Green Leaves

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society **Vol. XXIII, No. 2, Autumn 2017**

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

Conference Report, Oxford, 1-3 September, 2017

by Libby Tempest

The activities of the 2017 BPS conference in Oxford began at the Ashmolean Museum on Friday afternoon with a special exhibition of Raphael's drawings organised by Eileen's daughter Alison Roberts. After a most enlightening talk by Lynne Ward, with slides of the exhibits, we were led to the exhibition of the drawings themselves. (Full account follows on a later page). After a pleasant walk back through the city to St Hilda's, we enjoyed dinner (salmon or gnocchi with all the accoutrements) followed by our usual fun Quiz, cleverly written and presented by Ros Cleal and Lorraine Mepham.

Photo by Marianna Stewart

Our chosen novel this year was the delightful *No Fond Return of Love* and it really was delightful for me to pay a return visit to the last Pym novel published during Barbara's early golden years (1950-61). The suburban setting of the novel is key, and our first speaker, Sandra Goldstein, took us on an amusing journey through the net curtain-twitching sagas of the suburbs in her talk entitled 'The Things I See!'

Barbara and Hilary moved to an upstairs flat in Nassau Road, Barnes in 1949 and became extremely interested in observing their neighbours from the vantage point of their upstairs windows. Their mantra was always 'Find out what you can without asking', which, Sandra pointed out, took us back to Barbara's time in Oxford and her stalking of Henry. Both Barbara and Dulcie love detective work – they are both observers and both have vivid imaginations, tending to become rather obsessed (there is a good reason why Barbara is able to write so convincingly and with such insight about Dulcie's interest in Aylwin Forbes …) But the dividing line between reality and fantasy can become blurred, causing all sorts of difficulties, with Barbara pondering 'Is that true or did we make that up?' and Dulcie often attempting to remember which lies she'd told. As that one-man Greek chorus Senhor MacBride-Pereira constantly exclaims – 'The things I see!'

Senhor M-P was one of the male characters considered by Colin Oxenforth in his talk on 'Some Problems of the Male Sex' – Colin observed that many of the men in *No Fond Return of Love* are outsiders and perhaps none more so than the Senhor, dressed in his kilt, endlessly looking out of his window, living life vicariously. Our hero, the handsome Aylwin Forbes, also lives life in a manner that is somewhat detached from reality and insufficiently grounded in the lives of the people around him. It needs the straight talking common sense of Dulcie's outburst in the shelter on the seafront to turn the tide for Aylwin and make him realise that he needs to find a partner of his own age – the restoration of reality.

Our very own Yvonne Cocking has been having rather a dull time, going through some Pym notebooks from the late 1940s and 50s. Only Yvonne could make the uninspiring discoveries from the notebooks into a very funny and insightful talk, noting that some days Barbara must have done nothing but sit in the window and watch. (Yvonne: 'Did she have nothing better to do? But perhaps she was knitting?') The most sustained saga was the observation with Hilary of the

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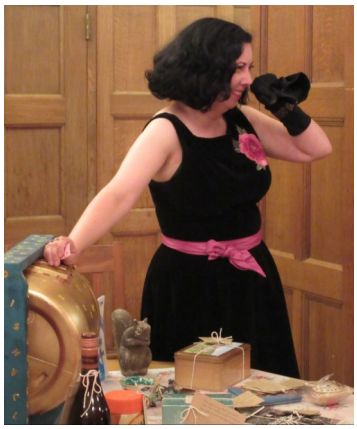
Bunn family at No. 51 – this led to 88 closely written (and 'stultifyingly boring') pages of notes compiled over a 5-year period. The question must be asked why the comings and goings of these people they did not even know were so fascinating. Barbara must have known that what they were doing was odd, and Yvonne breathes a sigh of relief when Barbara finally writes that This Must Stop! Only to find that the log started again the following day – the Pym sisters were



Triona at the tombola

clearly in the grip of a Dulcie-like obsession.

Saturday evening was fine and we enjoyed drinks on the lawn before heading into College for our Annual Dinner, where good food and excellent company were, as always, the order of the day. Following the success of last year's Tombola, Paul Howard volunteered to run another one and he makes a superb MC, ably aided by his glamorous assistant Triona! This year's irresistible prizes included a tin of cat food, custard powder, a cast-iron mincer, Ovaltine, 'Wilmet's box' (made by Paul!), a jigsaw puzzle of the Grand Canal, books by Elizabeth von Arnim and Tom Holt, a packet of Rennies, an apostle spoon and a Balmoral cake tin.

Rose won the framed black and white photo of the young Barbara and Henry, and I came home with what could only be described as a retro nail kit. Paul goes to huge trouble to provide quotes and labels for every prize – 'Do you think we should have our nails done while we're about it? Several of our companions seem to be having red claws made ... ' was attached to my prize, taken of course from *A Glass of Blessings* when Wilmet and Rowena have their hair done at 'Monsieur Jacques'. Alison also brought a stone squirrel which was much admired and coveted – but was for display purposes only …

Merchandise sales table

Our final speaker on Sunday morning was Emily Stockard, talking about 'Patterns of Change' in *No Fond Return of Love*. Emily noted the pattern of 'doubling' in the novel – the Forbes brothers, Viola and Dulcie, Marian and Laurel. Even the curious combination of old and new at St Ivel's doubles with Mrs Beltrane's 'church' – though of course 'it isn't exactly a church … very near Harrods … And afterwards, cocktails in Father Benger's flat.' A church, but not as we know it. Dulcie and Viola both follow certain patterns of behaviour and though they seem like opposites, they are in fact often alike – Viola's aggressive front hides a rather dull woman who just wants to be loved. The chain of events in both their lives leads them to change radically during the course of the novel and, rather romantically, both end up falling in love and being loved.

The Mighty Pym Players rounded the weekend off gloriously with their Sunday afternoon performance of Tom's adaptation of *No Fond Return of Love* – and an exceptionally enjoyable conference is over for another year.

Muscular Men and Tumbling Infants

Report on our trip to the Ashmolean Museum for the opening event of the conference

by Rose Little

If, like me, you had thought of Raphael chiefly as a painter of vibrant colour and form, you would have been pleasantly surprised by the sheer muscular intensity of his drawings of young men and the fluidity of movement of his women and babies.

We were being treated to an outing at the Ashmolean Museum, organized by Alison Roberts (our own Eileen's daughter), Assistant Keeper for European and Early Prehistoric Collections at the special exhibition of the drawings of Raphael. The splendid introductory talk with slides by gallery lecturer Lynne Ward was a great help to us when we came to study the actual drawings.

Born in Urbino in the Marche region of Italy in 1483 to an artist father, Raphael travelled to Florence and then to Rome where he lived and worked for most of his life. *The School of Athens,* which he painted in the Vatican in about 1509, is seen as Raphael's masterpiece, embodying the spirit of the Renaissance.

The impressive display of drawings we saw included not only pieces from the Ashmolean collection but also loans from other international collections including the Louvre, the Uffizi, the Queen's collection and the Albertina in Vienna, the Ashmolean's partner for the exhibition,

I particularly liked the different versions of *Head of a Young Man*, where we could see Raphael steadily making improvements. Another of my favourites was his version of Leonardo's *Leda and the Swan*, the well-known story behind which Lynne discreetly avoided relating. You can clearly see Leda's swaying movement as she walks encircled by the wing of the swan.

Finally – though bearing in mind the response of the six year-old who, when asked what she enjoyed about her visit to the art gallery, replied 'the ice-cream' – I have to say that we all appreciated the thoughtful provision of refreshments! We counted ourselves especially fortunate, as the exhibition closed two days after our visit.

Full details of the exhibition can be seen here:
www.ashmolean.org/exhibitions/raphael/

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Suburbs and Sagas

by Sandra Goldstein

Barbara Pym and her sister Hilary moved to an upper-floor flat at 47 Nassau Road in Barnes, a southwest London suburb, in 1949. Barnes, with its ubiquitous net curtains permitting inhabitants to observe without being seen, became the setting for *Less than Angels*, published in 1955, and *No Fond Return of Love* in 1961. Despite the 'visceral anti-suburbia bias of many progressive thinkers' (David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*) shared by several characters in *No Fond Return of Love*, Barbara and Hilary enjoyed living in Barnes. It was pleasant to walk along the river on summer evenings, and there was a congenial church, St Michael's. Like Senhor MacBride-Pereira, they had an upstairs sitting room from which to view the goings-on in the street. As Mabel Swan says in *Less Than Angels*, 'What is the point of living in a suburb if one couldn't show a healthy curiosity about one's neighbours?'

Like Dulcie Mainwaring, Barbara enjoyed investigating the lives of ordinary people, thus possibly creating a saga. Hazel Holt explains in *A Lot To Ask* that the subject of a saga 'can be anyone at all – a famous person you don't actually know, a fictitious character, or even an animal – but it is most rewarding to weave a saga around someone you can actually observe.' You don't *have* to live in the suburbs to indulge in sagas; Barbara had enjoyed the game of sagas from an early age wherever she happened to be living. Her mother enjoyed observing and making up stories about people, advising her daughters to 'find out what you can without asking.' When she went up to Oxford in 1932 Barbara, smitten by Henry Harvey ('Lorenzo'), investigated his comings and goings for several months before speaking to him. On January 18, 1933, she wrote: 'This diary seems to be going to turn into the Saga of Lorenzo.'

In *No Fond Return of Love* Dulcie, infatuated with Aylwin Forbes, determines to learn as much as possible about him and his family. She looks him up in *Who's Who*, goes to his brother's church and his mother's hotel, and indulges in flights of fancy about his noble birth. Meanwhile, Senhor MacBride-Pereira, from his solitary vantage-point, watches his fellow suburbanites come and go and speculates on what it all means. 'The things I see,' he thinks, watching Viola being handed out of a taxi by a gentleman who kisses her hand in the Continental fashion.

Watching people from their upstairs window, Barbara and Hilary noticed two young men ('Bear' and 'Squirrel') who lived nearby in Barnes with their dog. They monitored the men's movements, making timetables of 'sightings'. Hazel Holt, after reading a draft of my paper, wrote me about the Barnes saga, saying: '[It]was the best of all and the most detailed. The two young men and their little dog impressed themselves on Barbara's mind from the first and the picture was built up bit by painstaking bit. I think one of the reasons for this was that almost every day when Barbara came into our room at the Institute she would give me the latest news of its progress and so I was drawn into it too.'

One of Barbara's favorite authors, Rachel Ferguson, wrote the definitive novel of the saga, *The Brontës Went to Woolworth's*, published in 1931. Deirdre Carne, the novel's narrator, explains how she and her sisters weave sagas: 'All three of us learn everything there is to learn about people we love. We get their papers, and follow their careers, and pick up gossip, and memorise anecdotes ... and follow their moves about the country, and, as usually happens if you really mean business, often get into personal touch with friends or business associates, all with some fresh item or atom of knowledge to add to the heap.' The Carnes' most elaborate saga featured a judge, Sir Herbert Toddington ('Toddy'). Meeting the subject of a saga is tricky, as Deirdre describes meeting Lady Toddington: 'The main trouble lay in the fact that I came to [her] aware: primed with a thousand delicate, secret knowledges and intuition ... I felt as though I was taking her friendship under false pretences.' Dulcie experiences similar confusion on her return to Neville Forbes's church: 'You never told me you knew Father Forbes,' Neville's housekeeper says accusingly. 'I didn't know him then,' said Dulcie ... hardly able to remember whether she did or not.' Similarly, according to Hazel Holt, Barbara would say: 'Are we supposed to *know* that?' or 'Is it true or did we make it up?'

Barbara and Hilary's Barnes true-life saga ended with Bear becoming a friend, just as the fictional Carne sisters made friends with Toddy and his wife. At the end of *No Fond Return of Love*, Dulcie's Aylwin saga promises to become reality when Aylwin realizes that it is she, not Laurel, whom he loves.

A graduate in German and Russian, ***Sandra Goldstein*** *went on to be a translator and editor with the US Government. She has spent many hours studying the Pym notebooks, visited Hilary Walton in Finstock, and corresponded with Hazel Holt.*

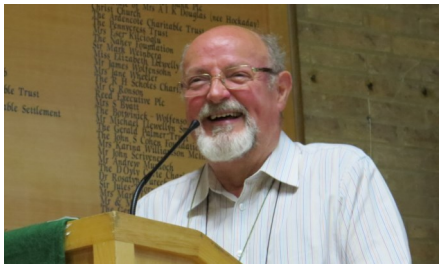
Some Problems of the Male Sex in *No Fond Return of Love*

by Colin Oxenforth

Aylwin Forbes is the main male protagonist with problems, and his first appearance at the literary conference in Derbyshire describes his problems succinctly. He cannot make decisions easily over how to deal with his possessions in his room, especially the photo of his estranged wife Marjorie, which is put back in the suitcase under his bed. He seems safe in academia, but not in his personal life or the world generally. He is however good-looking in a leonine way and is the centre of attraction for some women, especially (at this point) Viola Dace, who had been helping him in his work,

and has also come to the conference. If admiration is safe, he can bask in it, but not if it becomes demanding.

He unwittingly becomes the centre of attention when he faints just before giving his lecture 'Some problems of an Editor', and this brings the female lead, Dulcie Mainwaring, into his orbit. She is fascinated by him, adopts him as a project for study, and teams up with Viola, who eventually moves in with her after being advised to leave her lodgings. The plot moves swiftly to include following up Aylwin's brother Neville, an Anglican priest. The fact that he has a parish near Dulcie's uncle and aunt's house offers a chance to visit his church. Dulcie finds out what he is like, that Miss Spicer has fallen for him and that he has fled back to his mother's hotel at Taviscombe in the West Country. He is of course an Anglo-Catholic and even wears his cassock when at home and helping in the hotel.



Dulcie and Viola decide to follow Neville down to 'The Eagle House' to further investigate the family, which includes visiting the old Forbes castle and meeting up with Aylwin's estranged wife and mother-in-law, who are also down for a visit, but Aylwin turns up himself to sort out his marital problems. The plot becomes very complex and more than usually comic, with Dulcie hiding behind a bookcase and overhearing what she shouldn't. She later tells him exactly what she feels, which really changes the plot, and they both subsequently realize the potential of their own relationship. This has of course been more than complicated by her niece, Laurel. Laurel had been living with Dulcie, and had then moved very near to Aylwin, who became enamoured of her, although her youth makes this rather ridiculous.

The men so far have been weak and vacillating, like other smaller male characters in the plot. Maurice, Dulcie's ex-fiancé, is of dubious sexuality and treats women as something to lean on, rather than to properly relate to. Paul Beltane, a young neighbour of Dulcie's, is ineffectual in trying to relate to Laurel, and is tied to his mother's apron strings. Bill Sedge is the only man who seems to know who he is and what he wants. He is at one level the complete outsider, being a Jewish refugee who is a buyer of women's knitwear for a well-known store. He enters the plot because his sister is the cook/ housekeeper of Dulcie's Uncle Bertram and Aunt Hermione. Thanks to his attention, Viola makes a complete about-turn from Aylwin and they become engaged. Bertram is set to try his vocation as a monk, and Hermione catches her vicar after his two sister housekeepers have died or moved away.

Pym manages the movement in the plot with her usual skill, with the women taking the lead in planning, making changes in the lives of the men, almost having them as victims, even to the extent of what might now be called stalking, though not with evil intent. 'Not nosy, just interested' was how the lady who ran the post office in our holiday home in the Isle of Man called it, as she listened in to the phone calls. As agents of change, the women are paramount, though the men are improved in the process. Marjorie Forbes runs off with a man she meets on the train journey back from Taviscombe to London, thus solving the problem of how Aylwin can get a divorce, and develop his relationship with Dulcie, whom he now sees as being real wife material.

The men's problems are the women, but they are also their salvation and help them find fulfilment. There are four potential marriages at the end of this novel, which I am sure is unique in Pym literature. I shall look more carefully at how men are portrayed in my future reading, as I now think Pym is more empathetic than I had previously believed.

Colin Oxenforth *is a retired Anglican priest, living in Liverpool. He has worked in Bromley, Peckham, Toxteth, Brixton and Wigan and is on the Catholic wing of the church.*

The Pursuit of Love and the Love of Pursuit

by Yvonne Cocking

From an early age, Barbara Pym displayed an avid curiosity about acquaintances or even strangers who for one reason or another interested her. She satisfied this curiosity in several ways: firstly by actual physical pursuit – stalking as we might say today, though that word has acquired a pejorative meaning quite inapplicable to Barbara's innocent activity; secondly by putting herself in the way of her quarry; and thirdly by the sedentary occupation of watching from the comings and goings her window of her neighbours. When she became a writer the result of these activities was to stand her in good stead as source material for her novels.

In her younger days, Barbara shadowed young men with whom she thought herself in love. The first of these was John Trevor Lloyd, a bank clerk and lay reader in Oswestry. He was soon forgotten when Barbara went up to Oxford, though later he found new lives as Mr Oliver in *Jane and Prudence*, and Bernard Hatherley, Mildred's ex-boyfriend, in *Excellent Women*.

In spite of being among a small minority of women students at Oxford, and having plenty of admirers there, Barbara nevertheless fell for several attractive strangers. Her last major pursuit of love at Oxford was of course of Henry Harvey. After her university years, Barbara's pursuit of love seems to have been overtaken by a love of pursuit for its own sake, and the sake of her fiction.

Instances of following, watching, spying, snooping, by one character on others are found throughout Barbara's novels. Mildred in *Excellent Women,* Jessie Morrow in *Jane & Prudence*, Mabel and her sister in *Less Than Angels*, Marcia in *Quartet in Autumn*, Aylwin Forbes, Senhor McBride-Pereira and above all Dulcie in *No Fond Return of Love*, all pried into

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the lives of their neighbours.

Barbara acknowledged an ambivalent attitude towards this snooping, expressed by the differing behaviour of Belinda and Harriet when surreptitiously watching Agatha's departure on holiday, and Dulcie's feeling of delicacy when researching her 'victims'.

Both Mildred and Dulcie also expressed the view that unmarried women interest themselves in others as their own lives are so dreary.

But by far the most sustained factual episode of pursuit was in Barnes. In *A Lot To Ask* Hazel Holt described the Barnes 'Saga' fairly succinctly, making reference to letters from Barbara, and no doubt to conversations between them. She does not, however, refer us to the astonishingly numerous entries Barbara made in her notebooks between 1955 and 1959 when she and Hilary were developing an interest in the occupants of no. 51 Nassau Road. There are no fewer than 88 closely written pages, covering 5 years, detailing their comings and goings as observed from the sisters' upstairs window.

Barbara kept notebooks from 1948 until almost the end of her life. Each one covered about a year. On the first pages she made notes about her novels, especially in the early stages of their conception, and she used the later pages for shopping and other lists.

Beginning with the 1955 notebook another type of material was included. Starting at the last blank page and progressing backwards to the next and subsequent blank pages, Barbara recorded, often in minute detail, and tiny writing, the movements of their near neighbours, two of whom she called Blondie and Squirrel, the prototypes for Mr Coleman and Keith in *A Glass of Blessings*. (Blondie, also known as Bear, turned out to be the organist at St. Laurence's Church, Queen's Park). To the best of my knowledge, these notes have never before been disclosed.

She recorded their movements, their many visiting friends, their clothes, their cars and their dogs and much other trivial detail. Generally the pattern was for more detailed entries at the weekends, when Barbara was at home, and early morning and evening sightings on weekdays, but none of it makes for riveting reading, and one is astonished that Barbara thought it worth spending so much time recording it.

Pages and pages are devoted to a stultifyingly boring record of largely uneventful sightings. With all the constantly changing personnel in the house, the abbreviations, and pages and pages of near-illegible handwriting, it is virtually impossible to follow the narrative in any meaningful way. A great deal has to be surmised. You would have to be a very enthusiastic Pym fan, with unlimited disposable time and a high boredom threshold to do it justice.

The log finally stops at the end of 1959. About a year later the sisters moved to Queen's Park, became regular worshippers at St Laurence's, and, according to Hazel, made friends with Bear in particular, and probably others of Bear's circle. St Laurence's was demolished in 1971, but this was after the sisters had moved to Finstock where they had a new set of neighbours upon whom to indulge their curiosity if they so wished.

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.*

Incongruous Continuities
'In All Around We See':
Patterns of Change in *No Fond Return of Love*

by Emily Stockard

No Fond Return of Love is Barbara Pym's first novel to portray, in a very explicit way, a changing culture. This is a culture marked by television ads, the Welfare State, divorce, churches whose halls resound with skiffle music and those that ignore Lenten customs. In this novel, we see Pym's favorite social mainstays shifting with these changing times. But they shift in ways that nevertheless maintain a peculiar kind of continuity with the past.

Correspondingly, Pym peoples *No Fond Return of Love* with figures, both minor and major, whose unexpected, even eccentric behaviors are at the same time entirely understandable, even conventional, and maintain as well a surprising kind of continuity. For example, when Aylwin Forbes abruptly and unexpectedly changes the object of his affections from Laurel to Dulcie, he tells himself that he is acting completely in character. His surprising love for Dulcie simply continues his 'delightfully incongruous' habit of choosing unsuitable partners. (Pym, Barbara, *No Fond Return of Love*, New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1961, p. 253)

Aylwin's paradoxical thinking enacts a pattern that Pym weaves throughout the novel. With this technique of patterned analogy, Pym creates a rather remarkably optimistic cultural allegory. Like her characters' personal anomalies, social changes may at first surprise us but then quickly be welcomed as charmingly familiar.

In this novel, Pym rings changes on familiar features of her own work in ways that imply a chronological continuum and emphasize the sense that the Pym world is changing. The principles of social contact are shown to be in flux, primarily the church, but the tea ritual as well. St Ivel's is chock-full of conventional figures but with popular dance music blasting from the church hall, also appeals to the younger generation.

The theologically free-form place of worship frequented by Dulcie's neighbor, Mrs Beltane, may break liturgical rules, yet Father Benger 'brings wonderful comfort to the bereaved' (p. 245). An eccentric shift in ecclesiastical culture has carried with it the central function of providing spiritual comfort. The tea ritual, another communal mainstay, is given a similar twist. The idea of the old-fashioned and cosy comfort of women sharing hot drinks does persist, particularly in Dulcie's mind. But these evening talks with Viola become the way by which Dulcie is forced to recognize that she has feelings for Aylwin – certainly not a confidence that she can share with her friend. The arrival of Dulcie's niece Laurel, Pym's primary representative of the younger generation, brings fundamental alterations to the tea ritual. The contemporary permutation of

the shared hot drink receives its emphasis, but with a difference: the young flock to the coffee bars.

At the level of character, Pym works analogously, mixing categories and confounding expectations while maintaining continuity. In a way similar to her portrayal of cultural institutions, she implies a chronological continuum, but locates a basic continuity rather than making clear distinctions between old and new. In one central example, Dulcie's housekeeper, Miss Lord, although elderly, is nevertheless a great devotee of new technology.

All these examples of incongruous continuities play out minor variations on and give thematic support to Pym's central concern – the complex presentation of her primary figures, Dulcie and Viola. With these two, Pym gives us what seems at first glance to be a pairing of clear opposites: Dulcie, the conventional English woman contrasted with Viola – one determined to defy convention.

But as the novel progresses, both women defy categorization, and yet their very defiance leads to and enables a conventional comedic narrative. Viola's unconventionality turns out to be somewhat of a pose. But what seems predictable and dull to Dulcie falls into quite another category for others, including Viola herself, who considers the unlikely elements of her attachment to Bill Sedge, but concludes with her very conventional realization that 'Perhaps all love had something of the ridiculous in it' (p. 169).

While Viola's arc moves from the unconventional to the conventional, Dulcie's moves in the opposite direction. Pym gives her main character's rather old-fashioned qualities an unexpectedly idiosyncratic streak. It is Dulcie's persistence in observing and researching into others' lives, while systematically refusing to be placed into restrictive categories, that gives her a kind of control over her life and ultimately determines the novel's narrative.

As with the seemingly fundamental social alterations brought by the passing of time, both Dulcie and Viola, in the course of the novel, undergo radical changes in their lives. But in accordance with Pym's principle of 'incongruous continuity', these changes have sprung from qualities inherent in both women. Moreover, the alterations undergone have resulted not in something altogether new, but in a perspective that surprises, paradoxically, with its very familiarity.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society Saturday 2 September 2017, 11.15am

Committee members present: Michael Wilson (Chair), Kathy Ackley (NA Representative), Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Yvonne Cocking (Archivist), Alison Felstead (Secretary), Jean Harker, Paul Howard, Rose Little (GL Editor), Sandra Margolies, Linda McDougall, Rev. Colin Oxenforth, Maggie Parsons (Merchandise and ALS Representative), Eileen Roberts (Treasurer), Tom Sopko (NA Organizer), Libby Tempest (Membership Secretary).

Chairman's Opening Remarks: Michael Wilson welcomed members, and in particular those attending for the first time, to the AGM and Conference.

Apologies were received from: Charles Gilbert, Miriam Margolyes, Iona Bennion Roberts, Kathleen Elliott, Moyra Forrest, Shirley Dex, Sally Spicer, Jodie Robson, Georgina Pritchard, Lynn Walton.

Minutes of the Previous AGM (3 September 2016): These had been previously circulated in *Green Leaves*, and were accepted without amendment.

Matters arising from the Minutes. There were none.

Chairman's Report: Michael began with the happy news of Maggie Parsons' marriage, and congratulated both Libby Tempest and Rose Little on becoming grandmothers.

He continued by recalling the events of the past year, starting with the 2016 Annual Conference, whose theme was *Remembering Hazel*, a tribute to Barbara's close friend and literary executor the novelist Hazel Holt. Special guests were Hazel's son, the novelist Tom Holt, and his daughter Natalie.

Michael noted that Yvonne Cocking was sadly absent from last year's Conference, because of ill health, but had prepared a dramatized reading of Hazel's novel *The Cruellest Month* as well as a paper on the visit by Hazel and Hilary Walton Pym to the USA, which was delivered by Dee Bryan-Brown. Other papers read were 'Mrs Malory disposes: some problems of an amateur detective' by Clemence Schulze, focusing on Hazel's crime novels, and 'Finding a voice' by Jan Fergus, a close friend of Hazel's, read by Kathy Ackley in Jan's absence. A highlight of the Conference was a discussion during which Tom Holt shared memories of his mother; Michael noted his friendly and enthusiastic support for the Society. After the Conference Dinner, Paul Howard's cleverly Pym-themed raffle was drawn: this raised £150 for Cancer Research UK.

Michael reported on BPS business in 2016, including the acceptance of the amendments to the Society's Rules at the AGM, and the elections of Alison Felstead as Secretary, and Sandra Margolies and Colin Oxenforth to the Committee.

Other events in 2016 were the Spring Meeting in London where Alison Shell spoke on Anglicanism and women novelists, and the dramatized reading of the Pym/Larkin letters organized by Triona Adams in Oxford with the Friends of the Bodleian.

Michael congratulated the BPS in North America on attracting new members and record attendances at its spring Conference, and thanked Tom Sopko and his Committee for all that they do. He continued by thanking Committee members for their work, and expressed particular thanks to Hazel Bell, an award-winning indexer and long-time BPS member, for her work on making an index of *GL* from its first issue.

Linda McDougall was thanked for her enjoyable films, and Sandra Margolies for the BPS bags and the *Directory of Members*, which has been used by Jean Simons to organize an informal supper for members in the London area. Maggie Parsons was thanked for looking after sales of BPS merchandise, and for the links she has forged with Oswestry, which holds press cuttings of the Pym family in its Library and a portrait of BP in the Guildhall. Maggie also represents the BPS on the Alliance of Literary Societies.

Michael expressed particular thanks to Libby Tempest for taking on the role of Membership Secretary, and thanked Alison Felstead for her work as Secretary. Lastly, Michael thanked Eileen for her work as Treasurer of the Society and for organizing the Conference and the Spring Meeting, as well as being a 'fount of all knowledge relating to the Society, and as Edwin said of Father G "a real tower of strength"'.

Financial Report. [The balance of the UK account was

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£7,238 on the 31 July 2017 in comparison with £8,589.55 on 31 July 2016. This difference was in part due to non-payment of membership fees and payments to St Hilda's for on-going expenses (e.g. postage). This was somewhat rectified by reminder mailings for membership fees, the balance on 21 August being £7,627.93. Major expenses for the year were the Directory (printing & mailing) and the printing and postage of newsletters (£514 and £350 respectively).]

Membership Report. [Of the 218 names in the UK membership database, 110 had renewed by 21 August 2017. Following an email reminder, 121 had renewed by 2 September 2017. There were fourteen new members, most of whom had 'paid through' to the end of March 2018. Eight members had resigned, giving various reasons.] Libby Tempest, Membership Secretary, echoed the Chairman's welcome to new members and those attending the Conference for the first time.

Editor of *Green Leaves* Report: Rose Little reported that all was well and the autumn 2017 issue was on track for publication.

The BPS in North America: A written report from Tom Sopko was included in the conference pack, and this included a financial report from Jordan Bach. The NA chapter had 240 paid members at 1 August 2017 plus 72 who paid in 2016 but have not yet renewed – a decrease of 9 from one year ago, and including 23 new members. Cash-on-hand at 31 July 2017 was $19,567, an increase of $1,500 from one year ago.

The 2017 NA Conference on *Less Than Angels* received 13 proposals for talks. BPS stalwarts Tim Burnett, Linda McDougall, and Nick Turner were joined by newcomers Joan Vredenburgh and Gabriele Caras. Conference attendance was a record 114 including non-BPS members, and 75 attended the Friday night dinner. Conference fees plus $950 in donations covered all expenses with $200 to spare. The 20th NA conference, on *The Sweet Dove Died*, will be held on 16-18 March 2018, with proposals for papers due by 13 November 2017. The Ellen J. Miller Memorial Student Essay Prize has been replaced by a short story competition, incorporating Pym characters; entries are due by 4 December 2017.

The BPS website averages 218 visits and 652 page views per week, and posts on the BPS Facebook page reach over 1,100 people. Members are encouraged to post on this page to increase the Society's visibility.

Archivist's Report: No report from Yvonne, but Michael noted that Alison and Eileen are currently preparing to handover the archives of the Society to St Hilda's.

Elections: As no other nominations had been received by the Secretary, the following were declared elected: Lorraine Mepham, Christine Shuttleworth, and Lucia Costanzo as ordinary committee members.

AOB: Paul Howard reminded members about the raffle in aid of the Stroke Association, which would be drawn after the Conference Dinner. He noted that Miriam Margolyes was a patron of this charity, and that BP herself suffered a minor stroke in 1974.

The dates for the 2018 Conference will be Friday 31 August to Sunday 2 September, and the theme will be Food and Drink in the World of Barbara Pym. It was hoped that Laura Shapiro would be the keynote speaker.

Meeting closed at 12.10pm

Note: Information in square brackets was added after the meeting.

Detection and the Anglican Spinster

(Spring Meeting Paper, May 2017)

by Alison Shell

In Barbara Pym's *Some Tame Gazelle*, Archdeacon Hoccleve is spied on and speculated upon by his parishioners Belinda and Harriet Bede; in *No Fond Return of Love*, Dulcie Mainwaring and Viola Dace all but become private detectives in their fascination with Aylwin Forbes and his clergyman brother Neville. These episodes draw on the three-way relationship in 20th-century fiction between detection, the Anglican Church and the single woman. In tribute to Pym, a forensically acute Anglican novelist who turned her spinsterhood into the fulcrum for her creativity, my talk addressed the analogous literary phenomenon of the 'observant spinster': observant both religiously and socially, even to the point of having a flair for detection.

The observant spinster and detective fiction are, so to speak, a natural marriage. Historical coincidence partly accounts for this, since the so-called Golden Age of the detective novel began around the time that marital options narrowed for the generation of women whose potential partners were killed in the First World War. The 1921 census showed 1.75 million more women than men in the age range 25-34, the time of life when women were most likely to get married.

In an age when marriage was still overwhelmingly the preferred option for women, this gender imbalance must have stunted many lives. As importantly for imaginative literature, it stimulated a sense of waste, fear and downright misogyny, not helped by a literary culture that had long denigrated superfluous women: W. H. Auden's satirical ballad, 'Miss Gee', about a sexually frustrated spinster who yearns for her parish priest, is typical of this unattractive trend.

Dorothy L. Sayers sharply criticizes attitudes similar to Auden's in her detective novel *Unnatural Death*. Defending his decision to employ a spinster assistant, Lord Peter Wimsey declares: '"Miss Climpson ... is a manifestation of the wasteful way in which this country is run ... Thousands of old maids, simply bursting with useful energy, forced by our stupid social system into hydros and hotels and communities and hostels and posts as companions, where their magnificent gossip-powers and units of inquisitiveness are allowed to dissipate themselves or even become harmful to the community ... And then bright young men write nasty little patronising books called "Elderly Women", and "On the Edge of the Explosion" ... '. Miss Climpson vindicates his trust, especially when her intimate knowledge of Anglo-Catholic practice leads her to discover a vital clue in the notes a murder victim has made before confession.

But the best-known spinster sleuth in Golden Age detective fiction is undoubtedly Agatha Christie's Miss Marple. When she makes her debut in *Murder at the Vicarage*, the clerical narrator observes: 'Of all the ladies in my congregation, I considered her by far the shrewdest. Not only does she see and hear practically everything that goes on, but she draws amazingly neat and apposite deductions from the facts that come under her notice. If I were at any time to set out on a career of deceit, it would be of Miss Marple that I should be afraid.'

In Christie's two later novels *A Caribbean Mystery* and *Nemesis*, the symbolic implications of Miss Marple's legendary instinct for evil are explored. She characterizes herself, and is perceived as, the allegorical personification of divine justice: '"It's me," said Miss Marple, for once ungrammatical, "though I should put it a little more strongly than that. The Greeks, I believe, had a word for it. Nemesis, if I am not wrong."'

The amateur spinster detective has no place in the fictional world of a later writer, P. D. James. The single women who act as sleuths in her novels − the private detective Cordelia Gray, the detective inspector Kate Miskin − are professionals through and through. Yet the figure of the spinster remains too imaginatively useful for James to neglect, and she connects it to Anglicanism and murder in other ways. For instance, the first sentence of *A Taste for Death* reads 'The bodies were discovered at eight forty-five on the morning of Wednesday 18 September by Miss Emily Wharton, a 65-year-old spinster of the parish of St Matthew's in Paddington, London ... '.

Miss Wharton is essential to the book's atmosphere; dowdy and easily overlooked, she epitomizes the declining fortunes of the traditional Anglicanism which James herself espoused. Nevertheless, her personality commands the reader's respect for its resilience and integrity. Though less engaged in active detection than her spinster-predecessors, Miss Wharton finds, like them, that social marginalisation sharpens one's intellectual, moral and spiritual perceptiveness.

***Alison Shell** has taught at the universities of Oxford and Durham, and is currently a Professor at University College, London. She has a special interest in the relationship between literature and religious faith. Her most recent book is Shakespeare and Religion. With Judith Maltby, she is currently co-editing* Anglican Women Novelists*, a book of essays due from Bloomsbury in 2018.*

Spring Meeting Report

by Jean Harker

The weather was shaping up well as we arrived at St Alban's Parish Centre for the Spring Meeting on Sunday 7th May. Most of the 60 or so attendees had chosen to begin with the buffet lunch, and this time we experimented with a 'cabaret-style' layout of tables so that people could sit down and eat off tables rather than their knees, and then the arrangement remained for the rest of the meeting. It was generally felt that this system was an improvement on the previous picnic style of eating.

Our speaker for the afternoon, Professor Alison Shell, of University College London, was introduced by our Secretary Alison Felstead, using notes provided by Clemence Schultze, who was unfortunately ill and unable to attend. Alison's distinguished career has taken her from St Hilda's College, via a First in English and then a doctorate, to the Royal Institute of British Architects where she was Rare Books Curator, to a post-doc Fellowship at UCL, then to Durham University (where she met Clemence), and then back to UCL.

Alison's connections with the Barbara Pym Society go back to her undergraduate days when she was my assistant at the conference 'Barbara Pym: Her Life and Work' in 1986, and had the special job of looking after speakers Victoria Glendinning and Hilary Spurling in the Principal's lodging, as they compared notes and discussed their papers for the following conference day. Then, at the Barbara Pym Literary Weekend in 1993 (part of St Hilda's Centenary celebrations), it was Alison and her fellow alumna Dora Thornton – the two youngest and prettiest attendees – who went out punting on the Cherwell with Henry Harvey, when he was supposed to be attending a session at the conference.

At the Spring Meeting Alison was accompanied by her mother, Jean Shell, who is a founder-member and enthusiastic supporter of the Barbara Pym Society, as was her late husband, Stephen. Mrs Shell, who used to breed guinea-pigs (Alison has some good stories about them), has the unique literary distinction of having supplied a succession of guinea-pigs to *Paddington Bear* author Michael Bond – they were all called Olga da Polga and provided the inspiration for his series of books (highly recommended) about a guinea-pig of that name.

Alison is currently editing, with Judith Maltby, a book on Anglican women novelists for Bloomsbury, in which she is contributing an essay on P D James. Her subject at the Spring Meeting was *Anglicanism and Women Novelists: A Special Relationship.* She provided a superb illustrated handout to accompany her fascinating paper, which focused on the work of three English women crime writers, all staunch Anglicans with strong Oxford connections – Agatha Christie, Dorothy L Sayers, and P D James.

Alison considered particularly the unassuming, Anglican, highly intelligent (and frequently under-rated) sleuths created by Christie and Sayers: Miss Marple, who needs no introduction, and Miss Climpson, who undertakes discreet inquiries for Lord Peter Wimsey. They are both older unmarried ladies whose clear-sighted perception of human nature, 'foiled creative fire', and comfortable but semi-invisible social position make them highly efficient investigators, Miss Marple even to the point of finding herself regarded as Nemesis.

Alison contrasted these talented investigators with Barbara Pym's female investigators, whose investigations – for instance of Aylwin Forbes, the object of fascination in *No Fond Return of Love* – are of a nosy social nature rather then a criminal nature. Alison reminded us that Barbara Pym herself was an indefatigable social investigator in real life, aided and abetted by her sister Hilary, who was her co-sleuth and car-driver.

In the grittier and more modern crime fiction of P D James, Alison noted the presence both of unassuming elderly Anglican spinsters and of the fiction of Barbara Pym. In *A Taste for Death* the priest Father Barnes has just read 'with envious disbelief' a novel by Barbara Pym, which told 'the gentle and ironic story of a village parish where the curates were fed, entertained and generally spoilt by the female members of the congregation'.

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Our Chairman, Michael Wilson, thanked Alison for an intriguing and thought-provoking paper, and, after questions from the floor, closed the meeting with thanks to the caterers at St Alban's Centre. After some final refreshments, we emerged into bright sunshine and the best weather of the day.

Pym Merchandise goes to Oswestry

by Maggie Parsons

After the 'Christmas rush' of sales from the Pym merchandise had dwindled to nothing I decided I would try to seek a market and an opportunity to promote the Barbara Pym Society further afield.

I went to Oswestry, where Barbara was born and grew up. The library had agreed to give me a display case in the library for the month of May to show the merchandise and to give information about Pym's work and the Society. The library also provided laminates from their local history archive relating to Pym. On my visit I was able to meet with volunteer local historians who showed me copies of the local newspaper report of the names of all the attendees at the memorial service for Pym's mother in 1945, the notice of her sister Hilary's marriage and the remarriage of her father in 1946.

The library also sold postcards produced by the Oswestry Civic Society depicting the A-Z of Oswestry, 'P' being the reproduction of a painting of Barbara Pym by the artist Peter Edwards. I was told that the original had hung in the Guildhall in Oswestry. However when I called there to view it the staff at the local museum were unable to find it or to say where it had gone after the original exhibition.

So there was a mystery to be solved when I returned to Oswestry a month later to clear the cabinet and to purchase copies of the postcards to sell at our conference this September. Sadly I was not able to find the portrait on this visit, but recently, Googling the artist, I was excited to see that the painting was on sale at the Willow Art Gallery, Oswestry, very close to Barbara's birthplace, and described as 'Previously not for sale but now available for purchase coinciding with a revival of interest in the subtle accomplished novelist'. I think Barbara would have been pleased and amused.

I will be selling more postcards of the portrait at our 2018 conference at St Hilda's in 2018! Other merchandise will also be available.

Peter Edwards' portrait of Barbara Pym is in the willowgalleryoswestry@gmail.com

The portrait is for sale and the artist Peter Edwards can be contacted at paintpeteuk@yahoo.co.uk

Barbara Pym at Westminster Abbey 'Excellent Women' series: Barbara Pym: 'Anglican Anthropologies'

On the evening of 25 September, at least half a dozen BPS members attended Dr Jane Williams' lecture in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey. We also met again Prof. Alison Shell, our speaker at the Spring Meeting - she is delivering the next lecture in the series on P D James (2 October).

Dr Williams began by asking who present had read Pym - a forest of hands was raised - and went on to speak of Barbara's life and work. Her final section, 'Anglican Values', illustrated with appropriate readings, covered the parish as a place of acceptance; being part of a bigger story; small is beautiful; imperfection. She emphasized Pym's gentle, insightful, deep and meaningful writing which has merited an ever-increasing world-wide reputation. It was gratifying that the Dean and several members of the clergy (perhaps looking for sermon material?) swelled the audience on this special evening.

Paul Howard

Like Paul, I was fortunate to be among the audience, or should I say congregation, for Jane Williams' thought-provoking talk, while the stone images of William Shakespeare, Oliver Goldsmith, and George Frideric Handel among others gazed benevolently down upon us. (Before the talk began, I noticed at my feet a stone memorial to Thomas Parr, known as 'Old Parr', who 'lived in ye reignes of ten princes', from Edward IV to Charles I, and died in 1635, allegedly aged 152.)

I have a couple of reservations about Dr Williams' sympathetic analysis of Barbara Pym's work. She detects a falling-off in the 'darker' later novels, and feels, in particular, that in the posthumously published *Crampton Hodnet* the author is not comfortable outside her usual spheres of parish life and the world of anthropologists. I don't sense any such discomfort in *Crampton Hodnet*, which I consider one of her funniest novels.

Secondly, to my mind Dr Williams lays a little too much stress on Pym's 'gentle humour', and appears to undervalue her as a satirist. Admittedly Pym is not as acerbic as, for example, Angela Thirkell, but to me there is a subversive undercurrent to much of her writing, which sets off the honey of her 'cosiness' with just a dash of vinegar. I can't disagree, though, with the speaker's final judgement that 'Her world is very much to be celebrated and respected'. And I am greatly looking forward to the publication in 2018 by Bloomsbury of *Anglican Women Novelists: Charlotte Brontë to PD James*, based on this series of lectures.

Christine Shuttleworth

The Real International African Institute

by Professor Peter Lloyd

The 2017 North American conference was devoted to *Less Than Angels*, the only one of Pym's works that centred upon her place of work. Although many social anthropologists have commented on the accuracy of her descriptions of the IAI, sadly none seems to have been present at the conference to enlarge on this.

I first read the novel soon after its publication. It was written at a very significant time in the development of social anthropology in the UK and so I treat it as a valuable contribution to the history of the discipline. In earlier years the IAI had relied heavily on the contributions of retired administrative officers, some of whom had collected masses of ethnographic data. Many were eccentric (perhaps not as much as Alaric Lydgate). They also received contributions from missionaries, some of whom had lost faith in their proselyting role and turned instead to linguistic analysis or translating.

I first met Pym about 1952 after submitting an article to *Africa*. Pym had never been to Africa or received any formal education in anthropology, her task being to improve style. We never discussed theoretical aspects of the research. I knew, before I met her, that she was an accomplished novelist. I had expected an outgoing, rather glamorous person. Instead she seemed the very opposite – an ordinary and likeable person. We soon became friends, although our meetings were sporadic as most of the time I was in Africa.

I presented a paper to the 1993 BPS conference giving some of these thoughts on the IAI. This was also read in my absence a decade later, when some people, including Hazel Holt, thought Tom was modelled on me. A very slight resemblance; but I did no fieldwork among the Yoruba, an urban people, and so the background as mentioned by Tom was of traffic, not lions. I was most interested in the development of Nigerian political parties in the run-up to Independence, and probably narrated this to Pym though I never encountered a riotous disturbance. So I didn't get killed, but survived to enjoy a successful academic career. In my brief visits to the Institute I never met any of those who might have been models for Alaric and Father Gemini.

Daryll Forde had been commissioned to produce the many-volumed Ethnographic Survey of Africa (which Pym also edited). These were works which outlined in systematic form the 'traditional scene, political and economic structures of tribes/peoples'. The earlier works were often written by graduate students using published materials but later ones were by 'scholars' who had done extensive fieldwork.

In many ways the novelist and social anthropologist worked in similar ways: we were flies on the wall, our presence not recognized by the actors. But whereas Pym jotted down notes of things people said at the next table (when we went out together to Lyons Corner House), to be used in her own way in the appropriate places, we anthropologists had to report events exactly as they happened.

One late afternoon I was with Pym in the IAI office. She said she must try to bash out a few more pages on her novel that evening. She made it sound like a real chore and she reminded me of the graduate student who thinks he has discovered an original explanation of his field work and now has to produce the 80,000 words to justify it.

After World War II the Colonial Office (as it was then) established research centres in Ibadan in Nigeria, and Makerere and Kampala in Uganda and the Rhodes Livingstone Institute in Northern Rhodesia. It also began to fund research with grants for fieldwork and working up a doctoral thesis leading to a university teaching post, as more universities were creating anthropological departments. Hence the conflict between the old guard, exemplified by Alaric, and the new academics such as Tom, Digby and Deirdre.

**Hazel Holt mentions Professor Lloyd and gives us the identities of some of the other LTA characters in* A Lot to Ask*, p 169: 'Margaret Bryan became Gertrude Lydgate, a French anthropologist, Jean Rouch, was Jean-Pierre le Rossignol, and a Belgian linguist, Father Van Bulck … was Father Gemini.'* [Ed]

*Claire Tylee's paper can be read here: www.brunel.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/187155/ET72TyleeED.pdf

Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sussex, Professor Peter Lloyd is the author of numerous academic publications. Barbara Pym met him in the 1950s and mentions him several times in her journals.

An Indexer's Indexer: Hazel Bell

by Christine Shuttleworth

'For my own pleasure and interest, I have compiled an index to Barbara Pym's fiction, covering all her published novels and stories.'

Thus wrote Hazel Bell in the November 1999 issue of *Green Leaves*, of which she had just become editor (taking over from Jean Harker), a post she occupied until 2005.

Hazel Bell at Finstock January 2015

Hazel K Bell, who has been called the 'doyenne of indexing', has twice (in 2005 and 2006) been awarded the Society of Indexers' Wheatley Medal for an outstanding index, as well as the Carey Award (in 1997) for services to indexing. From 1978 to 1994 she was editor of the international journal *The Indexer*. Her numerous publications include *Indexers and Indexes in Fact and Fiction* (British Library, 2001) and *From Flock Beds to Professionalism: A History of Index-Makers* (HKB Press/Oak Knoll Press, 2008), with a preface by David Crystal (naturally, the index-makers featured in this book included Barbara Pym). She is also the editor of *No Soft Incense: Barbara Pym and the Church* (BPS, 1994).

Hazel's enthusiasm for the indexing of fiction has also led her to compile indexes (again for her own pleasure and

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interest) to the novels of A S Byatt, Iris Murdoch and Angela Thirkell among others.

As well as the index to Pym's fiction, she has prepared the index to this journal from its first issue (1994), and continues to do so. It is a much appreciated resource.

Hazel Holt has written of Pym:

> I think what she enjoyed most about indexing, apart from the pleasure of putting words into a certain order, was the peaceful, enclosed *space* an indexer inhabits. It requires a certain sort of concentration: you need to withdraw, as it were, into the world of that which is to be indexed, and this precisely suited Barbara's temperament. It is no coincidence that Mildred and Dulcie (especially the latter) are the heroines who are most like their creator.

This temperament is clearly shared by Hazel Bell. A more sympathetic or better-qualified indexer of Pym's own works could not have been imagined.

For further information see www.aidanbell.com/hkbell.htm

Shirley Hazzard: A Remembrance

by Gabriele Caras

Shirley – I find it difficult to call her by her full name or surname only – passed away on 12 December last year, and so I thought we might take a little space to appreciate someone who so appreciated Barbara.

You may not think you're acquainted with any of Shirley's work or words, but go to your shelves, and pull down one of those beautiful Dutton editions of Barbara's novels. Chances are, you'll find a line of Shirley's on the cover: 'There is a thrill of humanity through all her work.'

The same is true of Shirley's novels and stories, though, on the surface, the two writers appear to have little in common. Shirley's style has been described as 'epigrammatic'; her books have not a whiff of the trademark Pymmian 'cosiness.' Barbara's characters dwell in the byways of church and village life; Shirley's are scattered across continents, oceans, and decades.

But both Barbara's and Shirley's novels drive home that the only scale that matters is the human one. Their novels are testimonials of the individual consciousness in its encounter with the world. Theirs is the truth that a moment can seem to last, or can sustain, an entire lifetime. Both take pleasure in accuracy, and their novels communicate a keen awareness of the imprint details make on one's life. Their heroines see and understand more than they let on, especially recognizing that to try and bridge the gulf between the sexes may be a fool's errand, and one's own energies are sometimes better devoted to other things.

Barbara and Shirley also shared some early influences; the dialogue of Ivy Compton-Burnett, for one. 'I have the impression that poetry formed her,' Shirley wrote of Barbara. 'Poetry flows through her books – not only in outright quotations, but in suggestions, in allusions concealed not merely for the appreciative but for the loving.' Shirley herself was one of the latter. She referred to poetry as 'the longest pleasure of my life. … I do not know how people manage without it.' Of Shirley, I would say what she said of Barbara: *Excellent woman. Her books will last.*

Those interested in reading Shirley's work may wish to try her collection of short stories, *Cliffs of Fall* (1963), or one of her novels, such as *The Transit of Venus* (1980; National Book Critics Circle Award), and the most recent, *The Great Fire* (2003; National Book Award). For her reflections on Pym, see Dale Salwak's 1987 collection *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*, or *We Need Silence to Find Out What We Think*, a selection of Shirley's reviews, essays, and nonfiction published in January of last year.

A Year in West Oxfordshire

[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. Continued from the last issue of* Green Leaves.*]*

April

Four kittens born in time for a fine warm Easter. On Low Sunday 'reviving' the Easter decorations in the church. Some of the daffodils have survived in the chilly atmosphere (no central heating). Finstock Church is neither ancient nor particularly beautiful, but it has the distinction of being the place where T. S. Eliot was received into the Church of England on 29 June 1927. A bronze plaque to commemorate this has been put up in the church and was dedicated by the Bishop of Oxford on 23 June 1974. There is an account of Eliot's baptism in *T. S. Eliot: A Memoir*: *

> William (Force Stead) was living some fifteen miles distant from Oxford in a fine, seventeenth-century gabled house at Finstock on the borders of Wychwood Forest. He arranged that Tom should come and stay with him there and meet two friends who were to be his godfathers (B. H. Streeter and Vere Somerset). On the afternoon of 29th June 1927, St Peter's Day, William met with his three guests and locked the doors of the little church at Finstock before pouring the water of regeneration over the head of one who in future years was to be as much the leading layman in the Church of England as Lord Halifax was at that time.

William Force Stead, I believe, was a chaplain at one of the Oxford colleges. There are some lines in *Little Gidding* which are said to refer to this event. Only which ones, I wonder? Perhaps these:

> Thus, love of a country
> Begins as attachment to our own field of action
> And comes to find that action of little importance
> Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
> History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
> The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
> To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

May

In a good year this is the best month in this part of the country. Buttercups, cow parsley, and sun. And, of course, the cuckoo (A. E. Housman's poem, 'The cuckoo shouts all day at nothing/In leafy dells alone ... '). And, if it isn't too hot, a walk up to Wilcote and a beautiful 'sepia' portrait of sheep grazing in the churchyard round the tombstones. Another walk in Patch Riding, on the edge of the forest going into Cornbury Park (though you can't go into the Park). The bluebells will be out and towards the end of the month you can sometimes see bluebells and wild garlic out together.

June

The most variable month of the year – hottest, coldest,

wettest. The eleventh is St Barnabas's (Hymn 222 in the English Hymnal, by Mrs Maude Coote – 'The Son of Consolation!/Of Levi's priestly line ... ' A walk up to the church for evensong (poorly attended these days). The Collect for St Barnabas, who came from Cyprus and who introduced St Paul to the new church at Jerusalem, says that he was endued with 'singular gifts' and asks God not to leave us 'destitute of thy manifold gifts'. Barnabas was with the disciples at Antioch, the place where the word 'Christians' was first used.

*By Robert Sencourt, ed Donald Adamson. Garnstone Press (1971) p. 109.

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

Gleanings

compiled by Yvonne Cocking

The item most noted by members this half year was a long article in *The New York Times* on 24 August, *In Praise of Pym* by Matthew Schneier.

> Barbara Pym, the mid century English novelist, is forever being forgotten, and forever revived. Her novels sketch a circumscribed scene whose anchors were the church and the vicarage, and the busy, decent Englishmen and -women (more women) who shuffled between the two.

Much of it is devoted to *Excellent Women*, 'Pym's most famous and most perfect novel'. He considers it the 'finest introduction' to Pym's work, though 'her entire canon is a treat'.

Pym member and professional writer of culinary history Laura Shapiro also received much attention on the publication of *What She Ate: six remarkable women and the food that tells their stories* (Viking Press). Melanie Rehak's review *Cooking with Sass* appeared in BookForum, Summer 2017. Among the six is Barbara Pym.

> Society's unwillingness to acknowledge women's true selves and needs was territory Barbara Pym quietly remade over the course of her many novels (which I cannot recommend highly enough). Taken collectively, the characters she writes about are an argument for the importance and nuance of everyday women's lives, with an emphasis on food.

Another review, from a Book Page handout from *Library Review*:

> British novelist Pym 'was not a food writer, but she saw the world as if she were', leaving behind diaries and 88 notebooks that proved to be a culinary historian's dream, often including shopping lists and recipes. And while her literary characters sipped vast quantities of Ovaltine and tea, Pym showed in both her books and in her life that good food can be found anywhere.

Ending a short review of *Legendary Authors and the Clothes They Wore*, by Terry Newman (Harper/Collins), in *The London Review of Books*, 27 July 2017, Rosemary Hill says:

> Newman makes no claims to be exhaustive, and 'legendary' is not the word everyone would use to describe all these writers, but she sets the mind going along interesting lines about others who might be given the same treatment: Barbara Pym, beneath whose twinset beat a passionate heart ...

A Mash Note to Barbara Pym by John F. McIntyre appeared in *The Baltimore Sun* on 10 July:

> Sitting on the porch this afternoon with half a bottle of plonk and a paperback copy of Barbara Pym's *Less Than Angels*, I realized that, nearly forty years after first encountering her novels, I love her more each time I re-read them. Like Jane Austen, she penetrates into ordinary lives with perception and empathy. Of one character she writes that he often 'avoided looking into people's eyes when he spoke to them, fearful of what he might see there' ... but, as with Austen, we also revel in the distinctive authorial irony, as with another character 'who enjoyed the work which was congenial to her natural curiosity about people and her desire to arrange their lives for them'.

There was a mention in Michael Dirda's *Browsings* (Pegasus Books)

> I've somehow accumulated all the novels of Elizabeth Taylor – the English writer, not the actress ... and one day would like to read them. All I know is that Taylor is frequently likened to Barbara Pym, which is good enough recommendation for me.

In the course of recommending another book, Jonathan Lethem in *The New York Times* interjects:

> For years now my most reliable beach reading has been Ross Macdonald and Barbara Pym, in old paperbacks ... both write books so similar to one another that I'm never sure whether I'm rereading one I've read two or three times before – but I'm always heard laughing sharply aloud at the precision of the insights or murmuring in pleasure at the freshness of the storytelling.

Finally, in her feature *Best Books About*, in *The Daily Mail* on 17 July, Gill Hornby's subject was 'Moving to the Country':

> I never wanted to move to the country in the first place – it was my husband's idea. So when a helpful new neighbour informed me that, in order to survive, 'one simply has to buckle down to village life' I wanted to high-tail it back to London. If there's one writer who understands the sociological implications of buckling down, it's the splendid Barbara Pym. Her genteel yet beady ladies all swarm around bric-a-brac stalls and vestries with varying degrees of personal success. In *A Few Green Leaves*, anthropologist Emma takes on her mother's Oxfordshire cottage and casts her eye on all the characters and events of her new community – especially the church and, most especially, its rector, who just happens to be single ...

Thanks to Ann and Dan DiPietro, Alison Felstead, Scott Herrick, Sheila Kane, Linda MacDougall, Norma Munson, Marjorie Schnader, Christine Shuttleworth, Tom Sopko, Isobel Stanley, and Sue Willetts.

Members' Corner

Excellent Women, No Incense

by Fran Baxter-Guigli

When I first visited Great Britain in 1974, I was a few years away from discovering Barbara Pym, but hers was the England I came to see — and it was what I found. It was still

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more or less the Britain of black and white films of the 1960s, and women looked like characters out of Pym novels, wearing hats, with shopping baskets over their arms (and no stockingless lapses).

Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey was the first stop on my literary pilgrimage around the country. I don't recall if there was a charge to enter the Abbey, but I remember being able to walk right in and to walk about freely.

Fast forward to August 2017, when I returned to London with friends. The city was thronged with tourists like us, and at Westminster Abbey we joined a long queue of people from around the world, all staring at their cell phones. The senior concession fee of £17 included an audio listening device, and at the cashier's desk I snagged a flier advertising an upcoming lecture series at the Abbey on 'Excellent Women', which of course featured a talk on Pym herself. For the next hour I shuffled along a roped and numbered route hoping that whatever Jeremy Irons was describing on audio matched what I was viewing. Finally reaching Poets' Corner, which needed no commentary, I noticed two new memorials since my last visit: Pym's dear friend Philip Larkin, and Ted Hughes.

Ted Hughes name came up again a few days later, at a church in Queen Square near our hotel. The curate who welcomed me to the morning service mentioned that it was the church where Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath married in 1956. 'St George of the Chimney Sweeps' — St George the Martyr, Holborn — is a lovely 18th-century church, small but grand. I wondered what would Pym have made of it here in the 21st century.

At the entrance was a café (open daily), which led to the sanctuary illuminated by purplish uplights ('Hawaiian Orchid'?) Toward the back, two young women sat at a console providing technology support. The service began with music led by a man with a guitar and a beautiful voice, as words to the songs (not hymns) were projected on a screen. Two young people in jeans and shorts provided percussion, drumming on wooden crates that served as their seats. In the transept, children — one of them barefoot — sat coloring at a low table, and occasionally wandered around. (Did children attend services in Pym's world?) The curate cited Facebook during the lesson on Psalm 24.

Following the casual and friendly service, the parishioner who had led the prayers kindly handed me a mug of good tea in the café (from a modern urn, no Primus stove in sight) and encouraged me to help myself to the 'bits and bobs' on the table. She said that she had worked for many years as a nurse at nearby Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, which in the old days treated poor children such as chimney sweeps, and which, thanks to a bequest from J M Barrie, continues to receive, like a blessing, the annual royalties from the sales of *Peter Pan*.

Times change, but excellent women (and men) do not.

Readers Recommend

The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared, by Jonas Jonasson

by Betty Zausner

First, a disclaimer: the book I am recommending, *The Hundred-Year-Old Man who Climbed Out- of the Window and Disappeared,* by Jonas Jonasson, is not presented as a 'Pymmish' novel! But, as a devoted Pym reader, I believe other Pymmites may enjoy it as much as I did. And, since I am unable to read Swedish, I am discussing the English translation by Rod Bradbury.

On Allan Karlsson's 100th birthday, he decides to walk away from his nursing home, escaping the party he does not want, and the rules he cannot abide. He meets several colorful, quirky characters, including drug dealers, police detectives, a perennial student, and an elephant, and becomes involved in a series of unlikely and hilarious adventures. The story of Allan's equally unlikely and hilarious life is also gradually told, alternating with chapters which tell the story of his present day activities. During Allan's long, eventful life, he has encountered several world leaders and participated in momentous historical events. While reading these sections, I was reminded of Forrest Gump, and in fact, several reviews and descriptions of the novel do reference Forrest Gump.

The book's humor – at times slapstick, at times wryly clever, at times dark – was accomplished not only through the absurdity of the situations, but also through the use of language, for which I very much appreciated the skills of the translator as well as the author.

Allan's life story and present day adventures, while sometimes outrageously absurd, provoke serious reflections on politics, religion, love, truth and ethics, and on society's attitudes toward and treatment of older people. With this much food for thought, and quite a few laughs as well, this book has become one of my favorites to recommend.

Blast from the Past

BPS Members at the Oxford conference 2011

Boston Tea Party, 4 November 2017

by Judy Horn, photos by Joel Horn

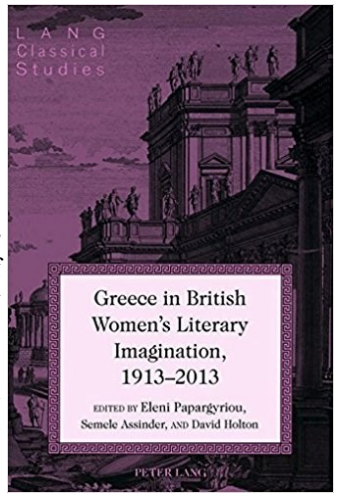
On a beautiful autumn afternoon almost 40 Pym Society members and guests met at the Church of the Advent in Boston for tea. The highlight of the event was a talk by longtime Pym Society member Laura Shapiro, a well-known author of books on food. She discussed her latest book, *What She Ate*, which examines the culinary habits of six prominent women, none of whom is a chef and one of whom is Barbara Pym.

Laura Shapiro

For this audience, Laura made the subject of her talk the chapter on Pym. She gave us some wonderful insight on how she gathered the information, describing her trips to the Bodleian in exciting detail, including how she was required to take an oath not to damage any of the materials there. Pym, who kept copious notes on all aspects of life, recorded numerous meals she cooked, ate in restaurants, and observed. These revealed that British food, while sometimes dreary, was not always the bland, tasteless affair we assume it to be.

After Laura's talk we went downstairs for tea, elegantly presented with silver tea services and lovely china as well as a gorgeous flower arrangement by Tom Sopko. Besides a choice of Earl Grey or English Breakfast, we were treated to delicious sandwiches and cakes brought by the attendees. We all enjoyed the chance to chat with our Pym Society friends.

Greece in British Women's Literary Imagination, 1913-2013



BPS members might be interested to read about the Greek dimension of *A Few Green Leaves* in a chapter of this new book published by Peter Lang. The chapter is called '"In a Different Light": Imagining Greece in Elizabeth Taylor and Barbara Pym', and is by Rowena Fowler and Rose Little.

Rambling Rose

by Rose Little

Years ago, I thought I would visit the Spanish Steps in Rome to see the spectacle of the azaleas massed on the steps – I had read about it somewhere, perhaps in a Pym novel. I decided to go in May, thinking of this as a warm month and sure to be when flowers would be out. When we arrived of course we were charmed, as who wouldn't be, by Rome in May and by Bernini's sculpture of the fishing boat in the Piazza di Spagna, but there were not many azaleas, just a pot on each step. I thought maybe the author had exaggerated.

On my next visit (still pre-Internet) we only had one day in Rome on our way to other cities and so I asked the Ufficio Informazioni Turistiche if the flowers were out on the steps yet. The official replied that she didn't come that way on her bike so she didn't know! Staggered by the unhelpfulness of this reply we decided not to risk squandering our one day on a fool's errand and so, in the footsteps of the St Basil's church party, we visited Trastevere instead.

For my third visit, which was earlier on this year, I had at last got Pym into focus and knew of course that the Italian expedition was to be found in *An Unsuitable Attachment*. There Rupert states quite clearly that 'azaleas were massed on the Spanish Steps at Easter'. On a cold but brilliant April day therefore, I saw the stunning flowers displayed on each step, with the Trinità dei Monti church a beautiful backdrop at the top of the curving steps, where Penny and Rupert had lingered. After taking numerous photographs I naturally repaired '*straight* to Babbingtons' (*sic*) for that 'good cup of tea'.

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Chairman's Chat

by Michael Wilson

You may have a friend like mine: you haven't met for ages so you look forward to having a good natter with them over lunch or dinner. But at the table you realise an unexpected other has joined you: your friend's mobile phone. It lies inert on the table but your friend just can't keep their eyes off it, willing it to come to life. And inevitably it does, and barely has it begun to ring before they eagerly snatch it up and, without so much as a 'Sorry, but would you mind if I took this call?', begin a lengthy chat with whomever, leaving you to gaze around the room while crunching a breadstick.

Now I'm sure that if Barbara had lived in today's world she would not have been guilty of such discourtesy. I do wonder though if at times her companions might have felt she was not giving them her undivided attention. Barbara couldn't help but cast her eye over other people in the room and eavesdrop on their conversations. She would take out a notebook and jot down details, what they looked like, what they were wearing, what they were saying. Many of these jottings of course found their way into her stories. Like Alan Bennett and Victoria Wood, now sadly no longer with us, she had a wonderful ear for the amusing and peculiar. People do say the funniest things.

The Barbara Pym Society 2017–2018

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The 2018 Ellen J. Miller Memorial SHORT STORY COMPETITION

Monday 4 December 2017 is the deadline for submitting original short stories that prominently feature one or more characters from Barbara Pym's published novels, in any setting or situation the author chooses. The winning author will receive a $250 cash prize plus complimentary registration and meals at the North American Conference to be held in Boston, MA, on 16-18 March 2018. The winning entry will be announced and read at the conference and will also be published on the Society's website and distributed to our membership in the Spring 2018 issue of *Green Leaves*. If the winner is unable to attend the conference, the story will be read by a member of the Board or one of the judges.
Complete rules and the submission procedure are posted on the BPS www.barbara-pym.org NA_short_story_announcement.pdf

Coming Events

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

North American Conference
Friday 16 – Sunday 18 March 2018
Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA
The Sweet Dove Died

UK Conference and AGM
Friday 31 August – Sunday 2 September 2018
St Hilda's College, Oxford
'Food and Drink in the World of Barbara Pym'

Spring Meeting
Sunday 13 May 2018
St Alban's Centre, Baldwin's Gardens,
London EC1N 7AB

Alliance of Literary Societies AGM
Friday 18 – Sunday 20 May 2018
(see allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/agm-weekend/)

'Noel Streatfeild: Families and the Vicarage'
16 November 2017, 7.30 - 9.00 pm
Clemence Schultze
The Old Library, University Church of St Mary the Virgin, High Street, Oxford
No booking required

Clemence Schulze

Tim & Yvonne

Margot and Pat

Betty and Rose

Libby & Ruth

Maggie and the Merchandise

Margot Schnorr

Lunch

The stone squirrel presides over the tombola

Yvonne & Michael

Fran & Rose

Emily, Michael & Sandra

Coffee break

Yvonne, Keith and Pat

Doug at his bookshop

Dinnertime conversation

Thank you to Jutta Schiller for taking most of the photographs in this issue of Green Leaves.

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