

Oswestry, 1913-1941

Oswestry is a small market town in Shropshire, near the Welsh border. The population in the 1920s was just under 10,000 and so it was a microcosm of English provincial life, where the social classes were neatly stratified and people knew exactly what their place was in the scheme of things. (ALTA)

[Numbers in brackets correspond to the numbers on the map below.]

[1] The house at **72 Willow Street** in the centre of Oswestry where Barbara was born in June 1913 was demolished in the 1960s and is now the site of flats for the elderly. A blue plaque at the junction of Willow and Castle Streets marks the location.

[2] Barbara's father, Frederic Crampton Pym, was a solicitor whose offices were at **the Cross** (junction of Willow and Church Streets) in the centre of town, above what was then the Midland Bank, now HSBC. While still a schoolgirl of 17 Barbara developed a crush on a clerk at the bank; her poem, *MIDLAND BANK: a poem dedicated to JTLI with the author's fondest love (But without his permission)*, is preserved in the Pym archives at the Bodleian. Frederic's firm, Crampton Pym & Lewis, Solicitors, are still in business in Oswestry.

[Our father] walked to his office every day in the middle of town, and came home for lunch. Sometimes we would visit him there, at the Cross, up a narrow flight of stairs to the small book-lined rooms, where he had a clerk and a girl typist. (AVPE)

[3] By the time Hilary was born in 1916, the family was living in a small house in **Welsh Walls**, just behind St Oswald's Parish Church in the centre of the town. (ALTA). Welsh Walls forms the western boundary of **Cae Glas Park**, where there is a tree planted in memory of Barbara Pym.

[4] **St Oswald's Church, Upper Brook Street**. Barbara and her family attended St Oswald's Church, an unusually large, fine church for a small provincial town, with a tower dating to the late 12th or early 13th century. The town Visitor and Exhibition Centre is adjacent to the church.

Irena was assistant organist at St Oswald's and Frederic sang in the choir. Like most of their generation, Barbara and Hilary graduated from the afternoon children's service to Matins and Evensong every Sunday. Full participation in church fetes, jumble sales and church outings was a natural and enjoyable part of their lives from earliest childhood...

There was, too, a succession of curates, one of whom in particular was worshipped from afar by Hilary. When he came to tea on a winter afternoon, his combinations, like Mr Donne's, did in fact show, tucked into his socks. 'Can your love stand that?' Barbara demanded of her sister. Apparently it could and curates frequently came to supper...

St Oswald's had featured in Civil to Strangers, where the rector preached his splendid sermon about Jacobean embroidery. It was also the Archdeacon's church, where Harriet and Belinda worshipped. (ALTA)

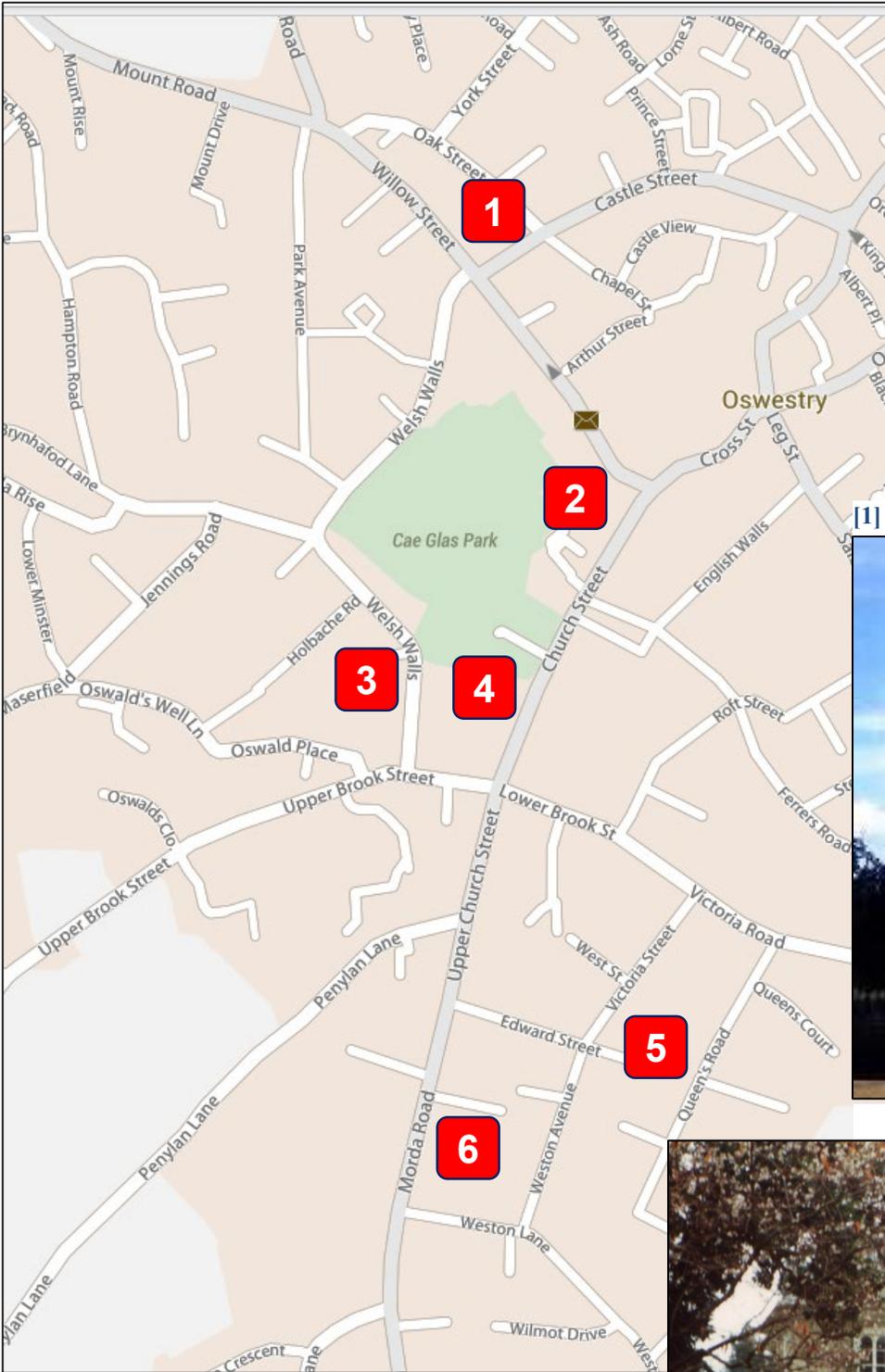
[5] Barbara attended **Queen's Park School**, a fee-paying establishment for middle-class girls, until age twelve when she was sent to boarding school near Liverpool. The school, on Queen's Road off Victoria Road, closed in 1989 and the building (now Queen's Park House) has been converted into flats.

[6] **Morda Lodge**. Around 1919 the Pym family moved to Morda Lodge, located on the east side of Morda Road between Edward Street and Weston Lane, approximately 0.2 miles south of St Oswald's, now opposite The Marches School. The house is still standing, but the original red brick is now stucco, and the central second-floor tower room visible in old photos has been removed.

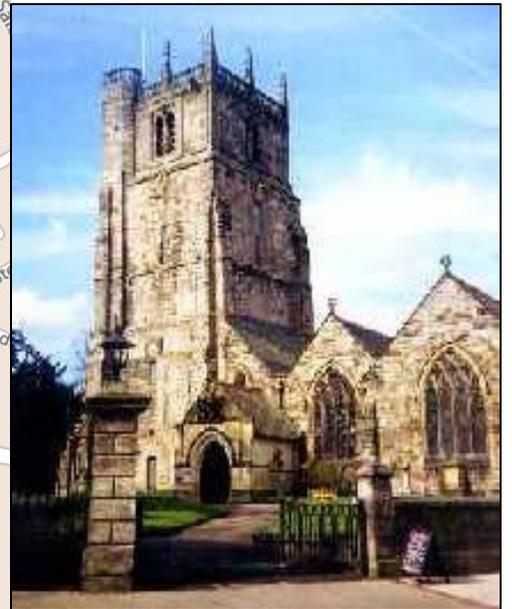
The house which was to be our real childhood home was Morda Lodge, a substantial, square red-brick Edwardian house with a large garden on the outskirts of the town on the way to Morda. Next door to it was Scotswood, where the Thomas relations lived, grandmother and Aunts May and Janie. Visiting them (which was often) was just a question of climbing over the garden wall. (AVPE)

Morda Lodge was a large, square, brick-built house with an imposing front entrance. As you came into the hall, the handsome drawing room was on the left and the dining room on the right with the nursery behind it.... On the first floor were the family's bedrooms (Irena and Frederic and Barbara at the front and Hilary at the back).... (ALTA)

After the onset of WWII it was no longer possible to get domestic help and the house was too large and expensive, so in 1941, just before Barbara left for war service at the Censorship in Bristol, her parents sold it and moved into a smaller house.



[1] Blue plaque marks Barbara's birthplace



[4] St Oswald's Church



[6] Hilary Pym Walton at Morda Lodge, 1998

Huyton College (1925-1931)

Liverpool College for Girls, Huyton, was later known simply as Huyton College. The College, adjacent to Huyton station, opened in 1894 and closed in 1993 when it merged with Liverpool College to become a coeducational day school. The surviving buildings have been converted into housing and care homes.

At the age of twelve, Barbara was sent to Liverpool College, Huyton, where Hilary joined her three years later. ... Huyton was a conventional school, with firm discipline and a strong religious background.... Unlike many authors, Barbara does not seem to have been greatly influenced by her schooldays. She was quite happy at school and made friends easily. She was a steady but not spectacular pupil, her only position of authority being chairman of the Literary Society. (ALTA)

My heart sank as I recognised the familiar landmarks. I could almost imagine myself a schoolgirl again, arriving at the station on a wet September evening for the autumn term and smelling the antiseptic smell of the newly scrubbed cloakrooms. (Excellent Women)



Oxford (1931-1936)



Barbara was a student at St Hilda's College from 1931-34. She visited Oxford frequently for several years after she graduated, and after her retirement in 1974 when she moved to the nearby village of Finstock. A walking tour of Pym landmarks and other literary sites in central Oxford is available as a separate document.

