Green Leaves

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society **Vol. XXIII, No. 1, Spring 2017**

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

Report on the North American Conference, Cambridge MA, 18-19 March 2017

by Laura Shapiro

'If it says six o'clock on the invitation cards you can be sure that my colleagues will arrive at that time', observes Professor Mainwaring, and one hopes he would have been gratified to see members of the Barbara Pym Society hastening along Boston's snow-lined sidewalks on Friday night in search of Brimmer Street, where dinner and an organ concert at Church of the Advent marked the first event of the 2017 North American Conference.

This year's book was *Less Than Angels*, set in the world of 1950s anthropologists; and suitably enough we were greeted by an open bar, widely recognized as a key ritual of hospitality, practiced in social organizations both primitive and otherwise. Another important ceremony, the distribution of nametags with nice clear print, made possible a great many happy reunions among returning Pym devotees. Thanks to nametags, moreover, it was also easy to find and welcome the newcomers. Dinner was ecumenical – salmon, beef and ravioli, vegetarian, non-vegetarian, gluten-rich and gluten-free. It was a particular pleasure to recognize what has become a Friday night classic: cauliflower cheese complete with green-grape caterpillars, an inspired homage to *Some Tame Gazelle*.

The next morning we gathered in Austin Hall, a spacious venue on the Harvard Law School campus that the Society re-inaugurated very successfully last year. Once again there were a few struggles with the individual high-tech microphones, but they worked splendidly whenever we remembered to use them. After a welcome by Tom Sopko, who noted that our group of 114 included 23 first-timers, Kathy Ackley introduced the speakers and ran the proceedings.

We began with a video documentary by Linda McDougall, 'The Geography of *Less Than Angels*', and there couldn't have been a better way to launch an exploration of Pym's fourth novel. The film opens with wonderfully evocative British newsreel and TV footage from 1955, the year *LTA* was published, and then guides us through the city and suburban neighborhoods where most of the novel takes place. Those who have seen Linda's previous documentary work on Pym know that she's a tireless journalist willing to chase down her quarry until there's nowhere to hide; just as important, she asks probing questions and gives her subjects ample time to speak their minds.

Here she interviews David Shankland, director of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and André Singer, president of the RAI, both of whom agree that *LTA* accurately evokes its midcentury moment in the history of anthropology as a discipline. Dr Shankland remarked that Father Gemini's grab of the Foresight funds was highly characteristic of the early professional rivalry between missionaries and academics, and Dr. Singer likened the book to Evelyn Waugh, or 'a more serious version of P G Wodehouse.' Pym would have been delighted.

Following the film there was quite a bit of animated discussion, much of it centered on Pym's own gift as an anthropologist, though one who was strictly focused on the world around her. Africa didn't really interest her, despite the fact that she worked for decades as an editor at the International African Institute. What she loved was observing the behavior of passionate, single-minded scholars for whom Africa was an entrancing life's work, especially once they had been 'in the field' and could use their copious notes as weaponry in academic battles. Most of all she loved the arcane details she could extract from all the ethnographic literature she was editing, footnoting, proofreading and finally shelving. 'She was endlessly fascinated by the word "hyena,"' Linda remarked; and perhaps that says it all.

Three papers were given on Saturday – by Joan Vredenburgh, Gabriele Caras and Nick Turner – and on Sunday morning Tim Burnett spoke. All four papers are summarized following this report. The discussions, as always, were lively and wide-ranging: we grappled with *LTA* from

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every conceivable perspective and bounced into many of the other novels as well. For most of us, I suspect, these conferences are the only chance we get in the course of a year to ponder and dissect and argue about these books as much as we could possibly want.

Austin Hall

During the sessions and throughout the meals and tea breaks, we got to analyze Tom, Deirdre and Catherine in detail; we talked about the ending of *LTA* and Pym's struggles generally with endings; we considered Pym's relation to Catherine as a writer, and the humanity with which Pym handled all her characters even while satirizing them; and we gasped (at least I did) to hear that some in the room did not consider *LTA* one of their favorite Pym novels. Tim's paper on adverbs and adverbial phrases prompted an especially rapturous outpouring – clearly people adored this once-in-a-lifetime chance to analyze such classic Pym locutions as 'wildly', 'obscurely' and "'I *must* learn to enjoy drinking, she thought rather desperately ... '"

Flowers by Tom

Saturday night's dinner, held in a large if sterile room in Wasserstein Hall, drew a fair amount of criticism on account of the food. Admittedly it was both expensive and lackluster; on the other hand, in Cambridge you're never just paying for food, beer and wine, you're also paying for real estate – in our case, specifically, a quiet room near public transportation on a Saturday night. Choices are few.

Sunday brought a return of the Mighty Pym Players, this year with Dan DiPietro as impresario in charge of dramatizing excerpts from the novel. He selected six mealtime episodes and created 'Dining with Miss Pym', performed by an excellent cast of nine. He also offered a prologue – three more scenes, which he added because he was plagued with guilt over how many characters he had been forced to leave out. Once he had given these characters their due, they quit tormenting him and retreated to their home in the novel like restless spirits finally appeased.

The Conference concluded with the traditional group singalong of the Society's anthem 'Unsuitable Things', greatly assisted by Rita Phillips's fine, strong voice and Tom Sopko's adroit signals guiding the pitch.

The Geography of *Less Than Angels*

by Linda McDougall

The Geography of *Less Than Angels*', a 22-minute video, used YouTube clips to set the novel in context in the year of its publication, 1955. The heart of the video was the interview with Britain's two leading anthropologists, André Singer, the Chair of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and the Director of the Institute, Dr David Shankland.

David Shankland:

I thought it was a marvellous book. There's no other word for it. It gives one such a wonderful insight into the way that the Institute probably was working in pre-modern times, but it also captures something else – the flavour of academic anthropology before it became fully modernized and finally established into the universities. So yes, I enjoyed it enormously.

Anthropology in the course of the twentieth century slowly discovered an emphasis on fieldwork. It was very small and it wasn't well established in the universities, and so the few students who used to study it were very intense. They felt that they were a small, select group that nobody else could properly understand, and they would go out and spend a long time doing fieldwork somewhere, certainly a year, maybe two years, maybe three years.

They were often working on very specific problems, such as kinship or social struggle or ritual, and that meant that there was a kind of *esprit de corps* among them. They didn't have large departments of anthropologists they could work with.

There wasn't very much money. Much of the book, as you will remember, is about raising funds for fieldwork. Although of course it is always difficult to raise money there are many departments, well resourced now, for anthropological research. In those days there weren't. And the Royal Anthropological Institute loomed large in those days simply

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for that reason, and so the Institute remained a focal point for anthropology.

André Singer:

With studying anthropology you do a lot of book work initially. You read a lot. I was in a department that dealt solely with Africa at that time. They were all working in the Sudan and in Central Africa. You do your book research and then you get a true feeling of what you are going to do your doctorate in.

Anthropology between the wars, but very much after the wars, became a subject where anthropologists had to decide they were going to immerse themselves in another culture in order to interpret it from within.

In my case it wasn't Africa. I ended up going to Iran, which was slightly a detour for the department I came from. But a lot of my contemporaries did field work in Africa. At that time it wasn't really fieldwork: it was field trips, immersive study, and Tom and others in the book did exactly that. They spent a long time gathering material and then they came back to write it up, do their thesis and then present their thesis, and then they said, I'm now an anthropologist.

Now the subject matter has changed. I think the core essence of anthropology is still the idea that you can only understand other people – their communities, their societies – by immersing yourself inside that culture, so the essence of anthropology today is still fieldwork. That fieldwork doesn't have to be an African tribe any more. You don't have to go and get your masks and wiggle your sticks. You can do it in a factory in Birmingham or you could do it at the House of Commons. You could do it in any community where you can find boundaries that give you an entry point, and you are trying to understand it through the eyes of the participants and people who live there in the community.

If you would like to view the complete video presentation, email Linda McDougall, lmmcdougall@btinternet.com

Linda McDougall *worked as a producer/director for both Granada Television's World in Action and Thames Television's This Week and TV Eye for two decades, twice winning the Royal Television Society Award for best documentary. In recent years, apart from making documentaries and current affairs programmes, she has been travelling around the UK to interview Hazel Holt, Richard 'Skipper' Roberts, Frances Atkin and others about their memories of Barbara.*

Less Than Angels or An Unsuitable Detachment

by Joan Vredenburgh

In *Less Than Angels*, Barbara Pym uses some form of the word detached twenty times – I counted! While acknowledging that detachment is important for writers and anthropologists, Pym examines the real benefits of human attachments. At the same time, she illustrates how complete or near-complete detachment leads to isolation and a real or figurative death.

Vanessa Eaves and Deirdre Swan are two characters who, despite their words and ambitions, cannot maintain a suitable detachment from people and circumstances. Through Vanessa, Pym shows us someone who, despite her desires to be an anthropologist, seems more intent upon pairing up with someone, such as her Ethiopian boyfriend, or flirting with Professor Mainwaring. Deirdre is of course the clearest example of someone who claims that she wants to detach from everything and everyone, especially her conventional upbringing and family. Yet we see several examples wherein Deirdre struggles with detaching from the expectations with which she was brought up – she can't quite view churches as specimens for anthropological study, and being alone with a man in his bedroom makes her very uneasy. In her interactions with Tom and finally Digby, we see that she is actually more intent on finding someone with whom she can establish a more suitable and permanent relationship. With Digby, she is assured of the attachment that she has been brought up to expect – marriage and possibly children.

Alaric Lydgate and Catherine Oliphant are two characters who professionally benefit from being detached, but detachment in their personal lives causes them much unhappiness. Alaric uses his mask, unwritten field notes, and his hedges to separate himself from others. Yet it becomes clear that he is unhappy and he begins to tentatively respond to some overtures from the Swans and of course Catherine. In making a connection with Catherine, Alaric realizes that he no longer has to hide behind his mask or prickly personality. In the scene where he burns his notes, Alaric dismantles a significant barrier that has kept him separate and unable to form more lasting relationships. In turning to Catherine, we see someone who professionally benefits from her detachment, as she uses her observational skills to write successful short stories. Yet despite living with Tom, she too is unhappy because of her detachment. She has no child, family, or truly significant relationship. After the break-up with Tom, Catherine realizes how her detachment has left her basically alone. She becomes interested in Alaric, and rather forthrightly pursues the connection with him. The ending of the novel, with both Alaric and Catherine in the garden, illustrates two formerly isolated people with the possibility of a more suitable attachment.

Mark Penfold and Tom Mallow illustrate the harm that can come to those who want to remain detached in both their personal lives as well as professional undertakings. Mark is a minor character, who, despite his apparent friendship with Digby, is cold and selfish. He is so detached that he views people in terms of how useful they will be to him – Catherine will provide meals, and his girlfriend and future wife will provide money and a job. He delights in others' misfortunes, and upon the news of Tom's death, his coldness actually causes Catherine to cry. Indeed Mark even blames Tom for getting himself killed. Of course, Tom is the clearest example of the dangers that await the permanently detached character.

Throughout the novel, while his detachment has been the basis of much of his success in anthropology, it has harmed his personal relationships. He separates himself from everything and everyone who has meant anything to him – his family, his home, Elaine, Catherine, Deirdre, and ultimately England. While he makes some half-hearted attempts to reattach, most notably when he goes back to Shropshire, he is unable to do so and must completely separate himself from all that he has known. His detachment is so complete, he literally becomes unrecognizable in Africa and is killed. All that remains of him are some unwritten field notes, an unfinished letter, and a simple memorial upon the wall in his village.

Detachment in this novel is both useful and dangerous. In the course of the novel, Pym makes clear that those characters who seek more significant attachments have the potential for growth and happiness. Those who insist on remaining detached are doomed to lifeless relationships or ultimately death.

Dr. Joan R. Vredenburgh *has been teaching at the college level for the past 27 years. Since 2006, she has been teaching composition at the Naval Academy Preparatory School in Newport, Rhode Island. She has been a presenter at several Jane Austen Society of North America AGMs and her most recent publication, 'Of Sailors and Soldiers', can be found in the Jan/Feb 2014 edition of Jane Austen's Regency World magazine.*

Various Positions: Oliphant, Mallow, Lydgate, and Pym, on Writing

by Gabriele Caras

In a talk given some months after the publication of *Less Than Angels*, Barbara Pym remarked, 'Even when a novel isn't obviously autobiographical, one can learn a good deal about a novelist from his works, for he can hardly avoid putting something of himself into his creations'. This is equally true of Pym and her creations. By considering writing as it is depicted in her novels and stories, we can discover some of Pym's own values as a writer and beliefs about literature.

My title seems to weigh two authors of fiction, Barbara Pym and Catherine Oliphant, against two academics, Tom Mallow and Alaric Lydgate. However, though *Less Than Angels* raises the question of how form and audience influence what a writer produces, this is soon complicated by other, more nuanced considerations, such as the importance of imagination. Is it true, as Ianthe says in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, that imagination gives novelists the advantage over anthropologists? Or are novelists 'just as bad' – repetitive, unoriginal, and dull?

Pym's anthropologists appear to derive no pleasure or profit from their work. In public, Alaric brags, 'One doesn't look for enjoyment in our field', but when he is alone in his house, the Damoclean piles of field notes in the attic burden him with unshakable feelings of failure. Though Tom manages to produce a 497-page thesis, along the way he loses confidence in the value and purpose of his work – and never recovers it. Tom and Alaric are either unwilling or unable to create something in which they really believe. (No, the caustic reviews, which have more in common with Rhoda's letter to the Electricity Board than anything else, don't count.) The unhappiness and uncertainty these characters face attest to the importance Pym placed on taking pleasure and having faith in one's work: without these, writing becomes an unfulfilling exercise and burden.

Nevertheless, Pym is not rejecting an entire genre of writing. Gertrude Lydgate and Father Gemini are figures of fun, but they show that even the most unlikely topic can be a source of excitement, passion, and intrigue. Nor does Pym consider the writing of fiction to be an inherently nobler pursuit. In Pym's short story, *The Pilgrimage*, a popular novelist, Gabriel Langbaine, turns out to be more interested in income tax than art. Adam Marsh-Gibbon, the 'philosophical novelist' of *Civil to Strangers*, works on a book whose single character is nothing more than a reluctant mouthpiece for Adam's own convoluted ideas about Wordsworth. Simply considering oneself to be an artist rather than an academic does not immediately draw one any closer to the human spirit novelists are reputed to capture.

Catherine Oliphant is a fictional character making her living as a writer at the same time and in the same place as the woman who created her. However, rather than read her as an embodiment of Pym, as some critics have, I find that their differences tease out some of Pym's more closely held beliefs about writing.

Catherine writes short romantic fiction for women's magazines – a form and formula Pym found to be a doubly uncomfortable fit and with which she was almost always unsuccessful. In spite of being so frequently published, Catherine speaks of her own work in a 'derogatory tone'. Unlike Pym, she seems more at ease with following conventions than with using her writing to draw out something of her own human spirit. Her stories, when they are based on life, are based on the lives of others. More usually, the characters and the dialogue are artificial, unreal.

Until, that is, Pym's next novel. In *A Glass of Blessings,* we learn Catherine has written a story called 'Sunday Evening', inspired by the incident with Tom and Deirdre in the Greek restaurant. This at last puts Catherine in step with Pym, not just because she has drawn on her own life, but because she has transformed a painful experience into art – something Pym thrived on. 'I have done so little writing this year', she wrote in April 1940, 'Perhaps I need some shattering experience to awaken and inspire me … ' Whether marked by pain or pleasure, the talented writer preserves these experiences by looking back on them with tenderness. These creative acts are imaginative acts; and these imaginative acts are acts of empathy. Perhaps this is something none of the writers in *Less Than Angels*, *Civil to Strangers*, and *The Pilgrimage* are quite

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capable of, but it is the very secret that the Catherine Oliphant of *A Glass of Blessings* and Barbara Pym share.

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Fireworks in Suburbia: Space, Place and Symbolism in *Less than Angels*

by Nick Turner

Less than Angels suffered from less favourable reviews and lower sales than Pym's previous novels when it was published in 1955. It has often been read as an anthropological novel, as a continuing investigation into romance or as an exploration of London life. It is also notable for being one of Pym's rare suburban novels. I argued in my paper that the novel is much subtler, and more demanding of repeated readings, than the other early novels, and supported Lord David Cecil's and novelist Elizabeth Taylor's praise of the book.

It is, first of all, a tragi-comedy anticipating the later masterpieces. This is not merely because of the death of Tom at the end: the larger cast than previously emphasizes isolation in both city and country, and comic scenes, such as Catherine's encounter with the women in the cafeteria who talk on and on about the ages of clergymen, have bleak undertones; we are frequently given access to interior sadness.

Secondly, while Pym's novels are frequently centred on movement and journeys, this novel is particularly interesting in its portrayal of place and displacement. Tom's movements around London highlight this, especially when he looks at the Beddoes' party from outside and is moved on by a policeman; Mark and Digby moving the sofa for Miss Clovis is a comic portrayal of the theme. At the start we see a library that is taken over by a party, Catherine briefly thinking she is a tourist when in London, and scenes at an airport and on a bus. The novel shows confinement and stasis in conflict with expansion and movement, most notably in the presence of Africa in the novel. In fact, we move outwards from London to the suburbs, to Shropshire and then, 'offstage', to Africa. The parallel scenes in Mallow Park and Mainwaring's country house offer comment on the decay – comic or not – of landowners and the powerful classes.

Most strikingly, *Less than Angels* is a novel of poetic symbolism showing Pym working in the same territory as E M Forster. Pym has not had Deirdre kick aside the headless body of a doll on her garden path for no reason, nor does she draw our attention to the dimming of the light noticed by Rhoda purely for comic value. Not a modernist, Pym nonetheless occupies a fictional world that straddles realism and modernism, as does Forster. Like Forster, she is interested in movement, people who watch others, and – in this novel – in sudden explosions of violence in calm locales.

I take the novel's key scene as Bonfire Night, a striking build-up to the end of the novel and Tom's death. Here, the apparent calm of the Swans' suburban home is framed by a fireworks party on one side, and Catherine helping Lydgate burn his research in the back garden on the other. A foreshadowing of the shooting of Tom in Africa, the scene also sums up the novel: stasis and the home may be valuable and desirable, but they must exist alongside joyousness, danger and energy.

By the end of the novel, Tom is dead, and Catherine has been temporarily absorbed into the Swans' home. But she has mused on Barrett Browning's lines 'What was he doing, the great god Pan, /Down in the reeds by the river?', showing her embracing the mysterious; Deirdre seems set to marry Digby. If the end is ultimately ambiguous, this is in keeping with the mood of the whole novel: profound, melancholy, yet hopeful. Even if not permanently, Catherine and Deirdre have managed, in Forster's words, to 'only connect'.

***Dr Nick Turner** is Associate Lecturer at the Universities of Central Lancashire, Edge Hill and Salford. His research area is currently British women novelists – especially the forgotten ones. His monograph is 'Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon' (2010). He is the co-editor of the online journal* Writers in Conversation. *Current projects include organizing a conference and new journal on Elizabeth Bowen, and a project on women novelists and comedy in the mid-twentieth century.*

' "Diarrhoea," Letty repeated … '

by Tim Burnett

'Do you find the country is doing you good?' Letty asked.

'I've had diarrhoea all this week,' came the disconcerting reply.

'Diarrhoea,' Letty repeated, in a clear, thoughtful tone. She was never certain how to spell the word, but felt that such a trivial admission was lacking in proper seriousness so she said no more.

This wonderfully humorous passage from *Quartet In Autumn* (composed 1973-76) is a good example of Barbara's use of adverbs, or adverbial phrases, for comic effect, or to convey the mood, or reactions, of her characters. Often this is done for humorous effect. The inappropriateness of David Lydell's reply to Letty's question is at the heart of the effect, but the description of the 'clear, thoughtful tone' in which she repeats the word 'Diarrhoea' enables us to see her as she sits there, to hear her voice as she says the word slowly, to feel her embarrassment and how she tries to cover it. When Letty suggests enterovioform, David smiles 'pityingly'. We can just see his scornful, self-centred manner. When he claims that his 'case is rather different ... ' from 'all those English on package tours' the adverbial sentence 'The sentence trailed off, leaving the difference to be imagined' is irresistibly

comical. Perhaps Barbara is as much a dramatist as a novelist. Certainly dialogue plays a strikingly large role in her novels, and she has a wonderful ear for it.

Whether Barbara knew how effective using adverbials was, or whether it just came to her naturally, the fact is that she made impressively extensive use of it. Another writer of the period, Evelyn Waugh, in *Black Mischief* (1932), never places an adverbial after reported speech, while Barbara in *Less Than Angels* (composed 1953-54) does it thirty-seven times in the first chapter alone. Of course, she does not use adverbials only for reported speech. In that first chapter she uses them in the narrative as well, on page 9 alone seven times.

Barbara's use of this stylistic feature started early. In a passage from the first chapter of *Crampton Hodnet*, written in 1940, she employed adverbials thirteen times, almost exclusively for comic effect. In *Jane and Prudence* (composed in 1950-52) Barbara is still using adverbials. An example is the passage where the two friends are doing the washing-up after a dinner party. The confident and competent Prudence looks 'apprehensively' at Jane's feeble efforts at washing up. Jane looks at the glasses 'rather sadly' but continues washing up 'in an absent minded way' and 'thoughtfully' observes that while Nicholas and Mrs Glaze deserve laurels, she herself does not. When she assures Prudence that she will make a splendid wife it is with 'a little dripping mop in her hand'. It is hard not to feel a tear at this point. But Jane still has the spirit of rebellion in her. ' "Why don't *you* ask *him*?" ' she says 'recklessly', an unexpected use of that adverb. And when Prudence 'rather complacently' remarks that she likes a man to be tall Jane replies 'scornfully' 'Ah, you like a rough tweed shoulder to cry on.'

A Glass of Blessings (composed 1955-56) is, unusually for Barbara, narrated in the first person. Would this influence her use of adverbs – would there, indeed, be many instances of dialogue? As it turns out, there is a quite surprising quantity of dialogue, but very much less use of adverbials. In a passage of dialogue spanning five pages there are only ten. When we come to one of the later novels, *The Sweet Dove Died* (composed in 1963-69), although Barbara does still make use of adverbials, it is to a much lesser extent than earlier.

Of course, using adverbials to enhance reported speech depends upon there being reported speech to enhance, and this feature varies from novel to novel. In the first chapter of *Quartet In Autumn* there are not many conversations and even then Barbara only uses adverbials ten times. When she does, however, it is to good effect. In the conversation about hypothermia we can perfectly picture the scene, as if it were being played upon the stage:

'Hypothermia,' he read the word slowly. 'Another old person found dead. We want to be careful we don't get hypothermia.'

'It isn't a thing you *get,*' said Marcia bossily. 'Not like catching an infectious disease.'

'Well, if you were found dead of it, like this old woman here, you could say you'd *got* it, couldn't you?' said Norman, defending his usage.

Letty's hand moved over to the radiator and lingered there. 'It's a state or condition, isn't it,' she said, 'when the body gets cold, loses heat or something like that.'

'That's one thing we've got in common then,' said Norman, his snappy little voice matching his small spare body. 'The chance of being found dead of hypothermia.'

Tim Burnett *was educated at Eton College and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read Medieval Languages. He was formerly Keeper of Manuscripts in the British Library, and has written, among other works, a biography of Scrope Davies, intimate friend of Lord Byron. He has spoken at numerous Barbara Pym Society conferences. He lives in London.*

Tea Break at Austin Hall

'We used to correspond'

by Alison Felstead

On a cold, wet Saturday evening in December, around 120 people (including a number of members of the Barbara Pym and Philip Larkin Societies) braved the inclement weather to gather in the modern Blackwell Hall in the Bodleian's Weston Library to hear Triona Adams and Oliver Ford-Davies reprise their dramatized reading of the letters between Philip Larkin and Barbara Pym. This special Friends of the Bodleian event, entitled *'We used to correspond': the letters of Barbara Pym and Philip Larkin*, was an edited revision by Triona of the original selection and dramatization of the correspondence by Anthony and Ann Thwaite. It was introduced by Anthony Thwaite (Larkin's friend and literary executor) and was held to mark Philip Larkin's memorial in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey on 2 December 2016 (see philiplarkin.com/uncategorized/poets-corner-at-last-2-december-2016/ for an account of the ceremony).

I first heard the performance at the Times Oxford Literary Festival in 2013, BP's centenary year, in the gothic setting of the Bodleian's Divinity School. The performance was even more entertaining and moving on a second hearing, and stands as a wonderful memorial to two very different writers who demonstrated through their nineteen-year correspondence a genuine affection and mutual respect for each other.

The readings begin with Larkin's first letter to Pym in

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January 1961, and end after Pym's death in January 1980. They chart the lives and careers of the two writers, mapping their changing fortunes as Larkin grows in fame and popularity and Pym – abruptly dropped by her publisher Cape shortly after the correspondence begins – endures sixteen years in the literary wilderness before she is famously rediscovered in 1977 following the *Times Literary Supplement* article in which she is named by both Larkin and Lord David Cecil as the most underrated author of the past seventy-five years ['Reputations Revisited', *TLS*, 21 January 1977, page 66, column 3 and page 67, column 4].

We witness the developing friendship between the two as they move from 'Miss Pym' and 'Mr Larkin' to 'Barbara' and 'Philip'. We hear about their occasional meetings (at the Randolph Hotel, Oxford, and at Pym's home in Finstock), and enjoy exquisite glimpses into their lives, at home and at work. Larkin provided Pym with support and encouragement during the wilderness years with observations such as 'John Betjeman was here a few weeks ago and we rejoiced over your work'. After her rediscovery in 1977, the Booker Prize nomination and dinner and the consequent revival of interest in Pym are covered in the letters. They also include a number of mentions of her illness. Pym felt able to share some details of her cancer with Larkin, from the initial diagnosis in spring 1971 to the final stages, just before she was admitted to Sobell House hospice in Oxford at the end of 1979. In her Christmas card to Larkin in 1979 which marked the end of their correspondence she wrote, poignantly, 'Still struggling on – perhaps a little better!'

Oliver Ford-Davies and Triona Adams

Pym's death concluded their epistolary relationship, and Larkin attended her funeral at Finstock. The title for the event comes from Larkin's letter to Anthony Thwaite: 'I regret her death very much; we used to correspond. Even at the funeral I found myself looking forward to getting a letter from her describing it.' The performance concluded with a reading of one of Larkin's best-loved poems, *An Arundel Tomb*, which ends with the now-famous lines: 'Our almost-instinct almost true: What will survive of us is love.' Coincidentally, this is the quotation that appears on Larkin's memorial in Poets' Corner. *An Arundel Tomb*, read by Larkin, was also chosen by Pym as one of her Desert Island Discs on Radio Four in 1978. She introduced this as follows: 'I'd like to have Philip Larkin reading one of his poems. I think I'd like to have the voice of somebody I know on this desert island and the poem I have chosen is *An Arundel Tomb*, which is one of my favourites.'

It was appropriate to hear the performance of '*We used to correspond'* in the Bodleian, as the library is fortunate to hold the letters from Larkin to Pym, deposited by her sister Hilary as part of the Barbara Pym Papers, as well as the letters from Pym to Larkin, bequeathed to the Bodleian by Philip Larkin. Judith Priestman, Curator of Modern Literary Manuscript Collections in the Bodleian Library, has characterized the correspondence thus: 'The tone of the letters is easy and unstrained, and it allowed both Pym and Larkin to express without too much commitment, the darker as well as the lighter sides of their characters. It is by turns funny, intelligent and rather moving in its scrupulous avoidance of personal stridency even when profound and often painful feelings are being described.' [Priestman, Judith, 'Philip Larkin and the Bodleian Library' in *Bodleian Library Record*, Volume XIV, 1991, page 52.] The performance by Triona and Oliver perfectly captured the essence of their friendship, as the warm applause at the end of the event testified.

For events run by the Bodleian Library or to become a Friend, see: www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/get-involved/friends

The *Church Times*

by Colin Oxenforth

"I just gave her an old copy of the *Church Times*", said Harriet airily.' This was my first introduction to Barbara Pym and the *Church Times*. Such an indelicate answer to the lack of paper in the downstairs lavatory is typical Pym humour, and a wonderful sideswipe at the reputation and use of the Anglican newspaper. I laughed exceedingly at this reference to what I used to call 'Jezebel's Trumpet' or 'The Church Crimes' when I was at theological college. It returns again when Belinda is reading an advert for a priest's cloak, wondering what the story is behind this request. Later on there is speculation about the Archdeacon advertising in this famous weekly for a new curate. In *Less than Angels* even Catherine refers to it as a respectable paper.

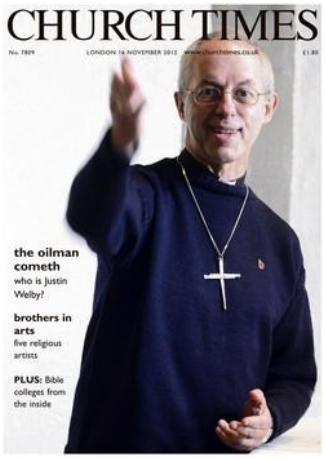

Photo by GJ Palmer & Sons Ltd

This august publication, an Anglican institution, was founded in 1863 and has always been independent of the Church of England hierarchy. It was a family concern until 1989 when it came under the auspices of a charitable trust – Hymns Ancient and Modern. It was started to campaign for Anglo-Catholic principles, so was very much in line with Barbara's own taste in Anglican worship and general principles. Throughout its life, it has scrutinised the actions of the church hierarchy but has been described as an 'ecclesiastical and general' newspaper, as it has always

included world events in its coverage. Much of its space is given over to serious book reviews, and, more recently, coverage of the arts. The paper's regular columnists include Paul Vallely, the associate editor of *The Independent*, and the author Ronald Blythe.

As well as mentioning it in many of her novels, Barbara Pym was in turn mentioned in some editions herself. In May 1951 a review of *Excellent Women* stated: 'Light fiction of any quality is hard to find nowadays. But Miss Barbara Pym's *Excellent Women* provides the exception ... It would have been easy to have gently ridiculed Mildred Lathbury, and to have left it at that; Miss Pym allows the reader to observe her gaucheries but leaves no doubt about her essential goodness ... Occasionally this book reveals flashes of insight into female character worthy of Jane Austen.'

No higher praise could be given, and this from a paper which at that time did not usually review novels! Clearly the *Church Times* saw Pym as someone special, writing about people and issues that they approved of. Their approval seemed to be mutual. When it later came to *A Glass of Blessings*, the reviewer was not so complimentary, seeing the novel as failing to engage a really lively interest. *No Fond Return of Love* was also seen as being in a minor key and sensitive without sentiment. Humour and fun are there to the full even when the characters themselves are rather dreary and futile. Her writing style was celebrated as one small mercy when compared with other contemporary novels.

The relationship between author and journal appears in letters to Philip Larkin, joking about a possible advert for herself as a tenant, and to Bob Smith, telling him she was to have a review since she had provided so many commercials in her novels. Another letter to Bob tells of an invitation to write a story for the paper. Such mutual back-scratching was beneficial to both of them. *The Christmas Visit* for the appropriate edition looked again at Mark and Sophia Ainger (and Faustina), now in a country parish. Barbara's use of characters from another setting gave her great joy – all part of the Pym world. 'Answers to Correspondents', beloved in reality and fantasy, was dropped and Barbara described this as gone off – just like the Kardomah. As the Pym world disappeared in reality, Barbara kept it going in literature. The *Church Times* is still thriving, under new management. They continue to be loyal and published an article by Kate Charles in 2013, which produced some good letters. Long may the literary relationship thrive!

Book Group Meeting

by Norma Munson

Our Rockford, Illinois, book group, the BBC, which depending on your preference is either Books By Chicks or British Broadcasting Company (there are many Anglophiles in the group) has been meeting for over 30 years. Jeannette 'Teen' Haskell, who died in 2013, was an original and active member and devoted Pym fan. Her daughter kindly gave Teen's extra Pym novels to a BBC member who suggested that each person choose one for our January meeting. My assignment was to provide background and supplementary material on Pym. We had previously read a Pym novel about fifteen years ago, but some of the membership had changed since then.

*Nancy Shannon, Marty Smith, Jo Paul, Norma Mun*son

I was gratified that the group had visited the Pym Society website and had opened links that I had emailed to them earlier. Some had watched *Miss Pym's Day Out* and all were enthusiastic and appreciative of her style, subtle irony, satire and humor. One member brought tea bags for us and we would have had fairy cakes and tea if food was allowed in our church meeting room. A copy of *No Soft Incense* was sold, and interest expressed in the *À La Pym* cookery book. One person, new to Pym, suggested we read a Pym novel each year. I don't recall that ever being proposed for any author in the past. We now have another group of readers who will always understand the concept of a 'Pymmian voice' and Teen's novels have found suitable homes.

Reading Group Lunch

by Sandra Margolies and Jean Simons

Having received the Members List late last year, I was surprised and delighted to see that several fellow Pymmites lived close by in SE London. I thought it would be interesting and fun to try and get together for a New Year meal. Exchanges of emails elicited an enthusiastic response and January 4th at Jean's house was agreed for a Pym-focused menu (after the Christmas excesses, to be more Lily Sedge than Wilf Bason).

Amanda Rainger, Sandra Margolies, Christine Jenkins (sitting); Judith Pye and Jean Simons (standing)

Cauliflower cheese (carefully scrutinised for caterpillars!), sausage and mash (though what might Barbara have made of the Quorn versions? Perhaps, to paraphrase Wilmet, she might have said, doubtfully, 'I know what it is'…), apple crumble and fruit fool. A good *German* wine, naturally, to accompany. A second gathering in February starred Sandra's crème caramel and Amanda's version of a 'shape', which bore no relationship to the unappetising object on the Malorys' supper table, containing as it did, a rich quantity of cream and white chocolate!

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After much sharing of favourite Pym moments, characters and menus and discovering of mutual friends, links and histories, all of us being women of a certain age, talk turned to the restricted lives led by so many single women in the post-war years, exemplified by the living arrangements of Letty, Miss Grimes (though Ianthe found her feistier than anticipated when she visited her), Mildred and many others. We talked about the lack of privacy, the acceptance of shared bathrooms and cooking arrangements, the very few possessions, and the fact that, as Chris said, 'Nobody expected to have her own front door'. We did wonder too, though, whether today's often lonely elderly women, in spite of having their own front door, might welcome the sound of Mr Olatunde and his friends singing their songs of praise, or even a visit from Marcia's resented 'do-gooder' Janice Brabner.

The bedsit life of the young single girl, like Laurel, ensconced in Quince Square, was a more cheerful matter and led to some very fond reminiscences of student and early working life experiences.

Are we the first branch of the society to be established? We would like to continue to meet occasionally, and if there are others in easy reach of SE13, do please get in touch. I'm rather tempted by Leonora's mention of James's favourite meal, chicken with tarragon and chocolate mousse.

Raffle in aid of Cancer Research

by Rose Little

At the recent Committee Meeting, Paul Howard showed us the certificate received from Cancer Research UK for the £150 raised from the raffle at last year's Conference. Paul had the brilliant idea of holding a raffle – but this was no ordinary raffle. Each prize was Pym-themed, so that lucky winners came away with a tin of condensed mushroom soup, a tin of custard powder or a pottery donkey calendar!

Raffle Table

Wilmet's Box

Each prize had a note attached giving a quote and the title of the book that inspired it. We are all looking forward to next time's raffle! Meanwhile if anyone sees an item that reminds them of a Pym book please bring it along! The task I've set myself is to run to earth a copy of *Enquire Within*, or even better (looking ahead to the subject of our next conference, *No Fond Return of Love*) Theodore Watts-Dunton's *Aylwin.*

Gleanings

compiled by Yvonne Cocking

I am often surprised, though gratified of course, at the range of publications in which Pym is mentioned, from mainstream newspapers to Society newsletters, learned journals to books, and mere snippets in odd places. In them too we often discover new Pym fans, such as our own royal historian Lucy Worsley, who says in *Good Housekeeping*, May 2016:

> I love Barbara Pym for her stories of church life, full of ridiculous social details ... she lets you into a secret club: once I find out that someone is a Barbara Pym fan, I know we're going to be good friends

Scott Herrick found numerous references to Pym in the works of author Cathleen Schine, whose books, according to Phillip Lopate in *The New York Review of Books*, 23 June 2016:

> comprise a sly illuminating corpus which seems more related to the English comic novel than to most contemporary American fiction. Her work is as shapely and precisely structured if more generously cluttered than Barbara Pym's, one of her avowed models.

Herrick also disclosed that Schine's Top Ten List includes *Quartet in Autumn*, and one of her six favourite inspiring books on independence is *Some Tame Gazelle.*

Kate Young, writing in *The Guardian* last May, says:

> I have happened across a book I feel I really should have read sooner ... I have finally discovered Barbara Pym. *Excellent Women* truly is excellent – witty, cleverly observed and with a wonderfully nuanced central character.

However, unimpressed by Mrs Jubb's pale macaroni cheese, Kate provides a recipe for 'a tastier take on the disappointing dish eaten by Mildred Lathbury'.

There were two items comparing the recently deceased Anita Brookner with Barbara Pym. In a regular feature in *The Daily Telegraph* Michael Deacon says:

> Bitterly funny, and pitilessly truthful, she is a laureate of loneliness, to rank alongside Philip Larkin, Alan Bennett, Barbara Pym and Morrissey

and Rachel Cooke in *The Guardian*, mainly discussing *The Next Big Thing*, Brookner's novel about an elderly divorcée, thinks that:

> If the young are 10 a penny in novels, old people are harder to find ... I can think of Kingsley Amis's *Ending Up*, Elizabeth Taylor's *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont,* and Barbara Pym's *Quartet in Autumn.* Those, though, come with a comic sensibility that Brookner's noticeably lacks.

Another author with whom Pym is frequently compared is Angela Thirkell. The Secretary of the Thirkell Society in North America in her recent work *Deconstructing class in the Barsetshire novels of Angela Thirkell*, writes:

> A similarly beloved author is Barbara Pym, often like Thirkell in her descriptions of genteel English people, but lacking Thirkell's rumbustious sense of humor, her vast literary references, and her wider array of characters. Well-loved authors create a deep streak of loyalty in long-time readers, and Linda Matcham's charming, gently mocking article [in the *Boston Globe* *] about the 2013 meeting of the North American chapter of the Barbara Pym Society easily could be about Thirkell, her readers, and their conferences ...

Lynn Knight's *The Button Box: lifting the lid on women's lives,* (Chatto & Windus, 2016) described by *The Guardian* as 'a lively and personal history of clothing', mentions Barbara several times, often with reference to her WRNS uniform, but also recalling hats typically worn by ladies at parochial church council meetings, Dora's everyday brown wool dress, and her unappetising laundry hanging to dry in Mildred's kitchen.

Neil Powell in *Amis & Son: two literary generations* (Macmillan, 2008) introduces an original concept:

> One of the riddling paradoxes of fiction is that an unambitious form is in one crucial respect more ambitious than an ambitious one: it is, in this sense, easier to write *Ulysses* than a novel by, say, Barbara Pym or C.P.Snow. *Ulysses* competes only with itself, with its own ambition; a novel by Pym or Snow competes with a thousand others about middle-class women, strange clergymen and mendacious academics.

The Pusey House Library holds a collection of 20th century Commonplace Books, one of which relates to Canon Freddy Hood. In the most recent issue of its newsletter is an item entitled 'A Hooded Gaze':

> Archibald Frederick 'Freddy' Hood was Principal of Pusey House from 1934-1951. He was something of a phenomenon in the mid-20th century Church of England, being incredibly well connected with the great and the good, the literati and the gentry, and having a strong but likeable character. He was the original inspiration behind Barbara Pym's novel *A Glass of Blessings.*

There is a Pym mention from *The Spectator's* website titled 'The Best and Worst Books of 2016'. Graham Robb says:

> My novel-reading year has been dominated by Barbara Pym, starting with *Excellent Women*. Pym is usually likened to Jane Austen, but her hilarious situation comedies and recurring characters constantly reminded me of Balzac.

As she watched *University Challenge* [12th September] Sue Willets was pleased to note a series of questions about writers in Shropshire. The question asked which writer was born in Oswestry in 1913 and produced novels including *Quartet in Autumn*. The students didn't get the answer right but it was pleasing to have her name on BBC2 at prime time. [Some years ago a similar question was asked on UC, with the same depressing answer. YC]

The index to the *Map of Fictional London* by Jones & Sawyer (The Literary Gift Company, 2015) which is a plan of London's streets, parks, gardens and buildings as mentioned in well over 600 novels, plays and poems, available as pocket-sized map or poster with the index as a separate booklet, includes three Pym places, thus:

> *Excellent Women*. St Gabriel's Church, Warwick Square, Pimlico, SW1. The model for 'prickly, Victorian-gothic' St Mary's.
> *Glass of Blessings, A*. St Stephen's Avenue, W12. Piers's flat: 'rather too near the Goldhawk Road, he had said'.
> *No Fond Return of Love*. Kilburn Park Road, NW6. St Augustine's Church - Neville Forbes's parish.

Snippets of praise appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* by Jilly Cooper and in *The Lady* by India Knight, both long-term Pym admirers; *Sainsbury's Magazine* offered 4 free sets of mugs and notebooks illustrating *Excellent Women* (mugs also available at £11.49 from hive.co.uk); and in *The Tablet* Robin Baird-Smith, remembering Liz Russell, co-founder of the publishing house which brought out the Jerusalem Bible 50 years ago, said:

> I will keep for ever in my mind a picture of Liz in her nursing home – a rosary, a crucifix and, of course, a complete set of Barbara Pym novels.

Thanks to Hazel Bell, Brenda Fazikas, Alison Felstead, Diana Gulland, Scott Herrick, Sheila Kane, Stephanie Kay, Linda MacDougall, Sandra Margolies, Norma Munson, Iona Roberts, Christine Shuttleworth, Michael Wilson, and Sue Willetts.

*If readers are interested, they can read Linda Matcham's account in the *Boston Globe* here: tinyurl.com/lmqnaru

Tom Sopko

Readers Recommend

The Amazons of *Cranford*

by Christina Gars

A lecture on the Arts and Crafts movement made me re-read Elizabeth Gaskell´s *Cranford*. I had a positive but vague memory of it from about forty years back. It was a true pleasure re-reading it, now with Jane Austen and Barbara Pym as references.

The setting is the small town of Cranford (Knutsford), with Drumble (Manchester) nearby, in the first half of the 19th century. The novel consists of episodes concerning mostly everyday life but also of more dramatic events, such as when the bank fails and Miss Matty is ruined (and very tactfully helped by friends) or when a cow, 'dear to her owner as a daughter', fell down into a pit (and was saved).

The opening sentence reads, 'In the first place, Cranford is in the possession of the Amazons.' The key figures are all women. They rule the little town of Cranford (Knutsford, where Elizabeth Gaskell herself spent her childhood with an

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aunt). They feel secure of their value: 'Equal (to men) indeed! She (Miss Jenkyns) knew they were superior.' The women are not young any more and they are all either unmarried or widows and very happy and content with that, so, unlike in Jane Austen`s books, marriage is not an issue. Fashion is not an important question (though they are properly dressed): 'What does it signify how we dress here at Cranford, where everybody knows us?' And if they travel, 'What does it signify how we dress here where nobody knows us?

The ladies of Cranford are all nice people 'above a certain rent', but certainly not wealthy. They may be daughters of doctors or rectors, they have servants but they live economically, not only out of necessity but also because extravagance is considered to be vulgar. They practise what they call 'elegant thrift'. The main thing is to follow the 'code of gentility', which is to know all the codes concerning visits, for instance; how long a visit should be (fifteen minutes) and when it should be returned. In spite of these rules, what really matters is kindness. The women all help and support each other; they take care of each other. Cranford is a book full of heart and warmth without any trace of sentimentality, it is gently amusing and it makes you smile.

There are about a hundred years between *Cranford* and *Excellent Women* but they both, in different ways, portray women that live 'a full life' just for us to share.

Mapp and Lucia

by Lorraine Mepham

I don't know if this piece should come under the heading of Books Barbara Might Have Read, but I am nevertheless delighted to be able to enthuse about some of my favourite books – the six *Mapp and Lucia* novels written by E F Benson between 1920 and 1939.

E F ('Fred') Benson and his siblings all wrote prolifically. Fred is today best known for his 'Mapp and Lucia' novels, but he published a stream of other novels and biographies. He also wrote some rather good ghost stories, in the mould of M R James.

The six novels start with *Queen Lucia*, which introduces Mrs Emmeline Lucas ('Lucia') who is the centre of social life in the small village of Riseholme. She is supported by her rather dim husband, Philip, and her loyal friend, Georgie Pillson, who is fond of embroidery and his 'bibelots'. Lucia is a crashing snob and a ruthless social climber, who will stop at nothing to annexe any well-connected newcomer to the village, and to monopolise any social event. She likes to entertain her friends to musical evenings, where she invariably plays the opening movements of the 'Moonlight Sonata' (the following movements are a bit too tricky). She and Georgie lard their conversation with Italian phrases ('Ah, Georgino *mio*, a little *divino Mozartino*?'), but cannot actually speak the language. In short, she is a mass of affectation, but is somewhat redeemed by her genuine interest in humankind.

Equally ruthless is Elizabeth Mapp, who appears in *Miss Mapp*, the third book in the series. She is the queen bee of the little Sussex town of Tilling (based on Rye, where E F Benson lived for some years), and proves a worthy adversary to Lucia. Miss Mapp rules Tilling in the same way as Lucia rules Riseholme, but with a more tyrannical hand: 'anger and the gravest suspicions about everybody had kept her young and on the boil'.

Lucia, freshly widowed, and faithful Georgie arrive in Tilling in the fourth book, *Mapp and Lucia*, and the duel for the throne of Tilling begins. At first Lucia has it all her own way – she has the benefit of novelty, and the recipe for lobster *à la Riseholme*, for which Elizabeth would sell her soul. The Tilling residents have for too long been crushed beneath Elizabeth's none-too-benevolent boot and are feeling rebellious. Lucia gives them delicious little dinner parties and musical evenings (the 'Moonlight Sonata', of course). She introduces them to callisthenics, financial speculation and bicycling. But Elizabeth won't go down without a fight ...

Lucia is the better tactician, frequently leaving her rival gnashing her teeth, but Benson's genius is in keeping the balance between her and Elizabeth. Neither can be on top for too long. While the Tillingites vacillate in their adherence to either Lucia or Elizabeth, what they most crave is excitement (not much happens in Tilling), and the occasional *rapprochement* between the two protagonists leaves them feeling flat: 'Tilling did not want to witness a demonstration of forgiveness ... but a combat without quarter'.

There is in fact an indirect link with Barbara Pym. Hazel Holt's son Tom, our esteemed guest at last year's UK conference, wrote three 'sequels' to Benson's books (starting with *Lucia in Wartime*). They are so pitch-perfect in imitation of Benson's style that while preparing this article, I several times thought of particular incidents, only to find that they appeared in Tom Holt's books rather than Benson's.

Saturday Lunch at Wasserstein Hall

Members' Corner

The Places you find Barbara

by Keith Armstrong

As I walked through the dusty streets of central Athens that hot August afternoon in 2009, Barbara Pym was the last thing on my mind. I hadn't read a Pym novel for over two decades, so imagine my surprise not only on stumbling across a second-hand English bookshop, but also on finding a somewhat well-worn edition of *A Glass of Blessings*, a Pym I had never read. I bought it for the princely sum of two euros and it proved to be a wise investment. While travelling in Greece, the quiet joy of reading another Barbara Pym reawakened a dormant spark that I had first experienced as an undergraduate some twenty years earlier.

It had all started with *An Unsuitable Attachment* – as it

often does. A French lecturer, who shared a fondness for tea, cats and a good addictive read, had recommended Barbara Pym and, following her usually sage advice, I promptly went out and spent part of my weekly student book allowance on *An Unsuitable Attachment*, *The Sweet Dove Died* and *Crampton Hodnet* – all three having recently been published in the early 1980s. But there the supply dried up and the seeming impossibility of finding earlier Pym novels, together with the weighty demands of study, further study, and the need for gainful employment all contributed to a veil of forgottenness falling slowly over Barbara Pym. The three novels were eventually relegated to an attic bookshelf, for the edification of spiders, no doubt.

That spark in Greece led me to search for other unread Pym novels and the discovery of the colourful Virago Modern Classic re-issues, together with the advent of search engines and online shopping, made trying to complete the set a much easier task. In 2014 I was able to buy and read the last remaining Pym novel twenty-eight years after reading the first. Some things are worth waiting for.

Pym and Trollope Adventures

by Lucia Costanzo

I must confess that I am a relative newcomer to Barbara Pym's life and work, but I am sure that she came into my life at exactly the right moment. I have always been a voracious reader of all sorts of fiction from crime to classics but had never considered reading Pym. I did know of her from those striking bottle-green covered Virago paperbacks of my early adulthood, but actually preferred reading the Maya Angelous and Radclyffe Halls, being somewhat more radical than I am now.

In my teens I had read Dickens, Austen and the Brontës, and when I had my daughter I inexplicably developed an obsession for the less well-known Victorian novelists: Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Mrs Henry Wood and Wilkie Collins. Then after a dalliance with George Eliot I discovered Anthony Trollope and became a convert, quickly becoming a committee member of the Trollope Society – and through attendance at the Alliance of Literary Societies AGM in 2013, hosted by the Barbara Pym Society, was introduced to Pym. My interest was sparked and I bought a copy of *Crampton Hodnet* from the book stall.

I devoured *Crampton Hodnet*, enjoying the style, wit and context – evoking a world which has disappeared but seems strikingly familiar, at least to this alumna of a (formerly women-only) Oxford college. I rapidly read her other works and joined the society, attending as many Spring meetings and conferences as I could.

So why do I love Pym's works? For me it is the description of a simpler world, where preparing an olive oil salad dressing and sporting bright orange lipstick was considered daring – and where evensong was held in appropriate (in my view at least) esteem. Pym's world is not entirely comfortable though: there is unrequited love that borders on obsession; carefully disguised homosexuality; genuine poverty; and a gritty description of growing old in *Quartet in Autumn*. Actually this blend of the amusing and the genuinely thought-provoking, together with sparkling characterization and seemingly slow-moving but ultimately well-crafted plotting, is also found in Trollope's works. So it is not surprising that Pym loved Trollope too.

Gabriele Caras, Martha Constable, Carreen Warner

Happy Days at St Hilda's

by Rosemary Fitzherbert Jones

I always say that I am famous for two reasons in the field of literature! First, I studied at St. Hilda's, reading medicine in the late 1970s, many years after Barbara was there of course. Secondly, my father met Hilary in the house she had shared with Barbara in Finstock. He is a clergyman and, on retirement, used to help out taking services at different churches. He was invited to coffee with Hilary and others after one such service.

I can well remember my introduction to Barbara Pym's novels. I was staying with an aunt who was an English teacher, and she had placed a selection of books by my bed. One was *Jane and Prudence*. I was soon engrossed and read late into the night to finish it before going to sleep. I suppose, as a vicar's daughter, the book has a special appeal for me.

Since then, I have read all the novels several times over. What I love are the moments when Barbara brings something to your attention which resonates and makes you feel: yes, that's what I have always thought too. It happens to me with John Betjeman and Alan Bennett as well and is the thing I enjoy most about reading the work of these three authors.

My husband and I attended our first Barbara Pym conference last year, and it is now firmly on the agenda. It was a joy to return to my old college, but above all to meet such an interesting variety of people all appreciating the work of my literary hero in their own way. The marmalade we won in the raffle was delicious too! We look forward to attending many more meetings in the years to come.

Sunday Brunch

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A Year in West Oxfordshire

by Barbara Pym

[In the last year of her life, Barbara was asked by Ronald Blythe to contribute to his book, Places: An Anthology of Britain, ed. Ronald Blythe (OUP 1981), *and Barbara generously sent him the following notes.]*

About twelve miles west of Oxford, in the Wychwood Forest area on the edge of the Cotswolds, is a cluster of remote villages off the main tourist track. Few of these villages would win a prize for tidiness and elegance, and some of them even now have an air of romantic decay, dating from the depressed Thirties (when my own village, Finstock, was described by one visitor as 'a tattered hamlet', and by another as being imbued with an evil emanation from the forest). Today there is an interesting mixture of carefully restored cottages and bright new bungalows with broken dry-stone walls, corrugated iron, and nettles, and even the occasional deserted or ruined homestead.

Every writer probably keeps some kind of diary or notebook, and my own (mercifully less personal and introspective as the years go on) has provided these few observations on the weather and natural surroundings, history and literary associations of the area.

January

Cold, snow, and blizzard and from my window I can watch cars failing to get up the hill to Wilcote. Later in the month a visit to Swinbrook, a pretty, well-kept village. In the church the Fettiplaces lie on their stone shelves – the mansion where they lived was demolished early in the last century and the family has now died out. But Swinbrook still has its Mitford associations – a tablet to Tom Mitford in the church, and the graves of Nancy and Unity in the churchyard. Go to Asthall nearby and stand in the churchyard to look at the manor where the Mitfords lived as children.

Swinbrook

February

Sometimes a mild, false spring. The month for gathering firewood in the forest (and once finding half of a deer's antler).

March

(Roses should be pruned by the end of this month.) On the 21st, the first day of official 'summer' with its bleak, cold-light evening. A good walk from Finstock, up the hill to Wilcote (with grey-stone Wilcote House, not all quite as old as it looks, and the apricot-washed manor), past the little romantic-looking church, then down to Ramsden, a more beautiful village than Finstock. Meanly trying to find examples of 'direness' (ugly bungalows, corrugated iron, nettles and general squalor), but it is less in evidence here than in other villages in these parts. The main street is pretty and orderly, but you seldom see people walking about.

[*To be continued in the next issue of* Green Leaves.]

Jean Thilmany in her cat skirt

Denton Welch

Members interested in the life of Denton Welch, one of Pym's favourite writers, may like to know of a recent publication, *Goodnight Beloved Comrade: The Letters of Denton Welch to Eric Oliver*, edited by Daniel J Murtagh and published by the University of Wisconsin Press.

Sunday Brunch

Rapt attention

Rambling Rose

by Rose Little

Now the spring is here at last we are going out and about, just like Barbara and Hilary in the springtime after she retired to Barn Cottage in Finstock. They visited the villages in the Cotswolds roundabout, Hilary driving, and Barbara recorded her impressions in her diary. I was thus able to discover that she'd found some interesting little villages near Finstock that I had never been to and now seems to be the time! Like Barbara, we exclaimed over the 'excessive exuberance of daffodils' near Ramsden and were dazzled by the superb spring display of blossom and magnolia trees en route.

We arrived in due course at the very peaceful village of Minster Lovell. Not having looked it up ahead of time we received the full force of surprise as we came round the side of St Kenelm's church and were confronted with the ruins of Minster Lovell Hall. This had once been a 15th-century manor house belonging to the prominent Lovell family. Now it is a beautiful ruin that lies beside the River Windrush.

We visited in the morning – like Barbara, going to her Women's Institute meeting at the church, the one where the woman who won the wine said that she never drank it but had nothing against those that did. But we also visited on another occasion in the early evening, when the grandeur of the ruin stood out eerily against the sky and we felt the mysterious atmosphere. We found ourselves quite ready to believe in the ghost, said to be that of Lord Lovell, whose remains were discovered in a secret chamber in the manor house. Apparently he had escaped from the Battle of Stoke in 1487 and had hidden himself there, where he must have died of starvation.

To dispel all thoughts of starvation, we drove on to the nearby pub, The Old Swan, hoping that Barbara and Hilary too enjoyed some quiet refreshment here.

Betty Zausner, Jane Knapp

Tim Burnett, Dan DiPietro, Rita Phillips, Dietmar Schiller

The Barbara Pym Society

Call for Papers

North American Conference, 16-18 March 2018

The Sweet Dove Died

The organizing committee is seeking speakers for the 20th annual North American conference, to be held at Harvard Law School on 16-18 March 2018. Preference will be given to proposals on the featured novel, *The Sweet Dove Died*, but proposals on any topic relevant to Pym studies will be considered. Proposals dealing with themes that span multiple novels are also encouraged.

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

Please send an abstract of 150-250 words, accompanied by brief biographical details, by **Monday 13 November 2017** to: Tom Sopko, North American Organizer, at barbarapymsociety@gmail.com with the subject heading "2018 Conference Proposal."

For more information about the Barbara Pym Society, go to www.barbara-pym.org. To read papers from past conferences, click the link "Pym Conference Monographs."

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Chairman's Chat

by Michael Wilson

In *Less Than Angels* Pym describes how disconcerting, upsetting even, it is for the regular churchgoer to find their customary place in church occupied by a stranger. I have been experiencing that recently, not at church, though there too I have my own space, but at the office.

We have recently been refurbished. Overall the office environment is much improved but there is one serious drawback. We no longer have our own desks. We are supposed to 'hot-desk', sitting anywhere that is free. But the desks are really just tables with a desk-top computer. Each morning we go to a locker and take out everything we need to do our job. Each evening we lock everything away again, having wiped the desk clean for whoever might be sitting there the next day.

We spend such a large proportion of our lives at the office, it is only natural we try to personalize our desks with pot plants, photos of family or pets or, in my case, postcards brought back from holiday. And of course no desk means no drawers. I wonder how Pym's office workers would have coped with this upset. Where would Marcia have kept all those leaflets about services for the elderly, William Caldicote his pigeon food, and of course Norman his jelly babies ?

The Barbara Pym Society 2017–2018

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Membership Secretary: Judy Horn
Board: Kathy Ackley, Barbara Boles, Denise Marois-Wolf, Sarah Saville Shaffer, Isabel Stanley

Honorary Life Members: Tom Holt, Mrs Frances Atkin, The Rt Rev Richard Harries, Professor Peter Lloyd, Alexander McCall Smith

Coming Events

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

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

2017 AGM & Conference
1-3 September 2017
St Hilda's College,
Oxford
OX4 1DY
No Fond Return of Love

2018 North American Conference
Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA
16-18 March 2018
The Sweet Dove Died
Call for Papers, see page 14

The ALS Conference and 2017 AGM on 3 June 2017 will be jointly hosted by the Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship and the Wilfred Owen Association in Craiglockhart, Edinburgh.
www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk/id9.html

Welcome

Dan DiPietro

Rita Phillips, Laura Shapiro

Church of the Advent

Jutta Schiller

Pym merchandise

Steve Hart, Connie Matricardi, Alison Stratton

Dee Bryan-Brown

Watching the Mighty Pym Players

Sandra Goldstein, Susan Bramson

Joel Horn, Donna Safreed, Sarah Saville-Shaffer

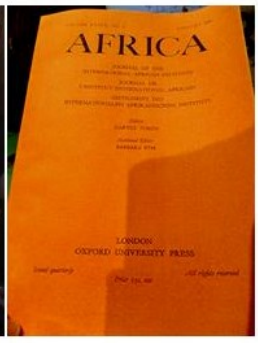
At Friday Dinner

Hymn Sing

Kathy Ackley, Isabel Stanley

Kathy Ackley, Tim Burnett

Donna Safreed, Jane Knapp, Betty Zausner, at brunch



The journal, 'Africa'

Louise Smith, Joel Horn, Judy Horn

Many thanks to Jutta and Dietmar Schiller for most of the photographs in this issue.
Thanks also to Nick Turner and Paul Howard.

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