

GREEN LEAVES

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THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2002



Phil Bacon, Hilary Walton and Louise Ross

The 2002 Annual Conference of the Barbara Pym Society was held on 7-8 September, at St Hilda's College, Oxford, attended by 65 members, including some who had flown in specially from the US, Belgium, Germany and Vienna.

The first session was the Annual General Meeting, the full minutes of which appear on pages 2-3.

The conference theme, "Unexcellent Men", was considered with regard to all aspects of Pym's life and work. First, Bridget Guymer read Patricia Shaw's paper examining unexcellent men in Pym's fiction (from which our conference title was taken; reproduced in this issue of *Green Leaves*, pages 8-9). Maggie Parsons then considered four examples in further detail: Adam Marsh-Gibbon in *Civil to Strangers*, Fabian Driver in *Jane and Prudence*, Tom Mallow in *Less than Angels*, and Aylwin Forbes in *No Fond Return of Love*.

Nancy Ellen Talburt spoke on unexcellent men in Pym's personal life, with the title, 'Unsuitable for attachment'. The men she cited as having 'represented the highs and lows of romance' in Pym's life were Rupert Gleadow, Henry Harvey, Julian Amery, Gordon Glover and Richard Roberts: Harvey and Glover being designated 'love-rats', and Roberts 'a rat-friend'.

Her paper was described by Hilary Walton as 'spot on'. She will repeat this presentation at the North American Conference in March, and it will subsequently appear in this journal. Unexcellent men in Pym's literary life were represented by the many letters of rejection of her work that Barbara Pym received from publishers. Yvonne Cocking had copied them all in the Bodleian Library archive, and they were read in a sequence interpolated with letters from Pym to publishers and to Philip Larkin, excerpts from her diary, and recorded comments from others, with Hazel Bell as narrator and the women, Tim Burnett as all the men.

Our after-dinner speaker was Triona Adams, on excellent men in general: she was to have taken examples from life, but, as she asked, "Where are they?" – and had been led to answer, in fact, they are all in fiction! She had conducted a private survey, seeking recommendations of such men: top of the list had come Hamlet, Romeo, Jay Gatsby, Bertie Wooster, Heathcliff, and several detectives – Philip Marlowe, Lord Peter Wimsey, Moriarty; with, topping the list, Sherlock Holmes.

Top of the list for men who excelled in love came Heathcliff; for wit, Jane Austen's men, who were held to achieve romantic hero status. Mr Darcy, though, did not show well: 'his rudeness



Hazel Bell and Nancy Talburt

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