building, where members participated in the Annual General Meeting (AGM). There was some discussion of what members can do with Barbara’s personal books that we acquired at the Blackwell’s sale of books a couple of years ago. We learned that if we wish to give these directly to St Hilda’s, there is an office called the Chattels Committee that decides whether to accept such gifts.

Some speakers’ sudden inability to attend caused a reworking of the programme. The revised schedule presented by Linda McDougall brought a new format to our meetings: a brief talk followed by a panel discussion with comments and questions from the audience. This solution was a big success and thoroughly enjoyed by the attendees. Our esteemed members and published authors Laura Shapiro and Perri Klass talked about ‘What She Ate’ and ‘What She Drank’, respectively, with panelists Jill Norman, Jane Peyton and Kate Young. What richness! They were indeed excellent speakers.

The conference theme was ‘Food & Drink in the World of Barbara Pym’ and we were treated not just to discussion of the same, but even to our meals based on menus from the novels, right down to Sunday’s luncheon of duck (No Fond Return of Love). The conference subcommittee compiled a list of the menus for the two days and St Hilda’s catering staff beautifully prepared and served it all.

On the Friday the tour of The Oxford Artisan Distillery had to be cancelled. Interestingly on the company’s website it is referred to by its initials as TOAD. Hmmm. I guess we ‘can’t take toad’, in solidarity with Vicar Nicholas Cleveland in Jane and Prudence. Since we can, however, take gin — ‘Mother’s Ruin’ — our incoming Chair Deb Fisher kindly provided a generous sampling of the spirit for us in the Senior Common Room of St Hilda’s to make up for the loss of TOAD.

Deb then led us in the annual pre-conference trivia contest, the questions for which she had brilliantly composed herself. The quiz featured Barbara Pym’s works themselves and gave an advantage to those who have read the novels over and over to the point of memorisation. A fine admixture of Shakespeare put extra demands on our memories. It was hard but fun, especially the fill-in-the-missing-word in quotations from Barbara Pym’s novels.

Saturday morning dawned the promise of the Full English Breakfast. For me this moment is the most special of the conference, not because of the satisfying meal, but because it reminds me always of my first conference (2003) and bravely sitting down at a table, happily with Joan Drexler, the very first society member I met. I was irrationally terrified of what the imposing-sounding, prestigious Barbara Pym Society might be like, but Joan’s sweet welcome made me feel instantly at ease, a feeling that has not changed over these last 15 years. I think of Joan, who is no longer with us in this life, and am grateful for her kindness.

I hope and believe that the many new friends — and this year there were quite a few — attending their first Pym conference felt the same warm and happy welcome that Joan extended to me.

Morning coffee was held at the Jacqueline du Pré building, where members participated in the Annual General Meeting (AGM). There was some discussion of what members can do with Barbara’s personal books that we acquired at the Blackwell’s sale of books a couple of years ago. We learned that if we wish to give these directly to St Hilda’s, there is an office called the Chattels Committee that decides whether to accept such gifts.

Old friends and new. Feeling at home and in a happy community of shared interests. These two impressions were stronger than ever for me this year. Despite the scorching summer having stressed the gardens, our society was in flower as usual. And the setting was exquisite: lovely late summer mornings, sunshine and breeze, the playing fields across the river and the bells of Oxford ringing.

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I hope and believe that the many new friends — and this year there were quite a few — attending their first Pym conference felt the same warm and happy welcome that Joan extended to me.
Laura Shapiro’s newest book, *What She Ate: Six Remarkable Women and the Food That Tells Their Stories*, includes a chapter devoted to Barbara. In her talk Laura said, ‘[Barbara’s] eyes and ears on permanent alert; the world around her feeds her.’ Perri told us that when she sees others, she wonders what Pym would have done with the episode. She then shared an item confirming Barbara’s legendary powers of observation and simultaneous practical efficiency: in the Bodleian Library archive, Barbara’s notebooks are full of observed moments — ‘material’ — for her work, but turn the notebook upside down and read the verso to see all the humdrum shopping and other lists. This is the trivial round that makes up life.

On a lighter note, Linda McDougall said she once mentioned the Barbara Pym Society to someone who misheard the name as the ‘Barf and Gin Society’. I think not!

In the late summer evening we had drinks on the lawn preparing for the annual Barbara Pym dinner, this year with its notes of mushrooms, tarragon, and blue cheese. Content and well-fed, we were ready for the excitement of the tombola, or ‘Pymbola’, as we call it now. Americans say raffle but it amounts to the same fun. Indeed our tombola prizes were only symbolic — but what symbolism! We must thank Paul Howard for his thoughtful work in gathering the prizes, their accompanying Pym quotations, and for the organization and sale of tickets to benefit Cancer Research UK.

I realised, as I inspected the prizes to choose from, that if I won in the Pymbola, which I did not, there was not anything that I really wanted. I somehow could not feel enthusiastic, and wondered why the charms of the Ovaltine and Wincarnis had no claim on me. Then I realized that of course ‘men want only one thing’, something which was probably not on offer, although I could not quite remember what it was and could not therefore definitely rule out the quince jelly.

On Sunday our programme began with a much cleaner version of the video *Tea with Miss Pym*, provided courtesy of Linda McDougall. The images, sound and color of this video surpass the copy we have viewed in past years.

The last talk of the conference was given by Lucia Costanzo: ‘Cooking with Pym’. Lucia made me want to cook! Not on a gas ring in a bed sitter, however. As with all our presentations, Lucia’s talk inspired me.

After the delightful lunch, we had the culminating treat: *Scenes from the Dining Table*, a series of episodes from no fewer than four Pym novels, dramatized and adapted by Society archivist and beloved member Yvonne Cocking, and performed by the Mighty Pym Players. Again, what richness.

A word about Yvonne: all weekend she kept zooming past and delighting everyone she talked with. Not only is Yvonne our archivist and living connection to Barbara Pym, she embodies key aspects of our society through her scholarship, seriousness, sense of humour, creativity, kindness and sparkling spirit. Kudos!

Of all the many fascinating or entertaining comments overheard, the one that struck me most was ‘She taught me how to listen’. I think Barbara would be gratified to receive this compliment.

Jill Norman is a British editor and food writer. She has published books on food and drink for many years. She created the Penguin Cookery Library in the 1960s and 1970s. She published authors such as Elizabeth David, who changed how the English appreciated their food, and then started writing about food herself. In 2004 she published the New Penguin Cookery Book. She has won many prizes for her books in England and the US. She also updated Encyclopædia Britannica’s entries on herbs and spices.

Jane Peyton, an adoptive Londoner, is a writer, public speaker, expert on alcoholic drinks, tour guide, radio and TV broadcaster, and events producer. She has won several awards for her work and became Britain’s first Beer Sommelier of the Year (2014). She is the author of *Beer O’Clock*, Brilliant Britain, Drink and School of Booze.

Kate Young is an Australian-born, London-based food writer and cook. After moving to the UK in 2009, she started her blog, thelittlelibrarycafe.com, which now has readers all over the world and is regularly featured in the Guardian. She is the author of *The Little Library Cookbook*.

Laura Shapiro is an author and food historian, whose articles and columns were published in *The Real Paper* (Boston), *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, Conde Nast Traveler, *Rolling Stone*, *Slate*, *Gastronomica*, *Gourmet*, and others. She was also an award-winning writer at *Newsweek* for more than 15 years. Laura is the author of several classic books of culinary history. The latest one is *What She Ate: Six Remarkable Women and the Food That Tells Their Stories* about six women, including Barbara Pym, through the lens of food and cooking. Laura lives in New York City and is a member of the NA Pym Society, and has given talks in the US and in Oxford.

Perri Klass, also a member of the NA Pym Society, is Professor of Journalism and Pediatrics at New York University and Medical Director of ‘Reach Out and Read’, a national childhood literacy programme. She has a weekly column in the New York Times. Passionate about Pym, she gave a talk on drinks and drinking in Pym’s work at the 2013 NA conference. She has also done a great deal of writing about food and travel (and knitting!) and won a James Beard journalism award for food writing.

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Cooking with Pym  

by Lucia Costanzo

As with many Pym readers of my generation (born mid-1960s), the novels present an opportunity to step back to a time that feels vaguely familiar. This is especially true when it comes to the many deliciously vivid descriptions of food.

Not everything described is familiar to me. I am half Italian and was brought up on traditional Neapolitan cuisine … with a generous seasoning of post-war working class fare, too. Spam fritters, watery beef stew, lime jelly with ice cream sawn off an icy block … all these were served at my school, providing a contrast to the pizzas, fish dishes and meat-based pasta sauces prepared by my Italian grandmother. My English mother served huge, tasty meals, mainly of the meat and two veg style.

I have a large collection of cookery books, including many older titles inherited from my mother. These provided a lot of material for research. But what cookery books would Barbara have been familiar with?

The Barbara Pym Cookbook suggests that Barbara was familiar with a cookery book called Tried Favourites, which was published and republished 25 times between 1900 and 1948. Indeed Harriet and Belinda in Some Tame Gazelle appear to own a copy.

“‘I seem to remember a recipe in Tried Favourites — a sort of substitute for whisky’”, said Belinda. “I dare say it would be quite easy to make.”

“‘I think our guests would hardly thank us if we offered them that’, said Harriet.”

The recipe is equal parts of chloric ether, tincture of ginger and sal volatile. Don’t try to make it at home — even if it is ‘ … a never failing remedy in every case when alcohol is deemed necessary — even for heart failure’.

So without much to go on I took a reasoned guess at the recipes. Over summer 2018 I cooked a range of dishes — one from each of the novels with the exception of Civil to Strangers. I couldn’t locate a recipe for savoury oatmeal.

For the early novels we must remember that rationing was still in force. This thought must colour our views of the food described. Sugar was rationed until September 1953 and meat and cheese until July 1954.

I started with Some Tame Gazelle written 1935–1950 and published in 1950. This novel features the well-loved reference to boiled chicken. ‘In the dining-room Harriet sat at one end of the table and Belinda at the other with the curate in the middle. Harriet carved the boiled chicken smothered in white sauce very capably. She gave the curate all the best white meat … ’. Much has been said and written about Harriet and Belinda’s chicken, and in her paper presented at the 2013 NA conference Laura Shapiro describes this quintessential mid-twentieth century British dish. I turned first to Tried Favourites, which offers a sketchy recipe for boiled fowl in a rather buttery white sauce with chopped hard-boiled eggs.

I really wanted something with lemon and a little more special … I found this in The Gentle Art of Cookery from 1925 by Hilda Leyel and Olga Hartley. To be fair, the recipe I used had a French title, Poulet au Blanc, but it is boiled chicken with white sauce, and really is a rather sophisticated dish using the stock from the slowly simmered chicken and lemons. So what was it like? Actually rather delicious … rich, buttery and lemony. As for the coldness in the description … well, it probably would have been made earlier in the day before the servants had their half-day.

The other recipes I tried were equally enlightening. They were from the following novels:

  - Crampton Hodnet, written 1939–40 and published 1985: a plum cake from Tried Favourites. I used the second recipe from page 171, halving the quantities. Available from archive.org/details/triedfavouritesc00kirkiala/page/n3
  - Jane and Prudence, written in 1950–52 and published in 1953: Mrs Glaze’s Shepherd’s Pie from Warne’s Everyday Cookery.
  - No Fond Return of Love, written 1957–60 and published in 1961: Mrs Sedge’s semolina pudding from Good Housekeeping Picture Cookery.

Of all the recipes from the novels I tried, the tuna mousse was my favourite: simple, tasty and very economical. Only the under-sugared glutinous semolina pudding is a recipe I would never repeat.

I did enjoy my summer of Pymmish cuisine. It was not just an adventure in vintage-style cooking, but a genuinely
minutes of the annual general meeting
of the Barbara Pym Society
Saturday 1 September 2018, 11.15am

Chairman’s Opening Remarks: Michael Wilson warmly welcomed first-time attendees and familiar faces to the AGM and conference. He apologised to those left off the list of attendees in error: Keith Armstrong (Taunton), Joel & Judy Horn (Reading, MA, USA), Moira Rafferty (Virginia, USA) and Trish Robinson (Tennessee, USA).

Apologies: Lucia Costanzo, Miriam Margolyes, Colin Oxenforth, Maggie Parsons, Clemence Schultzze.

Minutes of the Previous AGM (2 September 2017): These were accepted as a true and correct record, without amendment.

Matters arising from the Minutes: Libby Tempest had to resign as Membership Secretary as a result of becoming Chair of the Gaskell Society. Lorraine Mepham has stepped forward to take her place.

Chairman’s Report: In his final report as Chairman, Michael began by thanking his fellow committee members for their support and the work they had done. He noted in particular the ‘irreplaceable’ Eileen Roberts and the work that she does to organise the conference, and thanked Triona Adams for her work behind the scenes. He noted that this year’s conference had turned into ‘something of a nightmare’ due to several last-minute changes, and thanked in particular Linda McDougall and Eileen, with the conference sub-committee of Jean Harker, Deirdre Bryan-Brown and Sandra Margolies, for their work ‘in keeping the show on the road’.

Deirdre Bryan-Brown was thanked for her service as a former Chair and committee member, as she has decided not to seek re-election this year. Similarly, Rose Little was thanked for her work as Editor of Green Leaves following her resignation in advance of hip surgery. Christine Shuttleworth and Judy Horn were also thanked for their work on Green Leaves, and Michael reported that Jutta Schiller has allowed her name to go forward for election to take over from Rose as the new Editor.

Other officers mentioned were Alison Felstead (Secretary); Lorraine Mepham, who ensured the Society’s compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR); and Tom Sopko (North American Organizer), who organises the highly successful NA conferences and maintains the BPS website. Last, Michael expressed gratitude to the ‘one and only’ Yvonne Cocking, noting her encyclopaedic knowledge of Pym and her works.

Michael went on to recall last year’s conference, whose theme was No Fond Return of Love. Papers were delivered by Sandra Goldstein, Emily Stockard and Colin Oxenforth, and the conference ended with a performance by the Mighty Pym Players.

Attendees at the Spring Meeting had the privilege of being entertained by a cast of professional actors, headed by Dame Penelope Wilton, who performed a rehearsed reading of No Fond Return of Love dramatised by Georgia Powell and directed by her father Tristram Powell. This was first performed twenty-five years ago. Michael reported that
Tristram and Georgia have been made Honorary Members of the Society in gratitude, and thanked Jean Harker, who was instrumental in arranging the memorable event.

Michael expressed his pleasure at being Chairman, but confessed to ‘looking forward to being able just to sit back and enjoy the show’. In addition to the many highlights of his tenure he recalled some of the lows, including the deaths of Fred Holman, Jill Stevens and Michael Macke.

Without pre-empting the election of his successor, he noted that she was likely to be Deb Fisher, an active member since the Society’s early days as well as Secretary of the Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship and active in the Alliance of Literary Societies. He concluded by observing that Deb is, like Barbara Pym, an alumna of St Hilda’s, and ended his report with these words: ‘If World Cup football did not come home in the summer of 2018, the Chairmanship of the Barbara Pym Society will come home to St Hilda’s.’

Financial Report: A report for 1 August 2017 to 31 July 2018 from the Treasurer, Eileen Roberts, was included in the conference pack. In summary, cash-on-hand on 1 August 2017 was £7,238, and this had increased to £7,539 by 31 July 2018. Total expenses for the period were £15,220 and total income was £15,550. Major expenses for the year were the AGM and conference (£12,874) and Spring Meeting (£1,272). Conference fees brought in £12,309, and member dues £1,933. Eileen said that we were not doing too badly, but noted that the conference made a loss. Membership is looking healthier, and she hoped that the new members would enjoy the conference.

Membership Report: Lorraine Mepham presented her first report as Membership Secretary. Currently the UK has 118 paid-up members, with a further 84 who are in arrears of between 1 and 2 years. These will receive a further reminder with the next issue of Green Leaves, and those still in arrears of more than 1 year by next March will be eliminated. In addition, there are 16 non-UK members, and 26 Honorary and Life members. There have been applications by 26 new members since the last AGM; these have come mostly by post (using forms downloaded from the website), with a few coming directly through the pymmembers email account. Lorraine reported that all UK members and non-UK members from EU countries were informed of the new GDPR legislation in June 2018, and the specific measures that the BPS was taking in order to comply with the GDPR. There have been no individual enquiries or requests arising from this to date.

Editor of Green Leaves Report: Outgoing Editor Rose Little thanked everyone for the support she had received as Editor, and apologised for stopping after four years instead of five because of her upcoming hip surgery. She was pleased to be passing on the role to Jutta Schiller (pending the formal election), who would continue to have the help of Christine Shuttleworth with proofreading and production, and Judy Horn with technology. She concluded by saying that Editor of Green Leaves was a very interesting job.

The Barbara Pym Society in North America: A written report from Tom Sopko was included in the conference pack, including a financial report from Jordan Bach. Tom invited questions but there were none. The NA chapter had 208 paid members at 1 August 2017 plus 117 who paid in 2016 but have not yet renewed, totalling 325 — an increase of 12 from one year ago — including 29 new members. Cash-on-hand at 31 July 2018 was $22,006, an increase of $2,439 from one year ago.

The 2018 NA conference on The Sweet Dove Died received 10 proposals for talks. The eclectic panel of five speakers included four newcomers and three with PhDs in English Literature, and came from England, France, India and Florida.

Tom reported that the first Ellen J. Miller Memorial Short Story Competition was a great success and will be continued in 2019. Twenty entries were received and ranked by judges Kathy Ackley, Isabel Stanley and Denise Marois-Wolf. The three winning authors — Carol Novis, Eliza Langhans and Betsy Hanson — were present at the conference to read their winning stories after the Friday night dinner. The top four stories were included with the Spring 2018 Green Leaves.

Conference attendance was 114, matching last year. A record 76 attended the Friday night dinner at the Church of the Advent in Boston. Conference fees plus $1,619 in donations covered all expenses with approximately $380 to spare. The 21st NA conference, on Crampton Hodnet, will be held on 22–24 March 2019, with proposals for papers due by 12 November 2018. Short story entries are due by 3 December 2018.

The BPS website www.barbara-pym.org averages approximately 224 visits and 750 page views per week, with 53% of visitors from the US, 26% from the UK, 6% from Canada, and the remainder from elsewhere around the world. Posts on the BPS Facebook page reach over 1,400 people, most of whom are not BPS members.

Archivist’s Report: Yvonne Cocking reported that, as the BPS Archivist concerned with the Barbara Pym papers held in the Bodleian, she collects and passes on to the Bodleian new material as it is acquired. She noted that there is less and less of this material to hand on. Alison Felstead reported that the separate archive of the Barbara Pym Society is gradually being deposited with St Hilda’s College Archive. Oliver Mahony, the Archivist of St Hilda’s, has recently reported that some VHS videotapes from previous conferences have been migrated to DVD.

Rita Phillips asked about the list of books from BP’s library that had been bought by members of the Society at the Blackwell’s sale in 2004. Alison reported that Ros Cleal had passed on to her the details gathered so far, and these complemented the information that Alison had input into the LibraryThing catalogue of BP’s library (see www.librarything.com/catalog/Barbara_Pym, and select display style C to see the comments). Alison is still interested in hearing from members who owned books from BP’s library and invited them to contact her with the details at alison.felstead@btinternet.com.

Rita wondered if these books could be donated to the Society in due course, to form part of the archive, instead of being resold. Charles Gilbert had had similar thoughts about what to do with his BP books. Rita suggested that a ‘Barbara Pym Room’ could be fitted out in the college archive where these books and other artefacts (e.g., a table from the Finstock sale) could be preserved, and Yvonne noted that furniture items presented a problem. Moira Forrest wondered if such artefacts could be digitised in 3D. Alison suspected that St Hilda’s would not have the space for a
Barbara Pym Room, but suggested that this subject could be discussed at the next committee meeting in January.

**Elections:** Michael reported that nominations had been invited for the post of Chair of the Society, and only one had been received: Deb Fisher. He asked for a show of hands, and Deb was elected unanimously. Likewise, Jutta Schiller was unanimously elected to the other vacant post, that of Editor of *Green Leaves*. Paul Howard was standing for re-election for a second term as an ordinary member of the committee, and this was also carried unanimously.

**AOB:** (a) Jutta enquired about the portrait of Barbara Pym on display in the JdP foyer. Triona Adams said that she had done some research online, contacted the artist, Peter Edwards, and purchased the picture. She may loan it to St Hilda’s. She thought that the copyright might be for sale from the artist.

(b) Deb drew attention to a series of events taking place at the Gaskell House in Manchester in September and October. These included a ‘Victorian Book Group’ and ‘Dressing the Victorian Lady’. Libby Tempest could supply further details (see elizabethgaskellhouse.co.uk/).

(c) Paul Howard reminded attendees about the ‘Pymbola’, in aid of Cancer Research UK this year, which would be drawn after the conference dinner. Tickets could be purchased for £5.00 per strip of five. Eileen reminded attendees about the second-hand book sale in the JdP foyer. The money from sales will go to the PDA Society (see www.pdasociety.org.uk/).

(d) Eileen thanked Michael formally for his service as Chairman of the Society, and presented him with a bottle of wine. Dee Bryan-Brown thanked Deb for providing the gin on Friday night.

**Report of the Spring Meeting in London**

‘Perhaps It Would Have To Be Contrived: Scenes from Barbara Pym’s *No Fond Return of Love*’

by Rose Little

Spring Meeting with a difference — about sixty people gathered excitedly in May at St Alban’s, Holborn, for instead of a talk we were to be treated to a dramatised version of *No Fond Return of Love*. This was arranged for us by St Hilda’s alumna, Jean Harker, put on for us by a cast of distinguished actors, directed by Tristram Powell, and was a repeat of the 1993 original production at St Hilda’s which led to the founding of the Barbara Pym Society.

Penelope Wilton did a superb job as Narrator and linked the scenes together while Emma Fielding and Carolyn Pickles took the starring roles of Dulcie and Viola respectively. Pippa Haywood nimbly skipped among the distinctive voices and manners of several of the other women characters from the slight little-girl tones of Marjorie Forbes to the rough west country accent of Mrs Forbes senior. She brought to life the cozy, gossipy manner of Neville’s housekeeper and the disagreeing tones of Mrs Williton. Her ‘Tuscany!’ rang out unforgettably, just like the line, ‘A handbag?’ so memorably delivered by Dame Edith Evans in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Malcolm Sinclair took on all the men, including the smooth tones of Aylwin and his brother Neville.

I don’t usually laugh out loud at plays, confining myself to smiles, but this time I couldn’t help but laugh, along with the rest of the audience, as the life of Pym’s delightful characters and the irony of the conception made itself felt through the actors’ brilliant portrayals.

As usual we were treated to a tasty, nutritious spread organised by John Handley, Raschid and the team at the St Alban’s Centre and were well looked after with coffee at our committee meeting beforehand. Members were welcome to attend communion in the church before we gathered later for lunch and the play.

We are very grateful to Tristram Powell (the son of Hazel Holt’s old friend, Lady Violet Powell) for directing, and to his daughter, Georgia, for writing the adaptation, and for arranging this reprise. Tristram suggested that further plays could be adapted from Pym novels for us at spring meetings in the future, and I’m sure we all look forward to these tremendously.

**Milham Ford**

by Jean Harker

This year, as St Hilda’s development plans move forward, we will say goodbye to the trusty Milham Ford building which has been a feature of College life since 1958. Built on the banks of the Cherwell, the building housed study-bedrooms, a large laundry-room, the College Chapel, and the Fellow’s set of rooms (with a balcony overlooking the river) which was notably occupied by Classics tutor Dr Barbara Levick, who at the end of each summer term would sit in the sun outside the entrance door marking Finals papers at a small table, causing those who had yet to do their exams to shudder as they passed.

When Barbara Pym was an undergraduate in the early 1930s, St Hilda’s did not own the Milham Ford building, but operated on a split site with Hall building on one side, South building on the other, and between them Milham Ford School for Girls, whose school crest showed the mill and the river above their motto ‘Follow the Gleam’.

Milham Ford School had its origins, as did St Hilda’s, in the early 1890s. It began as a little nursery school set up by two sisters, Miss Emma and Miss Jane Moody, at their home in Iffley Road. In 1898, when they needed more space, they moved the school to a cottage in Cowley Place on the banks of the Cherwell. They named the school Milham Ford, after...
the nearby ford across the Cherwell. The ford is still visible today, sloping down to the punt station; historically it was used to take building stone across the river for transport to Christ Church, so as to avoid putting strain on Magdalen Bridge.

The Misses Moody sold their school to the Church Education Corporation in 1904. The cottage was incorporated into a new larger building finished in 1906, and this, with various alterations 50 or so years later, was to become part of St Hilda’s.

In 1923 Milham Ford School was sold to the City of Oxford, and became its first girls’ secondary school. By the late 1920s increasing numbers of pupils meant that the school, which had already expanded into several wooden huts used as teaching rooms, needed larger premises.

A suitable 16-acre farmland site (allegedly previously partly fields for pigs, partly Victorian rubbish dump) was found in Marston on the east side of Oxford, and the splendid new Milham Ford School opened its doors to staff and pupils in 1938. It became a girls’ grammar school in 1944, then a comprehensive school in 1974, then was closed in 2003. The building was sold to Oxford Brookes University.

The old Milham Ford School building on the banks of the Cherwell was put to various uses until 1945 when it became the architecture department of the College of Technology, Art and Commerce. St Hilda’s managed to acquire it in 1958, along with the small amount of land between it and the road, so that at last the College had a unified site.

Archie, Margaret and Barbara Pym

by Nicholas Tucker

Much of the action in Barbara Pym’s novel Less Than Angels takes place in a ‘dark depressing room, which had many tattered books in shelves round the walls and some moth-eaten African masks, put there either to inspire the students in their work or because no museum really wanted them. There was even the skeleton of a small animal, a relic of the days when the room had been used for the study of Zoology.’ Senior anthropologists in this story preferred gathering in more salubrious surroundings.

At the start of one such meeting, ‘Bringing up the rear were a small benevolent-looking man, bowed down by the weight of two suitcases which appeared to be filled with lead, and a tall thin man walking with a catlike tread.’ I can’t answer for the tall thin man, but the other person is my father Archie Tucker, former Professor of East African Language at London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies. He always carried copious notes around with him, occasionally bulked out by newspapers picked up on the evening train back to Sevenoaks, where we lived.

Archie knew Barbara from her time working for the International African Institute. An occasional guest at our house, she presented him and my mother with affectionately inscribed copies of all her novels. Archie also crops up in her notebooks where she recorded potentially comic moments often arising from the anthropologists and linguistic experts she worked with. On 18 November 1955 he gets this typical mention: ‘I thought that Flotum made out that Mbum was a Bantu language’, said A.N.T. ‘Oh he didn’t try anything of that sort with me,” said M.B. indignantly.’

This was Margaret Bryan, a formidable academic linguist, known to her students as ‘the dragon’. Another frequent visitor to Sevenoaks, in Less Than Angels she is clearly the ever-empathic scholar, Miss Gertrude Lydgate. Her threat, after thumping the table, to ‘withhold my material on the Gana verb’ from a double-crossing colleague, is entirely Margaret.

She and Barbara, also close friends, used to attend London concerts given by the newly formed Society for the Promotion of New Music. On one occasion in 1952 I was invited to accompany them to hear the premiere of the Scottish composer Ian Hamilton’s first string quartet. Aged 15 and soon bored by the scratchy sound, I noticed that both Margaret and Barbara were making notes. I could just make out the words ‘Easy? Too easy?’ on Margaret’s pad. I couldn’t see what Barbara was writing, but I wonder if it was more to do with the company than the music. Surrounded by some of London’s live classical music eccentrics, with the composer becoming increasingly ill-tempered with questions put to him after the performance, it could well have been a scene from any of her novels.

Professor Tucker (left) and Professor Lukas

That same year she invited me to the Albert Hall for a Prom featuring more orthodox fare. Sitting in our box during the interval she told me in her languid tones that ‘I’m afraid you are going to have to eat a rather rich cake’. I gobbled it up while she smoked a cigarette over a cup of tea. But knowing now how often she wrote about her own highs and lows when it came to food, especially sweet varieties, perhaps the cake got more notice in her diary that night than did my own only semi-articulate company, for I am pretty sure that it was originally destined for her before she thought of asking me along. Again, just the sort of rueful miscalculation she would have made the most of in her writing.

As Peter Lloyd points out in his excellent article ‘Barbara Pym and Social Anthropology’, first presented at the Barbara Pym Literary Weekend 1993, published in Green Leaves XXIV:2 (November 2005), her novel ignores any of...
the modern developments in this particular field, poking fun instead at what went on in its earlier days. Nor was she any more respectful of African linguists. Working at her desk in London for 28 years editing the learned magazine *Africa* when she would rather have been at home writing, she turned to these disciplines and their chief disciples mostly for humour. But *Less Than Angels*, although funny in its opening chapters, also makes some telling points about academia as it sometimes was. Her eagle eye for human folly and self-delusion is apparent in all her novels; there is no reason why academics should have escaped the same gently ironic scrutiny in their turn. And because it was accompanied by such obvious affection, no-one at the time minded. My father was delighted with the reference to him.

With her natural warmth and charm she made and kept a multitude of friends, all of whom cherished her company. Of these Margaret Bryan gets a brief mention in Hazel Holt’s biography of Barbara, but my father — benevolent to the last — does not. However, both live on in the wonderfully witty writing of this peerless twentieth-century author.

**Mary Moore Obituary**

by Jean Harker

The Barbara Pym Society owes a debt of gratitude to Mary Moore, the seventh Principal of St Hilda’s College, who died last October aged 87. She was Principal from 1980 to 1990, and, aware of the popularity of Barbara Pym’s novels and the affection which readers felt for them, she had the inspired idea of holding the original one-day conference *Barbara Pym: her Life and Work* in 1986. This led to the Barbara Pym Literary Weekend of 1993, as part of the College’s Centenary celebrations, and the BPS was founded in 1994 after an enthusiastic response to the BBC Radio 4 documentary about the Literary Weekend made by Sioned Wiliam and Elizabeth Proud. ‘A Very Suitable Occasion’ was the programme’s aptly Pymish title, though it tended to be referred to unofficially by those who were there as ‘Making Tea for Henry Harvey’.

Before any conference-organising could begin, I had the important task of taking Hilary Walton and Hazel Holt, who were Barbara Pym’s literary executors, to tea at the Randolph Hotel in order to ascertain their willingness for the conference to happen. Fortunately they liked the idea, and were also willing to participate, so we had our go-ahead. I did the nuts-and-bolts organising, and Mary Moore wrote to the distinguished literary and academic figures — Victoria Glendinning, Hilary Spurling, and the social anthropologist Edwin Ardener — whom we hoped to persuade to give papers. It is very difficult to refuse an invitation from an Oxford Head of House, and happily our potential speakers accepted with alacrity. Mary attended the conference and put up the two non-Oxford-resident speakers (both Somervillians) at the Principal’s Lodging, where Alison Shell, then an undergraduate and acting as conference assistant, poured generously sized gin-and-tonics to settle their nerves.

It is so appropriate that Mary Moore should have had the idea of a conference about Barbara Pym as she was herself a writer. Under the pseudonym Helena Osborne she wrote television and radio plays, and four page-turning novels, *Arcadian Affair, Pay-Day, White Poppy*, and *The Joker*, published between 1969 and 1979. The novels had exotic, foreign settings (Greece, the Middle East, Afghanistan … ) which reflected their author’s own travels in the British Foreign Service.

An alumna of Lady Margaret Hall, where she read history, Mary Galbraith (as she then was) was one of the first British woman diplomats, coming third when she took the relevant Service exam. She subsequently worked at the United Nations in New York, where she met her husband-to-be, Tony Moore, a senior colleague. When they married in 1963 he continued his career, but she was obliged to resign, and took in local colour for her novels from their far-flung postings.

By the mid-1970s Tony Moore had retired. He and Mary, with their young son Arthur, moved to Touchbridge farmhouse in the village of Brill in Buckinghamshire, and embarked with enthusiasm on its refurbishment. When Mary became Principal of St Hilda’s in 1980, Arthur (who is now a barrister) was a trumpet-playing schoolboy living with his parents in the Principal’s Lodging and tying trout flies for Miss Taylor, the legendary redoubtable countrywoman who was St Hilda’s Domestic Bursar. In the late 1980s Arthur went to Balliol, like his maternal grandfather, V. H. Galbraith (Regius Professor of Modern History, 1947–57).

During her Principalship Mary Moore was renowned for the care which she took of her undergraduates, and also of her college. She worked tirelessly at planning and fundraising, and at putting the case for the women’s colleges at Oxford. She was always kind, and invariably elegant, stylish and beautifully dressed, qualities which are shown in the portrait of her which hangs in St Hilda’s dining hall.


**The Portrait of Barbara Pym**

by Triona Adams

I rather fell in love with the portrait when I saw the postcards that Maggie Parsons had so cleverly tracked down in Oswestry and brought to the 2017 AGM in Oxford. I bought a card, musing on the rather dim colours and sad, gentle eyes, and forgot all about it.

Then, the following June, I was tidying up my office in College when I came to think of it again. (This would have been before the annual Alumnae Garden Party. You can always tell when I have a huge college event just around the corner as I begin frantically clearing and tidying the office. Waste paper, half eaten chocolate bars, Top Secret documents: nothing is safe.) There were copies of recent

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issues of *Green Leaves* on my desk waiting to be filed. As I flicked through them, possibly while tidying away a biscuit or two, the article about the portrait caught my eye and I read on. It looked lovely, the picture in *Green Leaves*. I wondered what happened to the painting.

As Maggie explained, it had gone on sale as a result of 'a revival of interest in the subtle, accomplished novelist'. What a shame for us to lose track of it, I thought. The article was nearly a year old. I wondered what lucky person might have bought it.

I Googled and soon realised that the painter, Peter Edwards, is an extremely distinguished portrait artist. I recognised his *Seamus Heaney* immediately. Oh, whoever bought our Barbara is indeed a lucky person! But who, who, bought it?

The trail ended there, but I could not resist emailing Peter Edwards to find out more. I thought it might be useful for us to know the new owner in case we wanted to use the image in the future.

Peter replied immediately that, miracle, it was still for sale and currently sitting in his studio, was I interested?

Reader, I was! But I played it cool. Well, coolish. Truth was, when Peter sent through photos of the piece I loved it all over again. The colours were far brighter, the composition more complex, and the eyes, though still a little sad, filled with a lively wisdom and gentle humour.

I considered urging the Barbara Pym Society to buy it. I considered urging the College to buy it but, when some members of the Senior Common Room expressed even vague interest in this, I panicked. Selfishly, I wanted it for myself. So, playing it cool (coolish), we struck a deal. Peter packed it up to arrive here just in time for our conference and currently sitting in his studio, was I interested? 

Reader, this may just be the first chapter …

**A Year in West Oxfordshire**

*by Barbara Pym*

*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.*

**September**

This is the month of plums and jam-making, beans and the last courgettes and tomatoes ripening in the garden. (A London friend doesn’t appreciate the courgettes, so carefully nurtured and proudly tended, thinks them ‘tasteless’ — and may well criticize the tomatoes of which one is equally proud.) And of course September is the great blackberry month and the lanes round here are full of them.

**October**

This is still a good blackberry month and they are often at their best, but after a certain date (I can’t remember exactly which) they are said to belong to the Devil, or even (in some parts) the Devil is thought to be in them! This is usually the month for Harvest Festival, though the harvest is gathered in earlier — much fruit and flowers in the church, of course, but one year it was noted that vegetables were ‘not given sufficient prominence in the decorations’. (What is Harvest Festival without at least one enormous marrow?) For a change you could go to South Leigh church (St. James’s) where a nineteenth-century vicar (Gerard Moultrie) made the translation from the Greek of the magnificent Communion hymn which is No. 318 in the English Hymnal. It is called the Liturgy of St. James.

*Let all mortal flesh keep silence*

*And with fear and trembling stand;*

*Ponder nothing earthly-minded,*

*For with blessing in his hand*

*Christ our God to earth descendeth,*

*Our full homage to demand.*

A nostalgic visit to the Trout Inn at Wolvercote for a memory of Oxford days in the Thirties. Guinness and sandwiches outside — eight peacocks but no trace of the wisteria of forty years ago. Now red creeper and what looks like a vine. A man and a girl embracing by the river, so nothing changes all that much. Huge car park.

**South Leigh church (St. James’s)**  
**Trout Inn**

**November**

Still a few roses in the garden and even on the altar in church. The first iris stylosa may begin to come out so that you have the remains of summer and (perhaps) spring, though there’s probably a lot of winter to be got through before then.

**December**

Hyacinths coming out in the house. Gathering and sawing wood for the fire is good exercise. A grey-white sky and a bleak landscape — plenty of bare trees but the death of the elms has left many gaps. Christmas seems suddenly mild and green, and as the days gradually lighten you begin to look forward to starting the year in West Oxfordshire all over again.

*This concludes our series.*

**Pym in Translation in France (continued)**

*Abbreviations, Footnotes and other Faux Pas*

*by Keith Armstrong*

At the end of the 1980s three Pym novels, *The Sweet Dove Died (SDD)*, *A Few Green Leaves (AFGL)* and *An Unsuitable Attachment (AUA)*, were translated into French by Martine Béquié with the help of Anne-Marie Augustyniak for the French editor, Christian Bourgois. The three translations, *La douce colombe est morte* (1987), *Un brin de verdure* (1987) and *Une demoiselle comme il faut* (1989), have been printed in the collection *Titres* and are numbered 51, 52 and 53 respectively. But a glance at the abstract of Barbara Pym’s life on the back cover of each novel reveals a glaring error as it states that Pym won the
Booker Prize for *Quartet in Autumn*, which we know she did not. Such a lack of care for detail did not bode well for the translations.

A number of cultural references were not picked up by the translator and explained by the means of footnotes. For example, the French reader can have little idea that *Crossroads* (*AFGL*) was a popular teatime soap opera at the time and that ‘A. et M.’ (*AFGL*) refers to (Hymns) *Ancient and Modern*. It was also remiss of the translator not to clarify ‘L.S.E.’ (*AFGL*) when it first appears, especially when ‘la London School of Economics’ is later mentioned. That said, more familiar cultural abbreviations such as ‘A.T.S.’ (*SDD*) and ‘W.I.’ (*AFGL*) are dealt with correctly. A footnote explaining the meaning of ‘purrs’ so that the French reader can tap into the humour behind Mrs Purry being ‘a lovely name’ (*AUA*) was helpful. The late 1980s was, of course, pre-Google, and quick research facilities for translators were not so readily available.

The translator appears to have problems with grammatical plurality as well, perhaps for phonetic reasons. In *SDD* we read that the vases James wants to buy for Leonora ‘coûtent plutôt chers’. But while adjectives in French do inflect, e.g., ‘ils sont chers’ (with ‘s’), they don’t when used adverbially, ‘ils coûtent cher’ (without ‘s’). In *AUA* when John and Rupert arrive at Ianthe’s house for a glass of sherry, Ianthe and Penelope take ‘leur manteau’ (their coat) upstairs, instead of ‘leurs manteaux’ (their coats) — as if they just had one coat between them.

Two of Rupert’s colleagues invited round for supper find themselves in a similar predicament when we read of ‘deux de mes collègues avec leur femme’, singular, instead of ‘leurs femmes’, plural.

And yet only a few lines below the translator has written correctly ‘… à ses collègues et à leurs femmes’. A sloppy mistake. Unless, of course, the translator was thinking that like their coat(s) they just had the one wife between them? That would certainly be a topic ripe for anthropological study!

There were some nice cultural translations. I did like the more gallic ‘demi’ for ‘pint of bitter’ and ‘toasts au fromage’ for welsh rarebit, both in *AUA*. The play on words ‘Dyer by name and dire by nature’ (*AFGL*) was got around admirably with ‘Dyer était son nom, et sinistre son caractère’.

But at times many phrases and idioms in French just seemed too close to the original English. For instance, the translation for ‘adding insult to injury’ (*AFGL*), ‘qui ajoutait l’insulte à la blesure’ could have been rendered by a more distant and habitual French idiom ‘qui portait l’insulte à son comble’. The long-winded ‘journée d’actions de grâces pour la moisson’ for ‘Harvest-Thanksgiving’ (*AUA*) could also perhaps have been rendered adequately with the shorter ‘fête de la moisson’. The last word in translation must, however, go to those World War I songs in *AFGL*. One cannot help but smile wryly at reading ‘Cours, lapin, cours’ for ‘Run, rabbit, run’ and as for the delightful ‘Nous irons pendre notre linge sur la ligne Siegfried’, I’ll leave you to back-translate for your own amusement.

Sources:


*Une demoiselle comme il faut*, B. Pym (translation by Martine Béquié), Christian Bourgois, 1989

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**Celebrating Barbara Pym’s 105th Birthday in Chicago**

by Betty Zausner

On 2 June 2018, North American BPS members Marla Donato Alonzo and Betty Zausner, along with several other friends, celebrated the 105th birthday of Barbara Pym with an afternoon tea at Betty’s home in Chicago.

Marla provided a lovely vase of peonies in fond remembrance of the 2018 NA conference, which explored many aspects of *The Sweet Dove Died*. Marla’s peonies were beautiful, and ‘possessed the added grace of having been presented to oneself’.

We concluded with a champagne toast to Barbara, thanking her for many hours of reading pleasure, and for the opportunity to meet fellow Pym readers and ‘say a word’ to those who have not yet discovered her novels, because ‘all this reading’ really does lead to wonderful experiences.

**Gleanings**

compiled by Yvonne Cocking

In a survey of 6,000 issues of the *TLS* (Times Literary Supplement, 30 March 2018), Ruth Scurr reminded us of Barbara Pym’s long-awaited reappearance on the literary scene. ‘There are two ways to celebrate the long life of an eminent paper: by date, or by number of issues. When the *TLS*, first published as a free supplement to *The Times* on Friday, 17 January 1902, turned 75 in January 1977, the then
editor John Gross organized a survey called “Reputations Revisited” in which authors were asked to nominate the most overrated and underrated books since 1902. Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin, presumably without prior consultation, both praised the novelist Barbara Pym, whose career was rehabilitated as a result.’

Another article from the same paper on 4 May 2018 was a review of Susan Stewart’s Painted Faces: A Colourful History of Cosmetics; the reviewer says: ‘The marketing wheeze of giving alluring names to lipstick and nail polish colours started in the 1930s with such temptations as ‘Black Honey’, ‘Truly Toffee’, ‘Lady Danger’, ‘Girl About Town’ and ‘Strawberry Fizz’. Think of Barbara Pym’s sensible Mildred Lathbury in Excellent Women (1952), humiliated by a sales girl: “Thank you, but I think I will have Hawaiian Fire,” I said obstinately, savouring the ludicrous words and the full depths of my shame.”

The novelist Paula Byrne, asked in The Daily Mail on 27 April 2018 what she was currently reading, replied: ‘Excellent Women by the fabulous Barbara Pym. She is as witty as Jane Austen, and is very acute on male vanity.’

The 50th anniversary of the Man Booker Prize inspired the writer of the ‘Culture’ feature in the Sunday Times on 1 July 2018 to question whether the judges always got it right, and picked its alternative victors over five decades. In 1977, ‘… Staying On, by Paul Scott [overlooked] Barbara Pym’s Quartet in Autumn, a brisk, spare and witty study of loneliness, as four unmarried clerks reach the age of retirement.’

On the same topic (Guardian, 8 July 2018), Michael Ondaatje’s The English Patient was voted by the public the best winner of the Booker Prize of the last 50 years. ‘Ondaatje felt it was important to acknowledge the authors who never won the Booker Prize, specifically naming William Trevor, Barbara Pym and Alice Munro.’

Philip Hensher, in The Spectator, 4 August 2018, reviewed Orphans: A History by Jeremy Seabrook. ‘Orphans are everywhere in literature — Jane Eyre, Heathcliffe, Oliver Twist, Daniel Deronda, and onwards to the present day … Mildred, in Barbara Pym’s Excellent Women, assures the lachrymose Julian, sighing over his fiancée’s condition, “Well, of course, a lot of people over 30 are orphans. I am myself. In fact, I was an orphan in my twenties.”

‘The idea that men “need” meat — a notion at odds with how out of fashion it is these days to be anything but a diehard vegan’ was aired by Hannah Betts in The Daily Telegraph on 27 August 2018. ‘“Man needs meat” was a myth still being propounded … by the less likeable characters in Barbara Pym novels, in which curates were plied with chops by spinsters who lived off scraps.’

The publication in paperback of Laura Shapiro’s What She Ate was noted in The Guardian on 1 September 2018 ‘in a brilliant chapter on Barbara Pym’, and in The Daily Mail two weeks later. After discussing the chapters on the two American women who feature in the book, the reviewer added: ‘It is a relief to read of the novelist Barbara Pym’s hearty appetite for walnut cake — but even she wasn’t above a little culinary bitchiness: when her editor rejected her novel she devised a particularly nasty milk jelly and named it after him.’

When asked ‘What was the last great book you read?’ (Guardian, 15 September 2018) the Canadian novelist, Patrick de Witt, replied: ‘I discovered Barbara Pym late in life and I just adored Excellent Women.’

We have noticed before that Lucy Worsley (don’t you love her TV programmes?) was a Pym fan. In The Sunday Telegraph Magazine on 16 September 2018 she writes of her daily professional life and chooses as one of her favourite books Barbara’s A Very Private Eye. ‘A selection from her diaries and letters which makes me think that, although she lived long ago and far away, she must have been just like me and my friends. Only cleverer and better at writing.’

‘Thanks to Sheila Kane, Peter Lloyd, Sandra Margolies, Iona Roberts, Christine Shuttleworth and Michael Wilson

Members’ Corner

More Food and Drinks

by Jutta Schiller

there was no time after the AGM 2018 in Oxford for me to be sad about it being over, as there is always the International Literature Festival Berlin to look forward to. And more so this year, as one section of the festival was ‘dedicated to literature dealing with cooking and eating in both a scientific as well as political and cultural context’.

And so I was very fortunate to be able to attend a lecture of the very famous Austrian cultural scientist and philosopher Thomas Macho, who told us all about the cultural history of food. And at some time during that lecture I had to think of Barbara Pym and her famous line ‘Men need meat’. Thomas Macho told us that meat was the privilege of the aristocracy in the past and that the French Revolution had changed that. Consequently the consumption
of meat by the people meant a kind of emancipation. I wonder what to make of Barbara Pym’s famous line in the light of that?

But history has more to offer, especially the history of the British Empire. I learned that from the most entertaining talk by the British historian Lizzie Collingham about her book The Hungry Empire — How Britain’s Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World.

In 20 chapters — each of which describes a meal symbolic of the food that the British Empire traded from one continent to another — this book takes us on a journey that goes back four and a half centuries. It shows us how the trade in Newfoundland salt cod started the British Empire — a fact, she states, which ‘is frequently overlooked’. From there she tells us how the British Empire established a global trade network and shipped products such as sugar, tea, curry, opium, pepper and much more from their origins to other countries.

Lizzie Collingham writes in an easy-to-digest style, not being too scientific, although you learn a lot about history from a very different point of view. The recipes she includes are probably more fun to read than to copy. Although the ‘Empire Christmas Pudding’ recipe with which she neatly ends the book seems to me not only a demonstration for the origin of the ingredients, but a recipe that can be tried next Christmas.

From there it is not difficult to lead to the next author I was lucky enough to meet in Berlin: Nigel Slater, the food journalist and author of numerous cookbooks. Not only because he was such fun to listen to, but also because of his latest book, The Christmas Chronicles, with recipes, notes and stories for the winter months. Although I am not a big fan of Christmas markets myself, his fascination with this German tradition made me long for Christmas time and Glühwein ‘to warm hands and souls’. Not only Glühwein does that, but all the other recipes, food photos and stories in this wonderful book as well.

The Hungry Empire — How Britain’s Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World, by Lizzie Collingham (Vintage, 2018)
The Christmas Chronicles, by Nigel Slater (HarperCollins, 2017)

Readers Recommend
The Crossing Places by Elly Griffiths published by Quercus, 2009
by Ros Cleal

Before writing this, I briefly toyed with the idea of recommending something intellectual and challenging, but then I reasoned that by the time you read this the evenings will be dark and cold, and I felt it was far better to recommend something gripping and enjoyable. The choice of crime seemed right, as I know that many Society members enjoy the genre, and the heroine of this novel, first in the Dr Ruth Galloway series, is an archaeologist who is almost certainly a member — like Everard Bone — of the Prehistoric Society, although by some oversight the author has failed to mention this. The series also comes highly recommended by St Hilda’s alumnus Val McDermid (if book cover blurbs are to be believed).

The Crossing Places is set on the north Norfolk coast, where the heroine, Dr Ruth Galloway, a forensic archaeologist, lives. It draws heavily on a real site, Seahenge, and the plot involves lost girls, Iron Age burials and a dinosaur of a policeman with redeeming qualities. Elly Griffiths apologises for having to mould the archaeology to her plots, but the fact that radiocarbon dates, isotope analysis, and DNA results are not, in real life, to be had within days would not presumably bother anyone but an archaeologist.

In all the novels in the series (and there are a satisfying ten more if you enjoy this one) the plots are intriguing enough to be interesting and always involve an archaeological discovery of some sort. While not falling into the ‘cosy’ genre of crime novel, the violence is not as gratuitous and upsetting as in many modern crime novels, for which I’m grateful. The great strength of the books, however, is that the landscape and settings are beautifully evoked and the characters are believable and rather endearing (they include — judging by my experience of working at a stone circle for many years — an entirely believable modern Druid). Each volume leaves you wondering what will happen next, and I would urge you to try them. A note of warning: even more than with most series, these really do need to be read in order!

Deb’s Diary

by Deb Fisher

Day -1

Tomorrow I become Chair of the Barbara Pym Society — not something I ever anticipated. Will I be equal to this challenge? Since I allowed myself to be nominated, Michael has been ringing me regularly with the words, ‘Another thing you may need to worry about … ’.

Well, plenty of time to think about it. A gin and tonic will help, served elegantly, with ice and lemon, by college staff in the SCR, following our afternoon at the Ashmolean Museum. One of the first people I saw when I arrived was my former tutor, Dr Innes. Did not dare tell her of my elevation to Chair; she knows me too well.

The quiz goes well, I think. It is won by the ‘Old Lags’, one point ahead of ‘Cauliflower Cheese’, themselves only one point ahead of ‘Excellent Ladies’. Unfortunately the kitchen staff have taken the prize away for safe keeping, so the winners are unable to enjoy their chocolates immediately.

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Thinking positively, things will soon be back to normal and I hope to spend time when recovering reading books by Barbara Pym’s friend, the writer and critic Robert Liddell. If anyone would like to sell me An Object for a Walk or The Almond Tree please get in touch as these are the two novels I do not have. roselittlesmith123@gmail.com

Pym is always a comfort in any state of health and driving home from the conference, two other members and I were discussing which Pym man we would like to be married to. Aylwin Forbes’ name (from No Fond Return of Love) came up, not because of any merit in his character but because Dulcie’s love for him elevates him: ‘it was [women’s] love and imagination that transformed these unremarkable beings’, as Jane decides in Jane and Prudence. Dulcie looks closely at him when he opens his eyes again after fainting during his own lecture. ‘Why he’s beautiful, thought Dulcie suddenly. Like a Greek marble ... the features a little blunted, with the charm of being not quite perfect.’ Perhaps he was modelled in appearance on Barbara’s boss, Daryll Forde (right). But this is pure fancy, as is the hope that Dulcie will be happy now that Aylwin has ‘turned to’ her at last.

But Everard Bone (said by Hazel Holt to be modelled physically on Professor Wilfred Howell Whiteley, 1924–72) (left) won because of his upstanding character, his admirable steadiness and most of all his dedication to his profession. Of course, if you were really married to him you might be left to the untender ministrations of his mother when you had flu. However, you will also find yourself working side by side with him in the fascinating continent of Africa. While Everard is studying the people and their exotic ways, Mildred will be entertaining the locals in traditional English fashion with a cup of tea. With her practical skills she will be of infinite use everywhere and find unexpected happiness in novelty and love.

Day 0

Time is going faster than I’d counted on. One thing I’m going to have to give up for the next five years is my accustomed early-Saturday excursion to the shops — a committee-meeting at the ungodly hour of 9.30am! Despite being invited as an ‘observer’, I find I cannot keep my big mouth shut. And now it’s barely 11.30am and I’m already Chair, apparently; no one came up with any just cause or impediment. Having checked my programme at the last minute, I find I’m down for ‘Opening Comments’ straight after lunch. I hope Eileen will tell me what to say.

Dinnertime, and I realise I have to do all the thank-yous after the meal. Much later, I realise I haven’t made the toast to absent friends. Will have to make a list for next year. But what a great afternoon it’s been, one of the best I can remember, a good way to mark my first half-day in the job. A new member makes a point of approaching me to say how much she has enjoyed herself. I even win a jar of marmalade in the Pymbola. And so to bed, with slight feeling of self-satisfaction.

Day +1

I can’t turn the clock back, so I set out to enjoy the day. Unbelievably, it’s as good as the day before, with another entertaining talk before lunch, and those hysterically funny dramatised readings in the afternoon. What would we do without Yvonne? So glad that I decided to stay for Sunday night and go out for dinner at La Cucina with the other stragglers. Our overseas members are unbelievably enthusiastic about Pym, and have a better command of her work than most of us Brits. More gin, please.

Day +2

Conference is over for everyone except me. Up in St Giles two young women — one a former HildaBeast — are awaiting my input for their podcast on ‘Women in Oxford’s History’. They have no idea how nervous I am. Bound to get some of the details wrong and be picked up by members as soon as it goes on-line.

On the way back to my car, I manage to pick up a copy of Jane and Prudence at Blackwell’s. The young man behind the counter knows Pym’s name and exactly where her books are kept; he goes straight to the shelf. Surely a good omen. During the journey home, my brain (apparently independent of the rest of me) begins planning for the next twelve months.
Remembering Jill Stevens  
by Robin Joyce

Jill and I met at the Oxford Barbara Pym conference in 2001. Jill’s husband, Andrew, encouraged her to attend. We found so much to enjoy in our first conversations at that conference, starting with Some Tame Gazelle. I gave a paper focusing on Belinda’s and Hilary’s joy in their spinsterhood, a topic that created a frisson in some of the audience. However, Jill’s lovely voice cut through the murmurs with her Pym reference to my paper as ‘splendid’: what a wonderful moment for this first-time paper presenter at a Pym conference with a controversial topic. And we both recognised the allusion.

Jill and Andrew’s lives were steeped in Barbara Pym, reading her novels together. Jill and I also made Pym an integral part of our friendship, visiting Virginia Water and talking of Leonora (SDD); walking through London streets and drinking at a pub associated with Pym; and visiting Finstock.

Each time I gave a paper at a Pym conference Jill and I discussed the intricacies of understanding her: Jill inclined towards an interest in her religious commitments as well as her feminism; I concentrated on her feminism and the complexities of her political and personal commitments. Returning from a marvellous trip in the Lake District after attending a Pym event in Preston, Jill had to ask me to stop talking so we could recover our voices.

Jill also came to Australia several times to visit her sister and me in Canberra. We also spent time further afield, with travel in Spain, Christmases in Venice and our amazing American trip after our attendance at one of the Harvard conferences. At that conference Jill and I took the parts of the two friends vying for ‘The German Baron’ in a play developed by Ellen Miller from Pym’s short story. We loved it — the competition over a man was so comical, both in itself and then in its interpretation from two avowed feminists with delightful partners at home.

I look to Andrew’s tribute to add a little more to our knowledge of Jill:

After graduating in Bible Studies, Jill qualified as a librarian, reflecting her respect for the opportunity that profession gave to contribute to the growth of knowledge. Most recently, her experience led her to pursue a volunteer position in the library of the Cathedral in Lincoln. Before this later voluntary work, Jill sought a new career: teaching English to recent arrivals to the UK, initially as a volunteer, then later as a qualified teacher and tutor to others.

Perhaps the pinnacle of her career was as co-chair of NATECLA. That unwieldy acronym stands for ‘National Association of Teachers of English and other Community Languages to Adults’. Jill saw each student as a person with needs — often going beyond language needs — that she was ready to help with, not just as a teacher, but as a human being.

And to finish, with a bow to Barbara Pym and her novel A Few Green Leaves. Pym’s several references to the ancient practice of burial in wool took Jill’s fancy. So, let us picture Jill’s lovely smile, soft wool, and Barbara Pym keeping Jill with us when we read one of her novels.

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Cat Comfort  
by Rose Little

Huffkins and his sister Prudence found a happy home with Triona Adams a year ago but this summer Huffkins decided to go walkabout! He was missing for nineteen days and Triona and her friends feared the worst. It was past midnight when Triona reached home one night and as she got off the bus she heard desperate mewing.

There was Huffkins, yards from home but stuck behind the high fences of a local electric substation. A few minutes, and a coffee table heavily dragged from the sitting room, and he was back in the kitchen. Prudence was livid. Turns out she had loved being an only cat.

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In a way it seems appropriate that the Barbara Pym Society asked me in my 20th year as a member if I wanted to take over the job of Editor. I joined the Society in 1998 after finding out about it in À La Pym, The Barbara Pym Cookery Book, which I happened to buy in a little bookshop near Kensington High Street, four years after I had written my Master’s thesis about ‘Love and Marriage in the Novels of Barbara Pym’.

As the 1997 AGM was cancelled because it clashed with the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, the Society had postponed the AGM to January, and that was the first time I attended. Little did I know about college life, and so I was quite impressed about the formalities and the procedures of the conference.

What a coincidence that the conference’s subject 20 years ago was ‘Barbara à la Mode (Food in the Novels)’. The speakers were Amy Myers, Margaret Rayner and Nancy Talburt. Guest of honour was Hilary Pym Walton. Saturday’s dinner was based on the recipes of the before-mentioned cookbook. As a starter we had avocado mousse, ‘Poulet Minerva’ was the main course, and as dessert we had ‘Poires Religieuses’. We still drank sherry — something I expected — before dinner, and the speakers and the committee members were sitting at the High Table, all very formal but highly enjoyable to me.

Since then I have not missed a single conference in Oxford. In fact I always look forward to it after summer as a kind of annual ‘family meeting’. And the Pym enthusiasts are all over the world. There was that concert once in Stockholm where by accident I met the Swedish Society members in the concert break. Or that encounter with Deb Fisher at Birmingham airport a couple of years ago. And those invitations to dinners, New Year’s Eve parties, and some other splendid events all over the world.

After 20 years it is time to switch from ‘receiving’ member to ‘contributing’ member, and I hope I will continue the good work my predecessors did. I’ll do my best.
Photographs in this issue of Green Leaves by Jutta Schiller, Judy and Joel Horn, and others.

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