

# Following Barbara's Footsteps

by Ellen J. Miller

Second Edition, revised and expanded by Tom Sopko



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## Dedication & Preface to the First Edition

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*To Hilary, who created her own footsteps.*

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*A Few Green Leaves* is set in Oxfordshire; that is almost all we are told. Barbara Pym's style – economical, direct, never using a long word where a short one will do, relying above all on dialogue – has never included much by way of physical setting. If the reader pictures bosky vicarage gardens, sedate London offices (of anthropological societies), the suburbia of decayed expectations, it is all in the mind's eye – the author has not told us about it...

And if at times this seems a shortcoming, it is because we have come to expect a lot: the author has given us a particular and a total world and we want to relate it to the familiar and the general one. We want to specify the London landscapes obliquely hinted at, to set down Leonora and the characters of *Quartet in Autumn* in familiar streets and houses.

Penelope Lively, 'The World of Barbara Pym'  
in D. Salwak, Ed., *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym* (1987)

As Ms. Lively notes, the unique world that Barbara Pym has left us only hints at London landscapes and the familiar streets and houses populated by Leonora, Letty, Jane, Wilmet and many other Pym personalities. A number of readers want to pinpoint specific locations in the novels as well as visit the places where Barbara lived, worked and worshiped. Some have already made "Pym pilgrimages" and have generously shared their findings and feelings.

It is the goal of this literary tour of Pym places to offer a small guide to those who want to set out on their own to find Piers' flat on St Stephen's Avenue or to follow Barbara's footsteps across Hammersmith Bridge or the Suspension Bridge in Clifton....

Quotations taken from Pym novels are followed in parentheses by the novel's title. Quotations from Barbara Pym's diary entries taken from *A Very Private Eye* are cited as (AVPE, 1 February 1943) and those from *A Lot to Ask* are cited as (ALTA). All other citations should be apparent. ...

I am greatly indebted to my fellow members of the Barbara Pym Society—Father Gabriel Myers, Hazel Bell, Marianna Stewart, Norma Munson, Christine Shuttleworth and Maureen Woolley – for sharing their information, photos, memorabilia and providing editing and proofreading skills. Special thanks to Tom Sopko for his information on churches and London maps. Thanks also go to Marcia Cohen for her formidable computer skills in preparing this guide.

Amendments to this guide from other Pym travellers would be very welcome. May your journeys into Barbara's world bring you joy and a closer connection to her.

*Ellen Miller, August 2006*

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**Ellen J. Miller** single-handedly conceived and organized the Barbara Pym Society's first North American conference in 1999, and continued to do so every year until her death in 2009. She also founded and managed the Society's North American Chapter, set up our first official web site and served as its webmaster, and edited our newsletter, *Green Leaves*, from 2005 to 2009. In 2003 she co-edited a collection of essays, *All This Reading: The Literary World of Barbara Pym*.

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# Residential Chronology

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## **1913–1931: Oswestry, Shropshire**

**72 Willow Street.** Barbara Pym born here, 2 June 1913

**Welsh Walls.** Hilary Pym born here, 1916

**Morda Lodge,** on Morda Road just south of town, 1919–1941

## **1925–1931: Huyton College (Liverpool College for Girls), Huyton, Merseyside.** Boarding school.

## **1931–1934: Oxford: St Hilda's College, Cowley Place**

## **1934–41: Oswestry**

Barbara returned to Oswestry during University vacations and after completing her Oxford degree in June 1934. After graduating she visited Oxford often, travelled to Germany five times, and also made trips to Hungary and Poland. In the autumn of 1938 she moved to London (see below) for ten months before returning to Oswestry to help her mother manage war evacuees staying at Morda Lodge.

## **1938–1939: London: 27 Upper Berkeley Street, Portman Square**

A bedsit with Hilary near Marble Arch, October 1938–August 1939

## **1941–1943: Bristol: The Coppice, North Road, Leigh Woods, Clifton**

A large house in a suburb west of Bristol, December 1941–July 1943

## **1943–1946: WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service)**

After training in Rochester Barbara was stationed in Southampton and then Naples. She returned to England in June 1945 when her mother was terminally ill, and was attached to WRNS headquarters in London until she was demobilised in January 1946.

## **1945-1974: London**

**41 York Street, Marylebone W1,** bedsit with Hilary, June–November 1945

**108 Cambridge Street, Pimlico SW1,** flat with Hilary, November 1945–1950

**47 Nassau Road, Barnes SW13,** flat with Hilary, 1950–61

**40 Brooksville Avenue, Queens Park NW6,** purchased with Hilary, 1961–72

**32 Balcombe Street, Marylebone NW1,** Flat in London during the week, Finstock with Hilary on weekends, 1972– July 1974.

## **1974–1980: Finstock, Oxfordshire: Barn Cottage**

Barbara shared this modest house where Well Hill meets the High Street (now marked with a blue plaque) with Hilary until her death in January 1980; Hilary remained there until she died in 2004.