

Church Crawling with Barbara Pym

‘Her books are indubitably “churchy”, partly in the sense that church-going frequently occurs and clergymen are among her best characters, and partly from the tacit and unproselytizing assumption that the world divides into those who do and those who do not attend their parish church. The ethos is always decently Anglican, but this too is taken for granted and no hint of doctrinal or emotional problems is intruded upon the reader. Religion, for Miss Pym’s characters, involves no anguish of conscience (“social” or personal), no dark night of the soul, but decisions about what vestments should be worn on Mid-Lent Sunday, what shall be served for luncheon on Fridays in the clergy-house, who is to query that enigmatic entry in the Church accounts, and “that rather delicate affair of the altar brasses and the unpleasantness between Miss Jenner and Miss Beard”. ... Her treatment of religion suggests, in fact, a rather unusually strong, though reserved, religious sense. (Robert Smith, ‘How Pleasant to Know Miss Pym’, *Ariel*, Vol. 2 No. 4, October 1971, p. 66; quotation from *Some Tame Gazelle*)

‘Barbara was brought up and remained throughout her life a member of the Church of England, and to her all its churches were places of devotion and interest. When after War service and her mother’s death she came to live with her sister in London, and “already well into churchgoing” as her sister has written, she became a regular worshipper at St Gabriel’s Church, Warwick Square, Pimlico. ...

‘About this time [ca. 1952] I returned from Africa ... Then began a period during which Barbara and I were meeting around London fairly regularly. We soon found a mutual interest in churches, especially Anglican churches. It was not the architecture which came first with us but an exploration of the different atmospheres and backgrounds which we found, usually the “higher” the better, and the differing congregations.’ (Robert Smith, ‘Exploring London churches with Barbara Pym’, in Bell, H., Ed., *No Soft Incense: Barbara Pym and the Church*, Barbara Pym Society, 2004)

St Gabriel’s, Warwick Square, Pimlico, London SW1V 2AD

‘When Barbara came to Pimlico she was already well into churchgoing (as you might say), and in London there were plenty of churches to choose from, but her experience had led her, for whatever reason, to want something higher, with more ritual, than the ones she was used to – and here was St Gabriel’s right on her doorstep. I think it might have been at this point that Barbara bought, at Mowbray’s (where else?), a little book called *The Ritual Reason Why* – not only, I might say, for her own enlightenment – and some amusement, because it is written in question-and-answer form – but if she was going to write about this kind of churchmanship, she must get it right.’ (Hilary Pym Walton, ‘Barbara Pym in Pimlico’, talk given at St Gabriel’s Warwick Square, 14 February 1996)

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)

‘This mid-Victorian (1854) near-Gothic church became dear to Barbara, and is dear to us because it is St Mary’s, the church which with its vicar, curates, jumble sales and boys’ club plays an important part in *Excellent Women*. In Barbara’s day the services were somewhat ‘middle of the road’ and so Barbara – daughter of Oxford and a former member of the God-fearing Royal Navy – was soon “wanting something higher with more ritual”.’ (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

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*)

<p>The following churches in central London are arranged roughly from east to west. Numbers in brackets correspond to numbers on the map below.</p>
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St Mary Aldermary, Watling Street at Bow Lane, City of London EC4M 9BW [1]

There has been a church on this site for over 900 years; the name ‘alder’ or old Mary suggests that it is among the oldest of the City of London churches dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The 16th century building was badly damaged in the Great Fire of 1666 and was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren; it is Wren’s only surviving church in the City built in the Gothic rather than the Baroque style.

'Here the priest was Father Freddy Hood, known to us both from his years in Oxford as Principal of Pusey House ... I recall also that it was in this church that we heard a telephone bell ringing in the vestry, speculation about which provided the opening pages for *A Glass of Blessings*. ' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

At St Mary Aldermary (Canon Freddie Hood's church) one hears the shrill whirr of the telephone through the organ music. (AVPE, 29 March 1955)

WHAT IS MY NEXT NOVEL TO BE? It can begin with the shrilling of the telephone in Freddie Hood's church and end with the flame springing up – the new fire on Easter Saturday in the dark church. Hope and a blaze of golden forsythia round the font. (AVPE, 15 May 1955)

I suppose it must have been the shock of hearing the telephone ring, apparently in the church, that made me turn my head and see Piers Longridge in one of the side aisles behind me. It sounded shrill and particularly urgent against the music of the organ. (A Glass of Blessings)

St Paul's Cathedral, St Paul's Churchyard, London EC4M 8AD [2]

A rather rich lunch hour in St Paul's churchyard. All the people sitting on seats with lunch, knitting etc, raising their faces to the mild September sun. I go round to the back where the pieces of broken marble are – it is all white and beautiful, looks good enough to eat – broken off bits of friezes and urn stands. In the middle of such a pile, as if on the rocks at the sea-side sits a woman (middle-aged of course) drinking tea from a plastic cup, the traffic swirling in front of her. I pass the mulberry tree, but it is too late for there to be squashed mulberries on the pavement. Coming round the other side and down by the shops I go to the secondhand bookshop. There is a band playing on the steps of St Paul's which can be heard in the shop. It is a boy's band and they play the Pilgrim's Chorus from Tannhäuser at which point inconsequential conversation starts in the shop between the owner and a woman about dogs/cats. As I go out the band plays 'Land of Hope and Glory!' Surely something for me here. John and Ianthe in the churchyard and Rupert and Penelope hearing the band? (AVPE, 20 April 1961)

Feeling rather dispirited [Rupert] began to walk up towards the cathedral. On the steps a boys' band was playing the Pilgrims' Chorus from Tannhäuser, a piece he always found particularly depressing. It was better, though not much, when they changed to 'Land of Hope and Glory'. He went on aimlessly and found himself round at the back of the building among the heaps of broken marble. In the middle of one such pile, as if on rocks at the seaside, sat a woman – middle-aged, of course – drinking tea from a plastic cup, the traffic swirling in front of her. ... Coming into the gardens he found himself among the office workers sitting on the iron chairs, some with sandwiches, others with knitting or books, and still others with their eyes closed and faces raised in the mild sunshine. (An Unsuitable Attachment)

St Alban the Martyr, Holborn, 18 Brooke Street, Holborn, London EC1N 7RD [3]

This church was only a few blocks from Barbara's workplace on Fetter Lane. While William Butterfield's Victorian façade remains, the ornate interior was destroyed by wartime bombing and was rebuilt in 1959-61 in an austere modern Gothic style with a rather garish mural covering the wall above the high altar. St Alban's Centre, adjacent to the church, has for many years been the site of the Barbara Pym Society's annual Spring Meetings.

'This famous church, "one of the strongest of the works" of the architect William Butterfield, was a centre for the practice in London of the "full Anglo-Catholic faith". Destroyed by German bombs in 1941, it was the temporary church amid the ruins to which Barbara found her way in 1955, and where she read the parish magazine in the porch: "Don't quite like to smoke or read Proust"; and where Mildred met Everard Bone.' (Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

Catherine goes round the back of a Holborn church (St Alban the Martyr). V. strong smell of incense – candles 3d. each. Outside two ladies sitting by a small bowl electric fire on an upturned box talking about the vicar. (AVPE, 1953)

Went into St Alban's Holborn mainly because I was frustrated at not getting a lettuce in Leather Lane market and it seemed a cool and quiet place. Inside the candles burn to St Alban – big ones. I lit one and put money in the box (like Denton). Over the confessional which has purple curtains, a violet coloured stole is flung. Outside the church is a courtyard, round which are the Stations of the Cross, with a seat where I sit and read the parish magazine. Don't quite like to smoke or read Proust. (AVPE, 15 July 1955)

How unsuitable to be reading Harold Acton's Memoirs of an Aesthete at lunch in Lyons (Jolyon) after a rather dire little service at St Alban's Holborn. Series 4 I should think. Oh pray for the Church of England! (AVPE, 31 October 1972) [Between 1966 and 1977 experimental alternatives to the *Book of Common Prayer* were published as Series 1, Series 2, and Series 3 – so Series 4, had it existed, would have been very avant-garde indeed. In 1980 the *Alternative Service Book*, the first complete prayer book produced by the Church of England since 1662, was published. It only lasted 20 years before being replaced by *Common Worship* in 2000.]

Things you can do in London: Austerity meal (with wine) at St Alban's Holborn. (AVPE, 2 July 1973)

St Mary le Strand, Strand, Westminster, London WC2R 1ES [4]

'This mediaeval church was rebuilt in the 18th century by James Gibbs and is described by Nikolaus Pevsner as "a casket one can handle with one's hands". Barbara and I visited it one 30th January, the anniversary of the beheading of King Charles I, saint and martyr, whose shrine is in the church and whose martyrdom was a subject that morning of a sermon by the Abbot of Nushdom.' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

Since 1984 St Mary le Strand has been the official church of the Women's Royal Naval Service, the Women's Royal Naval Reserve, and the Association of Wrens, and houses the WRNS Book of Remembrance.

St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, Charing Cross, London WC2N 4JJ [5]

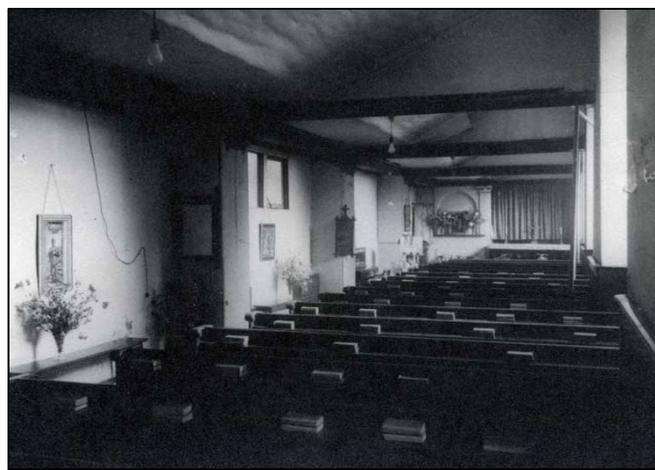
The medieval church on this site really was 'in the fields', but now the famous 18th c. building by James Gibbs is surrounded by the traffic and endless crowds of Trafalgar Square. The crypt where Barbara gave blood was renovated in 2008, preserving the original vaulted brick ceilings and tombstones in the floor; it now houses a café.

I give blood in the crypt of St Martin in the Fields. The donors are all rather ordinary-looking people – the women burdened by shopping baskets. I can imagine (for a novel) a little, frail laden woman saying 'Oh I have given blood' and putting others to shame. (AVPE, 4 May 1955)

St James's, Piccadilly, 197 Piccadilly, London W1J 9LL [6]

Lunchtime Lenten services held in the still partially ruined church of St Ermin's (St. James's, Piccadilly) where Barbara herself had come upon a little grey woman heating a saucepan of coffee on a primus stove. (ALTA)

It was my custom to attend the lunchtime services held at St Ermin's on Wednesdays. The church had been badly bombed and only one aisle could be used, so that it always appeared to be very full with what would normally have been an average congregation crowded into the undamaged aisle. (Excellent Women)



South aisle turned into a temporary church in 1940.

'A fashionable "middle stump" church before the war, after which the late 17th-century building (by Wren) had to be largely rebuilt. Barbara and I visited it in its transitory period under Dean Baddeley who once announced at Mattins, "Here endeth that perfectly lovely Second Lesson".' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

Bob and I ... made our way to St James Piccadilly where Matins had started. The rector (the Rev. William Pye Baddeley – brother of Hermione and Angela) was in the middle of reading the 2nd lesson in a modern version, where Mary Magdalen breaks the box of precious ointment over Jesus ... 'Here endeth that perfectly lovely lesson,' he declared. The congregation was mostly elderly and well dressed. (AVPE, 6 September 1970)

Church of the Annunciation, Marble Arch, Bryanston Street, Marble Arch, London W1H 7AH [7]

Bob and I have lunch and then walk in the park among the young green trees but he feels that Nature is not enough so we go into the Church of the Annunciation at Marble Arch—so near the Cumberland Hotel. Lofty but impressive with the lingering smell of incense. Fine red brocade-covered sedilia and a marble side-table—did

the vicar bring them back from Italy? As we were standing there Bob says 'Oh I wish I were still in the Church of England'. (AVPE, 30 April 1955)

All Saints, Margaret Street, 7 Margaret Street, Fitzrovia, London W1W 8JG [8]

All Saints was built in the 1850s by architect William Butterfield as a model church to embody the tenets of the Ecclesiological Society, whose purpose was to promote their vision of historically authentic Anglo-Catholic worship through Gothic Revival art and architecture. The rather unassuming brick exterior, set back from the street across a small courtyard, is in stark contrast to the riot of decoration inside – every surface is richly ornamented with gilded and polychromed wood and plaster or vividly patterned stone, tile, and stained glass.

The other evening (Thursday late shop-opening) I emerged exhausted from Marks and Spencers wondering where on earth I could go to sit down (without having to order a Wimpy or anything like that) and suddenly thought of All Saints Margaret Street, which turned out to be deliciously cool and restful and only one lady there – no violet-stoled priests lurking to force Anglican ladies to make their Confessions. (That sounds like one of Mr Kensit's pamphlets in the Protestant Truth Society, doesn't it.) (AVPE, letter to Bob Smith, 15 June 1962)

How splendid All Saints Margaret Street is – close to 200 people there! I reckon when you compare it with the five to ten at St Laurence's it hardly seems to be the same religion. And yet, where two or three are gathered together... (AVPE, 22 August 1971)

Christ The King, Gordon Square (London University Church), Bloomsbury, London WC1H 0AG [9]

John Betjeman called the Church of Christ the King 'without a doubt, the grandest church in London of the pioneer days of the Gothic Revival.' From 1963-1992 the church was home to the University of London Anglican Chaplaincy. The memorial service for Daryll Forde, Director of the International African Institute, was held there in 1973 and provided material for Esther Clovis's service, describe in both *A Few Green Leaves* and *An Academic Question*. Barbara was intrigued by the question of how to provide a suitable service for a non-believer:

There was a Memorial Service ('Thanksgiving Service' seems to be the term now) at the London University Church in Gordon Square. DF was not a believer so it wasn't very Christian though the Chaplain gave a kind of blessing at the end. It consisted of readings and music with an address by a colleague. Afterwards some of us were invited to have a drink in what was described as an 'anteroom' but really it was a kind of vestry with crucifixes and hymnbooks lying around and, on a hanger, a very beautiful white cassock or soutane, such as Roman priests in the tropics wear – that rather puzzled me. It was like something I might have put in a novel, I fear.' (AVPE, letter to Philip Larkin, 11 July 1973)

It was a beautiful church, the one chosen for the memorial service. Services of this kind were quite often held there because of its convenient situation. ... There were some rather non-committal hymns printed on a sheet which was headed 'Esther Ivy Clovis 1899-1970' in Gothic lettering. A clergyman, perhaps the vicar, said prayers and then we sat down for the address which was given by a layman... We stood up and sang 'He who would valiant be', all of us, I think, a little shaken. My impression was that Miss Clovis had not been a very nice person. She had obviously not been a Christian, so why had they had a church service? (An Academic Question)

St Cyprian's, Clarence Gate, Glentworth Street, Marylebone, London NW1 6AX [10]

St Cyprian's, designed by noted church architect Sir Ninian Comper, was constructed 1901-03. Fr Anthony Symondson SJ wrote, 'A simple red brick exterior gives no impression of the beauty and surprise of the interior. It is a fusion of controlled austerity and splendour.'

'Here we again attended an induction of a new vicar. While we entered Barbara memorised a clerical conversation which we overheard:

"Are you robing, Father?" ...

"Rather!" came the enthusiastic answer ... I saw that they were both carrying small suitcases, from which I imagined crushed cottas being taken out.' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*, quoting *A Glass of Blessings*)



Westbourne Grove Church, Westbourne Grove, Notting Hill, London W11 2RW [11]

On the way [to All Saints, Notting Hill] we passed Westbourne Grove Baptist Church and heard records of hymns blaring out. How trying to live opposite! It would surely try one's conscience to be lying in bed when such music was going on. (AVPE, 15 May 1955)

All Saints, Notting Hill, Clydesdale Road, Notting Hill, London W11 1JE [12]

The flamboyant Fr John Herbert Cloete Twisaday was vicar of All Saints, Notting Hill, from 1932-61. Badly bombed during WWII, the church stood closed for six years before re-opening, resplendent with new shrines and polychrome altarpieces by the famous church designer Sir Ninian Comper. Fr Twisaday made All Saints so ultra-High that the rededication service in 1951 was picketed by Protestant protesters. He is said to have been the model for Fr Hugh Chantry-Pigg in Rose Macaulay's 1956 novel *The Towers of Trebizond*.

'This church had suffered from bombing, and like St Alban's, it too was a shrine to advanced Anglo-Catholicism. The vicar was the redoubtable Fr Twisaday, whose likeness as Fr Thames appears in *A Glass of Blessings*, which also contains a somewhat evocative clergy-house.' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

I went to All Saints Notting Hill with Bob to High Mass. ... All Saints is splendidly Catholic – 3 priests. Sean MacAteer (whom I know) was the celebrant. We began with Asperges (later at tea Hilary asked what was the connection between Asperges and asparagus). The three priests in their lime green vestments with bands and birettas look like dolls bobbing up and down. Fr Twisaday, the vicar, is an elderly dried up celibate, irritable and tetchy. He fidgets in the pulpit, times things alarmingly with pauses so that one wonders if he's just forgotten what he was going to say and will fall down in a fit. The sermon, urging us to keep Ascension Day as a day of obligation, was quite good. Then he remembered a notice about a meeting in the Albert Hall and began talking about that, all mixed up – how many tickets to send for, etc. Apparently he lives in a large vicarage with a private oratory – the only telephone is there and he doesn't like the curates being rung up. (AVPE, 15 May 1955)

Corpus Christi. Benediction and procession at All Saints with Bob. It was advertised in the Church Times – priests were asked to wear chasubles(?) and 'plain cottas'. Afterwards in the church hall we met Sean MacAteer. He has charm, wrinkles his nose when he smiles. Such a display of charm is surprising, even a little shocking. Later when we are in a pub, Fr James comes in with the thurifer. (AVPE, 31 May 1956)

St Mary Magdalene, Paddington, Rowington Close, London W2 5TF [13]

The church was constructed in 1867-1878. The architect was George Edmund Street, and this church is considered to be his masterpiece. It includes notable stained glass, a painted ceiling, and a later crypt chapel by Comper.

Since the closing [of St Laurence Brondesbury] we have been to St Mary Magdalene's, Paddington. It has rather good music and quite an amusing vicar (dragging on a cigarette) and curate who live in a startlingly modern clergy house just opposite the church. (AVPE, letter to Bob Smith, 31 October 1971)

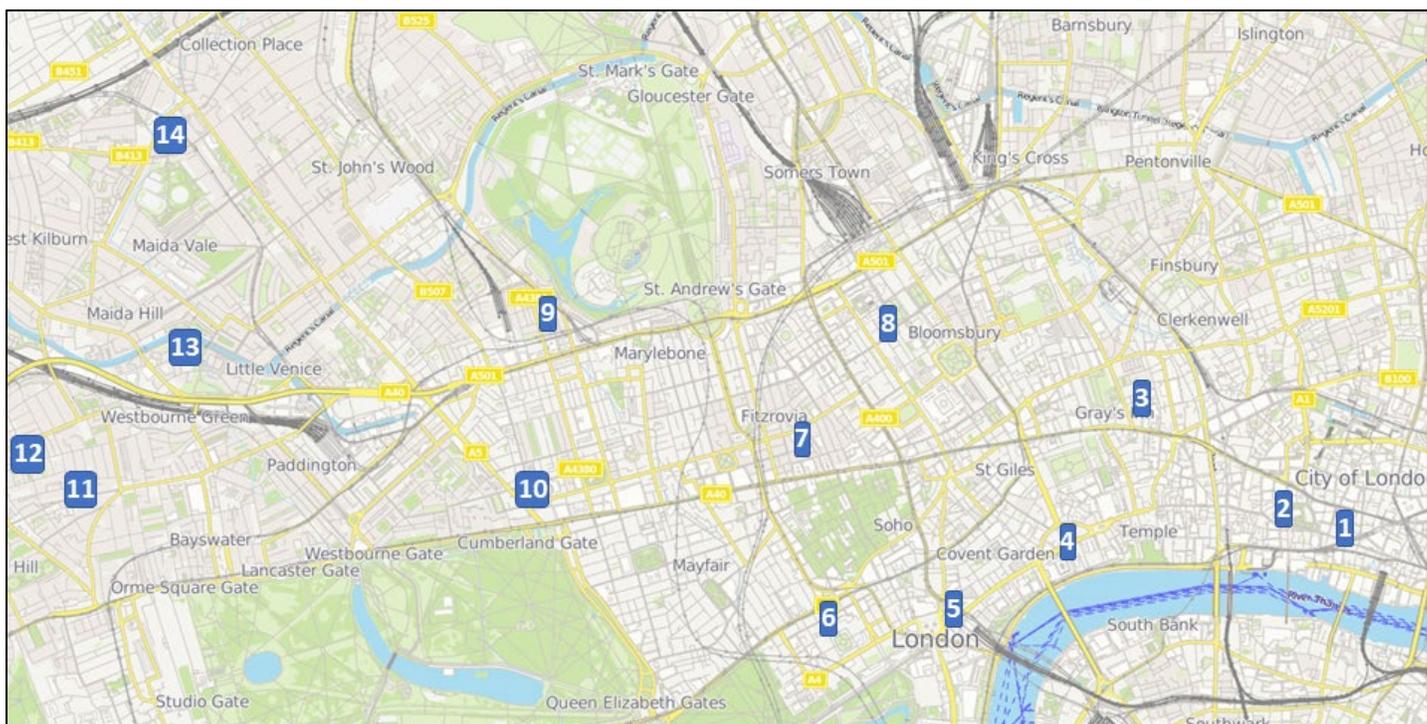
St Augustine's, Kilburn, Kilburn Park Road, North Maida Vale, London NW6 5XB [14]

St Augustine's is located in Kilburn, one mile southeast of the Pym sisters' home in Queen's Park – 'almost within walking distance, if one were wearing comfortable shoes'. Because of its large size, ornate decoration, and high church tradition, it is sometimes referred to as the 'Cathedral of North London'.

'A cathedral-like church in North London which became Neville Forbes's church in *No Fond Return of Love*.' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

Barbara named Neville Forbes's church St Ivel's, which was a joke – St Ivel was the name of a well-known range of dairy products from Aplin & Barrett Ltd. in Yeovil, and 'Ivel' is an archaic spelling of Yeovil; there is no Christian saint of that name.

[Dulcie] was glad that his parish was in an accessible part of London. Indeed, when she looked on a street map, she found that it was almost within walking distance, if one were wearing comfortable shoes, of where her Uncle Bertram and Aunt Hermione lived. She must make a point of going to tea with them soon, perhaps on a Sunday. Then it might be possible to go to the evening service at the church. (No Fond Return of Love)



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| 1) <i>St Mary Aldermary</i> | 6) <i>St James's Piccadilly</i> | 11) <i>Westbourne Grove Church</i> |
| 2) <i>St Paul's Churchyard</i> | 7) <i>All Saints, Margaret Street</i> | 12) <i>All Saints, Notting Hill</i> |
| 3) <i>St Alban's, Holborn</i> | 8) <i>Christ the King, Gordon Square</i> | 13) <i>St Mary Magdalene, Paddington</i> |
| 4) <i>St Mary le Strand</i> | 9) <i>St Cyprian's, Clarence Gate</i> | 14) <i>St Augustine's, Kilburn</i> |
| 5) <i>St Martin-in-the-Fields</i> | 10) <i>Annunciation, Marble Arch</i> | |

Other well-known Anglo-Catholic churches in London, with no documented Pym connection

St Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield, West Smithfield, London EC1A 9DS

Great St Bart's is London's oldest parish church building, having survived the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539, the Great Fire of 1666, a 1915 zeppelin bombing, and the WWII Blitz. The present church is what remains of an enormous Augustinian priory church founded in 1123 along with the adjacent St Bartholomew's Hospital. The nave and transepts were pulled down when the monasteries were suppressed, and the Norman choir was walled off for use as a parish church. The church fell into disrepair in the 18th century, and in the 1720s Benjamin Franklin worked in a printer's shop in what is now the Lady chapel. The church was restored in the late 19th and mid-20th centuries.

St Magnus the Martyr, London Bridge, Lower Thames St, London EC3R 6DN

The original 12th century church was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and rebuilt by Wren; it was modified and damaged by fire in the 18th century, extensively restored in 1825, and the interior was remodelled again in 1924 in a neo-baroque style to better reflect the Anglo-Catholic sensibilities of the congregation. The hymn tune **St Magnus** ('The head that once was crowned with thorns') is named after this church.

St Paul's, Knightsbridge, 32A Wilton Place, Knightsbridge, London SW1X 8SH

Founded and built in 1843, this was the first church in London to champion the ideals of the Oxford Movement. The nave has an unusual beamed ceiling, side galleries, and tiled panels depicting biblical scenes, and the chancel with its rood screen and striking reredos was added in 1892 by the eminent church architect G.F. Bodley.

St Mary's, Bourne Street, 30 Bourne Street, Belgravia, London SW1W 8JJ

This cave-like Victorian red-brick church near Sloane Square, with the Underground rumbling beneath it, was built 'quickly and cheaply' in 1874 primarily for servants, but over the years has been greatly enriched with elaborate altars, shrines, paintings, and other fittings.

In the suburbs and beyond

St Michael and All Angels, Barnes Bridge, 39 Elm Bank Gardens, Barnes, London SW13 0NX

This was the Pym sisters' parish church when they lived in Barnes in the 1950s.

'Barbara also found a highly congenial church, St Michael's, Barnes Bridge, where, in the fullness of time, she became a member of the Parochial Church Council.' (ALTA)

'A rather dull late 19th-century building which provided the background to services in a sound and advanced Western Catholic tradition.' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

St Laurence the Martyr, Brondesbury, Chevening Road, Queen's Park, London NW6 6DF

[Closed in 1971, demolished and replaced by flats bearing the name St Laurence's Close.]

'Members of the congregation became familiar figures, and especially the hard-working organist whom [Hilary and Barbara] privately christened 'Bear,' and who was transmuted into Bill Coleman of St Luke's, Father Thames's church in *A Glass of Blessings*.' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

Hilary set to work the other evening compiling a list of all the people who had 'worshipped' at St Laurence's since we came here that we could remember. We then analysed the circumstances of them leaving – if they had left – and came to the conclusion that they had been removed by Rome, Death, and Umbrage. A good title for a book, don't you think? Umbrage of course removed the greatest number. (ALTA, letter to Bob Smith)

St Anne's Brondesbury, 125 Salusbury Road, West Kilburn, London NW6 6RG

[Demolished in 1996, now site of a new building shared by the C of E parish of St Anne with Holy Trinity, St Andrew's United Reformed Church, and the London Inter Faith Centre.]

There was no Christmas service at St Laurence's which was rather sad, but of course there are plenty of nearby churches to go to. We went to St Anne's. A nice service and the church was really warm. (Letter to Bob Smith, 31 December 1970, AVPE)

Church of the Holy Innocents, Hammersmith, Paddenswick Road, Hammersmith, London W6 0UB

'Here we attended the induction as its new vicar of Fr Sean McAteer, formerly curate of All Saints, Notting Hill. The induction in *A Glass of Blessings* of the languid and charming Fr Marius Ransome owes much to this.' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

The Bishop's address was short and to the point. He told his congregation that last week he had inducted a priest as vicar of a very beautiful old church in the diocese. The church we were in this afternoon was not beautiful, but we must not think that beauty was everything. It was not nothing—he certainly would not go so far as to say that—but it was not so very much, not nearly so important as people imagined. (*A Glass of Blessings*)

St John the Divine, Richmond, Kew Road, Richmond TW9 2NA

'Well-known to us both, and memorable to Barbara for its American curate.' (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

Buckfast Abbey, Buckfastleigh, Devon

The first abbey at Buckfast was founded as a Benedictine monastery in 1018; it was dissolved in 1539 and the buildings were destroyed. The site was purchased by exiled French Benedictine monks in 1882 and the present abbey church was constructed by the monks between 1906-38, so it was quite new when Barbara visited in 1948.

Here's an example from my own notebooks. In September 1948 I described a visit to Buckfast Abbey:

... much commercialised, teas, car park etc. shop full of Catholic junk as well as books. Abbey very clean and new looking, inside bright and light, tiled effect; incense smells almost hygienic. Not thus would one be sentimentally converted to Rome, though perhaps rationally. Very young priests in the parties of sight-seers, mostly in pairs like little beetles, from the seminary in Paignton. The herds of people – the monk showing us round says: "I don't suppose any of you are Catholics" and explains about Our Lady – makes one feel inferior.

This passage seems to have found its way, very little changed, into my novel Excellent Women. ('Finding A Voice', a radio talk recorded for the BBC in 1978 and later published in Civil to Strangers)

The walls looked bright and clean, there was a glittering of much gold and the lingering smell of incense was almost hygienic. Not here, I thought, would one be sentimentally converted to Rome...

A neat-looking monk with rimless glasses took charge of our party... 'I don't suppose any of you are Catholics,' he said smoothly, 'so you may not understand about Our Lady.'

I saw the Anglo-Catholic ladies gather more closely together, as if to distinguish themselves from the rest of the group. They seemed to be whispering indignantly among themselves and one looked almost as if she were about to protest. But in the end, perhaps remembering their manners or the difficulty of arguing with a Roman, they calmed down and listened patiently with the rest of us. (Excellent Women)

Pusey House, Oxford, 57-59 St Giles at Pusey Street, Oxford OX1 3LZ, Oxfordshire

Pusey House, located on St Giles opposite St John's College in Oxford, was opened in 1884 as a memorial to Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882), Regius Professor of Hebrew and Canon of Christ Church, who was a figurehead of the 'high church' Oxford Movement and its *de facto* leader after John Henry Newman went over to Rome in 1845. The Gothic revival buildings, dating from 1912-26 and now shared with St Cross College, include a library and a chapel with fittings and windows by Ninian Comper that is still a shrine of Anglo-Catholic worship.

The future Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, remembered meeting people including C.S. Lewis, John Betjeman, and Harold Macmillan in the Pusey House common room in the early 1940s. Runcie once overheard Fr Freddy Hood, Priest-Librarian from 1922 and Principal from 1934-51, describe Pusey House to a group of German visitors as 'Ein centrum von Catholic life.'

Barbara Pym and Bob Smith both knew Freddie Hood, later of St Mary Aldermary, from their time in Oxford:

*'...the priest was Father Freddy Hood, known to us both from his years in Oxford as principal of Pusey House, where the colourful services based strictly on the ritual prescriptions of Adrian Fortescue [author of *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described* (1918), the definitive reference on pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic ritual] rivalled the quieter Prayer Book services in the college chapels. We recalled Fr Hood's invitations in Oxford to "Sherry and compline".'* (R. Smith, 2004, *op. cit.*)

St Michael's, Minehead, St Michael's Road, Minehead TA24 5NH, Somerset

Minehead, on the south bank of the Bristol Channel in Somerset, became Tavistock in *No Fond Return of Love*.

St Michael's Church, Minehead. Morning. Women are doing the flowers – huge dahlias. It smells of floor polish rather than incense. Old screen and font with stone figures (one partially restored?) The suspicious church-crawler looking out, not for the genuinely old, but the restored. (AVPE, 1949)

'Surely that is a Norman font?' said Viola rather sharply.

'Yes, I believe so, [the vicar] said, indifferently. (No Fond Return of Love)

St Wulstan's Catholic Church, Wells Road, Little Malvern, Malvern WR14 4JL, Worcestershire

*I find myself going to see Elgar's grave (directed by an arrow) in the R.C. church at Little Malvern. The weather is dull but not unpleasant—rather calming and saddening and I am glad I have brought Hardy's poems with me. Tea in the Abbey tearooms—very good home-made cakes only 6d. each. In the Priory Gardens the smell of heliotrope reminds me of Skipper's *L'Heure Bleue* (but one would have to change the sexes for a story, wouldn't one?). (AVPE, 15 September 1965)*

