Barbara at Work: The International African Institute

I am turning into an anthropologist as I now have a job at the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, which I like very much. I work for dear Professor Daryll Forde, who has great charm but no manners, and is altogether the kind of person I ought to work for! (AVPE, letter to Henry Harvey, June 1946)

'Although the Institute was registered as a charity, money was always short, and one of the main savings was on staff salaries. Apart from the typists and the bookkeeper, nearly all the members of staff either had independent means or were married women, supported by their husbands. Barbara's salary when she first joined the Institute was £5 a week and she was only earning £1,500 a year when she left in 1974. Barbara was fortunate to be able to live with Hilary, who had a good salary from the BBC, and share expenses with her, Hilary providing the little luxuries for them both.' (ALTA)

1946-53: Seymour House, 17 Waterloo Place, London SW1Y 4AR

When Barbara started working at the IAI in February 1946, the Institute was located in an impressive neoclassical building at the corner of Waterloo Place and Pall Mall, at the lower end of Regent Street in St James's. The building, dating from the early 20th century, is Grade II listed, but the interior has been completely remodelled since the 1950s.

'The Institute was at that time housed in two floors of an office building rather grandly situated in Lower Regent Street. The offices, though, were decidedly cramped, and at the top of the building – though this did give access to the roof, with a wonderful view of royal processions down the Mall. The main room on the top floor was devoted to the Institute's fine specialist library … and next door there was a large room for the bookkeeper, Freda Cooper, and the membership secretary, an Excellent Woman called Hilary Alpin. Next to that was the general office. … On the floor below was a large room, divided into two by a partition. In the smaller cubbyhole was … a library assistant, and the large, remaining area was occupied by editorial and research workers on the [Ethnographic and Linguistic] Surveys. (ALTA)

'The lease of the premises which the Institute had occupied since 1938 was due to expire in June 1953 and we opened negotiations for its renewal before the end of last year. We expected to have to meet a substantial increase in rent but not to discover, as we did after some considerable delay, that the landlords had, without advising us, already disposed of the premises for the future. After an exhaustive search new premises adequate to our present needs have been secured at a figure which we are assured by surveyors is very reasonable at the present level of rentals. … So far as accommodation is concerned the move to new premises is not to be regretted, for our former offices had become seriously overcrowded and the problem of storage space for our rapidly increasing stocks of publications was getting serious.' – Daryll Forde, Administrative Director's Report, October 1953. (*Africa*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, p. 350)

1953-72: St Dunstan's Chambers, 10-11 Fetter Lane, London EC4 (demolished 1973)

St Dunstan's Chambers was constructed ca. 1853, at the same time as the General Records Office on the other side of Fetter Lane. At that time the Falcon public house license was transferred from 127 Fetter Lane to the ground floor of No. 10-11, where it remained until the building was replaced by a new office block in 1973. The pub was frequented by journalists from the *Daily Mirror*, located at 113-115 Fetter Lane from 1920-61.

'When the Institute moved to Fetter Lane there was a great rearrangement of staff … Neither of the rooms we shared at the Institute, for over twenty years, can have been more than eighteen feet square. Taking up most of the space in this one were two large wooden desks, set facing each other. Their cigarette-scarred surfaces were obscured by stacks of wire trays which held slipping piles of galley proofs, dog-eared folders of yellowing manuscripts and dangerously leaning towers of books, endlessly awaiting review. In a small clearing on each desk

was an old-fashioned typewriter, since we typed not only our own letters but also long passages of revised manuscripts, bibliographies and indexes. We both typed with two fingers. Around the walls stood a collection of olive green metal filing cabinets, since we also did our own filing – eccentrically, but efficiently.' (ALTA)

'The offices were in St Dunstan's Chambers, Fetter Lane, off Fleet Street… The doorway opened on to a wide flight of brown lino-covered stairs, and the offices were on the first and second floors of the building. I did not see Barbara very often as our areas of work did not overlap much, and when they did Hazel was the usual intermediary…. However, I do have a clear mental picture of Barbara sitting in her office upstairs, one arm draped over the back of another chair with a cigarette in hand, on her lips the "warm, crooked smile" that Nancy Ellen Talburt noted in her May 2000 article in *Green Leaves*. She seemed to me always to have an air of calm confidence about her–despite the chaotic appearance of her desk, strewn with manuscripts and proofs.' (Yvonne Cocking, *Barbara in the Bodleian: Revelations from the Pym Archives.* Barbara Pym Society, 2013.)

[In *Less Than Angels*] 'she used the Institute's own building in Fetter Lane as the setting for her anthropologists, even down to the little room (in actual fact the inviolate kingdom of the bookkeeper Freda Cooper) where Tom and Deirdre were discovered in deep, non-anthropological conversation.' (ALTA)

'When Barbara returned to work in the summer of 1971 she was very aware of an atmosphere of change and, indeed, decay…. The Kardomah in Fleet Street had gone ("where now will we be able to read and brood?"), Gamage's in Holborn was about to be closed and demolished ("Oh unimaginable horror!"), leaving hundreds of lunchtime idlers and browsers desolate… St Dunstan's Chambers was also decaying fast. The Fleet Street/Fetter Lane area was being either rebuilt or redeveloped (we lived in a permanent haze of brick dust) and the leases of the buildings were gradually falling in. In the end only the Institute remained in the depressing building.' (ALTA)

I still try to get the odd day working at home and don't stay too late in the dilapidated and decayed Institute building. Now that the advertising firm above us have left the place is empty except for us and you can hear the mice scuttling overhead in the evenings (c. 5:30). (ALTA, letter to Bob Smith)

They have pulled down Gamage's and so much in Fetter Lane including St Dunstan's Chambers where we worked for close on 20 years. The emotion that place saw will never be experienced at 210 High Holborn. Now flat – nothing but rubble and a deep wide hole in the ground. (AVPE, 28 November 1973)

St Dunstan's Chambers, 10-11 Fetter Lane, 1970

1972-74: 210 High Holborn, London WC1V

The Holborn Cinema was opened at 210 High Holborn in October 1910. The cinema was closed in 1925 and it became a small manufacturing premises, then later a branch of the Midland (now HSBC) Bank, with offices above.

At last we are moving the Institute to 210 High Holborn, then this building is to be demolished and so is Gamage's [department store at 125-129 High Holborn] *– a whole period of civilisation gone! Perhaps the rot set in with the closing of the Kardomah* [café in Fleet Street] *all those months ago. The new offices are nice but far less spacious than the old St Dunstan's chambers and we shall all be rather cramped. Hazel and I have a room rather like the one here but smaller. Of course the new place will be more convenient – nearer to the British Museum, SOAS* [School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London]*, Bourne and Hollingsworth, Marks and Spencer* [department stores]*, and other desirable places.* (AVPE, letter to Bob Smith, 7 March 1972)

We have also moved our offices from Fetter Lane to High Holborn – not a great distance, but very different in most respects. A smaller more modern building and we are all more squashed together and have less privacy. But nearer to shops, the British Museum, and many Italian restaurants, second-hand bookshops, Marks and Spencer. I long to write a novel about the office move and the strange passions aroused and the unpleasantness about who was to go where… (AVPE, letter to Philip Larkin, 29 May 1972)

When Barbara retired in 1974, the following announcement was published in *Africa*, the journal of the AIA (Vol. 44, No. 4 (Oct. 1974), p. 418)

'It is with much regret that we must announce the retirement of Miss Barbara Pym, after twenty-eight years with the Institute. She joined the staff in 1946 and was at first concerned with editorial work for the Ethnographic Survey of Africa. In 1958 she became Assistant Editor of *Africa* in place of Mrs. Beatrice Wyatt, and since then has also dealt with all other Institute publications. Besides difficult and detailed preparation of the journal and volumes for the press, she did an immense amount of work in editing manuscripts and reviews, preparing 'Notes and News', keeping in close professional contact with presses and printers, and maintaining personal friendship with authors and reviewers, not all of whom were easy to deal with nor even good-tempered, but all of whom recognized and appreciated her knowledge, competence, and total devotion to the Institute.

'We wish her all happiness and peace of mind in her retirement, and hope that she will at last have the time to play her *alter ego*'s role as novelist. We shall miss her very much.

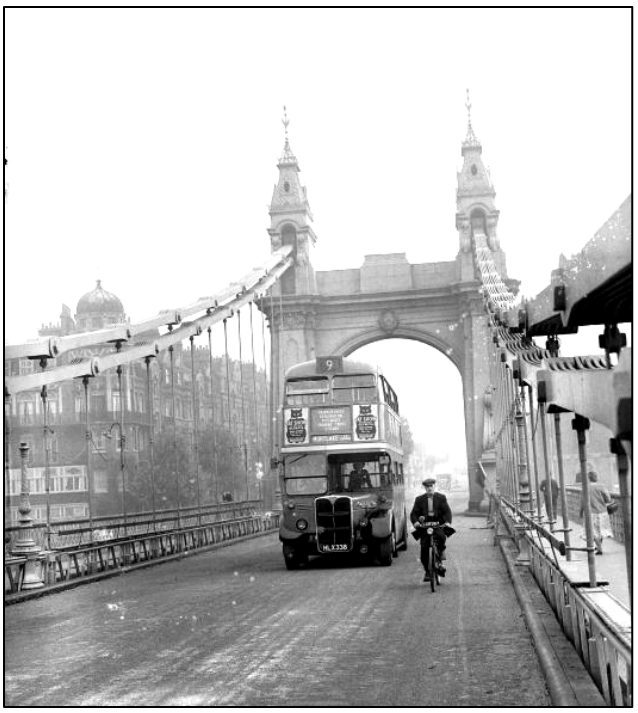
'We are lucky in having her colleague and friend, Hazel Holt, as future Assistant Editor, who will continue to help maintain the high standard of the Institute's publications.'

After her death, Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, a former Colonial Service administrator in Nigeria who became an ethnographer, historian, and Oxford don, wrote a fond and insightful obituary (*Africa,* Vol. 50, No. 1 (1980), pp. 94-95) which read in part:

'For those of us who were associated with the International African Institute in earlier, more leisurely-paced and less practically-geared years, one of the pleasures and rewards to look forward to, for both the academically-minded colonial administrator on furlough and the starry-eyed American graduate student setting out on his first African field-research trip, was to call in at the Institute, then housed in its cobwebby rabbit-warren in New [*sic*] Fetter Lane, and to have a chat with Barbara. Such was her modesty that, even if we at least accepted that this gentle character (though for all her shyness nothing could suppress for long her vivid gift for kindly humour about those she met) really was the editor of that scrupulously produced, prestigious and prized-by-the-budding-scholar journal, the IAI's *Africa*, it was by no means a matter of instant recognition that here, too, was an established authoress—as they were correctly described in those helpfully pre-unisex days—who was publishing a novel every two years between 1950 and 1961…'

The Number 9 Bus

In ALTA Hazel Holt mentions the Pym sisters taking 'the elusive number 9 bus' to work when they lived in Barnes (1949-61); what made it 'elusive' is unclear. During the 1950s the No. 9 bus route began at the Mortlake Bus Garage, just southwest of Barnes, and continued down Church Road, passing the foot of Nassau Road where Barbara and Hilary lived. It proceeded down Castelnau and over Hammersmith Bridge to Hammersmith Road, Kensington High Street, Kensington Road, and Knightsbridge. The route continued down Piccadilly to Regent Street and Waterloo Place (site of the IAI until 1953) before proceeding to Trafalgar Square, the Strand, and Fleet Street, where Barbara would have disembarked after the IAI moved to Fetter Lane. The route continued to St Paul's, Cannon Street, Queen Victoria Street, and Bank before terminating at Liverpool Street.



A No. 9 bus on Hammersmith Bridge, 1952

ROUTE 9 | **Mortlake - Hammersmith - Bank - Becontree** | **30.4.58** | **P.M. times are in heavy figures**

Via Avondale Road, Mortlake High Street, The Terrace, Barnes High Street, Church Road, Castelnau, Hammersmith Bdge., Hammersmith Bridge Road, Hammersmith Broadway, Hammersmith Road, Kensington High Street, Knightsbridge, Hyde Park Corner, Piccadilly, Piccadilly Circus, Haymarket, Pall Mall East (return via Cockspur Street, Pall Mall, Waterloo Place and Regent Street), Trafalgar Square, Duncannon Street (Eastbound only), Strand, Aldwych (Eastbound only), Fleet Street, Ludgate Hill, St. Pauls Churchyard, Cannon Street, Queen Victoria Street, Mansion House Street, Cornhill, Leadenhall Street, Aldgate High Street, Commercial Road, East India Dock Road, Barking Road, London Road, North Street, East Street, Longbridge Road, Wood Lane.

RAILWAY STATIONS SERVED OR NEAR: Barnes Bridge, Hammersmith, Kensington *Olympia*, High St. Kensington, Knightsbridge, Hyde Park Corner, Green Park, Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square, Strand, Charing Cross *SR*, Aldwych, Mansion House, Bank, Liverpool Street, Broad Street, Aldgate, Aldgate East, Stepney East, Canning Town, Barking.

Service interval: MONDAY to FRIDAY, Mortlake–Strand 2-5 mins.; Strand–Liverpool St. 3-6 mins. (eve. 10 mins.). SATURDAY, Mortlake–Strand 3-4 mins. (before 8 0 a.m. 6 mins.); Strand–Liverpool St. 6-7 mins. SUNDAY, Mortlake–Hammersmith 10-12 mins; Hammersmith–Strand 5-6 mins.; Strand–Becontree Heath 10-12 mins. The intervals between buses may be longer in the early morning and late evening.

	MON. to FRI.			SATURDAY				SUNDAY														
	First	Last	¶	First	Last	¶	¶	•	•	•	First	•	•				Last					
MORTLAKE *LT Garage*	5 33	11 10	12 11	5 32	....	11 10	12 11	12 33	5 50	6 8	6 26	6 44	6 57	7 18	7 33	7 49	9 49	10 47	10 52	11 4		
Barnes *Red Lion*	5 39	11 16	12 17	5 38	..	11 16	12 17	12 39	5 56	6 14	6 32	6 50	7 3	7 24	7 39	7 55	9 55	10 53	10 58	11 10		
Hammersmith *Broadway*	5 47	11 24	12 25	5 46	....	11 24	12 25	12 47	A6 5	A6 23	A6 41	A6 59	7 10	7 31	7 46	8 2	10 2	11 0	11 5	A11 19		
Kensington *High Street Station* ..	5 55	11 32	12 33	5 54	..	11 32	12 33	12 55					7 18	7 39	7 54	8 10	10 10	11 8	11 13	..		
Hyde Park Corner	6 3	11 40	12 41	6 2	....	11 40	12 41	1 3	STOP	STOP	..	..	7 26	7 47	8 2	8 18	10 18	11 16	11 21	....		
Piccadilly Circus	6 8	11 46	12 46	6 7	..	11 45	12 46	1 8	..	..	..	..	7 32	7 53	8 8	8 24	10 24	11 22	11 27	..		
Strand *Aldwych*	6 15	11 52	12 53	6 14	....	11 52	12 53	1 15	....	....	....	....	7 36	7 57	8 12	8 28	10 28	11 26	11 31	....		
Bank *Princes Street* ★	6 22	11 59	B12 57	6 22	..	12 0	B12 57	B1 19	..	..	..	..	7 44	8 5	..	8 36	10 36	11 34	..	..		
LIVERPOOL ST. STATION	6 25	12 2	....	6 25	....	12 3	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....		
ALDGATE STATION	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	C6 58	..	..	7 48	8 9	..	8 40	10 40	11 38	..	..		
Burdett Road *Commercial Road*	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	7 10	....	....	....	....	....	8 51	10 51	11 49	....	....		
Poplar *Blackwall Tunnel*	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7 15	..	..	..	..	..	8 56	10 56	11 54	..	..		
Canning Town Station	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	7 19	....	....	....	....	....	9 0	11 0	11 58	....	....		
Upton Park *Boleyn*	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7 26	..	..	..	..	..	9 7	11 7	12 5	..	..		
East Ham *Town Hall*	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	7 30	....	....	....	....	....	9 11	11 11	12 9	....	....		
Barking *Blakes Corner*	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7 36	..	..	..	..	..	9 17	11 17	12 15	..	..		
Barking *LT Garage*	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	5 22	7 40	....	....	....	....	....	9 21	11 21	12 19	....	....		
Bennetts Castle Lane	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	5 29	7 47	..	..	..	..	..	9 28	11 28	..	..	..		
BECONTREE HEATH *Lay-By*	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	5 37	7 55	....	....	....	....	....	9 36	11 36	....	....	....		

A–Time at Hammersmith *Brook Green*. B–Time at Ludgate Circus C–Time at Minories. ¶–Special late journey
★–Bank *Cornhill* on Sunday. •–Early journey.

One can still travel an abbreviated Number 9 route between Hammersmith Station and Aldwych; the buses stopped running into Barnes when traffic on Hammersmith Bridge was restricted and then halted due to safety concerns. It's one of the best sightseeing routes in London, passing Holland Park, Kensington Palace and Gardens, Royal Albert Hall and the Albert Memorial, Hyde Park, Wellington Arch, Green Park, the Ritz, Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square, Charing Cross Station, and Somerset House.