

# GREEN LEAVES

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society

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## THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2003

The 2003 Annual Conference of The Barbara Pym Society was held on Saturday and Sunday, 30 and 31 August 2003 at St Hilda's College, Oxford, attended by 53 members. Some came specially from the US, Belgium, Germany, Holland, Austria and Australia, as well as from the more distant British counties. Hilary Walton, sister of Barbara Pym, was unable to be present as she had been swept off on a cruise by kind friends.

The first session was as usual the Annual General Meeting, the full minutes of which appear on page 3. Some notable points were the announcement of plans for a special meeting to be held in June 2004 in the village of Finstock, where Barbara lived with her sister, and a joint meeting with the Philip Larkin Society at a later date. The work of Yvonne Cocking as secretary to the committee was gratefully recognised as her term came to an end, and the meeting was pleased to hear that she would continue her work for the Society as Official Archivist, a post which she has informally filled for some time. As always, the frustrations of Barbara Pym's novels continuing to be out of print in England was discussed. The committee will continue to support efforts to correct this situation, and the meeting was pleased learn that the American publishers are reissuing four novels next year.

After lunch **Yvonne Cocking** opened the first session with a look at the background of Pym's anthropological novel, *Less Than Angels*, the focus for this con-



**Yvonne Cocking introducing the reading of "Parrot's Eggs"**

ference. Yvonne had spent much time in the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford, going through the many Pym notebooks filed there. She was able to give us insights into Barbara's ideas for names and characteristics of characters, references to friends in her own circle, and some details of contemporary criticism, anecdotes connected with publicising and printing the book. The text of her paper appears on page 4.

Triona Adams, a St Hilda's graduate who has long been involved in the Society, then read **Peter Lloyd's** paper delivered at the 1983 meeting, to enable those

who had not heard it to enjoy some of his reflections as an anthropologist who knew Barbara and Hilary in the nineteen fifties.

After a lively session for questions and discussion, and the usual break for tea and coffee, two anthropology-based poems from the Barbara Pym archives were read, by Chris Ward, the Society's incoming Secretary, and an American member, Charles Gilbert. The poems appear on page 13.

There followed a paper, 'Barbara Pym: a novelist in the field', written and delivered by the Australian scholar, **Robin Joyce**, who is at present completing a PhD at the Australian National University.

During the ensuing discussion and questions, use of such words as "dim", and "bother" were mentioned as being typical of Pym's vocabulary. Members considered the sudden, untimely death of Tom Mallow in the book, seeing it as unusual in Pym's work, and apparently enabling Catherine to take over from him as the main character in *Less Than Angels*. There was dispute as to whether Tom really is the hero, the main character, as supposed by Peter Lloyd – who also regarded himself as the model for Tom – or whether this is Catherine, as posited by Robin Joyce.

The guest at the Annual Dinner was the prominent Oxford resident, Baroness James of Holland Park, OBE, better known internationally as the novelist **P. D. James**. It transpired during her thoughtful and witty talk that she had

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