wilmet just before guests are expected for dinner and is put out when she can't see him.

Although written arrangements were *de rigueur* (viz. letters and postcards to Barbara in the Pym archive), in Pym novels the telephone is equally important, and in *Excellent Women* Mildred reprimands Everard when he embarrassingly waylays her: 'Why didn't you write or telephone then?' But when later she does get a phone call, Mildred is hesitant – she 'lifted the receiver warily … wondering whose voice would come out of it and what it would ask [her] to do.'

My father constructed a pair of receiver/speakers with a long cord between them running down the length of our upstairs corridor and my sister and I were delighted with this new game. What would Barbara have thought of the mobile, which allows us to call our friends in China from a Cumbrian fell?

But after all, perhaps she would have disapproved. 'Mrs Williton had a deep mistrust and fear of the telephone, which she would use only in the gravest emergency', while Mildred comes away from her unsatisfactory call reflecting 'that the telephone ought never to be used except for the transactions of business.'

Jane hopes to allay her fears by phoning Prudence in London, but when she gets no reply this fuels her anxiety. Meanwhile, Prudence has had a cheering phone call from Geoffrey, inviting her out to dinner.

In her Journal on 5 June 1966, Barbara notes Henry Harvey's Athens phone number when she is on holiday in Greece (and he is working there) and she records her subsequent outings with him to 'Chalkis, Vilia and Porto Yermino'. I think we can take it she thought the advantages outweighed the disadvantages!

The Barbara Pym Society 2015–2016

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Coming Events

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

The Mirror Never Lies

One performance of this show, based on *The Sweet Dove Died* (book and lyrics Joe Giuffre, composer Juan Iglesias), will take place on Friday 27 November 2015 at RADA, 16 Chenies St, London WC1E 7EX. Tel.: 020 7307 5061. (Note venue and date have been changed recently and are not as advertised in the spring issue of GL). This is not a full-scale production but a performance with 7 actors, pianist and film clips and is the beginning of what we hope will go forward in the future into a commercial production.

2016 North American Conference

11–13 March 2016
Some Tame Gazelle

The North American conference is returning to Austin Hall at Harvard Law School, where the first North American conferences were held from 1999 to 2008. The conference room can hold up to 200 people, so there will be room for everyone. We will announce the program and open registration the first week in December at which time we will inform the membership by email or letter.

Spring Meeting in London

8 May 2016, St Alban's Centre, Holborn:
The Excellent Women's Excellent Women
Speaker: Chris Jenkins (*Freelance Researcher)*

2016 Annual General Meeting & Conference

2–4 September 2016
St Hilda's College, Oxford
No Fond Return of Love
Call for Papers

The Committee is seeking speakers for the conference on the theme of *No Fond Return of Love.* Send an abstract of 150-250 words, accompanied by brief biographical details to: barbarapymsociety@gmail.com by Monday 4 January 2016, with the subject heading '2016 Oxford Conference Proposal'.

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Colin Oxenforth & Paul Howard

Anita Chibb & Deb Fisher

South Hall

Jutta Schiller & Eleonore Biber

Paul, Triona, Tom & Isabel at the quiz

Dinner overlooked by portraits

Pym Players

Audience in JdP Hall

Lorraine Mepham & Rose Little

Lunch fruit course

Gloria Nakamura

Yvonne Cocking & Michael Wilson

Christopher Nankivell & Deb Fisher

Elisabeth Carlson & Margot Schnorr

Alison Felstead & Diane Packam

Miriam, Deirdre, Triona, Clemence

Lorraine Mepham & Ros Cleal, quiz-mistresses

Eleonore Biber & Phil Bacon

Thank you very much to Jutta Schiller, Chris Rutherford, Maggie Parsons and Keith Armstrong for their excellent photographs in this issue.

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