Green Leaves

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"A few green leaves can make such a difference."— Miss Grundy, *A Few Green Leaves*

A Note from the Editor

by Jutta Schiller

It was no surprise when the organizer of the North American Chapter of the Barbara Pym Society informed the members of the Society about the cancellation of the conference at Harvard University in March 2020.

Since then nobody's life has been unaffected by the worldwide pandemic. But 'hope springs eternal', and therefore we wanted to go on as normally as possible and decided to publish another issue of the Barbara Pym Society newsletter *Green Leaves*, although in a slightly altered version. We hope you enjoy it. We'll meet again.

A Note from the Chair

by Deb Fisher

The latest situation with regard to the social restrictions that have been imposed on our members is different depending on where you live. Even within the UK, there are differences. This has made it impossible to plan future events with any certainty.

The one thing that is certain is that the annual conference planned for the first weekend in September will not be able to go ahead. This is because St Hilda's College has cancelled all bookings up to the end of that month. The committee is generally agreed that the best way to deal with this is to rearrange the conference, with the same theme and speakers, for September 2021, and accordingly we have booked St Hilda's for 3-5 September next year.

Before then, many things could happen, but our present intention is to try to hold a smaller event at St Hilda's in the autumn or winter. This could take the form of an AGM followed by a celebration of some kind, but much depends on how long the UK remains in partial lockdown and what travel restrictions are in force by then. If you have any ideas or proposals for this, please do send them to us.

We also have plans for some kind of online event before the end of this year. Once again, this depends to some extent on discussion with technical experts. Perhaps we can offer some kind of preview of next year's events, or even a Zoom session.

We will certainly inform all those whose email address we have, in advance of any such event. In the meantime, we still hope to go ahead with the competition to win the 'Pym' coat that was kindly donated by Boden, but we have to think through the arrangements in view of the cancelled events. You will receive a separate notification about this, when it is decided. Best wishes to you all.

Before the world was struck by the Corona pandemic Connie Matricardi, Sandra Goldstein and Betty Zausner were planning to live 'like Barbara Pym for a year', an idea inspired by an article in the Baltimore Sun *in which a suburban mom described how she was 'living like Prince [the rock star] for a year'. But then the world turned upside down, and with it came the cancellation of the Barbara Pym Conference in Boston. Connie, Sandra and Betty decided to accept the disappointment about this cheerfully and calmly, as they thought Barbara Pym would have done. Then they decided to turn their original idea into a recommendation to us other Barbara Pym enthusiasts.*

Living Like Pym During a Pandemic

by Connie Matricardi and Sandra Goldstein

Connie and Sandra, photo by Leonard Goldstein

Drink Tea

Want to live like Pym? Have a cup of tea. How many pots of tea are served, steeped or stewed in Pym novels? The list is long: 'endless cups of tea', 'produced on every possible and impossible occasion' (*UA*). No matter the time of day, tea is appropriate: 'Of course one needed tea always at every hour of the day or night' (*EW*).

A solitary cup of tea is good, but so is sharing a pot of tea with friends. Try hosting an afternoon tea, even if it has to be virtual. Use your best teapot and loose tea. Do not make the 'pale, straw-coloured liquid…' experienced by Mildred and Rocky on the continent. 'The tea's in a funny little bag… And they may even bring *hot* milk with it…' (*EW*).

Experiment with recipes for shortbread, scones or a sponge. Even if you are not a cook, you can master the cucumber sandwich. 'It is an art all too seldom met with… the correct slicing of cucumber' (*FGL*) The secret? A sharp knife, as Emma suggests.

Tea can be used to soothe, stimulate, celebrate, commiserate or console. 'A cup of tea always helps… It can never come amiss' (*JP*). As we Pym followers know, 'life has to go on and I suppose a cup of tea does make it seem to be doing that more than anything' (*GoB*).

Contents

A Note from the Editor, A Note from the Chair	**1**
Living Like Pym During a Pandemic	**1**
Barbara Pym Doll	**3**
Short Stories	**4**
Deb's Diary	**10**
Barbara Abroad	**10**
Barbara Pym in Translation in France	**11**
Barbara Pym in Translation in Germany	**12**
Gleanings	**13**
Barbara Pym in Translation in Sweden	**13**
The Barbara Pym Society	**14**
Obituaries	**15**
Picture Gallery	**16**

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Find Comfort in Little Things

Whether we are staying home by choice or because of a pandemic, we can find comfort and satisfaction in the humble, domestic pleasures. As Catherine Oliphant finds, there's always something that needs cleaning: '...she went into the kitchen and got a duster and mop. She loved housework when she was in the mood for it' (*LTA*).

Staying home, you have more time to cook. Try a new recipe like Belinda Bede, hoping it turns out better than her ravioli, 'sticky, full of little lumps and greyish looking' (*STG*). If you are missing some ingredients because of limited shopping options or empty store shelves, improvise.

When an evening power outage disrupted the lives of the villagers, Emma made herself a tasty supper of 'gin and tonic and boiled eggs and toast done on the fire' (*FGL*).

And when Rocky turned to Mildred after Helena had left him, she prepared a delicious lunch with items in her larder: 'I washed a lettuce and dressed it with a little of my hoarded olive oil and some salt. I also had a Camembert cheese, a fresh loaf and a bowl of greengages for dessert' (*EW*).

Keep busy by reorganizing a closet, donating the unwanted items to Goodwill or a church jumble sale. Use YouTube to learn or perfect a skill like baking sourdough bread, flower arranging or speaking Italian.

On the other hand, 'there was a certain pleasure in not doing something; it was impossible that one's high expectations should be disappointed by the reality' (*STG*).

'The small things of life were often so much bigger than the great things…the trivial pleasures like cooking, one's home, little poems especially sad ones, solitary walks, funny things seen and overheard' (*LTA*).

Regarding the pleasures of staying home, perhaps women have an advantage over men? 'A woman can always find plenty to occupy her time…' (*QA*).

As Barbara recorded in her diary, 'Women are different from men in that they have so many small domestic things with which to occupy themselves – I think I could spend my whole day doing such things, with just a little time for reading, and be quite happy' (*ALTA*).

Make Do and Do Your Part

Be conscious of your carbon footprint. Carry a reusable bag to the grocery store like Mildred's string bag. You may find the supermarket shelves bare. If so, take it in stride. You can always eat the leftovers in the pantry, 'humble fare with no meat' (*UA*). 'I opened a tin of baked beans, thinking that it would be easy and quick' (*EW*).

If you are really desperate, look in the freezer. 'We have come to this…eating frozen vegetables like Americans' (*UA*).

Be conservative in your social media and news consumption. Avoid getting sucked into the modern-day 24-hour news cycle. 'There was really something in what Emma had said about the dangerous influence of television on the older viewer' (*FGL*). It might be best for your mental health to limit your daily viewing time. 'He [Tom] had the impression that his uncle was a kind of prisoner or a sacrifice laid before the altar of the television set which demanded a constant tribute of victims' (*LTA*).

If you can, make an appointment to donate blood. 'Now the idea of giving blood seemed exciting and I looked forward to the experience like a kind of treat' (*GoB*). If you have a rare blood type, like Miss Daunt, try not to cause a commotion by jumping the queue! '*This precious blood*... And you expect me to wait here behind all these people!' (*GoB*).

If you are not eligible to give blood, make a monetary donation to the Red Cross. If you have a sewing machine and the materials on hand, make cloth masks for family, friends and neighbors.

During desperate times you may resort to cutting your own hair. Look to Catherine Oliphant as an example. 'It was natural for her to look a little ragged and untidy'...with 'hair apparently cut with nail scissors' (*LTA*).

Do you really need to hoard supplies? Even essentials like toilet paper? Be creative and come up with a substitute. When the little seamstress Miss Prior noticed 'there was no paper in the downstairs lavatory', Harriet gave her an old *Church Times* (*STG*).

Keep a Notebook

Starting in 1948 Barbara kept small spiral-bound notebooks in which she wrote 'of all the trivia that she enjoyed so much – the odd overheard remark, an "atmosphere" at work or at church, any small incongruity or eccentricity of behaviour, notes taken "in the field" that were to enrich her work and give it its own special quality' *(ALTA).*

Even if you are not planning to write a novel, just be more observant, notice what is going on around you, and write long, interesting letters to your friends. Think of Dulcie Mainwaring, for whom watching other people is a game, 'to observe their joys and sorrows with detachment as if one were watching a film or a play… And how much more comfortable it sometimes was to observe it from a distance, to look from an upper window, as it were, as the anthropologists did' (*NFR*).

Barbara also used her notebooks to make detailed shopping lists, including such household items as Elastoplast, mothballs, laxatives, Grape-Nuts, pilchards and Topcat. She made three kinds of clothing lists: outfits to buy for the new season (for spring/summer 1954, she listed 'peacock blue poplin dress, charcoal grey suit, white blouse, and yellow hat'); lists of clothes bought, with prices; and lists of clothes to take on holiday (*ALTA*). Wilmet and Prudence, the best-dressed of her heroines, would probably have made lists like these.

Making lists of clothes could be the first step to organizing your closet and de-cluttering in a less rigorous but more enjoyable fashion than the Marie Kondo method.

Some of Barbara's notes described how people dressed. In 1948 for instance: 'overdressed women in furs, veiled hats, pearls, dark nylons and platform shoes'. Noting other people's sartorial errors might improve our own outfits, even if during the lockdown they consist of comfortable 'loungewear'.

Adopt Barbara's calm resolve: 'The only thing is to work at something you like and that you feel is worth doing, even if it's only a novel that doesn't get published' (*ALTA*).

Read

Read Barbara's favorite books, in particular the 12-volume *A Dance to the Music of Time* by Anthony Powell, or anything by Denton Welch; become acquainted with the 'greater English poets', especially those of the 17th century preferred by Jane Cleveland (*JP*); discover the works of Coventry Patmore, Prudence Bates' favorite poet (*JP*). Reread Jane Austen, especially her last chapters, 'to find out how she manages all the loose ends' (*VPE*).

Make reading lists in your notebook, as Barbara did in her commonplace book. At Oxford in 1934, her list included the poets John Gower, Alexander Pope, Edward Young, and John Wilmot, the 2nd Earl of Rochester. Around the same time she made a list of Victorian novelists, including Charlotte M Yonge, Charlotte Brontë, and Mrs Gaskell.

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Reread favorites and get to know the others. Staying at home is the perfect opportunity to catch up on your reading.

Alternately, for comfort reading, just go back to your favorite books, even those from your childhood. Didn't Belinda Bede and Jane Cleveland read poetry for comfort, or to remember the days of their youth? Or, for a change, read contemporary novels which Barbara might have enjoyed. She had a wide range of literary interests. It was a surprise to find *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin on one of her reading lists. You might even take a look at an Icelandic grammar, like the one which the Archdeacon maliciously placed upon Bishop Mbawawa's bedside table (*STG*), or you might prefer a Chinese cookery book, like the one at Mildred's bedside (*EW*).

Try to track down and read the books in Dulcie's bathroom: *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Poems of Gray and Collins*, *Enquire Within*, *The Angel in the House*, *A Voice Through a Cloud*, *Some Tame Gazelle*, and *The Boys From Sharon* (*NFR*). When all else fails, reread your favorite Pym novel. And don't be afraid of breaking some rules, unlike Letty, who still lived by the dictum of her headmistress: 'One did not drink sherry before the evening, just as one did not read a novel in the morning' (*QA*).

The example of Barbara Pym's novels and her life can provide inspiration, comfort and levity during difficult times. Let's continue 'Living like Pym' after the pandemic has passed.

Barbara Pym Doll

by Judy Horn

Among the material I received for this issue of *Green Leaves* was this lovely picture sent by Ann and Dan DiPietro. I felt there was a story here so I started my research by calling Ann and Dan who told me that the doll had popped up as an ad on their computer screen because they do so much searching for Barbara Pym. Of course, they *had* to look into it and found it was for sale on Etsy. And, of course, they *had* to buy it.

Thanks to Ann and Dan DiPietro for this photo

So I went to Etsy.com (an online marketplace for crafters and other entrepreneurs) and found the online shop, Uneekdolldesigns.etsy.com. I was amazed by the delightful items created by the artist Debbie Ritter on display there.

I wanted to know more so I wrote to Debbie and she quickly replied:

> I started doing my artwork after my husband built a dollhouse for my mother over 12 years ago. I wanted to make her some people to put in it and looked at various ways to do it and ended up using wood, wire, clay, paint, fiber, and fabric to make them. Starting out was awkward but I taught myself as time went on and here I am – now selling for going on 12 years. I've recently expanded what I do to include mini portraits of certain authors too.
>
> I am happy to tell you why Barbara is one of my chosen subjects – I love to read and love basing the majority of my art work around authors and writers.
>
> I have an extensive library with a lot of these authors on the shelf. I wanted to branch out into reading some British authors, especially the witty writers that include Barbara Pym, Miss Read, P G Wodehouse, and others.
>
> So far I have read just two of Pym's works, but hope to read more. I've enjoyed what I have read thus far.

The 2021 Ellen J. Miller Memorial
SHORT STORY COMPETITION

Monday 30 November 2020 is the deadline for submitting original short stories that prominently feature one or more characters from Barbara Pym's published novels in any setting or situation the author chooses. The first, second, and third place winners will receive cash prizes of $250, $100, and $50, respectively, plus complimentary registration and meals at the North American Conference to be held in Boston, MA, on 19-21 March 2021. The winning entries will be announced and read at the conference and will also be published on the Society's website and distributed to our membership in the Spring 2021 issue of *Green Leaves*. Complete rules and the submission procedure are posted on the BPS website.

Here are the top four entries from the 2020 Ellen J. Miller Memorial Short Story Competition, starting with the first-prize winner.

Not Scorned in Heaven, Though Little Noticed Here

by Tanya van Hasselt

Miss Spicer picked up the scattered Christmas cards lying on the hall mat and examined the writing on the envelopes with resignation. They mostly looked dispiritingly familiar. Inside would be a card with a printed message of seasonal goodwill, accompanied by a round-robin letter brimming with the exciting holidays, achievements and enjoyments of the senders and their relations.

Did she really have to open them? A year of silence, and then in December these triumphant detailed accounts of lives lived so separately from her own.

Big, vibrant, centre-stage lives. Hers was small, drab, waiting in the wings.

A picture came into her head of colourful jockeys on glossy racehorses galloping around a track and herself as a grey mouse crouched and listening in the undergrowth. She pushed it away, ashamed. There must be something wrong with her that receiving round-robin letters left her feeling inadequate and useless, the despised spinster without what people called a full life.

Clearly she was jealous, and that was something to be ashamed of when you were approaching 70. Miss Spicer scolded herself for her lack of generosity. Wasn't Advent meant to be a penitential season? She would make a cup of strong tea and treat herself to a biscuit while she opened her cards. She should count herself lucky that people were kind

enough to send them.

The Harrison-Browns' jolly snowman card was the same as last year's. Miss Spicer won't notice, she imagined them saying as they unearthed the box of leftovers. It's actually more suitable, as it's in aid of the homeless, whereas this year's cards are for Help the Aged, which might look a little pointed.

Two sides of closely typed text. Arabella's stunning success in her exams. Ben's school football trophy. The family holiday in the Caribbean. Roger's promotion at work.

Miss Spicer bit into a custard cream.

Natalie and Steve Cotton – a tasteful Michelangelo angel with wings outstretched – had no children to boast about. Instead there were photographs of the new conservatory and the five cultural and activity holidays they'd squeezed in between their high-flying jobs. ('Far East trip planned for next year! Watch this space!')

Miss Spicer sipped her tea, feeling tired at the thought of it.

'Our church saw more than two hundred of us at summer camp this year and all of us experienced ever more wonderful blessings!' David and Jenny Newman's card was always a group photograph of their family exuding a bright Christian atmosphere. 'Martha and Jacob are now leaders in their children's groups and can't wait to tell all their friends!'

Miss Spicer loved seeing the dear children grow and change year by year. Their mother, Jenny, was her goddaughter. Not that Jenny had ever brought Martha and Jacob to Eastbourne to see her. Parents – and children too – were so busy these days. She could still love them at a distance, couldn't she? They would always be the sweet, innocent children she might have had herself if only – Miss Spicer allowed herself a little daydream from the past.

Two more envelopes to open. White geese with orange beaks wandering down a path. A merry Christmas from Geoff and Marjorie. Miss Spicer racked her memory. Who on earth were Geoff and Marjorie? Maybe there was some mistake. But no, there was Miss Lavinia Spicer and her address clearly written on the envelope. She put the card down, annoyed with herself, knowing it would go on worrying her.

Miss Spicer picked up the last remaining envelope. She knew that handwriting with its flat, un-joined-up letters in blue biro. Inside was a glitter-covered nativity scene from a Woolworths selection box.

For a full minute Miss Spicer waited, holding the card, remembering.

It was from the former housekeeper at the vicarage of her old church in north-west London. The church where Neville Forbes had been the vicar, and where no doubt other spinsters had secretly loved him as passionately as she had done.

Only her love hadn't been secret. She hadn't been able to hide it and had made a fool of herself.

'My dear, it's no good your hankering after him. He's one for celibacy, you ladies should be able to see that. It sticks out a mile.'

But she hadn't seen it. It was stupid of her. Certainly naive. She supposed women like her *were* naive about certain matters, at least they were then. It was rather unfair to blame them, seeing that they hadn't had the chance to be any different.

The housekeeper was right. Moving herself and her invalid mother to this house in Eastbourne had worked out for the best. Her mother had perked up for a few years and been happy before she died. And it was all she could do for Neville Forbes.

Thirty years had passed since she'd seen him. He'd be an old man now. But in her memory he would remain untouched by time, forever austere and beautiful in his clerical robes.

She opened the card to read the message inside. 'My dear, such a busy month we've been having in the church here, but you'll like to know you aren't forgotten by us. God willing, I'll be popping down to Eastbourne again in the spring, the same as this year. A lovely day out it was. Were your ears burning on Sunday? The ladies' knitting circle were talking about you. Kathleen Gladwell, you'll remember her I'm sure, was saying how you'd helped her in her trouble when nobody else did, and if it hadn't been for you, she'd have given way altogether. Made all the difference to her life, she said, set her on a sunlit path. Nice to know you've been a guardian angel, isn't it?'

Miss Spicer turned over the card to look at the picture on the front. Crowds of angels of varying sizes were flying above the stable. With a shaky finger she touched the glitter on the star of Bethlehem. Did it matter that she didn't have a life like the Harrison-Browns, the Cottons and the Newmans? All at once their letters lost their sting.

It was possible that writing round-robins at Christmas was a kind of therapy for them; a much-needed reassurance that the year hadn't been wasted and they were doing all right in the world. So perhaps reading them in a more understanding spirit was something she could give to them – a kind of widow's mite. In time it might even become rather enjoyable to have a share in lives so different to hers.

But now she must try and remember who were Geoff and Marjorie. If she murmured each letter of the alphabet very carefully, their surname might come to mind. It was only to be hoped it didn't begin with a Z.

Miss Spicer helped herself to another custard cream.

Tanya van Hasselt, *BPS member, lives in Tunbridge Wells, UK, and has published two novels,* All Desires Known *and* Of Human Telling. *She was a joint winner of the Barbara Pym Centenary Short Story Competition in 2013*.

An Exhausting Number of Blessings

by Diane Alimena

'Mildred! My shirt!' Everard Bone sounded grieved as he called for his wife.

'Why, whatever is wrong, Everard?' Mildred calmly asked as she came up the stairs. She had been in the kitchen making breakfast for their two sons before they headed out for school.

'I've put my elbow through the sleeve,' said Everard.

'Oh dear, why, so you have,' stated Mildred. 'Better here at home than when you were out somewhere,' Mildred said sensibly as she examined the shirt. 'It is really quite worn so it is only good for rags. With a rip like that I wouldn't donate it for the jumble sale. I'll take the buttons off and cut it up. There are half a dozen other clean shirts in your drawer. Shall I look through them today? You may need to buy more.'

'It would be very inconvenient to have to go shopping. Perhaps you can just go on my behalf when you know how many I might need,' Everard replied.

'Yes, of course I can. Though it might not be today. I need to take a few things to the church for the jumble sale. You don't mind if I donate a few birds?' Mildred asked. When Everard's mother had died they inherited the house

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complete with dozens of stuffed birds. 'As Sister Blatt says, "they go like hotcakes".'

'As far as I am concerned you may take them all. I have never liked them,' Everard generously offered.

'Well, the boys might each want to keep a favorite. I'll let them choose and see how many I can manage to carry,' Mildred decided.

Heading back downstairs she heard their sons arguing about cricket matches.

'Mummy!' cried her younger son, Thomas. 'Jeremy says you're going to go to his cricket match next week and bring a cake. What about my match? Don't you want to see me play?' Thomas had the same grieved quality in his voice as his father had had.

'Not a sponge cake, Mother,' Jeremy stated. 'Those never come out very well. But you do make a fine walnut cake. Sorry Thomas, but I asked her first.' Jeremy did not sound very sorry.

'Oh dear,' said Mildred. 'I'll have to check the calendar again. I just can't think at the moment. Oh, and both of you may choose one bird to keep but the rest are going to the jumble sale.'

'The owl!' both boys yelled in unison.

'Oh dear,' said Mildred again. 'All right, we'll keep the owl and whoo whoo whoo gets it will be decided later,' she said jokingly, trying to avoid another conflict.

'Oh, and please, Mummy, I will need some new paints. I need to make a papier-mâché dinosaur for science class. I need lots of brown and green. Can you get those for me today? Please?' pleaded Thomas.

'Oh dear,' said Mildred again. 'Another item on the list. Now off you go, boys. Hurry or you'll miss the bus.'

Everard came down, suitably clothed, gave Mildred a goodbye kiss and headed out the door. He suddenly turned back. 'The index… I need the index by next Tuesday. You'll have it done by then, won't you Mildred?'

'Oh dear,' said Mildred. 'I suppose it is possible.' But the door was shut and Mildred was finally in a quiet house.

She put on the kettle and spoke to herself in a gentle voice. 'Now Mildred, a cup of tea, strong with plenty of sugar and milk. Just the thing to face the beginning of a long day.' She took her calendar and began to add her new tasks in the appropriate day and made a separate list of things which simply must be accomplished in the day at hand. She smiled to herself and thought, 'I have a life full of blessings, an exhausting number of blessings. I wonder how I could manage a day or two off.'

Mildred looked through Everard's wardrobe evaluating the condition of each shirt. Two more were worn but still good enough for jumble. She sorted through the clothes Thomas had outgrown and added some trousers and sweaters to the pile. It was a joy to remove a dozen birds, some savage and some sad, from the drawing room and dining room. As she placed them in boxes she decided that Everard would have to drive her to the church on Saturday morning. She could take the clothing with her on the bus. Sister Blatt was expecting her to help with sorting of donations at 10am. Then Mildred could snatch a quick lunch and stop and buy some new shirts for Everard. Finally she would pick up some paints for Thomas.

As she caught the bus into the city center she found a window seat and drifted into a mental game of how to plot to get a day or two away. There would have to be a reason to travel, a noble reason, something that Everard and the boys could not object to or see as anything enjoyable. Yes, that was it, another duty, but what? And to whom? A sick relative? No, they would know her relatives, or rather her lack of relatives, who could call on her for aid. A friend? No, Dora Caldicott was too hale and hearty and known. She could go visit Dora, but really, sometimes that was not a bit relaxing. Dora was just a different person to whom she would have to accommodate herself. Someone from her past? Yes. That was it. A godmother, an ancient lady from her childhood parish. She would get a letter from the vicar saying that Miss, now what name could she give her… Doggett, Miss Doggett was very poorly and would like to see her one last time.

Mildred laughed to herself. This deceit was coming too easily. Now where should she go? Not too far or too near. Oxford seemed about right but they might want to come along and see the city. No, it would have to be a bit out of the way with just an offer of overnight accommodation at the vicarage. Perhaps...Crampton Hodnet. That sounded like a likely place. A long bus ride from Oxford city center. She would have to write a letter to herself from the vicar of Crampton Hodnet requesting an urgent visit to Miss Doggett. And the real plan would be Oxford itself, with a room at the Randolph paid for in cash of course: no check to trace. Just two days of wandering and doing whatever she felt like. It would be heavenly!

As she got off the bus and walked to the parish hall, Mildred was struck by the thought that this could be a reality. It was a good plan and one which she could carry out. 'Am I really so desperate and deceitful?' she asked herself and did not receive a ready answer. It was tempting.

The piles of clothes were daunting but Sister Blatt and Winifred Mallory, both really elderly now, sorted with the ease of those whose years of experience made child's play of the task. They chatted and asked about Mildred's 'boys'. Their small talk and gossip were comforting to Mildred. 'Why would I need an escape from this cozy world of good works?' she thought to herself. Then Sister Blatt said, 'Remember, Mildred, you are going to bring a cake on Saturday afternoon for the baked goods table. Not a sponge, but you do make a good walnut cake.'

'Oh dear, I had forgotten,' admitted Mildred. 'Yes, of course, a walnut cake.'

She suddenly realized she would have to buy some new stationery, something different, so no one would recognize it when the letter from the vicar of Crampton Hodnet came.

Mildred was glad that her errand to buy shirts gave her an excuse to turn down Winifred's invitation to lunch. She hurried off walking a few blocks to a small ladies' tea room. But as she approached the entrance she felt the need to act a bit out of character and be a bit self-indulgent. 'I will treat myself to a really good lunch and perhaps a glass of sherry,' she thought.

So Mildred entered a larger, rather posh restaurant. She chose a small table in an alcove, slightly hidden away. When the waiter came she ordered the salmon and dill potatoes and a glass of sherry, an amontillado, to enjoy as an aperitif.

Sipping the amber liquid, Mildred became aware that she could overhear the conversation at an adjoining table.

'But, Leonora, I didn't know you had a sister! You've never mentioned her.'

'Oh yes, I have a sister. I just don't really ever see her. It is so much easier to have a life unencumbered by relatives.' Leonora replied in a rather unpleasant voice. Then Mildred saw Leonora signal the waiter and held up her glass to him. 'Another martini, please.'

'But Leonora, she asked to come and visit and you lied to her? You told her you would be away a few days?'

'Oh yes. Sometimes lying is the only way to deal with family.'

'But Leonora, what is she like? Your sister.'

'Very like my mother.' Leonora paused as she ate the last olive from her empty glass. 'I never really liked my mother.'

Mildred's cheeks flushed. Was it the sherry or the realization that she did not want to become a person who resorted to lying to family? And Mildred's best quality came to her rescue. She smiled and almost laughed aloud. Her gift of seeing the funny side to life put everything into perspective. She would be a bit less accommodating. She would just tell Everard and the boys that she might just need an afternoon or a day to quietly relax.

That evening at dinner Everard seemed unusually animated. He took his knife and tapped on his water glass. 'I have some news. I am sorry I probably should have discussed it with you first, Mildred, but I feel quite strongly so I am just letting you all know together. This summer I will need to travel to East Africa and spend about three weeks scoping out some new locations for fieldwork. Now I have decided that you boys are old enough to come along. It will be a useful way for you to spend part of your summer holidays. You will see Kenya and start to get a feel for my work. You won't be able to know if you'd like to follow in my footsteps without seeing the field.'

Jeremy and Thomas were stunned into silence.

'Now, Mildred, you, of course, need no invitation to come along. However, most of these locations, though not actually dangerous, are rather primitive. The boys and I will be fine roughing it a bit, but I would very much understand if you preferred to stay home. Or will you be too lonely?'

'Oh dear! This is a surprise,' said Mildred. 'I think it will be a wonderful experience for the boys. But you're right, Everard. I don't think I would enjoy primitive living. I will just have to manage by myself for a few weeks.'

Everard seemed a bit apologetic. It was unusual for him to be so solicitous. 'Are you sure you will be all right? Perhaps your friend Dora could come for those weeks. I hate to think of you alone.'

Mildred was surprised at the sense of dread that filled her. The thought of three weeks in Dora's company was exhausting. She coolly replied, 'That is very thoughtful, Everard. But I am sure I can cope. Besides, I think Dora mentioned something about having to go this summer and stay with an elderly friend in Crampton Hodnet.'

***Diane Alimena**, BPS member, is a New Jersey native and retired librarian.*

Featherweight

by Janet Gilbert

'And here's one called Rattlesnake Roll,' said Catherine, 'but with no serpent whatsoever! Just a "mélange of crab, octopus, cream cheese, smelt egg, avocado and cucumber". Boring description. Perhaps I could punch up the menu for them.'

'Perhaps,' said Alaric.

'Your turn, dear.'

Alaric sighed. They once spent happy evenings sharing wine lists with each other, glorious things filled with poetry and nuance. He actually kissed Catherine for the very first time right after she read – in a suitably breathless voice – the entry for a lush Cabernet Sauvignon simply dripping with the nectar of honey.

But now Catherine was pregnant, and those lovely winey words just made her thirst for forbidden fruit. Raw fish was another no-no, but she never yearned for sushi, so here they were, turning Takahashi's bill of fare into a kind of performance art.

'Alaric? Everything all right?' asked Catherine.

He looked at his wife sheepishly. Another Easter Island moment, as his wife called them, when his spinning brain turned his rugged face into granite.

'Forgive me, Catherine. I just thought of a possible ending to Chapter Five. A cliffhanger, as it were.'

'Good show! Plots can be such a pain.'

'Indeed,' said Alaric. 'Would you mind if I…'

'Of course not,' Catherine assured him from their coziest chair, the plush olive green with the ottoman. 'We ink-stained wretches must strike while the iron's hot, to quote the time-worn cliché. Have at it, sir.'

Alaric got up from their second coziest chair (the shabby beige with no ottoman) and crouched solicitously before Catherine's feet.

'Thank you for understanding, love. Do you need anything first? A hot milky drink or some of that marrow chutney you love so much?'

Catherine giggled. She had craved marrow chutney exactly once, in her second month, but Alaric still remembered.

'I'm fine, sweetie. I'll just knit a little and turn in early.' Catherine pulled up her workbasket and set to turning the heel on a 'stay-put' baby bootee in 2-ply yarn.

Alaric shuffled to his study and closed the door. Truth be told, the ending of Chapter Five was still a mystery to him. Back in his book reviewing days, Alaric was never at a loss for words: harsh words, haughty words, words that ripped an author to little bits, but now his editors were bright young things who demanded a cool, dispassionate tone from their contributors.

'Surely you understand, Mr. Lydgate,' reasoned Ms. Allsopp, the new *Currents in Culture* chief with the long ginger pigtails. 'Times have changed, and so have writing styles.'

'Now you can start that novel!' said Catherine when he glumly shared the news. 'You have the most wonderful material, I've always thought.'

To his surprise, Alaric did indeed have the knack, and now he happily wrote thrillers set in the cutthroat world of anthropology. Eminent blowhards he had known and loathed often popped up in titles like *The Kinship Diagram Killings* and *Mitsogo Murder Mask*. Catherine hadn't the heart to tell him that people rarely (actually, never) recognize themselves in print.

'What a curmudgeon I am,' he thought suddenly. 'Some father I'll be.'

Goo-goo and gaa-gaa had never been in his vocabulary. He had no nieces or nephews or really any close family, only his pushy sister Gertrude, now living in Africa with her friend Hortense. And thank goodness for that. Gertrude would surely nag Catherine to have the baby outdoors, behind the lilac bush to the sound of drumbeats.

Try as he might, Alaric simply could not picture himself as someone's papa, and neither could his friends and neighbors, judging from their reactions at the news.

'Oh! How...nice,' said Mabel Swan, the stunned widow next-door.

'Really? At your age?' blurted her sister, Rhoda Wellcome.

'Say goodbye to your career,' sniffed Dashwood from the colonial office. 'Children do suck the life out of one. That's why I've never procreated.'

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Everyone was thrilled for Catherine, of course. She was sweet and funny and smart and loving and infinitely patient; in other words, a perfect mother-to-be. Their child would be lucky to have her.

'And then there's me,' thought Alaric. Born grim, with a face to match. One of society's featherweights. Even his own mother called him weak.

But what if he could change all that? People changed all the time, they stopped drinking or smoking or telling off their boss. Surely he could train himself to look less forbidding! Jolly was a real stretch, but he could aim for pleasant, at least. A pleasant father in suburbia. The very thought made him smile all the way to the bedroom, and he kept smiling until he fell asleep, with Catherine snoring softly beside him.

The next day, Catherine was nursing a cup of Earl Grey at their breakfast table when Alaric bounded in, humming a happy little tune. She looked up with surprise. He could be quite grumpy before noon.

'So you did finish Chapter Five last night! Congratulations!' she said warmly.

'Not quite,' admitted Alaric, 'but no worries. Shall we take a turn along the river before porridge?'

'A walk sounds divine,' sighed Catherine, patting her bump, 'but a waddle isn't quite the same. Plus my feet hurt.'

'Poor darling, shall I rub them for you?'

'Maybe later, dear. Now run along and get some nice fresh air. We need you strong and healthy for baby.'

Alaric protested – he hated to leave her alone – but Catherine was insistent. He fetched his tweed jacket and went outside.

Across the street, elderly Mr. Dulke was weeding the tulip bed while his angry little dog ran about. Alaric usually hurried past to avoid conversation (and a nip from Peaches) but his new 'pleasant' regime required contact.

'Good morning, Dulke!' he called out cheerfully. 'Basking in nature before the bacon and eggs, eh?'

Mr. Dulke's head shot up. Alaric Lydgate rarely greeted him, but there he stood, looking like he'd just won the National Lottery.

'Digging in the dirt is better than vitamins, I always say,' said Mr. Dulke.

Peaches charged toward Alaric and nipped his hand. Alaric patted his little head, while Mr. Dulke gawked at the sight.

'Sorry, mate, Peaches does get excited,' he said. 'Will you and your lady get a dog when the heir arrives?'

Alaric shuddered at the thought, though he kept on smiling.

'Probably,' he lied, edging away.

'Children need a pooch,' Mr. Dulke yelled after him. 'Our five kiddies always had a bow-wow around the house.'

Alaric had a sudden inspiration. Maybe he could train a dog to remind him to smile! A little nip on the hand to ward off the Easter Island look. Alaric made a mental note to reread Pavlov, and then headed for the bakery with the steamed-up windows.

Once inside, he gazed at the offerings in awe, as though they were jewels in the Tower of London. It was the pleasant thing to do, after all.

'Everything looks delicious! How will I ever choose?' he marveled.

The short, flushed woman behind the counter gaped at him. Mr. Lydgate's wife always did the talking while her husband hung his head nearby.

'Half a dozen cream scones, please,' said Alaric.

'Ah, a treat for the mum-to-be! Baby's coming soon, right?' chattered the baker.

'Yes, very soon.'

'Well, my two tots simply thrived on sugar. Sure, fruit and veg are important, but sweet things keep them happy.'

'I'll…I'll tell my wife,' promised Alaric.

'Please give her my regards. She'll be the perfect mum,' said the baker.

Alaric sincerely agreed. He paid her and darted out the door.

On the way home, Alaric gave his mouth a much-needed rest. No one was in the road and his cheeks hurt from so much pleasantness. Hopefully his facial muscles would soon adjust to their rigorous new workout.

Outside the Swan house, the noted anthropologist Digby Fox unloaded two small children from his car. He looked a bit harried, but Alaric approached him anyway, for practice.

'Hello, Digby! Visiting your mother-in-law?' said Alaric.

'Yes, Mabel and Rhoda offered to watch our babes while Deirdre and I attend the paleoanthropology symposium in Bristol.'

'How kind of them,' said Alaric.

'We're quite lucky,' agreed Digby, grabbing a little blue suitcase from the boot. 'Finding childcare can be overwhelming, as you'll soon discover.'

Alaric sighed despite his vow to remain upbeat.

'Fatherhood itself seems overwhelming,' he muttered. Digby set down the suitcase and looked directly at Alaric.

'Would you like some advice from a frazzled dad of two?' he asked gently.

Alaric cleared his throat and nodded.

'Just be yourself,' said Digby with conviction. 'Through and through, always and forever, as the poets say.'

Alaric gruffly thanked him and headed for home. Catherine was still at the breakfast table, crossing out entries in a long list of baby names. Alaric put the kettle on and arranged the scones on her favorite 'Rose Chintz' plate from the church jumble sale.

'Pfft! Why in the world did I ever consider Fiona?' snorted Catherine. 'A name that instantly brings to mind a pallid girl with a sour expression. Jasper is even worse! What if he's born with a lisp? Children can be so cruel.'

Alaric laughed.

Catherine put down her pencil and looked wistfully at her husband.

'I'd like to name our daughter – and I'm convinced it's a girl – after our mothers. What do you think? Shall she be Rosemary Prunella or Prunella Rosemary?'

Alaric winced. Prunella Hyde Lydgate was a stern sniffy woman he'd much prefer to forget.

'Rosemary sounds lovely, but Prunella makes my mouth pucker,' joked Alaric.

'It does, rather,' chuckled Catherine. 'Have you a better idea?'

'Absolutely,' he beamed.

* * *

Rosemary Catherine Lydgate looked exactly like her name, with her blushing cheeks, rosebud mouth and pink-tipped toes. Her parents fell instantly in love with their beautiful precious angry squawky baby that refused to sleep at night, and only fitfully in the daytime.

'Rosemary is fine,' the doctor assured them. 'Some infants are just, well, noisier than others. She'll settle down sooner or later.'

But as sooner turned to later, Alaric's pleasant persona transformed into constant anxiety. He desperately wanted to

make Rosie happy, but how? She was far too young for a puppy or even a jam roly-poly from the steamed-up bakery. What was wrong with their little girl?

Alaric discovered the unfortunate answer late one night, when Rosie woke up screaming yet again. As he lifted his yowling angel from her cot, she shot him an Easter Island look.

'This is my fault,' he suddenly realized. 'Me and my gloomy DNA.'

Alaric rocked Rosie until she finally fell asleep, and then crept back to his study and donned his favorite Yoruba mask from Africa. Raking his fingers through its raffia beard never failed to soothe him.

Alaric sat at his desk for a long time, pondering the universe, until Rosie cried out again. He hurried to the nursery before she woke Catherine.

'Shh, little one. Mummy's sleeping,' he whispered, picking her up.

Rosie stopped howling at once, and patted the stringy beard with one little hand.

'Daddy bought this mask in Africa,' he said softly. 'Nice, isn't it?'

Rosie gurgled with approval. Alaric walked her around the house until she dozed off again, her tiny fists filled with raffia.

The next morning, Professor Digby Fox pulled up to the Swan house with his children in tow. Granny Mabel came out to greet them.

'So which conference is it this time?' she asked brightly, feeling a bit used. There seemed to be so very many conferences.

'Human sexuality: past, present and future,' replied Digby. 'A broad topic, to be sure, but utterly fascinat–'

'Good heavens!' hissed Mabel. 'Look at that!'

Digby turned to see Alaric pushing a pram. He wore a resplendent African mask, most likely Bokongo, Digby thought.

'That poor infant will be traumatized,' scoffed Mabel. 'What's wrong with Mr. Lydgate?'

Digby chuckled.

'Absolutely nothing, dear mother-in-law,' he said. 'He's just being himself.'

Alaric tenderly readjusted his little girl's pink lacy blanket and leaned in close.

'Once upon a time in Africa, a tortoise had a pretty daughter,' he began.

Rosie goo-gooed, followed by a hearty gaa-gaa. It was going to be a perfect day.

***Janet Gilbert**, BPS member, lives in NE Ohio and read her first Barbara Pym novel,* Excellent Women*, in 1984. She has spent most of her adult life writing the comic book adventures of Donald Duck.*

Happy Endings

by Christina Betar

I wasn't really surprised when Miss Statham told me that she had seen Allegra Gray recently and that she had wanted to catch up on all the parish news. She had always had an enquiring mind and it was not unusual, particularly as she was a clergyman's widow, that she had expressed an interest. It seemed she was keen to come to the Christmas bazaar and so long as I was able to keep Winifred away from her, I saw no harm in it. Now that Everard and I had been married for a year and Julian had got over the worst of the parish chatter about his escapade with Allegra, welcoming her back seemed the right thing to do. After all, maybe she was lonely and contrite about the fuss she had caused.

Not that I knew too much about being lonely. What with helping my impoverished women in Belgravia and assisting Everard with his proofs and indexes, it seemed I never had a spare moment to myself. Unlike poor Rocky. Just three months ago he had lost Helena. Not that she had been mislaid as Mr Wilde's Ernest Worthing had, but she had been called to God in the most surprising of circumstances. After she and Rocky had reconciled, they retired to a small cottage in the country. The plan was that in order to provide them with a living, Helena was to continue her research and under the guidance of Miss Clovis to have her material published. Rocky was to take on the role of house husband, and this proved to be a most satisfactory arrangement, as he was an excellent cook and adept at keeping the place spick and span. He still remembered the burnt saucepan on his polished table, not that he mentioned that incident too often as he was committed to keeping the peace between them.

This peacekeeping even extended to attending the local church together, and surprisingly Helena undertook parish duties with an earnestness that amazed everyone, most of all Rocky. He was content to doze during the long, soporific sermons or gaze admiringly at the stained-glass windows recalling those he had marvelled at in Naples. But Helena was forever writing up the parish bulletin or welcoming newcomers. And that was how it happened. One rainy Sunday she was standing on the church porch trying to shelter from the storm when a huge gust of wind caught the large oak door and slammed it on the back of her head. The end came so quickly that Rocky couldn't quite comprehend what had happened.

Naturally Everard and I sprang to his side and did what we could to allay his misery. But there is only so much that can be achieved with a quiet gin and tonic occasionally shared at the local, or dinners at home with my mother-in-law. Everard had thought it best if we lived with his mother and, as the home was vast and she was not getting any younger, he worried that her interests in Jesuits, birds and woodworm would not sustain her indefinitely.

One night as I was struggling with a particularly difficult spelling of Ngugumu, it occurred to me.

'Let's make sure that Rocky comes to the Christmas bazaar,' I said excitedly.

'I'm not sure he's up to that sort of frivolity yet,' Everard replied. 'After all, it is only three months since Helena passed.'

How I hated that ridiculous expression! It sounded as though Helena had been driven along the High Street, waving to the villagers as a member of the royal family might have done.

However I was not to be put off and feeling certain that Everard had absolutely no inkling of what I had in mind, I persisted. I had realised long ago that a man of Everard's intellectual standing could never really be in touch with the big questions in life.

'Well, I am going to invite him. He can always say no if he's not interested.' But I was confident that Rocky would not let his dark good looks and winning ways delay him too long.

All the arrangements for the Christmas bazaar unfolded as they had done for as long as I could remember. Miss Statham and Sister Blatt were in charge of the afternoon tea presiding over the fairy cakes and finger sandwiches; Teddy Lemon and the boys erected the trestles and carried the tea urns; and Winifred and I sorted the jumble. Odd bits of

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clothing, broken photo frames and chipped pieces of crockery were covered by the more respectable contributions of hand-knitted bed jackets and babies' bootees. The excited crowd surged forward when the doors to the parish hall were opened and the pushing and shoving that followed convinced us that there would be a pleasing amount of money to add to the parish coffers.

I kept looking out for Rocky and hoped he had not changed his mind about coming. He had seemed quite pleased to accept my invitation when I rang him but one never knew what sorrow could do to a man, particularly when he has had so little time to compose himself and attend to his grief-stricken demeanour.

But it was not Rocky who arrived at that moment. It was Allegra Gray who appeared, bringing with her a breath of Chelsea or Holland Park or wherever it was that she was now living. Miss Statham had not been quite clear on that detail but she had assured me it was certainly a more salubrious district than ours. Her garments were even more stylish than I remembered and easily put my dowdy outfit to shame. Her simple cashmere coat was perfectly cut and showed her trim figure off to perfection. The soft fur collar and small matching hat completed the picture, so that as she walked around the stalls trailing her finely manicured nails along the edge of the trestles it seemed as though she were giving her endorsement to the lowly folk who had been summoned there just for the purpose of her approval.

'I cannot believe she came,' hissed Winifred to me. 'Has that woman got no shame?'

'Well, Winifred, it certainly looks as if she has plenty of money to spend, and that's the main thing, isn't it?' I replied. 'And don't worry. You won't have to speak to her and I'm sure that Julian has got over the upset by now. It is more than a year after all.'

'Don't worry. I won't be speaking to her. Now or ever!' Winifred snorted as she hurried off in search of a soothing cup of tea.

'Why, Mildred, I was so hoping you would be here today. I have moved out of the district and have recently found a divine little flat near a couple of respectable churches. Both High of course, but it is always such a fuss trying to sort out one's boxes and furnishings in a new environment.'

'Yes, I'm sure it is,' I commented, secretly hoping she would not expect me to come and hem the curtains as she did last time when she moved into the vicarage with Julian and Winifred.

'Congratulations are in order, Mildred. I hear you are married. To an anthropologist no less. I am never quite sure what that means,' she giggled childishly. Allegra had certainly lost none of her charm but I could hardly admit that I too was never quite sure what Everard's work entailed. 'It is so divine to be back here again. I have so many happy memories…'

Well, that was hardly my recollection of Allegra's time in the parish, but these thoughts were interrupted as I saw Rocky approaching my stall.

'Mildred, thank you so much for inviting me. It was quite a struggle to gather myself together to come today but one must make an effort.' He looked rather untidy, a bit like an unmade bed, and he had clearly been drinking too much. His unshaven face was more heavily lined than it used to be and his crumpled clothes hung loosely on him. It seemed that Helena's death had taken a far greater toll than I had realised.

Allegra's eyes glittered at the prospect of being introduced to such an attractive man even if he did have the rather dishevelled appearance that grief inflicts.

'Rocky, this is Allegra Gray. I don't think you two ever met when you lived here before.'

'No, I don't recall we did,' Rocky replied.

'I'm so pleased to meet you,' Allegra purred, holding out her hand as though she were expecting Rocky to kiss it.

'Rocky has recently lost his wife and he has moved to a cottage in the country,' I announced, much as one would summarise the most pertinent facts about a person's life when introducing strangers. Should I have added that Allegra Gray is a clergyman's widow and recently had a romance with my best friend's brother Julian, causing her to leave the village in embarrassment? I thought not, but needn't have worried because Allegra cut in.

'What a coincidence! I am a clergyman's widow and I too moved away, so we will have a lot in common. Joined in grief as it were.'

With that, she took Rocky's arm and directed him to the afternoon tea stall.

Good heavens, Julian and Winifred were standing there chatting with Sister Blatt and Miss Statham!

I held my breath… Winifred saw them approaching and scurried away, determined not to face Allegra. But Julian with a vaguely nonchalant air gazed in their direction as if struggling to recall where he had seen Allegra before and whether or not they had ever met.

'Julian dear,' cooed Allegra. 'It has been a long time, hasn't it? I was just saying to Mildred how many happy memories I have of my time here.' Then she reached up and kissed him on the cheek! At that moment Julian remembered – the night of the boys' club ping-pong game and a rain-soaked Winifred huddled over the gas fire in Mildred's flat. What were the words that were exchanged? He couldn't remember but sensed with Winifred's hurried departure that there must have been some unpleasantness.

'Oh yes, it's Allegra, isn't it?' asked Julian, hoping he had got the name right.

'Julian, you are a sweetheart. You remember me. I guess when two people have shared an experience like ours it is difficult to forget.'

Julian was becoming decidedly uncomfortable and wondered whether she had the right person. What on earth was the experience he was expected to remember?

However he certainly remembered Rocky and shook his hand offering condolences.

'And how are you managing, Rocky?' Julian asked.

But before he could reply Allegra butted in. 'Now that we have met, he'll be fine. I think we'll discover we have a lot in common and will be able to recover from our grief together.'

What grief was that, Julian wondered? Had Allegra lost her husband? He would have to check with Winifred or even Mildred. They would be sure to know. Such excellent women always had their fingers on the pulse.

Allegra continued holding on tightly to Rocky's arm and before he could say anything she added, 'We can go on country trips together and Rocky can show me his cottage, and then he can visit me. There will be so many things to look forward to.'

Rocky smiled slowly. Yes, there could be possibilities here, he thought. One mustn't grieve forever and a clergyman's widow did suggest a certain level of refinement. Who knows what the future might hold? He would have to talk this over with Mildred. She had always given him such good advice and in the months to come she might even be able to help organise the nuptials and the reception.

Everard's family home was quite splendid and he guessed that it was the sort of venue Allegra would expect for the festivities to follow the service. Who knows, Everard's mother might even advise on the catering – poultry of course, from Harrods.

***Christina Betar**, BPS member, first discovered Barbara Pym's books more than thirty years ago. She lives in Sydney, Australia, and is a retired English teacher and Deputy Principal of a private girls' school in Rose Bay, Sydney.*

Deb's Diary

by Deb Fisher

24 January 2020

Arriving in Oxford a little early, I spend the early evening in the convivial company of St Hilda's graduates and their families who have, like me, come to hear Carrie Gracie give a public lecture in the Jacqueline du Pré Building on the subject of her time as a BBC correspondent in China.

Carrie is a woman of whom Barbara Pym would have approved – the woman who took on the BBC in an equal pay case and won – and it is wonderful to be able to shake her hand. I also spend five minutes speaking to another celebrity – the actor Stuart Bowman – about tartan, whilst completely failing to recognise him as Bontemps from 'Versailles'.

Next morning…

Back at St Hilda's for the first committee meeting of the year. (No dramatic falls or knives on this occasion.) We are small in number but rich in ideas, especially when planning for the September conference. What a feast of entertainment lies before us! At this point we have heard of COVID-19 but fail to anticipate the coming doom…

One excellent piece of news for the committee is that Jilly Cooper has sent me a lovely card (addressed to 'Delightful Deb', no less!) accepting our offer of life membership.

1 March 2020

To mark St David's Day, I invite Mrs Morris the cleaning lady to assist me in preparing a recorded message for the North American conference, since I can't be there in person. Shortly afterwards, I learn that the conference has had to be cancelled. What a terrible blow for Tom and the North American board after all their hard work. But worse is to come…

What keeps me going is the wonderful example set by the irrepressible Yvonne Cocking, to whose 90th birthday party I am invited. I meet other Pym friends there – Michael, Alison, Dee and Linda. We don't, at this stage, have much idea about social distancing. Fortunately, no one becomes ill as a result of this very enjoyable afternoon.

19 March 2020

We tried so hard to make the London meeting happen, but we have had to bow to the inevitable and cancel. What would Barbara have done? What would Mrs Morris have done? Methinks Barbara and her wartime friend Frances Kendrick would keep a stiff upper lip, while Mrs Morris would be busy cleaning all surfaces – not to prevent infection but just because it's what she does. I can hear her now: 'This old coronary virus is getting on my nerves. Do you know, I couldn't get any toilet paper in Tesco this morning! I couldn't even get flour to make Welsh cakes!'

5 April 2020

Our members tell us, mainly via Facebook, that rereading Barbara Pym is one of the things that keeps up their spirits while in lockdown. Personally, I find some entertainment in leafing through a copy of *Enquire Within Upon Everything* (1928 edition), which I found while clearing my mother-in-law's house so she could enter a retirement home. It must have belonged to *her* mother, a Lincolnshire farmer's wife. *Enquire Within* is the household encyclopaedia to which Jane Cleveland referred when wondering how to take the Italy-shaped stain out of Prudence's dress. Home treatments for various ailments, instructions for playing popular card games, even tips on grammar are included. *Now* I know where the cooks at St Hilda's got their recipes for 'Russian Fish Pie', 'Beef Olives' and other unpalatable dishes that made frequent appearances on the dining room menu in the mid-1970s.

Barbara Abroad and the Italian Adventure in *An Unsuitable Attachment*

by Rose Little

I first learned of the red, pink and white azaleas massed on Rome's Spanish Steps at Easter from Barbara Pym's novel *An Unsuitable Attachment* and was inspired to go to Rome and see them for myself. In fact the novel often acts as a tourist guide to Rome and the Amalfi coast, as Pym delights in taking her characters and her readers to beautiful places she has visited and loved. By comparing passages in her novels with her notebooks, we can see how she used (sometimes years afterwards) the detailed notes she made on her travels, putting them to good effect in her novels.

Barbara was obviously a keen traveller, as during the late 1930s she visited Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland and also intended to go to Finland, but could not get a passage. Italy came her way when she joined the WRNS in mid-1943 and was sent to Naples. In her time off-duty she visited nearby places such as Capri, as she details in her notebooks, and later she ventured further south: '6 December [1944]. Positano, Amalfi and Ravello, which is romantic at twilight. Cypresses, olives, an orange grove and a church which is, I believe, Byzantine.'

Photo by Rose Little

Besides Italy, Barbara also travelled to France and Spain after the war: She writes, '24 June Wednesday [1953]. By public transport to London Airport. Le Bourget. (delays). Eventually caught the 21.15 to St Pierre des Corps and changed for Tours. This train incidentally is the very same one that I caught two years ago for Spain.'

Barbara may have visited Italy on more occasions across the years: for example, there is a letter in the archive to Bob Smith from 15 June 1962, telling him that she is going with Hilary 'to the Italian lakes for a short holiday in mid-September'. However, we have more details for her journey

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in 1961 when she once more visits Rome, this time with Ailsa Currie (Secretary of the IAI – the International African Institute) to attend the annual IAI Executive Council meeting – and has a holiday in the south.

Once again she sees the azaleas on the Spanish Steps and visits Ravello. She writes in her notebook, '20 April [1961]. To Amalfi and then went to Ravello on the bus. Acres of lemon groves all covered with matting… It is for the lemon groves that one loves Italy…in the garden of the Villa Rifolo a little marble lion licking its cub.' The cub is immortalised when Sophia takes Ianthe for a walk in Ravello: '"Shall we sit down here?" asked Sophia. "I always love this marble lion licking its cub…"' And the 'acres of lemon groves' that Ianthe sees from her window at Sophia's aunt's house in Ravello recall Barbara's real-life experience. We watch Sophia unwrapping the lemon leaves, and the image was important enough for Barbara to suggest 'Lemon Leaves' as an alternative title for the novel.

Rome gets close attention in *An Unsuitable Attachment* when Barbara has the parish party go to many famous places that she had visited in both 1944 and 1961. In her notebook she records on '24-25 March 1945… Rome itself, wide pavements – magic twilight (as I first saw Berlin in 1938).' She mentions St Peter's, the Vatican, the Piazza di Spagna and other well-known squares in her notebook which then appear in the novel. Barbara does not merely evoke the azaleas on the Spanish Steps but uses them to reveal the women's thoughts: Sophia finds the essence of Italy, Penelope experiences a lift of the heart, Ianthe admits to herself she is in love with John. Italy also appears in other novels, for example, *Less than Angels,* which begins with Catherine imagining herself in Ravenna.

Barbara spoke some Italian as well as French and German and probably a little Portuguese (I own her original grammar book) in preparation for her trip to Portugal, like Wilmet and Sybil in *A Glass of Blessings,* and so she delights in a language joke for the cognoscenti. Rupert forgets what the Italian word for 'Stop' is when he needs it for the taxi driver ('Stop' is widely used). Miss Bede (Harriet, from *Some Tame Gazelle*, making a cameo appearance) asks for milk that is boiling (*bollente*) instead of hot (*caldo*). We chuckle when Randolph Burdon tells Sophia they are going to Estoril in August, '"where I believe the climate is delightful."' We know from Senhor MacBride-Pereira (*NFR*) that Estoril (in Portugal) is not very exotic and is in fact just like Bournemouth.

Other Pym novels as well as *An Unsuitable Attachment* have large sections featuring countries in Europe: for example, she takes us to Hungary in *Civil to Strangers*, Greece in *A Few Green Leaves* and Finland in *Gervase and Flora.* Most books are peppered with casual references to foreign parts. *Less than Angels* of course gives many examples of places visited by anthropologists and more are cited in *An Unsuitable Attachment* (Zazzau, Nigeria; Ethiopia) and other novels, although sadly Mbawawa (*STG*) is a fictitious tribal area in Africa.

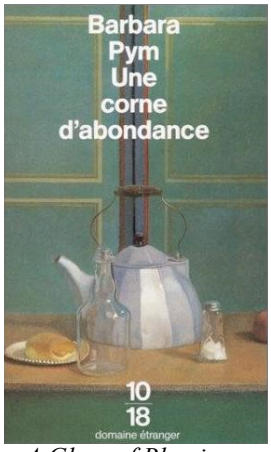
Although some people think of Pym as a cosy 'cat lady', going to church events, she clearly felt at home travelling in Europe and was knowledgeable about countries further afield. In later life she also travelled to Greece several times with Hilary, when they visited Robert Liddell in Athens and journeyed to many parts of the country.

Above all, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, this originally rejected novel, is full of a love for Italy. I particularly like Sophia's pretending she is in Italy when she is in London (chapter 9). It seems likely the author also engaged in this sort of thing. For Barbara and for the parish women, Italy is special because, as Sophia says, 'It's only when one comes to Italy that one imagines – oh such things!'

Barbara Pym in Translation in France (Part 2)
Dulcie and Wilmet: An Encounter at Dunster Castle?

by Keith Armstrong

This article focuses on the translations in the late 1980s and early 1990s by the French publishing house Domaine étranger of *No Fond Return of Love* (*NFR*) – *Les ingratitudes de l'amour* (*LILA*, 1988) – and *A Glass of Blessings* (*GoB*) – *Une corne d'abondance* (*UCA*, 1992). The two novels overlap famously in the scene where the main characters of *GoB*, Wilmet, Rodney, Piers and Keith, have their cameo appearance at the castle in *NFR* and meet Dulcie Mainwaring. But more revelations about that chance encounter later after some comments on the translations.



A Glass of Blessings

No Fond Return of Love

Both translations were done by Anouk Neuhoff, and I must start by saying that they are excellent. She makes full use of explanatory footnotes to explain to the French reader the meaning of a number of cultural references retained in the original English in the text. These include: 'Crockford's' (*UCA*, p60), 'hot cross buns' (*UCA*, p192) and 'toby jugs' (*UCA*, p312). Plays on words in *GoB* such as with the surnames 'Thames' and 'Bason', are also dealt with deftly. In *LILA*, the surname 'Dace' is revealed in a footnote to translate into French as 'vandoise' (*UCA*, p43) and somehow I can't help thinking that 'Viola Vandoise' would have made an equally suitable name for a Pym character.

Translating text where the author plays with the sound of words is particularly challenging. The translator faces difficult choices, for instance, when Piers and Wilmet comment on the rhyming of 'clod, sod, trod' with 'God' (*GoB*, p203/*UCA*, p247). Not only does the translator have to deal with phonetic similarity, but also the first three words are also related semantically to the countryside. The translator has little option but to retain all four words in English and provide yet another explanatory footnote with a translation. Although I should point out that the word 'trod' – the past form of the verb 'tread' – is mistranslated in the footnote as 'échelon' (*UCA*, p247). Perhaps there was some confusion on the translator's part between a rung or hierarchical step – ie 'échelon' – and a more physical step, or 'tread'?

The translator rightly puts herself into her readers' shoes when providing meaning for many cultural linguistic items. For example, 'We plough the fields and scatter' (*GoB*, p40)

would make little sense if translated directly into French and so the translator sensibly replaces the hymn with a popular French song which is also related to agriculture, 'le Gai Laboureur' (*UCA*, p56) – 'The Happy Labourer'. However, 'boiled baby' (*NFR*, p269) is overlooked and simply translated as 'bébé bouilli' (*LILA*, p325), which in culinary terms means very little to a French-speaking reader. The lack of an explanatory footnote and the resorting to direct translation would suggest that the translator did not know or had no means of finding out the true meaning of the term.

Interestingly, when Viola notices a bookshelf in Dulcie's bathroom which contains amongst other novels Pym's wink to herself, *Some Tame Gazelle* (*STG*), this is translated as *La douce colombe est morte* – in another words, *The Sweet Dove Died*! Of course, at that point in time, 1988, *STG* hadn't yet been translated into French and wouldn't be translated until a year later (by Bernard Turle for Ed. Fayard). The translator was perhaps reluctant to offer a translation which might not be the definitive title in French, and so opted to maintain the Pym connection by using a title that already had an official translation.

One reason for writing these articles on translation into French was a belief that the humour would translate quite well thanks to cultural similarities and a shared linguistic heritage, with so many words in English deriving from Norman French. *LILA* provides us with three examples where linguistic similarity help the translator to convey the author's intended humour and play on words. For example, the concept of 'breaking the ice' (*NFR*, p46) translates literally and metaphorically as 'briser la glace' (*LILA*, p61). Similarly, 'tusks' (*NFR*, p154) are 'défenses (d'éléphant)' (*LILA*, p188) in French, enabling the translator to play on the concept of 'defensiveness' in relation to 'Tuscany'. When the hotel employee pronounces 'eccentric' as 'essentric' (*NFR*, p193), the linguistic similarity with French – 'excentrique' as 'essentrique' (*LILA*, p233) – comes to the translator's aid once again.

Finally, a word on the subject of Williton. No, not Aylwin and Nev's mother, but the town in Somerset located between Taunton and Minehead. It is a place I know well, as my grandparents lived there, and when I was a child I would spend a week with them every summer, picking plums, feeding the hens and going to whist drives, amongst other summer activities. Near Williton is the village of Crowcombe. Could 'Taviscombe' be an amalgamation of Tavistock in West Devon and Crowcombe? There is just one castle in the region open to the public and just five miles from Williton to Dunster Castle, a beautiful and impressive castle/manor house, now owned by the National Trust. Could this be where Dulcie and Wilmet had their chance encounter? I like to think it must be.

One thing's for sure, they certainly didn't meet 'up Dene Vale' (*NFR*, p179) as Mrs Williton puts it. Neville was right to shiver, as being 'up Tone Vale' was a common way to refer to being in need of psychiatric treatment. Tone Vale Hospital near Taunton closed in 1995, but it is so ingrained in the psyche of the region that my mother, who grew up in Williton, still uses the expression to this very day.

Sources:

Barbara Pym, *A Glass of Blessings*, Virago Press, 2009

Barbara Pym, *No Fond Return of Love*, Virago Press, 2009

Barbara Pym, *Les ingratitudes de l'amour* (*No Fond Return of Love*). Translated by Anouk Neuhoff, Domaine étranger, 1988

Barbara Pym, *Une corne d'abondance* (*A Glass of Blessings*). Translated by Anouk Neuhoff, Domaine étranger, 1992

Barbara Pym in Translation in Germany (Part 2)

by Jutta Schiller

What a wonderful surprise when I found out that a well-known German publisher, DuMont, planned to launch a new translation of *Excellent Women* in June 2019. I contacted them and they sent me a review copy of the book.

While their press officer was really friendly and forthcoming when I told her of the Barbara Pym Society, the editor in question was not. And consequently she did not make contact between the translator of the new edition and me. I would have liked that, just to get to know her opinion about Barbara Pym and her style of writing.

The new translation was undertaken by Sabine Roth. Since 1991 she has translated books by Jane Austen, Henry James, Agatha Christie, John le Carré, V S Naipaul,

Excellent Women

Elisabeth Strout and Daniel Handler (Lemony Snicket), and I assume she is highly familiar with the English language.

But comparing her translation of *Excellent Women* with the first one, which was done by Dora Winkler and published by another German publisher, Piper, in 1988, surprised me tremendously.

As I stated in an earlier article for *Green Leaves* in 2018, I was not impressed by the 1988 translation. I was disappointed with the old-fashioned style and I got the feeling that Dora Winkler had missed the subtle humour of Pym.

I cannot say the same about the new translation, but there are other problems I could not understand. Very often I find the sentence structures odd, not to mention the use of words which do not correspond with the original text, for example, when Barbara Pym describes Julian Malory and his sister Winifred as 'tall, thin and angular'. Sabine Roth calls them (in German) 'tall, thin and square'. Dora Winkler translated the former as 'tall, thin and bony' (in German), which to me is more to the point.

Then there is the constant use of words even I had never heard of, for example when Helena says of herself to Mildred 'I'm such a slut…' There is a direct translation for 'slut' in German: 'Schlampe', which is quite common. But Sabine Roth chose to translate 'slut' as 'Schlamperin', a word that does exist, but according to *Duden*, the standard German dictionary, it is old-fashioned and rarely used. There are numerous examples like this which made me shake my head quite often.

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Another oddity was the use of the polite and very formal German 'Sie' for 'you', as when Julian and Winifred address Mildred. 'Mildred, Sie…' I had never had any doubt that Julian and Winifred were on more personal terms with Mildred and would address her with the less formal 'du' (you), as used in the first translation. The use of first name and 'Sie' is rather old-fashioned in German these days, and mainly used by older people to younger ones who are no longer children but not old enough to be called Mrs or Mr.

I sometimes wondered if the translator was not familiar with the English lifestyle, but that seems very unlikely. For example, when Everard invites Mildred to have a drink, Mildred tells us: 'I am not used to going into public-houses…' We all know what a 'public house' is, but Sabine Roth translated it using the German word for restaurant, although only two lines further she uses the English 'Pub' with a capital P. To me this is not consistent.

Every devoted reader of Barbara Pym's novel could immediately tell you the shade of the lipstick Mildred is looking for in a large store: 'Hawaiian Fire'. It wouldn't have done any harm if the translator had refrained from translating that name in a book that otherwise used names, expressions and words in their original English form. But Sabine Roth translated 'Hawaiian Fire' as 'Feurige Tropen', which is the German expression for 'Fiery Tropics'.

I could quote several words, sentences, text passages, etc, which in my opinion have not been translated in accordance with the original text or show incongruities. My notebook is full of them. On top of all this the book was badly edited, although I have to admit that the book cover is fairly elegant.

The publisher's press campaign for this book was quite impressive; I have seen some trailers on TV and listened to reviews on the radio. I just hope that my critical notes will not do any harm to our beloved author.

Gleanings

compiled by Yvonne Cocking

Paula Byrne, who, as we know, is preparing an eagerly awaited biography of Barbara Pym, wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 13 December 2019 an article about Jane Austen in which she mentions Robert Liddell's *The Novels of Jane Austen*, and 'his fellow Janeite Barbara Pym', to whom she herself refers with her nearly-last sentence:

> My own research into Barbara Pym's unpublished war journals shows her packing *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* into her string bag as she is called to fire-watching work by the air raid siren.

Writing in *The Spectator* (7 December 2019) a review of Lydia Davis's *Essays* (published by Hamish Hamilton), Philip Hensher concedes that…

> [t]here are writers [in this collection] I have barely heard of… There are essays, too, about less predictable enthusiasms, including Stendhal's *The Life of Henry Brulard*, Thomas Pynchon and, amazingly, though in passing, Barbara Pym.

On 30 January 2020 the *Times* ran an article by Anna Murphy on the revival of tweed as a fashion material:

> Uterqüe is just one of the brands putting the sexy into tweed in a way that would have made Barbara Pym's Esther Clovis 'with her tweed suits and dog-like hair', turn in her oh-so respectable grave.

Prue Anderton, daughter of Honor Wyatt (*The Barbara Pym Cookbook*), had a full-page article in *The Oldie*, January 2020, entitled *Pym – and not so proper*, in which she spoke of the time when she and her brother lived in Bristol with Honor and Barbara in 1940-41. 'I adored Barbara Pym', she said, 'even though she was my father's mistress.'

In the March issue of the same magazine, Kathy Walton wrote on the Readers' Letters page:

> I was delighted to see the photo of Barbara Pym outside her cottage in the Oxfordshire village of Finstock… When I spent a brief period in Finstock 20 years ago, I met Barbara's sister Hilary at a supper party. She asked me if I lived in Finstock or in the neighbouring (and rather prettier) hamlet of Ramsden. She said it was important to know as 'one meets one's friends in Ramsden and one's servants in Finstock'. To this day I don't know if she was joking or being serious.

Oh, knowing Hilary, certainly joking, I'd say!

Coming right up to date with the current world situation, Jack Kerridge, literary critic of *The Daily Telegraph*, wrote on 15 March 2020:

> I will be instituting a firm rule that I will abandon any book that is making isolation harder rather than easier to bear: there is no point in scrolling Twitter or tidying the shoe cupboard for hours because you can't quite face another chapter of *Buddenbrooks*. I will make sure I have a comfort reading (or rereading) file in case depression or fluey symptoms set in: detective stories by Agatha Christie and Margery Allingham; plenty of funny books by P G Wodehouse, Barbara Pym, Nicola Barker and Jonathan Ames…

A week later, Joanna Trollope wrote in *The Mail on Sunday* 'Books to warm the heart'. Among them were 'escapist reads', which included the Hilary Mantel trilogy, E F Benson's *Mapp & Lucia*, David Lodge and *Jane & Prudence*.

Finally, just as I was about to send this to the editor, I noted in the *i* [daily newspaper] today, 2 April, a page on stockpiling books to read during isolation. Andy Miller's five essential lockdown reads included the complete works of Barbara Pym: 'Any Pym novel will transport you somewhere more calm and peaceful.' And so say all of us!

Thanks to Linda McDougall, Jutta Schiller, Christine Shuttleworth and Michael Wilson.

Barbara Pym in Translation in Sweden

by Peter Stenson

In a letter to Philip Larkin on 9 November 1977, Barbara Pym wrote: '*Quartet in A*. has been accepted in Sweden! My ambition would be to have Liv Ullmann read it on the equivalent of Swedish *Woman's Hour*! I think it might appeal to the Scandinavians.'

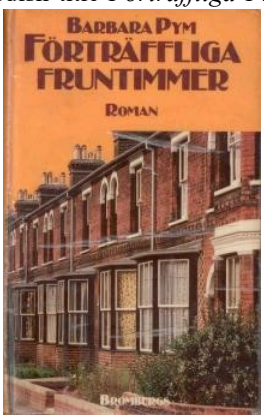
The Swedish translation rights for three novels by Barbara Pym were acquired by Brombergs, a publishing company established in 1975 by Adam Bromberg and his daughter Dorotea. Polish immigrants with Jewish background, they had left Poland in 1970 for Sweden, as a result of the antisemitic campaigns orchestrated by the Polish government. Brombergs, 'The small Publishing house with the big authors', with four Nobel prize winners on its list, is still run by Dorotea Bromberg, who received the London Book Fair's Lifetime Achievement Award 2019.

Did *Quartet in Autumn* – in Swedish: *Höstlig kvartett*, which is a fairly literal translation, meaning autumnal quartet in English – appeal to the Scandinavians when it was published in 1978? According to the reviews in some of the biggest daily papers in Sweden, it certainly did. The critics praised it in phrases such as '[an] original miniature work of

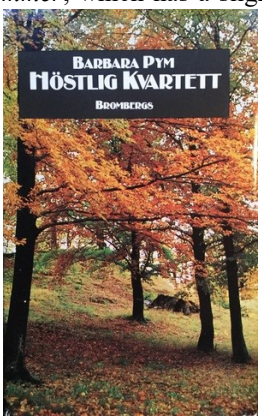
art'; 'a fascinating wealth of details'; 'a drama in grey nuances'; 'a quiet, deceptive stillness'; 'an author in total command of her means of expression' and '[i]t is boring in a very uplifting way'.

The translation by Jane Lundblad was described as 'faithful' to the original. Jane Lundblad (1905–1986), an editor with a PhD in English, was at the time regarded as one of the most qualified translators from English into Swedish. Among other authors she translated Jane Austen, Henry James and Virginia Woolf. In an interview she said that she particularly enjoyed the abundance of literary quotations when translating Barbara Pym (Lundblad also translated *Excellent Women*) even if it was quite a tricky task to render them in Swedish.

Lundblad's translation of *Excellent Women* with the Swedish title *Förträffliga Fruntimmer*, which has a slightly



Excellent Women



Quartet in Autumn

comic connotation with its alliteration and old-fashioned Swedish words for 'excellent' and 'women', was published in 1981. The reviewer Berit Hård in Gothenburg's biggest daily paper wrote: 'Maybe we need the microperspective on life that Barbara Pym so vividly depicts when the world is weighed down with gigantic problems and terribly dramatic incidents.' Still true today.

The translation is characterized as 'excellent' by one critic and 'superb' by another. I agree. My only objection would be that I sometimes find the dialogue, despite being in idiomatic Swedish, a bit *too* faithful. I would now and then have preferred a freer interpretation, but that could be due to the fact that this translation now is forty years old. Oddly enough translations often seem to age faster than the original texts.

The translation of *The Sweet Dove Died*, *Kärlekens klenoder*, which means 'love's treasures', appeared almost simultaneously with *Höstlig kvartett*. The translator was Marianne Gerland-Ekeroth (1924–2007) who, apart from translating bestselling writers such as Harold Robbins, also translated Iris Murdoch and Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer.

The Swedish title was deemed 'a clear stroke of genius' by the reviewer Britt Dahlström: 'It is among the auctions' heirlooms the principal characters meet; it is among the treasures of the antique shops and their homes, that important conversations are carried on.' She also points out that '[u]nder the cool and refined social dealings strong emotions are hidden, skillfully suggested by Pym. Sexuality does not belong in this atmosphere except in people's thoughts.' Per Wästberg, author and member of the Swedish Academy, considered Leonora 'somewhat of a monster, but Pym blows life into her.'

When *A Very Private Eye* was published in 1985 the esteemed critic Ruth Halldén wrote a major article in Sweden's biggest daily paper, *Dagens Nyheter*. She gave an overview of Barbara Pym's life and novels and mentioned her many years of rejection. She ended the article thus: '*A Very Private Eye* also gives a frightening picture of the author's vulnerability within the commercialism of the literary world. The disloyalty and confusion are disquieting. How can the publishers turn her down flat and later make a sudden turnaround just because a couple of famous critics give the green light? This sad but not at all unusual destiny for an author accumulates a lot of questions.'

Sources:

Barbara Pym, *Höstlig kvartett* (*Quartet in Autumn*). Translated by Jane Lundblad, 1978

Barbara Pym, *Förträffliga Fruntimmer* (*Excellent Women*). Translated by Jane Lundblad, 1981

Barbara Pym, *Kärlekens klenoder* (*The Sweet Dove Died*). Translated by Marianne Gerland-Ekeroth, 1979

***Peter Stenson**, BPS member, has been reading the novels of Barbara Pym since the late 1980s, both in Swedish translation and in English. After having worked as a non-fiction editor and publisher for many years he has started to work as a literary translator from Danish, English and Norwegian into Swedish.*

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2020–2021

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Frances Atkin (neé Kendrick)

by Michael Wilson

The Barbara Pym Society regrets to report the death of Honorary Life Member Frances Atkin, neé Kendrick. She died in January 2020 at the age of 96.

Frances had met Barbara shortly after the Second World War when they were serving in the WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service), and they remained lifelong friends. It was through Frances that, in 1945, Barbara began work as editorial assistant at the International African Institute in London. Frances had introduced Barbara to her aunt, Beatrice Wyatt, who was Secretary of the Institute.

Members who were present will recall Frances sharing her memories of working with Barbara at a spring meeting of the Society when she said: 'We laughed and we laughed and we laughed.'

Frances had been born into comfortable circumstances in Kensington in 1923. Her father, Sir Thomas Kendrick, an archaeologist and art historian, became director of the British Museum. Her mother was a talented pianist.

She won a scholarship to study in Boston, MA, USA. On joining the WRNS she was sent to Canada and was described as a 'quick and intelligent' cypher officer. After the war she travelled widely with UNESCO, working in Switzerland, North America, Mexico and Israel.

Back in the UK she worked for a time at Buckingham Palace. Frances was keenly aware of those less privileged than herself. In 1965 she joined the Probation Service, where she met her husband, Richard. Later she worked on the medical wing at Brixton Prison. She was a lifelong supporter of the Labour Party and an avid reader of *The Guardian*.

Friends will remember her as a feisty and determined woman. She refused to give up her car and was still driving up to the time of her death. Her funeral, conducted by a Humanist celebrant, was held near her home in South London, with music by her beloved J S Bach, concluding with 'You're the Top' sung by Ella Fitzgerald.

Frances Atkin at the 2010 Spring Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society. barbara-pym.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/GL-Vol16No2-Jan_2011.pdf

Margaret (Maggy) Rayner, CBE

by Clemence Schultze

A Memorial Celebration for Dr Margaret Rayner was held on 6 October 2019, and, as she was a great friend and supporter of the Barbara Pym Society, members may enjoy learning more about Maggy.

Colleagues, pupils and friends shared their reminiscences, making it one of those occasions where one thinks 'Oh, I wish I'd known that' or 'I'd have loved to have discussed such-and-such with her'.

Born in 1929 into a farming family, Margaret was expected to continue that tradition, but an aunt who was a headteacher encouraged her to go to grammar school and then to Westfield College. She was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Mathematics at St Hilda's in 1953, and gained an Oxford DPhil in 1960; her research area was in isoperimetric inequality. Students recalled her as a dedicated and supportive tutor, and 'a truly formidable brain'; she insisted on their achieving a secure grounding across the whole subject. She was keenly interested in the teaching of mathematics in schools, and her wide-ranging contribution to the field was recognised when she became President of the Mathematical Association in 1987.

Maggy was 'a St Hilda's woman to the core', serving as Vice-Principal from 1981 to 1988; and, in retirement, she turned historian and wrote the college's centenary history. She was a fount of knowledge about the buildings, the personnel, and student life generally. It was in this capacity that Pym members chiefly knew her: she spoke to the Society on various occasions about the college as Barbara would have known it, and on women's education in interwar Oxford. A short film (shot in the Senior Common Room only a few weeks before her death) in which she describes the origins of St Hilda's under Miss Beale is available on YouTube. youtube.com/watch?v=AjGobNZf32U

I have warm memories of Maggy as a friend of the Barbara Pym Society, and am most grateful for all her support. But my chief student recollection of her was as a most formidable Dean, back in the days when one had to seek specific permission to leave Oxford during term-time to make a weekend visit home. She and I never agreed as to how many days I was asking for – her total being one greater than mine; I did not argue. Many years later, after working on knotty problems of early Roman chronology, I reminded her of this, and she was much amused by my assurance that now I understood the difference between inclusive and exclusive counting.

The college and Maggy's colleagues, her ex-students, and the mathematical world will all miss her; and so will the BPS members who encountered her at St Hilda's and benefited from her unrivalled knowledge of its history.

Joy Vines (née Grant)

by Rose Little

I first came across the name Joy Grant in the Barbara Pym archive in the Bodleian Library, when I read a letter from Barbara to Philip Larkin from March 1979. She wrote, '…a young woman is coming to lunch who is writing a book about Elizabeth Taylor (the novelist, of course). I am to delve back into my memories of the fifties…'

I was very pleased to discover that Joy Grant (later Joy Vines) was a BPS member and lived not far from me, and I went to visit her at home, near Bicester. We spent a beautiful afternoon's literary chat and reminiscence together.

Joy told me how she and Barbara talked about her friendship with Elizabeth Taylor. In the course of her research, Joy contacted Elizabeth Taylor's family and also traced her lover, Ray Russell. Subsequently she passed on all her notes to Nicola Beauman, which the latter then used in writing her biography, *The Other Elizabeth Taylor* (Persephone Books, 2009).

Joy had earlier published two books, one of which, *Harold Monro and the Poetry Bookshop* (University of California Press, 1967) remains the only book on the Poetry Bookshop. The shop, in Bloomsbury, was open from 1913 to 1926. It had a welcoming atmosphere and it sold and published poetry by living poets. Several, including Wilfred Owen, made their home there.

In 1987, Joy published another book, *Stella Benson, A Biography* (Macmillan). Benson, feminist, novelist, poet, travel writer and recipient of the Benson Medal, was the author of 18 books, the most famous of which is *The Far-Away Bride* (1930).

Sadly, Joy died in 2019, leaving her daughter and two sons.

2019, with Beverly Bell

2011

2014, with Louise Smith

2018

2018, with Ruth Pavans de Ceccatty

2013

2018, with Judy & Joel Horn

2012

2010, 80th Birthday

2019

2015, with Michael Wilson

2012, with Tim Burnett

2012

2014, with the Pym Players

2011, with Deirdre Bryan-Brown

2011, with Ann DiPietro

In honour of the 90th birthday of Yvonne Cocking, our beloved archivist, we present a gallery of photos of her throughout the last ten years. Thanks to all who took these pictures.

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