

NEWSLETTER NUMBER NINETEEN

Welcome to the Summer Newsletter for 2009. This includes the programme for the September weekend, two little-known articles by Sylvia Townsend Warner – and details of the new STW bus!

The next issue, Number Twenty, will mark the Society's Tenth Anniversary.

Judith Stinton

SUBSCRIPTIONS: a reminder

If you haven't yet paid for 2009, please send your subscription to Judith Bond, 26 Portwey Close, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 8RF. The cost for UK members remains unchanged at £10, while the rate for overseas members is \$25. Cheques should be made payable to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society.

CHANGES IN THE COMMITTEE

At the 2009 AGM, changes were announced in the Society's Committee. Eileen Johnson is now Chairman, Lynn Mutti is the Secretary and Helen Sutherland is the Editor of the Journal.

We would like to thank the former Chairman, Stephen Mottram, and the former Journal Editor, Peter Tolhurst, for all their hard work and help in building up the Society throughout its first years.

MAY WEEKEND, 2009

The sun shone on our May weekend, as usually happens when we meet. Is this just luck, or can some of the credit be given to Sylvia Townsend Warner herself? She was after all (it has been suspected) both a witch and a spy, and so surely she could do something about the weather.

On a fine Saturday morning Judith Bond gave an entertaining and

informative presentation, which she had compiled with Mary Jacobs, called CLICK 'Nefarious Activities': Sylvia Townsend Warner under MI5 Surveillance 1935 - 1955. Surveillance began when Sylvia and Valentine joined the Communist Party. It was persistent and wide-ranging, and the files which have so far been released (122 of them) provide 'a contemporary picture of Left activism and social organisation...specifically in relation to the political participation of women, and to the interaction between the centre and the periphery; the metropolitan and the urban'. Details provided by the files also show that Warner's political action has not always been taken seriously enough. She did not merely follow where Ackland led as has sometimes been remarked. Her contributions tended to be more practical (perhaps less showy) than Valentine's, ranging from organising rest-cures and cooking for her guests, to collecting money for soap for Spain.

The files provide a good deal of valuable biographical detail as well, about such (unpolitical) matters as Sylvia's communications with her fishmonger, and with the Royal Society of Herbalists. Oddly, there is no reference to the activities revealed in the Society's recently-purchased Stonor letters, where STW sought accommodation for European anti-fascist writers. Indeed, there are several notable omissions in the records - this is still only a partial record.

Let us hope for more. And let us hope, too, that Mary Jacobs, who is unwell at the moment, will soon be back among us.

On Saturday afternoon, we visited Jane Austen's Lyme Regis, beginning at the Museum. As well as display's of the town's amazing geological and marine history, Lyme Museum has a small literary gallery (Jane Austen, John Fowles - and Beatrix Potter). From there we ambled along the esplanade to the famous Cobb. After climbing up the harbour wall and round to the open sea, above the dragon's teeth steps from which Louisa Musgrove fell, we gathered to hear Eileen Johnson read the passage from *Persuasion* which describes the incident.

Witchcraft was reserved for Sunday morning, when we met at Granny Moxon's cottage, behind the Sailor's Return in Chaldon. Members Penny and David Penton have used the cottage as their holiday home for many years, restoring it carefully along the way. It was easy to imagine Granny sitting in the main room of the cottage, as she does in Valentine Ackland's photograph of her - and the garden still flourishes, just as it did under

Granny's expert hands.

We sat outside in the warm sun, and I gave a talk on witches in Chaldon, which mainly featured Granny, who was loved by Sylvia and Valentine, but which also included other local witches like Bessie Cornick - and, some say, Sylvia herself.

Then we went, as always, to the churchyard. Gathering around Sylvia and Valentine's grave, we saw a new stone close beside theirs. It was for Janet Machen Pollock, and read, simply and truly, 'Love for Life'. Our readings at the grave were about our late Patron.

We had a highly enjoyable weekend, to which we welcomed new member Susan Ellis, Helen Sutherland who had travelled from Glasgow, and Jay Barksdale, on what we hope will become his annual trip from New York!

Judith Stinton

THE SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER BUS

Last year, our Treasurer Judith Bond received this letter:

Dear Judith

I am the commercial manager for Norfolk Green, an independent bus operator in Norfolk, and we run the ever-popular Coasthopper bus service along the North Norfolk coast. As part of a revamp of the service this year, we have bought six new buses for the route, and we are naming each of these, plus four others, after notable historical people with connections to places along the route.

As well as the rather more obvious Horatio Nelson etc, we are to name one of the buses 'Sylvia Townsend Warner' to commemorate the fact that she and Valentine both lived in the small village of Salthouse, now on the Coasthopper route, in the early 1950s. As well as her name and a brief explanation of who she was on the front of the bus, inside will be an A4 poster telling passengers a little bit more about her and why we have chosen

her as one of our famous ten.

As the official STW society, I felt it was appropriate to let you know of our desire to keep her memory alive in this part of the world - the buses are all due to have their names applied later this week prior to an official launch at Holkham Hall next month, and so I can supply photos of the finished article if that would be of interest to you.

With very best wishes,

Rob Bennett
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The bus is now up and running – as members who join us on the September weekend will discover...

SEPTEMBER WEEKEND 2009

We have decided to visit Norfolk for our September weekend, **which will be at an earlier time in the month than previously** (as requested by several members). The weekend will be based in Norwich.

Friday September 11th. Meet at 7.30pm in the centre of Norwich for a meal. Please let Richard Searle (01305 269204) know if you are coming.

Saturday September 12th. A visit to Norwich Cathedral: *its lovely cream colour, so warm and kind on that grey day, the pillars I said, like milk pouring from rows of cows, the great width of the clerestory, and the lovely perspective of the transept aisles underneath...* as Sylvia wrote in her diary in January 1951. We are hoping that the visit will begin in the Cathedral archive, to view material used by Sylvia in her researches on Tudor Church

Music. We will then explore the Cathedral, and have lunch in the Refectory, both of which have good disabled access. Please let Richard know if you plan to have lunch (which will be at 1pm).

2.30pm. We will be picked up from near the Cathedral by the new Sylvia Townsend Warner bus, which will take us, via Cromer, along the coast as far as Salthouse and Holt (where we can stop to explore) and back. We can also have tea in Holt.

After waiting in for a baker named Jasper who did not come, we went off to the local stores, and bought staples like potatoes and toilet-paper, and then on to Holt, over a russet heath and through a violent hailstorm. Valentine bought nails in a shop resounding with anecdotes of cats, and everyone had Norfolk manners, and we much approve of Holt.

7.30pm. Meal in Norwich. Please give your name to Richard.

Sunday September 13th. Meet at Blickling Hall, near Aylsham, at 10.30am (about 40 minutes drive from Norwich). Jacobean Blickling is famed for its long gallery, fine Mortlake tapestries and paintings, its rare books in the Long Gallery and its gardens. Added attractions are a barn full of second-hand books - and the headless ghost of Anne Boleyn. Both gardens and restaurant have good disabled access, and there is a lift to the first floor of the house.

Admission for non-National Trust members is around £9.

27 May 1931. We set out before lunch to explore north Norfolk. First Worsted church... Then we drove on, looking for a luncheon place, and suddenly found ourselves staring at Anne Boleyn's Blickling. It is brick and stone, with hipped gables, and ogival central tower, a very rich and curly façade & two forecourt wings of gable... continued down the road by long, massive, plane-surfaced yew hedges. It is exquisitely beautiful...

We plan to stay for Sunday lunch here. (Again, please let Richard know.)



SOCIETY ACQUISITIONS

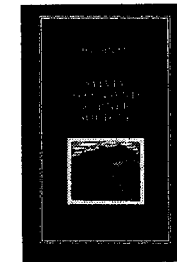
Several members have been kind enough to donate items of interest regarding STW and VA which they have come across in their studies or researches. We have placed these items, along with others which the Society has purchased such as the Stonor Letters and the early VA poetry, in the STW Archive at Dorset County Museum, Dorchester. These were originally placed there under permanent loan to the Museum.

The Museum's policy is now that it will no longer accept items on a permanent loan basis as this presents too many administrative problems. We have been asked if we will 'gift' the items, making them entirely the property of the Museum but with certain conditions about access which we can stipulate.

If anyone who has donated an item has any concerns about this we should be pleased to hear from them. If any donor would like to remove items they have given they are quite free to do so at the moment before we agree to the Museum's request.

Eileen Johnson

BACK COPIES OF SOCIETY JOURNALS



e Society has a large number of back copies of our Journals, the first being published in 2000, and the problem of environmentally-suitable storage for these is beginning to arise. So we have decided to offer them for sale at the truly bargain price of £2.50 each, instead of the current price of £5.00. This is a great opportunity, particularly for any member who has recently joined the Society or for anyone who would like a new copy of old favourites.

A complete list of contents for all our Journals is available on the Publications page of the Society website at www.townsendwarner.com or, if you prefer, contact Judith Bond who will send you a hard-copy list. Copies of all the Journals from 2000 right through to 2008 are available.

If you would like to purchase a copy or copies, please send a cheque for the appropriate amount (£2.50 each) made out to 'The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society' to Judith Bond, 26 Portwey Close, Weymouth, DT4 8RF, indicating which Journal(s) you would like.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF STW

A very few sets of the photographs of STW by John Miles are still available, at £2.50 per set, including p & p. To purchase, please send a cheque for the appropriate amount made out to 'The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society' to Judith Bond, 26 Portwey Close, Weymouth, DT4 8RF.

'On Choosing a Country Residence'

Our indefatigable member, Jay Barksdale, has found several more articles by Sylvia in New York Public Libraries. The first piece included in this issue is on a subject which may have been in Sylvia's mind at the time, as she was staying in various country residences herself, whilst writing her third novel, *The True Heart*:

I suppose that a considerable number of my readers are Londoners; and having supposed that, it is reasonable to suppose that they have followed the Londoner's custom of spending some part of the Whitsun holiday in the country; and these suppositions being granted me, I think I may go on to a third: that they have been playing the same pleasant game that I have been playing, the game of fitting themselves with a country house.

Children play the game of House too; but theirs is an earlier and more ancestral version of it, for which little more is necessary than a table with a drooping table-cloth, a corner behind the window and curtains, or a weeping ash. The elements of Taste and Personality scarcely enter into this pure and primitive state of the House game. Shelter, privacy and a certain degree of darkness are the desiderata. A few stones for bread may be thrown in, and a doll's tea-pot gives a fine sense of stability, but they are not essential, for however much children may think that they are imitating their parents, the motto of their play is *Antiquam exquirite matrem*, and the parents they set themselves to reproduce are exceedingly grand ones – so grand that they might eat with their fingers without rebuke; so grand that though their pies were not made of mud, their pie-dishes were.

Grown-ups add to these primitive instincts – Dens and Domesticity – many more complicated considerations; but I do not think that they play the game with any less ardour. And like children too, their longings are of an immortal kind, and having nothing whatever to do with a personal Housing Problem. Baucis may be perfectly contented with her cot beside a rill, but that is no reason why she should not spend the afternoon rambling round a shooting-box in the Midlands, or poking her nose and her imagination through the barred slot-windows of an extensive cellarage; and I have seen Horatia, whose villa Tivoli is the envy of all hearers, stand for ten minutes in the rain and the raining dead leaves, with her mouth watering over a damp Victorian-Gothic Vicarage that had happened to strike her fancy.

So great a passion goes to the playing of this game of Houses, and so surprising and inexplicable are the elections of those who play it, that I have sometime wondered if we grown-ups have not added a moral and metaphysical tincture to the original brewage, which, working and fermenting, results in the draughts of strange rapture tasted by its players. Perhaps the soul of man is always in revolt against that ordinance which declares that though it may change its sky itself it may not change. Perhaps we all believe that where the change of sky is unavailing a change of ceiling will do the trick. Or it may be that a simpler explanation can be found in the old saying that every personality is but a bundle of personalities, so divers, so ill-assorted, so numerous that, whatever house we may live in, that house is bound to be overcrowded. In either of these hypothetical cases the true devotees of the House game submit themselves humbly enough to the rigour of the game and the laws of their being; for they are not mentally ambitious,

they have none of the spiritual pride which says: "I shall never be removed," they do not flatter themselves that their choice is a permanent one, never to be sapped or superseded. I myself have chosen as many as five ideal homes in one day's walk, and if the day be spent in a car or a train my chosen may be numbered in two figures.

Yet for one's own pleasure solely, it is best not be too profuse. A seemly façade, an agreeable grotto, a sagging thatch that caresses a squinting window, a garden trim or neglected according to taste... one may fall in love with these if one pleases; but to love for these alone is to love like a libertine, and the true player of the House game will always play it with a view to honourable matrimony, examining into the state of the roof, taking note of the soil and the prevailing winds, and being properly exigent about the aspect of the larder window and the nursery. At least, if he is a her, he will. I do not know what men look for in their House game; but if they have any sense they will look to the larder and the nursery as the chief points.

One further consideration must be noted, and that a serious one. In choosing one habitation one must look beyond it to another, remembering that day when one will pass out from one's gate to a new and final resting-place... the grave. And whoever plays the House game with a single heart and honest observance will go and take a stroll round the churchyard. There too he will note the soil, and the moss upon the stones will tell him from which quarter he may expect the wind to bring the rain. He will discover how the sun falls slanting through the sycamore, and at what hour the sword of Orion pierces the great grave heart of the yew tree; and if he is wise he will make what acquaintance he can with the names and qualities of those who will one day be his neighbours, that when he comes among them he may not come as a stranger and unadvised.

Sylvia Townsend Warner

Miscellany

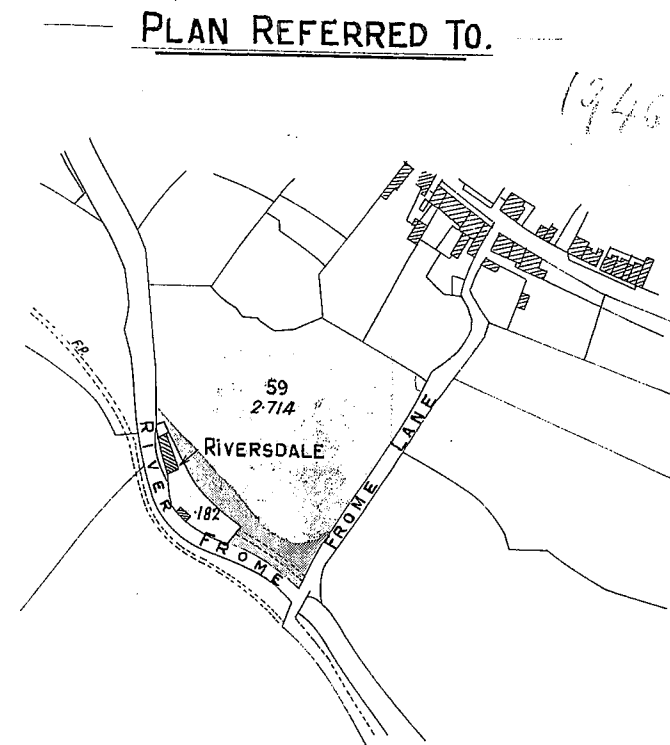
Time and Tide June 17, 1927

RIVERSDALE, FROME VAUCHURCH

Sylvia Townsend Warner's own country residences had a tendency to come to a sticky end. Miss Green's cottage in Chaldon was hit by a bomb in 1944,

24 West Chaldon (damp and rat-ridden) was later pulled down by the West Chaldon farmer – and, most dramatically of all, Great Eye Folly at Salthouse in Norfolk was destroyed in the flooding of 1953.

The house at Frome Vauchurch, to which Sylvia and Valentine moved in 1937 (on what they believed was a temporary basis) is still standing. The plan below shows how it looked in 1946, which was probably the year when they finally bought the house.



This inscription from Llewelyn Powys to Sylvia and Valentine was found by Claire Harman in her copy of Llewelyn's *Dorset Essays*, dated November 1935.

*Subtle Pair
Dark and Fair
Rest Still
Under the Hill*

*Every day
Is for play
Every night
For delight.
It is human
For a woman
To scold
Young and old.
Which is moral
Breeds sorrow
Like a worm
In a churn!
Be free
As the Sea
Mock the Moon
Late and soon
Till Life is done
Worship the Sun*

BOOK NEWS

The New York Review of Books have just reissued Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show*, in paperback, with an introduction by Claire Harman. This is distributed in the UK by Frances Lincoln books.

Claire will also be appearing in Bridport for the Literary Festival on November 19th.

What the Soldier Said

"In the name of the soldiers of the Sixth Army Corps, I am come to say a few words to you. We are defending the legitimate cause of the Republic, and the cause of justice. We will defend them with courage and with all the strength that is in us. Now we, the Sixth Army corps, say this to you. We fight in defence of justice and culture. We will fetch peace and culture at the point of the bayonet for the sake of our happiness and that of our children. That's all. Greeting, comrades."

It was July, 1937. The International Association of Writers in Defence of Culture was holding its second congress. War had not, as we feared it might, deflected our intention of holding that Congress in Spain. The Spanish Government had confirmed the original invitation of the Spanish members of the Association. War had not affected, either, the arrangements of that congress. We held our sessions in Madrid; it was in Madrid that the delegate soldier from the Sixth Army Corps made us his speech. His was not the only military voice to be raised at our congress. Many of the writers in defence of culture who took part in our sessions come to us on special leave, fighters in the defence of culture as well as writers: Ludwig Renn, Jef Last, Ralph Bates, were among these. And through all the various languages of the delegates from twenty-six countries sounded the international language of cannon; for we sat discussing questions of culture and humanism within earshot of the battle.

"What the soldier said is not evidence." This dictum is by now almost an axiom of British thinking. Even in the improbable event of a private soldier of the British Army addressing a congress of writers, it seems unlikely that his speech would be received as evidence. His interest in culture must be felt as one of two things: a private idiosyncrasy of extraordinary force, or an indication that the War Office had issued orders that at such and such a

moment interest in culture should be manifested.

The hypothetical soldier in the British Army should, ideally, be better equipped for interest in culture than the Spanish soldier who addressed us. He would have learned, at any rate, how to read and write, whereas it is quite possible that our Spanish soldier had learned neither of these arts, or was but just now learning them, in the schools staffed by the Cultural Militia of Spain – an organization of the lettered classes whose duty it is to teach the fighting men, in the barracks, and in the actual trenches.

But we could feel no doubt but that what the Spanish soldier said was evidence. His speech, as you see, expressed no subtlety of thoughts, no yearning for culture; it expressed a more solid appreciation than yearning, an intention to have and to hold. And what the soldier said to us was borne out by a hundred speeches we heard in Spain.

One of the long discontents of Spain has been its illiteracy. The Spaniard has a natural appreciation of culture; this shows itself in a hundred manifestations, in the decoration of a wayside inn, in the turning of a phrase, the lingual consciousness of those who use dialect (a cook in Barcelona said to me, "This is our Catalan word. In Castile you must say *manzana*"), in the common people's appreciation, passionate and passionately critical, of points of style in such things as the singer's coloratura or the gestures of the bull-ring. Even such affairs as the arrangements of wares on market stall are stylized: a novel juxtaposition of fruits will call out interested comment and discussion.

But these people who have preserved a traditional culture and preserved it alive and kicking, have been in great number denied any education. In the streets one hears the clacking of typewriters, and the clacking comes from the public letter-writers' booths, where men and women whose faces bear the unmistakable imprint of intellect and thought wait in a queue to dictate the letters they are not able to write for themselves.

The Government of 1936 came into office pledged to carry out a programme of education. In spite of the war, this programme is being steadily carried out. New schools have been built and are a-building, every month the Cultural Militia render their figures for the numbers of soldiers who have passed from being analphabetic to being literates (the figure for May, 1937, was over 4,000). Other war-time Governments might have hesitated to offer

hospitality to eighty literary delegates, people who would consume food and petrol and accommodation and care. Going from Barcelona to Valencia, from Valencia to Madrid, we had no doubt that his hospitality of the Government of Spain was the hospitality of the people of Spain also. Hotel-workers, shop-keepers, people in villages, harvesters in the field, welcomed us, not as curiosities, not even as possible propagandists, but as representatives of something they valued and understood. To us, the British delegates, this unfeigned and natural welcome was a particularly interesting experience. We learned to hear ourselves spoken of as *los intelectuales* without dreading words usually so dubious in good intent, without feeling the usual embarrassment and defiant shrinking. We were released from the old fear that by giving one's support as a representative of culture to a cause one had at heart one might be doing that cause more harm than good.

The experience was the more impressive in contrast to a recent experience in our own country.

For we had applied for permits to travel to Spain as delegates to the second congress of our Association, and had been refused them. With patience and firm serenity an official of the Foreign Office had assured us that there was no political bias underlying this refusal; it was merely that as representatives of culture we were not included in the Foreign Office's *Weltanschauung*, cultural reasons are not among those reasons recognized as valid reasons for wishing to travel to Spain. If you go (so he explained) as an accredited journalist, yes. If you go on a humanitarian errand, yes. If you go as a man of business, YES! But if you go for purposes of culture, no.

Sylvia Townsend Warner

(From *Time and Tide*, August 14, 1937, XVIII/33 p. 1091)

Also published in *New Frontier*, date unknown

The above article, sent by Jay Barksdale, relates to the refusal of the British authorities to validate the passports of STW and VA (and other writers like Spender and Rickwood) who had been invited to attend the 2nd International Congress of Writers in Defence of Culture, in Spain in 1937. Despite this obstacle, the group succeeded in reaching the Conference – somewhat late – in Valencia, where Sylvia promptly addressed the meeting.

Read all about it!

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