Green Leaves

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

Interview with Paula Byrne

by Kathy Ackley

For the Pym Society virtual conference 'Quarantine in Autumn', I had the pleasure of interviewing Paula Byrne about her new and much anticipated biography of Barbara Pym, due out in spring 2021.

Paula has a PhD in English literature from the University of Liverpool and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. She lived in Oxford for eight years with her family when her husband was Provost of Worcester College, but in 2019, when he accepted a new position at Arizona State University, they moved to the States. Paula has an impressive list of publications that have established her as an acclaimed and experienced biographer. These include best-selling biographies of Mary 'Perdita' Robinson, Jane Austen, Evelyn Waugh, and Kathleen 'Kick' Kennedy.

Linda McDougall coordinated our meeting, arranging a suitable time for the three of us to get together via Zoom, which we did in early August. Before we began recording, we talked for a bit, which was good as I had not met Paula before the interview, other than through an exchange of emails in preparation for the event. As soon as I joined Linda and Paula, I was struck by her friendly, unpretentious manner.

Deb Fisher joined us shortly after we began recording. Given the nature of the virtual conference, which consisted of a variety of short segments featuring different topics related to Barbara Pym and the Society, we had only ten minutes for the recorded interview. Thus, I needed to focus my questions to get as much information as I could about her biography in our allotted time.

I began by asking Paula what it was that had attracted her to Barbara Pym as a subject for a biography. She divulged that she had come to Pym late in life and related an anecdote about how she discovered her. She had been visiting one of her favorite independent Oxford bookshops, run by a man named Dennis, whom she described as 'grumpy' but an 'absolute Pym addict'.

Dennis had arranged an impressive display of colorful vintage Pym novels on a prominent bookshelf and was always giving book recommendations to whoever came into his shop. When he recommended *Excellent Women* to Paula, she admitted that she had never heard of Barbara Pym. She said that not only was Dennis horrified at this confession, but a number of customers browsing nearby ('a whole cabal of Pymites', she felt) also expressed their astonishment that she had not heard of Pym. Wondering what all the fuss was about, she decided that she would read *Excellent Women* to find out, and of course she liked it immensely.

From there, she went on to read all of the novels, falling in love with Barbara Pym. Having written often on Jane Austen, Paula was drawn to Pym's domestic comedies and wonderful settings. She said that she began to feel a kinship with Pym as she read her novels and learned some details of her life. Not only had Barbara and she grown up in the same area – Barbara in Oswestry and Paula in Birkenhead, about 45 miles away – but they had also had similar experiences in coming to Oxford.

As she read and grew to admire Pym's novels, she began to wonder why more people did not read or even know about this remarkable author. It became her goal, as it had with Jane Austen, to make more people aware of her, and that is why Paula began work on a new full-length biography.

Paula's early title for her book had been *Excellent Woman: A New Life of Barbara Pym*, but she told me before the interview that she had changed it to *The Adventures of Miss Barbara Pym*. My next question, then, was about this fairly dramatic change from what seemed a rather typical title for a biography to this intriguing, rather exciting one. I asked that she explain this change and in the process also talk about what her approach had been and what readers can expect from the book.

Paula Byrne acknowledged that when she began her research, she had the sense that Pym's life was rather dull, that nothing much had happened, and she was worried about that. However, that viewpoint changed completely in the course of her research and she began to think much differently. She realized, as Pym herself would likely say, that there is no such thing as a conventional dull life. Everyone's life is interesting in its own way.

She related that she had been reading Tom Jones at the time, knowing that Barbara Pym loved eighteenth-century novels. She said that she herself very much enjoys those books from the period that are subtitled 'being the adventures of…in which our heroine goes off to…' She began to see Barbara Pym as an eighteenth-century heroine and even came across a letter in which Pym wrote that she saw herself in exactly that way.

She also pointed out that as a student at Oxford she would have been just 'Pym' and that Barbara liked her friends

Contents

Interview with Paula Byrne	**1**
Tea Time in Oxford in the 1930s	**2**
Jutta's Jottings	**4**
'They Never Write'	**4**
Deb's Diary	**7**
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting	**8**
St Mary Magdalene's Church Paddington	**9**
St Laurence's Fluctuating Fortunes	**10**
Saint John Henry Newman	**12**
Barbara Pym in Translation in Spain	**13**
Gleanings	**14**
***CH*: Romantic Entanglements & Nosy Neighbours**	**15**
Obituary	**15**
'Following Barbara's Footsteps'	**15**
The Barbara Pym Society	**16**
Boden Coat Competition	**16**
Pym-Themed Cocktails	**16**

calling her 'Miss Pym'. Moreover, Paula noted, Pym had written at the beginning of one of her diaries, 'The adventures of Miss Barbara Pym'. Thus the book title fittingly comes from Pym's own inscription and suggests her sense of herself and her life perfectly. Paula said that it all 'clicked', and the focus of her biography changed. The title now reflects how she came to see Barbara Pym and what she wants to convey about that life.

Paula added that she also wanted quite short chapters to enhance the sense of action like that of many eighteenth-century picaresque novels. Her biography has turned out to be quite long: she had contracted for 300 pages, but in the end, the book grew to over 600 pages. She felt that short chapters 'in this sort of picaresque, adventury way' resonated for her and that they would have the effect on readers of offsetting the fact that they are reading a very long book.

Taken all together, these factors resulted in an entirely different book from what she had at first imagined, not a conventional life at all but something much more exciting and intriguing than what she had set out to write.

When I asked if she had discovered any new material in her research, Paula replied that she had found lots of new material, aided especially by digital technology. She believes that the digital world has transformed the way that research can be carried out, especially in libraries such as the Bodleian, which has enormous archives but where handling the materials, taking notes, and spending long hours in sometimes cold rooms can result in a researcher's overlooking important information.

Her work was made easier when the Bodleian gave her permission to photograph the material with her phone. So she did just that, taking pictures of page after page of the archival material and then saving them on Google Docs. This gave her the leisure to read the archives in her own home, at her own pace, zooming in on words or passages that she felt were important to consider more closely.

Paula acknowledged that she was 'standing on the shoulders of giants', referring to Hazel Holt and Hilary Pym's *A Very Private Eye: An Autobiography in Diaries and Letters* (1984) and Hazel Holt's biography *A Lot to Ask* (1990), as well as Yvonne Cocking's thorough and exhaustive research into Pym's life and works.

However, she said that she discovered from close reading that a lot of material had been omitted or edited out of the previously published biographies. She felt that these excisions or omissions were completely understandable because many people whom Pym wrote or talked about were still alive when the diaries and biography were published.

Paula revealed that there are many surprises in her book that she has uncovered in her research but that she would not want to spoil the surprise by disclosing anything now. We will just have to wait until the book is published to find out what they are.

As a final question, I asked Paula what she sees as the future for Barbara Pym and her novels. She replied that she feels the future is very bright and that more and more people will be reading her novels.

Paula believes that Pym's work is still fresh and funny, that it is such a consistently good body of work that readers will always enjoy it. She said that this is why she writes biography, to introduce new readers not only to the person but also to her works.

Paula lamented that, in Barbara Pym's case, like Jane Austen's, she was such a good writer who developed her skills over the years that it is a shame that she spent all those years not being published. Paula related with a chuckle that her editor had muttered 'damn Tom Maschler!' when reading her manuscript, annoyed at Maschler's treatment of Pym.

Most of us are aware that in 1963 when Pym submitted *An Unsuitable Attachment*, which she expected to be her seventh novel published by Cape, Tom Maschler rejected it with a comment that her writing was no longer of interest to the reading public.

Thus followed 14 years when Pym was not being published, though she kept writing throughout the period. If only Maschler hadn't rejected her, Paula said, think of how many more Barbara Pym novels we might have. But, she observed, what we do have is wonderful. Pym is a comfort and a treasure, especially during difficult times such as now with the pandemic. It is Barbara Pym's time now, she concluded.

After our recorded interview, the four of us spent some time chatting about various subjects, including the wonders of Zoom. We thought that Barbara would have been amazed that we could come together this way.

Paula was in Arizona, Linda in Yorkshire, Deb in Wales, and I in Indiana, and there we all were, discussing our dear Barbara. We talked about what a comfort she has been to so many of us during the lockdowns and quarantines, and someone pointed out that we all chose shelves of books as a backdrop for our screen images, a testament to our love of reading.

As we ended our online gathering, we agreed that, though Paula had not revealed any of the surprises that we can expect to read about in her forthcoming biography, she did give us plenty of details about the book to whet our appetites. Deb expressed her hope that the Society could do a much longer interview when the book comes out. Meanwhile, we felt that the interview had increased our anticipation of the publication of *The Adventures of Miss Barbara Pym* in April 2021.

Tea Time in Oxford in the 1930s

by Yvonne Cocking

I hardly need to tell you that tea is a recurring theme in all Barbara Pym's novels. Not only the innumerable cups which any occasion seemed to require, but also the meal which was an essential part of the middle classes' routine, whether eaten in, with a home-baked cake, or cakes from a bakery, at the houses of friends, or in a tea shop. Barbara Pym's novels illustrate the almost ritual importance of this meal.

Who will forget Miriam Margolyes's rendition of Miss Doggett, in *Crampton Hodnet*, shrilly interrupting her companion who is getting ready for her Sunday afternoon tea party for carefully selected undergraduate guests? '"Miss

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Morrow! Miss Morrow!...Where are the buns from Boffin's?"'

In the same novel, when Edwin Killigrew and his mother are holding a tea party, she asks him: '"Did you remember to bring the cakes from Boffin's, dear?"… "Oh, Mother, you know I did"', he replies.

In *So, Some Tempestuous Morn*, another story featuring several characters from *Crampton Hodnet*, though in different roles, Miss Doggett tells her niece Anthea, who is lacking some occupation, '"you might go along with Miss Morrow. I shall want some cakes from Boffin's, too."…"I will go for the cakes, Aunt Maude"', replies Anthea, but she dallies on her way in the company of an attractive young man, and '[i]t was only when she had got into Boffin's [that she] noticed that the best cakes were gone…'

Boffin's appeared to be the bakery of choice to supply the tea tables of North Oxford in the 1930s. It had a long history, from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries. From 1852 to 1866, James Boffin, baker, had premises advertising itself as 'Cook, Confectioner, Bread and Biscuit Baker', first at 109, then at 107 High Street.

From 1875 to 1930 there was another Boffin's at 71 St Giles. One would like to think that Miss Morrow bought her cakes here, as that would be the nearest shop to North Oxford, but it was demolished in 1931 to make way for an extension to the Taylorian Institution, so Barbara would never have seen it.

No 1 Queen Street had also been a Boffin establishment since 1852. This, I think, was the only actual tea shop, and was probably on several floors. Margaret Cleveland remembered how her husband 'had once recited the whole of Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* to her over tea in Boffin's', but there is little else suggesting that Pym's characters patronised it, as they did the baker's shops.

A photograph taken in 1932 shows the building with the name Boffin's written large along an upper story. This is now part of Santander Bank.

I'm not sure exactly when Queen Street closed, probably some time between 1932 and 1941, as Agatha says, in *So Very Secret*, written in the latter date, '"I had just said to Freda that I could do with a nice cup of tea and what about going to Boffin's and she said Boffin's isn't there any more, so we had to go to Lyons."'

Two other popular tea shops were the Cadena and Fuller's, on either side of Cornmarket. I will pass over the Cadena as I don't think it was ever mentioned in the novels.

Fuller's were established at nos 24, 25 and 25A from 1921 until 1972. It is mentioned several times in Barbara's novels. In *Crampton Hodnet*, it was the café to which Francis took Barbara Bird to tea on the day his wife encouraged him to go out as he was in one of his 'loose-endish' moods. '"And now we seem to be at the door of Fuller's"', he says to Barbara. "'Shall we go in here?" "Yes, I think it's a very suitable place…Quite the right sort of place for a tutor to take his pupil"', she replies, little knowing that the ensuing scandal of their relationship would begin here.

Bishop Grote, in *Some Tame Gazelle*, on the rebound from Belinda's rejection, proposes to Connie Aspinall in a Fuller's tea shop, and Cassandra Swan, in *So Very Secret*, has a coffee in Fuller's from where she sees her friend Harriet abducted in a car which speeds off towards the Woodstock Road.

I note, from a list I compiled some time ago of places frequented by Barbara during her undergraduate days, that she and her friends most frequently met for tea or coffee at Elliston & Cavell, the department store now owned by Debenhams; and Stewarts, a café/restaurant at 21 Cornmarket, which operated from 1928 to 1936, where Barbara spent many a romantic evening with Rupert Gleadow. It is now a branch of Next.

Finally, I'd like to return to Boffin's, the only one of these companies which traded exclusively in Oxford. This is how Barbara's friend Robert Liddell, who was an expert rhymester, especially of epitaphs, ended his verses on the death and funeral of a Don, who had apparently killed himself because of an unrequited love:

Wheeler had made the coffin
Mowbray had lent the pall
Refreshments were by Boffin
Such was the funeral

Jutta's Jottings

by Jutta Schiller

I don't know how you all cope with the developments of this year: the cancellation of family events, travel plans, work events - not to mention all the other things that make our life worthwhile, such as the cancellation of the Barbara Pym conference. I am sure you miss as much as I do. Therefore I was so glad that the digital conference 'Quarantine in Autumn' took place at the beginning of September.

If you have not seen it up to now you can still watch it on our own YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7EMuQ-8fmI&t=1810s

I was not only impressed by all the work the organisers and film makers put into this conference, but I was touched by the feeling that this pandemic cannot spoil the pleasure of being together in this Society, sharing the pleasures of 'knowing Miss Pym'.

Because of the pandemic, *Green Leaves* looks different this time compared to previous issues. But I am sure you will like it, as you will be able to read a short story by Barbara Pym you might not know.

But there is more change to come. We want to explore new ways with *Green Leaves*, too. This is the last issue in this design. We are experimenting with a new layout, with new ideas and more. Just be prepared for it when you receive the Spring 2021 issue.

'They Never Write'

by Barbara Pym

This short story, which was written in 1936 (note the reference to Abyssinia), has never before been published although it appears to me to be of a high standard, a neat little story told with Barbara's habitual dry wit and understated humour, qualities which were, of course, wonderfully interpreted by Miriam Margolyes when she read it after dinner at the Oxford conference in 2013, Barbara's centenary. Yvonne Cocking

'Mother,' said Abigail one morning, 'why is it that Orlando never writes to me?'

'They never write,' remarked her mother calmly. 'It was just the same when I was a girl.'

Abigail smiled indulgently. She had heard all that before. But it was now six weeks since Orlando had returned to Reykjavik and he hadn't even written to thank her for the photograph of herself by the lily-pond, with the *Oxford Book of Scandinavian Verse* in her hand. It made Abigail angry to think of the time she had wasted learning Icelandic when she would have been much happier making herself a wine-coloured velvet jacket or several pairs of satin pyjamas.

'Of course I know he doesn't *love* me,' she said, 'but after all I used to go to tea with him often enough in Oxford and well, you know...' She paused significantly, thinking it unwise to say more.

But her mother went on peeling mushrooms quite placidly and repeated what she had so often said before, 'They never write.'

Abigail sighed. 'Well I suppose that if it comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all,' she said rather grudgingly, thinking as she did that it was a pity the quality of dear Orlando's letters did not make the quotation a more appropriate one.

'Yes, dear, I'm sure you're quite right,' said her mother, who was thankful that she had such a sensible daughter, even though she was not really sure what she meant.

'Ought you to be peeling mushrooms in the drawing room?' asked Abigail suddenly. 'The curate might call.'

'I am perfectly at liberty to do what I like in my own drawing room,' said Mrs Pye, deliberately extracting a maggot from a large overripe mushroom. 'Of course they couldn't still be alive after cooking, but I always think it's better to take them out,' she remarked.

'Oh, yes,' said Abigail nodding vaguely.

She went and stood by the window. She was a tall girl 23 years old. She was rather plump. Some people thought her appearance was quite pleasing, but she had run after poor Orlando so shamelessly that he might be excused for not loving her very much.

'Mother,' exclaimed Abigail, 'here's the curate coming. I *knew* something like this would happen. Whatever will he think when he sees you peeling mushrooms in the drawing room?'

She tried to hurry the mushrooms away, but the front door bell was already ringing.

'He'll have to be shown into the dining room,' said Mrs Pye. 'There's a nice fire there.'

'But my sewing things are all over the table,' said Abigail frantically.

The curate had already been shown into the dining room when Mrs Pye and her daughter went in. When they came upon him he was examining with interest the French seams of the satin pyjamas.

'Wouldn't they be rather cold?' he enquired pertly.

No mention of it being a fine morning or the early frost being bad for the young plants.

Mrs Pye drew herself up and said with dignity. 'Good morning, Mr Sheldonian.'

Abigail drew the pyjamas away from him rather angrily.

Mr Sheldonian had but lately come to the parish and this was the first time he had been to their house. His nose looked like one of those noses you buy on the end of a pair of spectacles, Abigail thought. But he had nice fair hair and his complexion was not too pink and white. If he used a darker-coloured powder on his nose from that on the rest of his face he could make it appear smaller, she mused. Still, a large nose was not such a great disadvantage as it was to a woman; it even added a look of distinction to the face of the Reverend Oliver Sheldonian. And of course dear Orlando had rather a large nose.

'Are you finding your lodgings comfortable?' asked Mrs Pye, rather primly.

The curate made a face, rather a funny face, Abigail thought. He would be a valuable addition to the Dramatic Society, if the vicar considered it proper for curates to act in such performances.

'Tolerable,' he said, 'just tolerable.'

Abigail laughed at this. 'What's wrong with them?' she asked.

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‘Electric fires,’ answered the curate promptly. ‘They’re so cheerless.’

‘Oh, yes, I quite agree,’ said Mrs Pye ardently.

The conversation was getting used up. The somewhat unfortunate episode of the pyjamas had not made Mrs Pye and her daughter as well disposed towards Mr Sheldonian as they might otherwise have been.

‘I wonder if you would care to teach in the Sunday school?’ said the curate boldly, making a sort of rush at Abigail.

She drew back, rather frightened.

‘Oh, no thank you. I’m afraid that sort of thing isn’t at all in my line,’ she said, giggling a little at the idea of it.

‘But you could *make* it your line,’ said the curate with terrifying heartiness.

‘Oh *no* thank you.’ Abigail was quite positive. ‘I really have no vocation. I can’t keep children in order. I’m so nervous that I always stutter before a lot of people. I’m so sorry.’

‘Well perhaps you would think it over,’ said the curate rather lamely.

Abigail assured him that it was really no good her thinking it over.

‘My studies of Icelandic literature take up all my time,’ she said, as a kind of parting shot.

The curate was silent, rather impressed about the Icelandic literature.

‘So good of you to call,’ said Mrs Pye, who was longing to go back to her mushrooms. ‘You must come and have tea with us one day next week.’

‘I don’t think anyone realises how much of my time this Icelandic takes up,’ said Abigail. ‘I couldn’t possibly do any work in the parish.’

‘Well, dear,’ said Mrs Pye placidly, for she was a very placid woman. ‘You’d better marry Mr Sheldonian and then people would give up asking you to do things. Everyone knows that a clergyman’s wife always has plenty to do without being asked. He’s really quite a nice young man. A little too familiar perhaps, but that seems to be the way of these young curates nowadays. I believe he has money of his own too,’ she added.

‘Yes,’ said Abigail. ‘The vicar said so in the parish magazine. Five hundred pounds. I think it was rather poking of the vicar to put that, don’t you? Almost like a kind of bait,’ she added.

‘You would have plenty of time to go on with the Icelandic then,’ said her mother.

‘But I wouldn’t want to,’ lamented Abigail. ‘After all, it’s only because of Orlando, and as he never writes what is the use of it?’

Mrs Pye did not make her usual remark about them never writing. Instead she thought it best to change the subject, so she said that the mushrooms were rather maggoty this week and she had had to throw away quite a lot.

A day or two later Mr Sheldonian sat in his room, so inadequately warmed by its electric fire, composing a note of acceptance to Mrs Pye’s kind invitation to tea on the following Saturday.

After he declared how delighted he would be to come, he said that he hoped Miss Abigail had discovered that she could spare time from her studies of Icelandic literature to take a class in the Sunday school.

He signed himself ‘Oliver Newman Sheldonian’, and took the letter to the pillar box across the road. He had been christened Oliver *Wesley* Newman Sheldonian, but as he was, as one of the Sunday school teachers put it, ‘rather high’, he preferred to forget the Wesley part of his name. He couldn’t help thinking about that crude Wesleyan Chapel joke,* and although not averse to an occasional crude joke, he disliked them in any connection with himself.

If Miss Pye refused to teach in the Sunday school, how else would he have an excuse to see her alone? This was the problem which occupied the Reverend Oliver Sheldonian’s mind this evening. If he went to tea that mother would of course be there and somehow he didn’t think the vicar would approve of her coming to his lodgings unaccompanied. Besides he did not think it would be easy to say tender things over the cheerless electric fire.

Still, Mr Sheldonian was an optimistic young man and he even dared to think that Miss Pye might be a little attracted towards him. She had certainly stared at him in church last Sunday, so that he had been quite embarrassed when he mounted the pulpit steps to preach his little sermon about the water being changed into wine.

He thought she would make him an excellent wife and his life in the parish would be so much easier if he had a strong woman beside him to help him fight his battles. He believed she was a Bachelor of Arts of Oxford University too, which meant that she was probably rather superior and looked down on other people, so that when they were married they would be able to keep themselves to themselves a little more than was possible now. For what singular and reasonably attractive curate has ever been able to keep himself to himself?

Abigail, too, had been thinking. Her mother had been talking about the curate a good deal and of course she had never approved of poor Orlando, what with his never writing and his queer moods and his 250 a year, which certainly wouldn’t be enough to keep Abigail in the luxury to which she had been accustomed.

‘You’ll wear your new dress, won’t you dear?’ said Mrs Pye, when they were getting ready for the tea party.

‘But it’s only the curate and I was keeping it for special occasions,’ said Abigail, meaning Orlando.

‘You might just as well wear it this afternoon,’ said Mrs Pye. ‘It may turn out to be a special occasion for all you know.’

Mrs Pye had tried to make this last remark sound light and casual but Abigail thought she detected a note of coyness in her mother’s voice. She looked up suspiciously and said, ‘Perhaps my red one is rather shabby after all.’

She supposed that her mother was trying to make a match between her and the new curate. Quite a sensible idea, thought Abigail detachedly. She was 23 years old and had

already been down from Oxford two years. Many people in the town must think that her expensive education had been a waste of money, as here she was at home, apparently quite idle, and not even getting married. Undoubtedly she would be looked upon with more respect if she managed to find herself a husband and how much greater the respect and how much louder the congratulations if that husband should happen to be the much sought-after new curate, the charming Mr Sheldonian.

Of course, Abigail told herself automatically, as she always did on such occasions, Orlando is the one love of my life, and although I rather like Mr Sheldonian he was certainly cheeky about the pyjamas. And yet, perhaps, he was right. Might they not be rather cold? She had always had Meridian woolly ones and didn't know what it was like to sleep in the cool slimy turquoise satin which she was now sewing.

By the time the curate arrived Abigail was feeling quite well disposed towards him, especially as he seemed more subdued this afternoon and did not make any too familiar remarks. Nor did he mention the teaching in Sunday school.

At about five o'clock Mrs Pye suddenly remembered that she had to ring up a friend on the telephone to arrange about tomorrow's golf.

'I'm sure Abigail will be able to entertain you quite well,' she smiled, as she left the room.

For some minutes there was silence, then the curate said, 'Why do you waste your time doing that silly old Icelandic or whatever it is?'

Now this was an unfortunate beginning. Mr Sheldonian was not likely to advance his suit by referring to the sacred language as 'that silly old Icelandic'.

Abigail shuddered, especially at the 'whatever it is'. 'I happen to be interested in the Scandinavian languages,' she said rather coldly.

'Oh *no*,' teased Mr Sheldonian, with a very ridiculous expression on his face. 'Now I wonder why.'

'I have a very dear friend in Reykjavik,' said Abigail, who was rather enjoying herself.

The curate looked interested. 'Is she to be long in Reykjavik?' he asked boldly.

'He is a lecturer at the University,' smiled Abigail, 'I dare say he will be coming home to England in December.'

'Oh,' said the curate gazing into the fire. Then there was quite a long silence.

'I wish I knew about Icelandic,' he said at last, 'I had no idea that anyone who studied such a thing could be so charming.'

The compliment made up for the tactlessness of the phrase 'such a thing', Abigail decided. Mr Sheldonian was improving.

As for him, though somewhat cast down by the news of the dear friend in Reykjavik, he made valiant efforts to be agreeable and did not mention taking a class in the Sunday school.

By the time Mrs Pye had finished her very long conversation on the telephone Abigail was promising to lend him Grierson's *Metaphysical Poetry from Donne to Butler*, which was certainly a step in the right direction.

Mrs Pye heralded her return with great rattlings of the door handle, though they were really quite unnecessary rattlings, for she could hardly have expected the most forward curate to reach the kissing stage after so short an acquaintance. But after he had gone Abigail said that he was 26 years old and very nice. Now she was getting to know him better she really didn't mind about his big nose. In fact she rather liked it. It added an air of distinction to his face.

Mr Sheldonian for his part was very happy with his dreams and the metaphysical poetry. He had even gone so far as to buy the poems of John Donne in the Everyman edition. As the days passed he found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on his sermons and on one occasion he discovered to his shame that he had drawn a picture of Miss Abigail Pye's profile in the middle of his notes on *Lightfoot on the Galatians*. At the time he had no india-rubber handy, but he appeased his conscience by reminding himself that he was such a poor draughtsman that nobody would be likely to recognise the portrait. Still that was no excuse, and Mr Sheldonian realised that he would have to be firm with himself. And yet since he intended to marry the young woman, would it not be better to get over these first stages of love as quickly as possible? Once or twice, it is true, Mr Sheldonian was beset by somewhat uncomfortable *doubts*. What about the dear friend in Reykjavik? How dear was he? And might it not be that Miss Pye regarded Mr Sheldonian as a *brother* rather than as a lover? Mr Sheldonian had several uneasy moments during which he imagined Abigail saying that she would always be a sister to him, and who wanted a sister when there were so many in the parish who could never be anything else? What he wanted was a wife and he was determined not to be put off with any substitute.

Brooding over his electric fire, Mr Sheldonian grew rather depressed, but after he had drunk a glass of beer and reminded himself of 'Droop Not, Young Lover', he felt much better.

And then at that moment his landlady came in with a note from Mrs Pye, inviting him to supper on Sunday night, so that altogether it seemed as if the odds were slightly in Mr Sheldonian's favour, in spite of the dear friend in Reykjavik.

Abigail was beginning to think so too. She was coming to the conclusion that it was really no use pining for Orlando. Besides, if she did not soon make up her mind whether she was going to encourage Mr Sheldonian or not, he would lose interest in her. On the other hand he might, under the influence of Marvell, begin to quote:

'Had we but World enough and Time, this coyness Lady were no crime.'

But Abigail thought this unlikely, and anyway some lines of the poem would most certainly have to be omitted, which would be a great pity.

Mrs Pye thought her daughter distressingly frivolous the way she talked about Mr Sheldonian. She could only hope the frivolity was a mask which hid deeper feelings. Mrs Pye was apt to think things like this, but she knew better than to say them.

'I'm afraid it's just cold beef,' she said at supper, not in the least apologetically, for she didn't believe in fussing over young men and giving them chickens. It only made them more conceited than they already were.

'Oh, that will be very nice,' said Mr Sheldonian ardently, gazing at Abigail with undisguised admiration.

She was wearing a blue velvet dress, which suited her fair hair and blue eyes so perfectly, he thought. But were her eyes blue? Mr Sheldonian prayed fervently that he would soon be given the opportunity of making certain.

At supper they discussed Italy and Abyssinia and Mrs Pye asked Mr Sheldonian what Sanctions were. From that they passed to lighter subjects such as the pleasures of foreign travel and the most suitable clothes to wear in London on a hot August day. Thus the conversation was pleasant but not inspired.

When Mrs Pye had gone out of the room to see if the

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maid had come in, Mr Sheldonian asked if Icelandic had many points of similarity with German. He knew that he was on dangerous ground, but he could not resist probing his wound. He would have been quite contented had Abigail spent the whole evening talking about her dear friend in Reykjavik, if it meant that she would never speak of him again.

But somewhat to his relief she dismissed his question frivolously. 'I don't suppose you know a word of either language,' she said, 'so why all this interest?'

Mr Sheldonian laughed nervously. 'I thought I ought to know about such things,' he said. Her eyes looked distinctly green in this light. 'Which of the metaphysical poets did you find most sympathetic?' asked Abigail, 'I mean in the book I lent you?'

'Oh, Donne,' answered Mr Sheldonian without any hesitation.

Abigail nodded understandably. It was as she had expected. 'And which *poem* did you like best?' she probed.

Soon Mr Sheldonian was able to discover that her eyes were a most enchanting mixture of blue, grey *and* green.

Mrs Pye was very pleased when she came back to see their flushed faces. Of course it might only have been the fire, but she preferred to think otherwise. She was happy to believe that Abigail had at last been giving Mr Sheldonian a little encouragement.

'It's the quiet hours spent by the fireside together that really tell in married life,' said Mrs Pye next morning, trying not to sound as sentimental as she felt.

'How dull,' said Abigail, with a cynicism that caused her mother some alarm.

There had been no letter from Orlando that morning. Perhaps after all he doesn't want the love of a good woman, thought Abigail angrily, although he didn't know what he was missing, she told herself.

But a few minutes later Mrs Pye was relieved to hear her daughter say, 'I think I may be able to teach in the Sunday school after all. You see it's only one day a week.'

* *Water Closet, Or Wesley Chapel?* – To find out more go online: http://www.gospelweb.net/ChurchHumor2/WaterClosetOrWesleyChapel.htm

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Deb's Diary

by Deb Fisher

What day is it? In fact, what month is it?

The only thing I'm sure of is that the date of the planned Barbara Pym online conference 'Quarantine in Autumn' is perilously close. Two weeks to go and I still haven't got most of the material. At least the interview with Paula Byrne is in the bag. What an engaging speaker that woman is, especially when interviewed by someone of the calibre of Kathy Ackley. I can't wait to read Paula's 600+ pages of revelations about Barbara when the new book comes out in April 2021.

One week to go…

In desperation I attempt to contact a couple of my St Hilda's contemporaries in the hope of getting some extra content. Kate Fenton comes up trumps with a lovely little message for members, and the additional news that she has a new book out, her first since 2002. The lengthy hiatus gives her something in common with Barbara Pym, though the reasons for the gap are very different. Can't wait to read *The Time of Her Life*. Make a mental note to add it to my Amazon wishlist.

Three days to go…

Still short of a couple of promised contributions. And I wonder whether Miriam Margolyes really will manage to do the live chat with Linda McDougall; it's asking a lot for her to sign in from Tuscany. Better have a backup plan. I draft a 'preview' of our conference speakers for next year in case I need to fill in for ten minutes.

One day to go…

I drive up to London to my daughter's house – her internet connection is so much better than mine in Wales. Dropping in to visit Yvonne Cocking in Marlborough is a welcome distraction. We have a table booked for lunch…in a church of all places. Luck is on my side for once, as I find that the closest possible parking place is vacant – and it's free! We enjoy an enormous meal, and both choose the option of clotted cream on our dessert. I feel as though I'm burning off all the calories in nervous energy...

In a tiny room in a small semi-detached in the suburb of Isleworth, I spend the evening going over the content with my capable daughter, ending up more anxious than ever. How does Alex stay so cool? If I didn't remember giving birth to her in gory detail, I'd be doubtful whether she really was my child.

A few hours to go…

I try to take my mind off the task ahead of me by taking a trip to Paddington, a longish tube journey made longer by a couple of unnecessary changes of train, either because I was on the wrong line or because the conduct of other passengers (failure to follow COVID guidelines, insistence on having long loud phone conversations throughout journey) was getting me down. I arrive early and meet Jutta at her smart-looking hotel. We go in search of St Mary Magdalene's Church Paddington, where Barbara worshipped after the closure of St Laurence's Church Brondesbury.

She must have loved it – and she would have loved it even more now that the beautiful painted ceiling has been restored. The vicar, Father Henry, is a dead ringer for Nicholas Cleveland. Jutta enquires whether they serve tea after morning service, and if so, where and how. (Apparently this is not done in Germany.) Cupboards containing kettles are pointed out. Father Henry also shows us the undercroft, where one of Hugh Jackman's solos from *Les Misérables* was filmed. There is much more to know about this church than initially met the eye. Afterwards Jutta and I get a

takeaway coffee and walk alongside the Grand Union Canal. What a fruitful morning!

No time left…

At the last minute I check my phone and find a message from Linda McDougall saying that Miriam can't make it. (Expletives deleted.) Maybe I can plug the gap with some extra chat about this morning's ecclesiastical discoveries?

Oh botheration, now we're on air and things are not going completely according to plan. We lose the sound, we lose the picture, we begin to lose our grip on practically everything, but we soldier on. While I panic, Alex just laughs it off.

Thankfully I've rambled on so long about Father Henry that we will fill the hour even without Miriam's contribution. Peace reigns at last, as the Paula Byrne interview proceeds. Somehow I can tell, even without seeing them, that the entire audience is paying rapt attention. Congratulatory emails begin arriving even before the final slide goes on screen. But the real pay-off is that over a hundred members have joined the session, more than we have ever had at a live AGM.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society Saturday 5 September 2020, 8pm

by Lorraine Mepham

Committee members present: Deb Fisher (Chair), Eileen Roberts (Treasurer), Maggie Parsons (Secretary), Lorraine Mepham (Membership Secretary), Kathy Ackley (NA Representative), Yvonne Cocking (Archivist), Paul Howard, Jutta Schiller (Editor, *Green Leaves*), Christine Shuttleworth (Assistant Editor, *Green Leaves*), Tom Sopko (NA Organizer), Ronald Wates

Apologies for absence: Shirley Dex, Catalina Meders, Iona Bennion Roberts

Minutes of the 2019 AGM: The minutes had been circulated and were accepted subject to some minor amendments.

Matters arising: There were no matters arising.

Chair's Report: Deb welcomed all to the AGM, held for the first time online as a result of coronavirus restrictions on meeting in person. She started by noting the considerable progress made in our attempts to reorganise the Barbara Pym Society and set it on a course that will be easier to maintain in the future, largely by strengthening our links with St Hilda's, which is where the Pym Society was founded. This will help to secure the Society's future for many years to come.

Deb again paid tribute to Eileen Roberts, who helped to establish the Society in 1994 and has filled the role of Treasurer since then. The BPS Constitution says that the role of Treasurer should remain with St Hilda's. Since Eileen no longer officially works for St Hilda's, a replacement is needed. Triona Adams has already taken over as Co-Treasurer and will be handling the aspects of Society finances that directly relate to our work with St Hilda's.

Eileen will pass over the rest of her work to a new Co-Treasurer, Devon Allison, a long-term BPS member. In return, Eileen has agreed to take on a new ambassadorial role within the Committee, created especially for her, and for which there is as yet no formal title. Her role will be to make members feel welcome. She will continue to greet newcomers, host drinks, and other similar jobs that have been vital to making the Pym Society the warm, friendly fellowship that it is. These changes, and a few others, will need to be recognised in our Constitution, and to this end they will be circulated amongst the membership next year and discussed at the 2021 AGM, which will effectively ratify our decision to go ahead with the changes.

One important action that was agreed by last year's AGM was the matched funding on the Barbara Pym Room. At present we are more than halfway to our target, and our next project is to raise additional funds for the room by means of the Boden coat competition. In order to enter the draw, members just need to donate £5 to the BP room fund. The winner of the coat will be announced at our next live event, which we hope will be the North American conference in March 2021; failing that, the Spring Meeting in London.

Deb attended Yvonne Cocking's 90th birthday party just before lockdown began in the UK, along with several other Pym members. Deb wished Yvonne the best of health and many more years of involvement with the Barbara Pym Society.

Last year Deb commented on the worldwide aspect of the Pym Society and how we needed to maintain close links with all our overseas members. As a result of a universal crisis that has affected pretty much every country in the world, our online contacts have increased; Deb noted the number of people participating in our online AGM from other parts of the world, especially the United States. Many members have been keeping in touch with us through Zoom, Facebook and of course by phone and post. Many have mentioned the comfort they have obtained from reading novels by Barbara Pym, and her novels have been mentioned in the media a number of times as ideal lockdown reading.

The other big news is that Barbara Pym will be having a new biography next year, written by Paula Byrne. At over 600 pages long, it will go some way to doing justice to Barbara. An interview with Paula, recorded recently with Kathy Ackley, was the highlight of the programme for the mini-conference following the AGM. We hope to conduct a longer interview with Paula later in the year, or early in 2021.

Financial Report: Two sets of accounts were presented for the period 1 August 2019–31 July 2020. The first covered the moneys held in the St Hilda's account. The opening balance was £20,052.45; income (conference fees covering B&B and meals etc) over the last year was £4735.50, and expenditure was £11,199.57. Closing balance was £13,588.38. There are still high reserves, some of which will go into the Pym room fund.

The second set of figures covers the BPS account held by the Co-operative Bank. Opening balance was £10,454.25, income (mostly membership fees) was £2694.25 and expenditure £4230.90. Closing balance was £8917.60. The decrease in balance is largely due to the year's extraordinary

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circumstances: events have been cancelled, leading to loss of income, and we have had to re-order stocks of merchandise.

Membership Report: UK membership stands at 216 members (189 individual members, which includes 16 non-UK, plus 27 Honorary and Life Members). Of the 189 individual members, 71 are in arrears with their subscriptions (non-payers are allowed one year's grace). There have been 37 new members over the last year (including 6 non-UK). This is encouraging, but it should be noted that only about 50 percent of new members tend to stay with the Society for more than a year or two.

North American Chapter of The Barbara Pym Society Report: Tom Sopko reported on NA matters, with a financial report by Jordan Bach. The NA Chapter has 304 members, of whom 217 are paid up to date. This is a decrease of 18 from one year ago but includes 24 new members. Cash on hand was $25,799 as of 31 July 2020, an increase of $2,923 from one year ago (including a $1,137 deposit for the conference venue at Harvard that was paid in the previous fiscal year and refunded when the event was cancelled).

The 2020 NA conference, booked for March, and on the subject of *An Unsuitable Attachment*, had to be cancelled at the last minute because of the pandemic, fortunately entailing no financial loss. Speakers will present their papers in some form in 2021. No decision on what form next year's conference will take will be made before December, and an announcement will be made in early January.

The third annual Ellen J. Miller Memorial Short Story Competition was a great success; 13 entries were received and the top four stories were printed in the Spring issue of *Green Leaves*. Short story entries for 2021 must be received by 1 December 2020; complete rules are posted on the BPS website.

Editor's Report: Jutta Schiller presented her report via video link. She thanked everyone for their contributions to the Spring issue of *Green Leaves*; she had been worried about a possible shortfall in content following the cancellation of the NA conference, but this was not the case, largely due to the inclusion of the Ellen J. Miller Short Story Competition winners. Jutta thanked Christine Shuttleworth and Judy Horn for their help in respectively editing and compiling the issue and encouraged members to submit new articles for the Autumn issue.

Elections: A slate for the election of Committee members had been circulated. Christine Shuttleworth was re-elected for a second term as Ordinary Member. Lucia Costanzo, who had had to resign from the Committee after serving two years of a three-year term, was reinstated as a replacement to cover another resignation; she will serve her third year and will be due for re-election in 2021. Keith Armstrong (Ordinary Member), Abigail Bosanko (Ordinary Member, will take on responsibility for merchandise) and Devon Allison (Co-Treasurer – see Chair's Report) were all elected as new Committee members. Deb thanked all old and new Committee members and mentioned in particular Eileen Roberts and Yvonne Cocking for their devotion to the Society.

AOB: There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

St Mary Magdalene's Church Paddington

by Jutta Schiller

'The event for us has been the closing of St Lawrence's [sic!]. It closed at the end of September without ceremony… Since the closing we have been to St Mary Magdalene's, Paddington. It has rather good music and quite an amusing vicar (dragging on a cigarette) and curate who live in a startlingly modern clergy house just opposite the church.'

Barbara Pym to Bob Smith, 31 October 1971, VPE

That there would not be a conference in St Hilda's this year was bad enough, but as the airline did not think this sufficient reason to reimburse me for the tickets, I decided to board the plane to London as planned a long time ago. And London was Pym's base anyway, so I couldn't go wrong.

I was more than lucky that our Chair, Deb Fisher, was in town that weekend to host the virtual Barbara Pym conference from her daughter's place, and she found the time to meet up with me on Saturday morning. Because of the pandemic, I stayed in a hotel in Paddington, and Deb immediately found out a connection between Pym and Paddington and suggested a Saturday morning walk to St Mary Magdalene's Church Paddington, an Anglican church at Rowington Close, Paddington. As Deb is a woman of action she had already contacted the vicar of St Mary Magdalene's Church Paddington, and he was quite prepared to welcome us in his church.

After a nice little walk from my hotel we rang the bell of the 'startlingly modern clergy house' (how right Pym was! It was built in 1969 and looked exactly like a house from the 1970s) and a man presumably in his fifties ('mild, kindly looks and spectacles', *Jane and Prudence*) opened the door for us. At the same time a woman left the house giving us a short nod. A thought passed my mind about good-looking

vicars (eg Neville Forbes of *No Fond Return of Love*) and the female members of their parishes. But it turned out this woman was the vicar's wife.

The vicar, Father Henry, admitted that he had never heard of the connection of Barbara Pym and his church.* But at least Barbara Pym was no stranger to him. When we read to him what Pym wrote about St Mary Magdalene's the vicar laughed and told us that the 'amusing vicar' must have been Father Stephenson, a prominent figure in the history of the church.

The parish was founded in 1865, the building (by the architect George Edmund Street) started in 1867 and was completed in 1872, but a fire destroyed the roof and it had to be reconstructed. The first mass was on St Mary Magdalene's Day, 1873. The impressive stained glass windows were constructed by Henry Holiday. Later on Ninian Comper designed the crypt chapel.

Over the years the church experienced some hard times, as did its parish, but eventually they were able to restore and regenerate the building after decades of decay. Nowadays the red and white spire of St Magdalene's Church is a landmark in this part of Paddington.

Deb and I were shown into a nave with an impressive painted ceiling by Daniel Bell, which was only cleaned and restored in 2018-9. The seating consisted of chairs – now positioned in safe distance to each other but Father Henry admitted that even at Pym's time they sat on chairs, not in pews. The 'good music' Pym wrote about to Bob Smith is still part of the parish's life, as one can see not only from the piano in the church but from the music programme on their website.

Father Henry told us that the church is thought to have inspired P D James as a location in her novel *A Taste for Death*, although she constantly denied it. And the former bad state of the church was obviously a suitable background for movies such as *Secret Ceremony* with Elizabeth Taylor and *Les Misérables*.

When I asked if they served tea after the service Father Henry pointed to a modern-looking cupboard in the front part of the church that obviously hid not only the cups and saucers but the water main connection.

Last but not least Father Henry showed us the underground vault. While there is still work in progress the blue ceiling is just beautiful and could be a wonderful set for films or even to social gatherings of any sort. Or a set for a secret meeting in a Barbara Pym novel.

**As this was not mentioned in the Wikipedia article about the church, Deb Fisher has added a note to point out that Barbara Pym was a member of its congregation.*

St Laurence's Fluctuating Fortunes and *An Unsuitable Attachment*

by Rose Little

Line drawing of
St Laurence the Martyr, Chevening Road

When Barbara and Hilary moved to Brooksville Avenue, Queen's Park, London NW6, they attended

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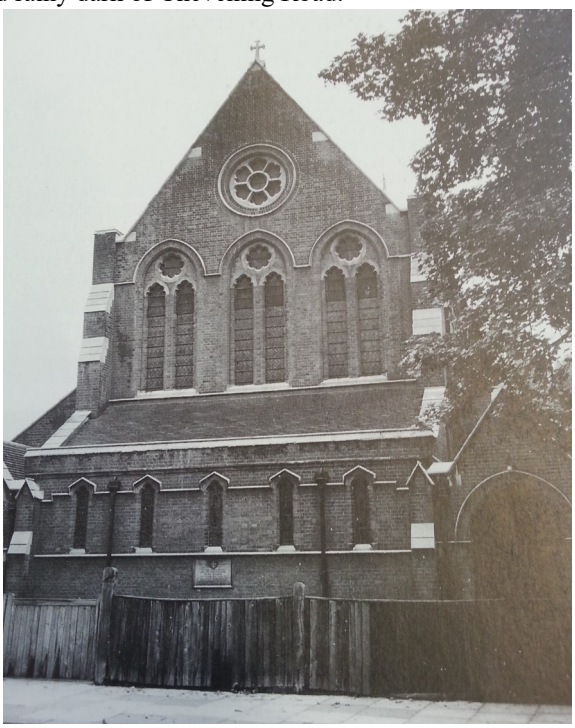
St Laurence the Martyr, a Victorian Gothic church built in 1906. In *An Unsuitable Attachment* Barbara immortalises it as St Basil's, a 'poorly attended North London church of hideous architecture', but notes that in spite of that, this is where Rupert regains his faith.

As a little girl I lived in Chevening Road, just round the corner from Brooksville Avenue, before Barbara and Hilary came to live there. I remember it well, an imposing building standing on the corner, opposite Queen's Park. One evening when the light was failing, feeling curious, my big sister and I crept up to the church. Inside it was silent and musty. We walked slowly up to the altar. 'Curtsy to God', commanded my sister, and we earnestly did so. There was nobody about, but suddenly feeling scared we turned and rushed out. I'm sure we would have been welcome.

Barbara and Hilary first came to know St Laurence's through their stalking of 'Bear' and 'Little Thing', their neighbours in Barnes. Barbara writes in her notebook on 4 October 1958: 'At St Laurence's,* stalking...We part in the cold rainy dark of Chevening Road.'



St Laurence's Gothic Frontage

It turned out that 'Bear' was really Walter, and was the church organist, while 'Little Thing' was Clive. Soon afterwards they all became friends and the Pyms started attending services at St Laurence's.

Barbara's friend Professor Robert (Bob) Smith, teaching at the universities of Ibadan and later Lagos in Nigeria, shared her interest in churches and they regularly exchange church news in their long correspondence. She writes: 'Solemn Evensong and Benediction on Tuesday evening – church really quite *full* and very nice service. B (Walter) playing splendidly.' So the church at that time, October 1957, was doing well.

By early 1959 Barbara and Hilary are more involved at St Laurence's. She records on Thursday 12 February, 'Meeting at St L's about new organ…later cosy tea round the vicarage kitchen table.' They decide to move there and on Sunday 18 October 1959 we find her '[w]alking along Harvist Rd N.W. 6 to look at a house in Brooksville Avenue, Queen's Park. I see a cluster of exotic looking fruit hanging in a window.' She was to use this memory later in *An Unsuitable Attachment.*

Barbara is thinking consciously of writing a novel based here as she writes in her notebook: 'A novel of North London might contrast rather piquantly with the elegant setting of Eliz. Bowen's *To the North.'* [Note that she makes this Ianthe's favourite novel]. In January 1960 she writes, 'Evensong and Benediction in a N. London church, rather sparsely attended...an older man who has lost his faith coming out of nostalgia...' And there we have Rupert.

40 Brooksville Avenue

When Bob Smith comes to England on leave he nearly always sees Barbara and they visit St Laurence's and other London churches. 1960 was a good year and she writes to him on 21 October, 'St Laurence the Martyr continues to flourish.' And later, 'Tonight we are going to a sort of Parish meeting (not PCC) to discuss the usual things – finance etc.'

In early 1961 they move in and Barbara reports to Bob: 'All goes well at St Laurence's – we now have a thing called the Parish Meeting which usually takes place in the vicarage with much jollity and Mrs P.C. going round with drinks. Last Sunday we had the Parish Breakfast and I was asked to pour tea at one of the tables!'

Their new house has a garden so they happily have cats: Tatiana, the original of Faustina in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, followed by Tom Boilkin and Minerva and later Kitty. Tatiana was a beautiful, neurotic, tortoiseshell cat who died young, but her vibrant personality lives on in the novel.

Bob misses England and spending Christmas with the sisters. In December 1961 he enquires about the St Laurence choirgirls' supper and he also asks, 'Is there a mist in the Paddington bellows? My pen grows watery with sentiment', probably referring to St Mary Magdalene's Church Paddington, the church the Pyms attend after St Laurence's closes.

In April 1962 Barbara writes to Bob that it was '[v]ery nice at St Laurence's for Easter' and in August, 'St Laurence's is thriving: 'We think [the Parish priest] is getting a little bit above himself as there was a record number of communicants for St Laurence's day last Friday.' But by the end of 1963 St Laurence's is pressed for money, its balance sheet recording: '31 Dec 1963. Bal of £926. 7. 8'.

In September 1964 Barbara gives the news her own comic

spin: 'St L's congregation continues to fluctuate…Hilary set to work the other evening compiling a list of all the people who had "worshipped" at St L's since we came here that we could remember. We then analysed the circumstances of their leaving – if they had left – and came to the conclusion that they had been removed by Rome, Death and Umbrage. A good title for a book, don't you think? Umbrage of course removed the greatest number!'

Despite successful jumble sales in 1965, fortunes continue to waver and Barbara confides to Bob, 'We found Easter here rather exhausting and both agreed that it would be much more of a *holiday* if it weren't for the religious side. St L's has quite good congregations, but in general our numbers don't increase.'

Seeking to amuse Bob in his lonely exile in Nigeria, she tells him that the vicarage drawing room 'has an enormous square Swedish paraffin stove...Father P.C. [Parry Chivers] now has this strange obsession with paraffin' which recalls the Taviscombe vicar in *No Fond Return of Love*, who is obsessed with his church's heating rather than its Norman font. To Bob she adds, 'The hall is to be let to a school during term time which will bring in a little much needed money.' Unfortunately, 'St L's numbers are dwindling' in April 1968 and by October 1969: 'St L's congregation much depleted but the faithful few struggle on.'

In her letter to Bob of 26 January 1970, Barbara reports the unhappy outlook with a light touch: 'St Laurence's is in the red and numbers dropping all the time. But I hate the idea of "meeting in people's houses" rather than going to church, as I have seen suggested. Just imagine Sung Mass at 40 Brooksville and Minerva jumping up on the altar and Tom sniffing the sacred vessels.' Bob enters fully into her feelings about the disaster, telling her in June 1970 that he is 'devastated about St L's.'

This observation shows how poor the congregation was: 22 August 1971: 'How splendid All Saints Margaret St is – close to 200 people there! I reckon when you compare it to the five to ten at St Laurence's it hardly seems to be the same religion. And yet, where one or two are gathered together...'

St Laurence Close

'Despite the efforts of faithful members like the Pyms', as Father Myers observed, (Spring edition of *Green Leaves* 1999) the final service was held on 27 October 1971. St Laurence the Martyr was reunited with Christ Church, Marylebone Road [today the name is Christ Church with St Laurence Brondesbury], and the building was demolished to make way for a block of flats. The name has been kept: 'St Laurence Close'. The Vicarage, next door, was retained to become the Rectory of Christ Church.

Barbara tells Philip Larkin in November 1971, 'Our church has become "redundant" and been closed! *There's* something I should like to write about...Neither my sister nor I really want to get involved anywhere at the moment, having had enough of all that to last a long time.'

If only she had written about it, but in St Basil's we catch a faithful echo and in *An Unsuitable Attachment* we breathe again the atmosphere of 1960s Queen's Park.

**Please note that the correct spelling of the church is 'St Laurence's', and not 'St Lawrence's'. Neither Barbara Pym nor Hazel Holt, in* A Very Private Eye, *always kept to the right spelling. To keep it uniform for ease of reading (and because it is the correct spelling), in this article 'St Laurence's' has been used throughout.*

Saint John Henry Newman

by Hazel Bell

Anglo-Catholicism is a major theme in the novels of Barbara Pym, and John Henry Newman is a significant figure in the development of Anglo-Catholicism.

Born in 1801 and brought up as a strict Calvinist, at Oxford he formed a close intimacy with the theologian Edward Pusey. He was ordained in the Church of England in 1824, but through the 1830s he contributed to the Oxford Movement's *Tracts for the Times*, that preached Anglicanism as a *via media* between Catholicism and Evangelicalism. Tractarians began to move over to Roman Catholicism, and in 1845 Newman too was finally received into the Roman Catholic Church. He wrote many Roman Catholic works, and received the cardinal's hat in 1879.

Newman is the classic example of an Anglican's conversion, 'going over to Rome'. Pym makes much reference to him, both in her novels and her diary, showing a real fascination with him.

The earliest reference, in *Some Tame Gazelle* (written 1934), is the most trivial. Harriet is considering going to Edward Plowman's church, though Belinda considers him '"rather high...so – well – Romish."' Harriet defiantly insists that Plowman '"is such a fine-looking man, too…Like Cardinal Newman."' Belinda protests, '"Cardinal Newman

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had a much bigger nose. And besides, he really did go *over*, you know…"'

In *Excellent Women* (1952) Mildred's carrying a biography of Newman in her string bag, and reading it, 'thinking about the Oxford Movement', runs through several pages of Chapter 16, where she tells Everard: '"One has great sympathy for him…"'

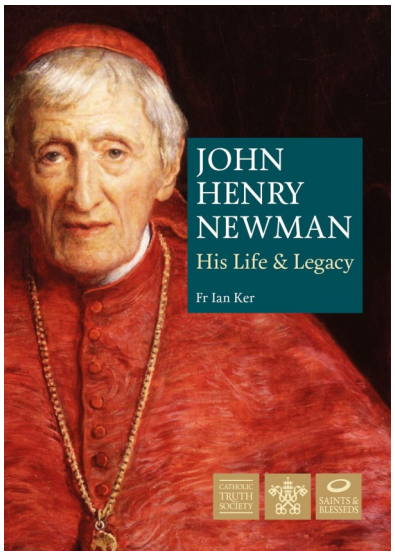
There are many references to the hymn Newman wrote on a Mediterranean tour in 1834, 'Lead, Kindly Light'.* Mildred remembers that they were not allowed to sing it at school, as '"[Miss Ridout] thought it was morbid and unsuitable for schoolgirls. Of course we loved it."' Tom Dagnall thinks of it when walking in the wood in *A Few Green Leaves*, reflecting on the circumstances of its composition (Chapter 28).

In her diary, *A Very Private Eye*, in February 1943, Pym writes more fully of these circumstances; in July 1943 she chooses that hymn at a YWCA service; and in April 1971: 'It amuses me to read in a review of Malcolm Muggeridge's book about Mother Teresa that he describes Newman's "Lead kindly light" as "exquisite". *Not* quite the word.'

In 1951 she makes the diary entry: 'It seems rather dangerous, after we have been praying for the unity of the churches, to have a hymn by Newman.'

But Pym's most serious writing about Newman is in *A Very Private Eye*'s entry for 11 February 1943, where she recounts reading Newman's autobiography of 1864, '*Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, but not really getting very much from it as I do not understand many of the theological terms and arguments.' She writes about his conversion, and comments: 'I am still waiting for the miraculous act of faith, that finally sent him over.'

On Sunday 13 October 2019 Blessed John Henry Newman was declared a Saint by Pope Francis. How one would love to know what comment Pym would have made on this event in her diary!



In another posthumous development concerning Newman, the journalist Bernard Levin, always a stalwart champion of indexes, reviewed Father Ian Ker's *John Henry Newman: A Biography* in *The Times* (16 November 1989) under the heading, 'Bernard Levin finds Cardinal Newman lost without trace in the index of his latest biography'. He hailed the book as:

> As splendid and enthralling a Life as I have had in my hands for many a day…wonderful precision and clarity...Newman's greatness is undeniable…

But, this encomium continues…

> And then I turned to the Index...its full, almost heroic, awfulness needs proper savouring, since every time the reader thinks that the nadir has been reached...worse is to come….[paragraphs of undifferentiated page numbers], subheadings as ridiculous as they are otiose…listed only in the order in which they appear in the book…

Barbara Pym is the acknowledged novelist 'Queen of Indexers', both practising indexing and writing often of indexes herself.** I would love to know also how she would have reacted to this treatment by her own craft of the figure of whom she thought so much!

**Note the different spellings in the novels' texts:*
VPE – *Lead, kindly Light (11 February, 18 July 1943); Lead kindly light (22 April 1971)*
FGL – *Lead Kindly Light*
EW – *Lead kindly light*

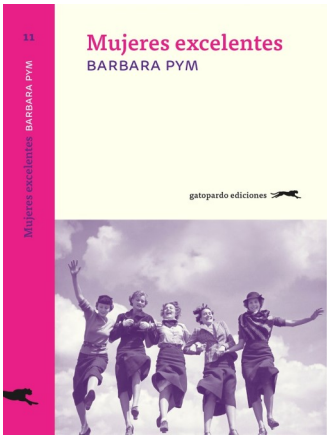
** *'Barbara Pym' in* From Flock Beds to Professionalism: a history of index-makers by *Hazel K. Bell. Oak Knoll Press & HKB Press, 2008.*

Barbara Pym in Translation in Spain
Pym in a Hot Climate

by Keith Armstrong

It was with some trepidation that I began to read my first Pym translation in Spanish, but I was more than pleasantly surprised.

Having read and enjoyed a number of French translations I had my doubts as to how the style and humour would translate across the Pyrenees, but the translation of *Excellent Women* (*EW*) – *Mujeres excelentes* (*ME*) – was smooth, flowing and a joy to read. I particularly liked the way the translator, Jaime Zulaika, played with Spanish language in order to convey the humour of the English original. For example, when Mr Conybeare reminds Sister Blatt that 'The early bird catches the worm,' (*EW*, p65), the translator adopts a literal approach '"El pájaro que madruga atrapa el gusano'," (*ME*, p78) rather than the more usual Spanish translation of the idiom: al que madruga Dios le ayuda (God helps those who rise early) so that the humour of Miss Statham's subsequent comment about worms can be made sense of.



Excellent Women

However, I did spot one minor mistranslation, I think – namely when Mildred says to Rocky during their last meeting alone: '"Let me stay as I am…I'm quite happy."' (*EW*, p252). The word 'quite' here to my mind has

the sense of *completely* rather than its ambiguously other meaning in English of *fairly*. But the translator uses the Spanish word 'bastante', which translates as *fairly*: '"Que me dejen como estoy… Soy bastante feliz."' (*ME*, p273).

There was one other oddity in the text, which may, or may not, have been intentional – this time during Mildred and Rocky's first meeting when they joke about how tea is served abroad. When Mildred says, '"And they may even bring *hot* milk with it…"' (*EW*, p33), the translation is given as '"Y a lo mejor no te sirven leche caliente siquiera"' (*ME*, p45): And they may NOT even bring hot milk with it. Of course, in Spain hot drinks such as coffee are always served with hot milk. To use cold milk would be considered quite barbaric. So perhaps the translator was trying to take the reader's culture into account? A mistranslation or a deliberate cultural translation? The jury is out.

To date, seven of Barbara Pym's novels have been translated into Spanish. As might be expected, the first one was *Mujeres excelentes* (*Excellent Women*) which was published by Anagrama way back in 1985. Eight years later, in 1993, *Murió la dulce paloma* (*The Sweet Dove Died*) was published by Editorial Lumen. A sixteen-year gap then followed – rather like Pym's own journey in the wilderness! – until Editorial Lumen issued *Jane y Prudence* (*Jane and Prudence*) in 2009. The following year, 2010, *Les hombres de Wilmet* (*A Glass of Blessings*) was published. Incidentally, the Spanish title translates literally as Wilmet's Men!

The last two novels were translated by Ana Mata Buil. We need to jump forward now to June 2016 when another publisher, gatopardo ediciones, re-issued the original translation of *Mujeres excelentes* (*Excellent Women*) by Jaime Zulaika. By December 2018 it had already achieved the printing of its fourth edition.

Translations of other novels have come out regularly since 2016, each translated by Irene Oliva Luque: *Amor no correspondido* (*No Fond Return of Love*) in June 2017, *Un poco menos que ángeles* (*Less Than Angels*) in June 2018 and *Extranjeros, bienvenidos* (*Civil to Strangers*) in June 2019. Given the current global situation there was understandably no new translation for June 2020.

These translations by gatopardo ediciones have eye-catching covers – period photos on the front and very colourful spines. The spine of *Mujeres excelentes*, for example, is shocking pink! But I think Barbara Pym would have appreciated the contrast and so I am going to have to collect other gatopardo translations, if only to have such a colourful bookshelf.

Sources:

Barbara Pym, *Excellent Women,* Virago Press, 2009
Barbara Pym, *Mujeres excelentes (Excellent Women)*, Translated by Jaime Zulaika, gatopardo ediciones, 2016

Gleanings

compiled by Yvonne Cocking

I have received an unusually large number of gleanings since spring, some of them continuing the theme of lockdown reading, and from the usual wide range of sources.

Friday Books (on comic novels this time) by Roger Lewis, in the *Daily Mail* on 2 April, chose among others *Excellent Women*, '[whom] everybody takes for granted, who cooks for bachelors and does their typing'.

Waitrose magazine's May issue had an extract from Kate Young's *Little Library Year*, and although Barbara Pym was not mentioned in it, there was a copy of *Jane and Prudence* in an accompanying bookshelf photograph.

In 'Lockdown Special' in *The Sunday Times* of 17 May, Gillian Reynolds, the paper's radio critic, wrote:

> When lockdown began I escaped into fiction. First week, the novels of Barbara Pym, set after the Second World War but before the Swinging Sixties, when women had all the best comic insights and men thought they knew everything about wine. I laughed aloud, devouring one every afternoon.

Writing on British comfort food in *Country Life* of 27 May, Flora Watkins thought that

> a post-prandial hot chocolate can go a long way to putting the world to rights. 'What a pity we can't make a cup of Ovaltine', muses Dulcie in Barbara Pym's *No Fond Return of Love*. 'Life's problems are often eased by hot milky drinks.'

Barbara Pym's birthday (2 June) was noted in Garrison Keillor's news sheet, *The Writer's Almanac*, and from the same source Louise Erdrich says:

> We have a lot of books in our house…Advance Reading Copies collect at bedside, to be dutifully examined – to ignore them and read Henry James or Barbara Pym instead becomes a guilty pleasure.

In the weekend *Financial Times*, 13/14 June, Isabel Berwick held a fantasy dinner party

> which isn't a dinner at all but a picnic on the meadow at Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath in north London...Because of the location, my guests are all women, but that's no hardship. My first, the 20th century author Barbara Pym, wrote exquisitely observed books that are wise and funny companions through the best and worst of times…she will certainly love my colourful picnic which I'll serve on mismatched plates bought at my church's jumble sale. I hope she will appreciate the gesture…

The Spectator for 15 June ran an article by Flora Watkins on 'literary staycations' (horrid word!).

> One of Pym's many famous fans, Jilly Cooper, invariably takes one of her subtle, slyly comic novels on holiday…*Some Tame Gazelle* – with its monstrous clergymen, curate-chasing spinsters and unfathomably hilarious repetition of the word 'marrow' – is for me the acme of Pym's high comedy of a certain genteel sort of Englishness.
>
> **Where to stay:** Any English village with a tearoom run by a gentlewoman – Chawton in Hampshire, given that many see Pym as a twentieth century Jane Austen, is perfect. Stay at the absurdly Pymm-ish St Mary's Hall, a B&B in a converted church.

Susan Hamlyn, in the July *Oldie*, thought that if a man loses his wife, 'women rush round with shepherd's pie', but a widow is 'shunned as a "spare woman".':

…That I should be writing this in 2020 surprises me – I feel the spectres of Nancy Mitford, Barbara Pym and Ivy Compton-Burnett raising quizzical eyebrows at me in this age of gender fluidity and vaunted sexual equality.

A review by Alfred Hickling in *The Guardian* on 1 July of Clare Chambers' *Small Pleasures*, on the subject of 'single-sex reproduction'(!), considers

> the postwar suburban milieu of Chambers' work has drawn comparisons to Barbara Pym, although perhaps a closer parallel could be made with Anita Brookner, with whom she shares an interest in intelligent, isolated women destabilised by the effects of an unexpected and unsustainable love affair.

Robbie Millen in *The Times* on 11 July wrote a very

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amusing article about rereading *Crampton Hodnet*.

> If you want to escape from reality, go to Pym Land, a world of snobbish spinster aunts and slightly silly curates, Ovaltine and Evensong. It is a place of high comedy and low-wattage passions…I'm emigrating there as soon as I can get a visa and a set of fish knives.

In an article in *The Guardian* on 25 July on various books about childless marriage by Sian Cain, she says:

> Ever since my partner and I concluded that we wanted to be child-free I have looked to books for positive examples of fulfilling and rewarding lives lived without children. The closest I have found have been eccentric spinsters and ambivalent parents, in a long line from Doris Lessing and D H Lawrence, to Barbara Pym and Rachel Cusk.

On 31 July on BookBrunch, a daily news service for the book industry, Nicholas Clee wrote:

> Prompted by *The Times* Books newsletter, I have read *Excellent Women* by Barbara Pym (Virago). After I had adjusted to her wavelength, I found her writing irresistible: it is all about the unexpected yet perfectly apt, comic word, like a perfectly placed chromatic note in music.

And finally, following a similar theme to one in Spring 2019's Gleanings, Nina Stibbe in *The Guardian* on 18 September, declared her comfort reads:

> Early Barbara Pym for times of trouble. Elizabeth Jane Howard's Cazalets for sad times. Wodehouse or Samuel Pepys for a grim journey. Maya Angelou to bolster. Nancy Mitford for heartbreak. Mapp & Lucia for loneliness. David Sedaris at any time.

Thanks to Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Diana Gulland, Nicolette Jones, Norma Munson, Iona Roberts, Jutta Schiller, Christine Shuttleworth and Maureen Woolley.

Crampton Hodnet: Romantic Entanglements & Nosy Neighbours

by Dan DiPietro

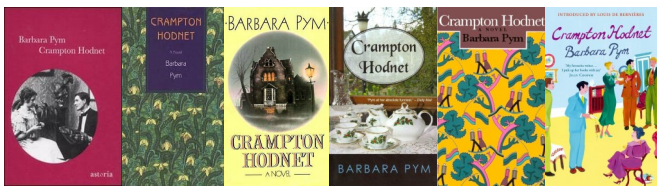
How often have Pym fans said her books should be made into movies? Don't most of us believe Pym is even funnier heard, let alone seen, than read?

Well, soon you will have the opportunity to decide for yourselves. Be on the lookout for the premiere of Barbara Pym's *Crampton Hodnet*: Romantic Entanglements & Nosy Neighbours.

The Virtual Pym Players are producing this video play in a COVID-friendly way. Each actor will record their lines and send to Dan DiPietro who, with expert help from writer and director Fred Stroppel, will edit the individual segments into a coherent video play.

We expect the YouTube premiere to be held in early December 2020.

Updates will be posted on the Barbara Pym Society and the Barbara Pym Fan Club pages on Facebook.



Obituary
Tom Maschler

by Michael Wilson

Buccaneering publisher Tom Maschler died on 16 October 2020 aged 87.

He was born into a Jewish family in Berlin in 1933, coming to the UK to escape the Nazis. After school, deciding not to accept a place at Oxford, he made a lot of money as a tour-guide, then moved into publishing. In 1960 he joined Jonathan Cape as editorial director, becoming Chairman in 1970.

He quickly built up a client list of some of the biggest names in contemporary literature, including Joseph Heller (he paid £250 for *Catch-22*), John Fowles, Kurt Vonnegut and Doris Lessing. Among those he mentored were Salman Rushdie, Martin Amis and Ian McEwan. He was also instrumental in founding the Booker Prize.

He was a controversial figure in the world of publishing, sometimes criticised for having little interest in books for their own sake. Of his own memoir, *Publisher*, a critic wrote: 'The only surprise is that, with so many friends in the literary world, none of them persuaded him not to publish this book.'

Pym readers will regard him as one of the villains in Barbara's life story: it was he who cast her into 'the wilderness'. Cape had published six of Barbara's novels but in 1963 they rejected *An Unsuitable Attachment*. She was not published again till *Quartet in Autumn* came out in 1977.

Quartet in Autumn was of course shortlisted for the Booker Prize. The winner was announced at a dinner at Claridge's where Barbara met Tom Maschler for the first time, 'charming of course' (*VPE*). Earlier, when her work had been rediscovered and introduced to a new and wider audience, he had written her some 'quite cordial letters' (*VPE*).

Maschler was married twice and had a reputation as a prodigious ladies' man, despite being described as 'camp as a sequined bivouac'. Were it not for the deep grief his rejection had caused her, perhaps she would have found him an amusing friend. What she did enjoy was inventing 'a Maschler pudding, a kind of milk jelly' (*VPE*).

'Following Barbara's Footsteps'

by Tom Sopko

Some fifteen years ago, Ellen Miller compiled a guide for Pym fans who wanted to 'pinpoint specific locations in the novels as well as visit the places where Barbara lived, worked and worshiped.'

In those days many Pym fans were not very internet-savvy, and smartphones and Google had not yet taken over our everyday lives, so providing addresses, maps, and website URLs was a valuable service.

Now, of course, anyone can easily find maps, directions, photos, and more in seconds. So the guide has been revised, with fewer maps but more quotations from the novels and additional background information from the biographies and other sources. It has also been split into sections (Oswestry, Oxford, Pimlico, London suburbs, Finstock, church crawling, etc) to make it easier to use 'in the field'. Many locations from Barbara's real life that made their way into her novels are documented, some for the first time.

You can find the new and improved guide at **barbara-pym.org/following-barbaras-footsteps/**. Until we can resume actual travel again, the 'Street View' feature in Google Maps makes it possible to see all the locations online, so one can take virtual tours through Oxford or London and see the streets and neighbourhoods that Barbara called home throughout her life.

The Barbara Pym Society
2020–2021

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Coming Events

Please visit barbara-pym.org for details.

Thank you for the photos in this issue
Barbara Pym Society,
Paula Byrne, Deb Fisher,
Rose Little, Jutta Schiller

Boden Coat Competition

by Deb Fisher

Members will be pleased to know that, after the long delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the competition to win the luxurious 'Pym coat', made by Boden, has succeeded in raising funds towards the cost of the Barbara Pym Room in the new building at St Hilda's.

We still need more to make it happen, so I hope that those of you who intended to enter, but had forgotten about it, will take the opportunity to do so. The competition will run until **18 December** (a week before Christmas); all entries must be in by then. You can follow the link from the main page of our website, or go directly here: https://barbara-pym.org/barbara-pym-society/boden-coat-drawing/

Paula Byrne, Barbara Pym's biographer, has kindly agreed to draw the winning ticket for us on Boxing Day, ie 26 December. We hope to show the draw live online and will inform members of the timing when final details have been agreed.

Lorraine Mepham, modelling the Boden coat

Pym-Themed Cocktails

Next year's annual conference, when we all hope to be reunited in Oxford, will be a cause for celebration. Barbara Pym Society member Ros Cleal has suggested that we devise a Pym-themed cocktail to be served to delegates. We'd love to hear what you think.

Here are a couple of ideas that have come in so far via the Facebook page of The Barbara Pym Society https://www.facebook.com/Barbara-Pym-Society-326965535031/ – one humorous, one a real possibility:

'A Long Slow Vicar Up Against The Vestry Wall'
Pour over ice and stir:
2 parts Wincarnis
1.5 parts Apple Brandy
0.5 parts Sloe Gin
splash of maple syrup
decorate with apple slices dusted in sugar and cinnamon.

'Biretta' (virgin cocktail)
Mix 75ml elderflower cordial with 1 litre cloudy apple juice.
Add a small handful of roughly chopped mint leaves.
Stir well.
Pour half glasses of the juice and top up with sparkling water.

Send your recipes to: chair@barbara-pym.org

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