

## Pimlico (1945–1950)

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

*There were two churches in the district, but I had chosen St Mary's rather than All Souls', not only because it was nearer, but because it was 'High'. (Excellent Women)*

In the period 1840–60 Pimlico was being developed as a residential area and the Marquess of Westminster, the major landowner, donated funds and land for two churches. Both were designed by Thomas Cundy in the Gothic Revival style, built in ragstone to contrast with the classical stucco of the surrounding residential terraces. Both were altered and embellished 1890-1910, and both sustained bomb damage during WWII.

*Winifred Malory, late as always, came and sat by me and whispered that somebody had sent quite a large donation, most generous, towards the cost of repairing the west window which had been damaged by a bomb. An anonymous donation – wasn't it exciting? (Excellent Women)*

### [1] St Saviour's Church, St George's Square, London SW1V 3QW

This church was built in 1863-64, after St Gabriel's. The east window by Clayton and Bell and the reredos were designed by architect W. H. Romaine-Walker, son of the first Vicar, ca. 1880. Laurence Olivier's father was a curate at St Saviour's and Lord Olivier was a choirboy and server here. Diana, Princess of Wales, worked at the kindergarten in the parish hall prior to her marriage.

### [2] St Gabriel's Church, Warwick Square, London SW1V 2AD

*The church I used to go to when we lived there [Pimlico] was St Gabriel's, Warwick Sq., the model of the church in Excellent Women, really. (AVPE, letter to Bob Smith, 9 March 1962)*



St Gabriel's was built in 1851-53. It has long been assumed that St Gabriel's, just across Cambridge Street from the Pym sisters' flat, was the model for St Mary's church in *Excellent Women*, but recent scholarship suggests that the 'high church' parish may in fact have been St Saviour's, and that St Mary's combined features of both:

‘[Pym] combines the exterior of St Gabriel's, Warwick Square, with the interior of St Saviour's, St George's Square, at the eastern end of Lupus Street, in order to create her fictional St Mary's. When Barbara lived in Cambridge Street, on the corner with Warwick Square, St Gabriel's was a middle-of-the-road parish, and it was St Saviour's that was Anglo-Catholic. What is more, she describes the east window of St Mary's as hideous, which is certainly not true of St Gabriel's, where the east window is a fine example of the work of the great Victorian stained-glass designer, Charles E. Kempe. The east window of St Saviour's, however, could fairly be described in less than flattering terms.’ (T.A.J. Burnett, 2013 North American conference paper)

*I could just see the church spire through the trees in the square. Now, when they were leafless, it looked beautiful, springing up among the peeling stucco fronts of the houses, prickly, Victorian-gothic, hideous inside, I suppose, but very dear to me. (Excellent Women)*

*Worshipping in a Victorian church (St Gabriel's, Warwick Square) – no nice monuments round the walls, but the brass tablets and the atmosphere of Victorian piety is in its way just as comforting. (AVPE, 1948)*

### [3] 108 Cambridge Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 4QF

*Hilary and I have taken a flat – in Pimlico, not a very good district, but perhaps we shall raise the tone. It is on the corner of Warwick Square and really quite nice. Anyway we are so lucky to get anywhere at all, as it is practically impossible to get flats and you really can't choose at all. (ALTA, letter to Henry Harvey, 7 November 1945)*

*I began to wonder what could have brought a naval officer and his wife to this shabby part of London, so very much the 'wrong' side of Victoria Station, so definitely not Belgravia, for which I had a sentimental affection, but which did not usually attract people who looked like Mrs. Napier. (Excellent Women)*



They were very lucky that Hilary was able to find them a flat, through the BBC Housing Officer, that they could afford – £150 a year – and without having to pay the 'key money' that many unscrupulous landlords were demanding. The flat was on the second floor of a house belonging to a Mrs Monckton, whose husband was a colonel, still away in the army, and it was not self-contained. They each had a good-sized room, Barbara's was on a corner and had windows on both sides, giving her a good view of Warwick Square and St Gabriel's Church. Next to her room was a small kitchen and, along the landing, Hilary's room, overlooking Sussex Street, and the bathroom, which they had to share with the occupants of the flat above. (ALTA)

*'I have to share a bathroom,' I often murmured, almost with shame, as if I personally had been found unworthy of a bathroom of my own. (Excellent Women)*

The people in the flat above were a retired Brigadier and his wife, Bill and Siddie Palmer, together with their large Alsatian named Belinda.... She was very undomesticated and would often run downstairs to ask their advice when overtaken by some culinary crisis. (ALTA)

#### [4] Victoria Station

To get to work they would walk to Victoria Station and take a bus from there, often calling on their way home at the grocer's in Warwick Way, where they were registered. Rationing was still in force...(ALTA)

*[Miss Clovis] has offered to collect some of my things. I wonder if you could pack a suitcase for me and meet her at Victoria Station under the clock?' ...*

*I had packed the case and was waiting at the appointed place at Victoria, feeling rather foolish, as if I were about to elope with somebody myself. It was the rush hour and droves of people hurried by me to catch their trains. Men in bowler hats, with dispatch cases so flat and neat it seemed impossible that they could hold anything at all, and neatly rolled umbrellas, ran with undignified haste and jostled against me. (Excellent Women)*

*Lady Selvedge and Mrs Grandison arrived at Victoria Station on the day of the bazaar shortly after noon, and proceeded to look for a place where they might have lunch, or luncheon, as they called it. (An Unsuitable Attachment)*



#### [5] 112 Eaton Square, Belgravia, London SW1W 9AA

This was the London home of Mr. and Mrs. Leo Amery, the parents of Julian Amery, with whom Barbara had a brief but intense romance in 1937-38. ('Twenty hours – but perhaps twenty years of memories.') In July 1939, while she was living with Hilary in in Portman Square, Barbara wrote in her diary, 'Met Julian by the traffic lights at Portman Square. Went back to 112 [Eaton Square] and met Mrs Amery.' She added more details later:

*On the 4th of July I met one I had loved and not seen for more than a year. Such meetings should be avoided if possible. On this same day I went inside that curious house in Eaton Square with its paintings and smell of incense and met his mother, a splendid character for a novel. (AVPE)*

Mrs Amery, ‘a splendid character for a novel’, was the inspiration for Lady Beddoes in *Crampton Hodnet*, Mrs Lyall in *Jane and Prudence*, and Mandy Wray in the unfinished *Home Front Novel*. Barbara also used the house in *So Very Secret* (1941).

*‘I am Mrs Beddoes, I live in Belgravia,’ she explained... Mrs Beddoes lived in a terrace of large grand houses, all of which had once been lived in by wealthy families but which were now mostly turned into flats or even government offices. (Less Than Angels)*

Leo Amery was a Tory minister in May 1940 when he told Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, ‘In the name of God, go!’ during a debate in the Commons. He then hosted a meeting at his home where senior Tory politicians decided that Churchill had to become Prime Minister. In 2016, when the house sold for £25 million, Conservative Party historian Lord Lexdan wrote in a letter to the London *Evening Standard*:



Machinations at 112 Eaton Square played a big part in bringing Churchill to power in May 1940 but some hoped that the property’s owner, Leo Amery, would become prime minister of the coalition government.... Thirty-five years on, some Tory MPs felt that Leo’s son, Julian, should replace Ted Heath as leader. He took calls in the same drawing room where the earlier conspiracy had taken place, and while he decided he lacked the support to rival Mrs Thatcher, he said: ‘This room has had its place in political history confirmed on a second occasion’.

