

been unflagging. Never resident in these islands, and all too rarely a visitor, he maintains old relationships and creates new ones by his genius for correspondence. His letters are an unceasing flow of ideas, an irresistible blend of impish humour and learned observations. Fortunate are those UK members who at any time during three decades have shared—or still share—in these inspiring epistolary relationships.

This citation could become a catalogue. It is best, therefore, to call a halt and to invite readers to seek out the honoured name, 'Heckscher, W.S.', in this journal's volume-indexes. Thus may they find much interesting reading both by and about the fourth recipient of the Society's highest honour.

JOHN A. GORDON

Index makers

Barbara Pym's editorial colleague, friend, and literary executrix, Hazel Holt, contributes the second instalment of our series featuring the personalities and careers of individual indexers.

NO THANKLESS TASK: BARBARA PYM AS INDEXER

She would sit crouched (a favourite word) over a battered, wooden four-drawer card index of antique design, like Miss Clothier,¹ 'moving the cards here and there with her fingers, as if she were coaxing music from some delicate instrument'. Occasionally, as I sat opposite, our desks facing each other in that small room, I would catch a murmur, like the recital of some litany: 'Abortion, administration, age-sets, agriculture, amulets, ancestors, animal husbandry...'. Barbara was making another index.

For over twenty-five years Barbara Pym was in charge of the International African Institute's publications. In any one year she would edit and see through the press four full-length monographs, two volumes of seminar papers, two or three volumes of the Ethnographic Survey of Africa and one volume of the Linguistic Survey (linguists are notoriously more difficult to get anything out of), not to mention four issues of the journal *Africa*, whose Assistant Editor she was. I was her only assistant. In addition to the general editorial work we divided between us the other Thankless Tasks.* I compiled the bibliographies and Barbara made the indexes.

She loved the mystique of certain aspects of her job, such as being in charge of the Institute's collection of maps, or arranging with agencies the advertisements for



Barbara Pym, 1913–1980

Africa, but, best of all, she enjoyed the art of indexing. She liked making lists, particularly alphabetical ones. Indeed, her favourite way of getting to sleep was to list as many African tribes as possible beginning with one letter—Teke, Tio, Toro, Tswana, Tutsi....

Authors of monographs usually made their own indexes (or their wives or girl-friends and once, gloriously, the author's mother), but those for the Ethnographic Survey and the Seminar volumes were done by Barbara herself. These were rather uniform and boring to do, requiring a quick professional job, but nothing to linger over with pleasure. No, the great on-going indexes, offering so much more scope, were the cumulative, annual indexes for *Africa*. The General Index was extensive but straightforward; the real challenge was the Index of Tribes and Languages. Variations of tribal names

*The original title of *No fond return of love*, in which Dulcie Mainwaring asks, 'Do we all correct proofs, make bibliographies and indexes, and do all the rather humdrum thankless tasks for people more brilliant than ourselves?'; reflects, 'A book can be made or marred by its index... remembering the wives and others who undertook what was often acknowledged to be a thankless task'; and refers to acknowledgements 'about your having undertaken the arduous or thankless—though I hope it won't be that—task of compiling the index'.

gave delightful opportunities for cross-referencing, and the special characters had to find their formal place in the scheme of things—the long-tailed S (=sh) or the Bushman ‘click’ (!Kung would come after Z). This was, of course, the most tiresome of all indexes to proof-read. For some reason we never formed the news-room habit of reading proofs aloud and so we employed a kind of Wimbledon swivel between text and proof that was physically very wearing. Still, as Barbara used to say, ‘Thank God we don’t have to proof-read lists of Premium Bond winners’.

Even after Barbara had retired from the Institute, she continued to do most of the indexes (‘The author *may* do the index,’ she wrote in the instructions she left me when I took over her job, ‘or, at a pinch, Miss Pym.’). When she had a slight stroke in 1974, which left her with a form of dyslexia, she forced herself to read and write properly (and alphabetically) again with the incentive of doing the *Africa* indexes.

I think what she enjoyed most about indexing, apart from the pleasure of putting words into a certain order, was the peaceful, enclosed *space* an indexer inhabits. It requires a certain sort of concentration: you need to withdraw, as it were, into the world of that which is to be indexed, and this precisely suited Barbara’s temperament. We can see this in those of her characters who do indexes, either as a job or as an expression of love: it is no coincidence that Mildred² and Dulcie³ (especially the latter) are the heroines who are most like their creator.

Barbara enjoyed working ‘on the dustier academic fringes’, because it was a pleasant, one might almost say cosy, backwater, inhabited, for the most part, by those who were happier observing others on the hard, upward road to success rather than striving themselves. The formidable Miss Peacock (a senior Editor at the Oxford University Press in the 1940s) might declare that she would advise any daughter of hers to Go on the Streets rather than become a proof-reader, but for the excellent women in Barbara’s novels this world of libraries and bibliographies and indexes was a safe place. A canon’s daughter like Ianthe⁴ could (in spite of the deplorable students and the ketchup-stained pages) find it ‘suitable’, as did Dulcie, working at home while looking after her invalid mother;³ and Alan Grimstone deemed it a more fitting job for his wife, Caro, than working in a second-hand bookshop.³ For a beady-eyed novelist, of course, it was a marvellous vantage point, there was so much richness all around: those for whom the editors, bibliographers and indexers worked—the young post-graduate students in shabby raincoats and pathetic woolly gloves, struggling to catch their Professor’s eye; acerbic Librarians engaged in a constant battle to prevent people actually *reading* the books in their care; academics who spent more time fund-raising than teaching; linguists oblivious of the world about them as they pursued obsessively ‘the extraordinary debility of liquids and the

abundance of palatized and labialized phonemes of Gurage’.⁶ Barbara observed them all and created a fictional world for them to inhabit.

‘It is so seldom,’ says Miss Randall, ‘that one meets anyone who appreciates one’s work, or who even knows that there *can* be problems of indexing.’³ Thanks to Barbara, perhaps there are now many more people who do, though the inhabitants of that small, enclosed world will smile to themselves at some ironic stroke in her novels which only they can fully appreciate.

‘The lay reader then gave a short address. He tried to show how all work can be done to the Glory of God, even making an index, correcting a proof, or compiling an accurate bibliography. His small congregation heard him say, almost with disappointment, that those who do such work have perhaps less opportunity of actually doing evil than those who write novels and plays or work for films or television.’³

They will understand that although Barbara was laughing, she was also acknowledging, as she so often did, the small seed of truth that lay within.

HAZEL HOLT

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3. ——— *No fond return of love*. London: Cape, 1961.
4. ——— *An unsuitable attachment*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
5. ——— *An academic question*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
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Barbara Pym died in 1980. The novels referred to above are featured in *The Indexer* 12 (2) Oct. 1980, 108–9; 13 (1) April 1982, 26; 13 (3) April 1983, 197–8; 14 (3) April 1985, 189; 14 (4) Oct. 1985, 277; 15 (2) Oct. 1986, 66.

Cannibalistic compilation?

From California a reader sends a copy of ‘the index to a handsomely printed brochure, or program, for the “Decorator Showcase” recently held in San Francisco. It contains primarily advertisements for decorators and allied firms, so the index is mainly a guide to the advertisers. In an effort to include every scrap of editorial matter to be found in the book, the compiler came up with two remarkable entries.’ These are:

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