Finstock, Oxfordshire (1972-1980)

We like Finstock very much and the people have been very friendly. It is not a beautiful village but so near all those lovely places like Minster Lovell, Burford, Swinbrook (grave of Unity Mitford in the churchyard), Westwell, etc. etc. Our house (cottage) is in the olde bit and was originally a 17th century barn, converted about six years ago. We have beams in every room, but modern comforts too. (AVPE, letter to Philip Larkin, 24 October 1972)

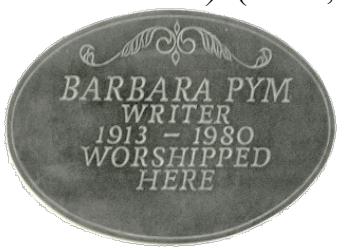
It is a tiny village with roughly 800 inhabitants, three streets, two pubs, and neither traffic signals nor street lights, easy to miss if you're zipping by on the nearby highway from Charlbury to Whitney. Hilary called it 'grotty' and the New Oxfordshire Village Book *calls it 'the sort of place you've been to without noticing.'* (Tom Sopko, *Green Leaves,* November 2006)

Barn Cottage. Barbara shared this house, on the High Street at the foot of Well Hill, with Hilary until her death in January 1980; Hilary remained there until she died in 2004. The Oxfordshire Blue Plaque was unveiled by Deirdre Bryan-Brown, then Chair of the Barbara Pym Society, in September 2006.

The sofa pattern [William Morris 'Willow Bough'] and the hearth are familiar from the photograph in the biography. There is a cat purring on a rug, and a 'Whiskas' box among the kitchen canisters. … The sitting room is lined with books, prints, photographs: neat and cosy in the way I imagine Miss Prideaux's to be in A Glass of Blessings. (Fr Gabriel Myers OSB, 'Seeking Barbara Pym: A Pilgrimage' in *No Soft Incense: Barbara Pym and the Church*)

Holy Trinity Church.

The church is not very high ('Series 2') but there is quite an enthusiastic congregation of people who have come fairly recently to the neighbourhood. Hilary and I are a bit jaded and cynical about things like bazaars but try not to show it. Like most country parishes the Vicar has 3 churches to cope with (not like the old palmy days of which I write in Some Tame Gazelle *when every village had its own vicar or rector).* (AVPE, letter to Philip Larkin, 24 October 1972)



On the wall towards the front, where Barbara usually sat, is a modest and tasteful grey granite oval plaque. The inscription reads, 'Barbara Pym, Writer, Worshipped Here,' with her dates. Near the chancel step is a mahogany lectern…. Under its Bible is a tiny brass marker which says that Barbara 'organised the Epistle readers' in her eight years at Finstock. The plaque and the lectern were given as memorials by her admirers in 1984. (Fr Gabriel Myers, *op. cit.*)

There is also a small brass plaque commemorating the baptism of T.S. Eliot in the church on 29 June 1927:

Philip Larkin came to tea and then walked up to the church to see the T.S. Eliot memorial. So two great poets and one minor novelist came for a brief moment (as it were) together. (AVPE, 30 July 1976)

The mausoleum in Finstock churchyard was built in 1899 by Harvey du Cros, millionaire founder of the Dunlop Pneumatic Tyre Co., after he was denied permission to have a private burial ground in his estate at Cornbury Park.

It would be impossible, for example, to imagine anything like the de Tankerville mausoleum being erected now. It had been put up outside the church in the early nineteenth century and later members of the family had been buried in it. Now, when they no longer lived at the manor, it seemed an awkward anachronism in such a small and humble parish. (A Few Green Leaves)

Barbara Pym and her sister Hilary are buried in Holy Trinity churchyard.