

*The Espalier, Time Imporuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boswood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's Meggon, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After The Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flim Anchor, The Maze, Some Would Fear From Ours and 'Suey Corydon, Thon Swain', Elinor Berkeley, A Moral Ending, The Salvation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cuddle Book, A Garland of Sonnet, The Museum of Cheats, Winter in The Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and The Guilty, Kingdoms of Effin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, Selected Stories, Somerset, Jane Austen, T.M. White, A Biography, Letters, The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner, The Espalier, Time Imporuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boswood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's Meggon, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After The Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flim Anchor, The Maze, Some Would Fear From Ours and 'Suey Corydon, Thon Swain', Elinor Berkeley, A Moral Ending, The Salvation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cuddle Book, A Garland of Sonnet, The Museum of Cheats, Winter in The Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and The Guilty, Kingdoms of Effin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, Selected Stories, Somerset, Jane Austen, T.M. White, A Biography, Letters, The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner, The Espalier, Time Imporuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boswood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's Meggon, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After The Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flim Anchor, The Maze, Some Would Fear From Ours and 'Suey Corydon, Thon Swain', Elinor Berkeley, A Moral Ending, The Salvation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cuddle Book, A Garland of Sonnet, The Museum of Cheats, Winter in The Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and The Guilty, Kingdoms of Effin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, Selected Stories, Somerset, Jane Austen, T.M. White, A Biography, Letters, The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner, The Espalier, Time Imporuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boswood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's*

## *The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Newsletter Number Thirty*

*Meggon, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After The Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flim Anchor, The Maze, Some Would Fear From Ours and 'Suey Corydon, Thon Swain', Elinor Berkeley, A Moral Ending, The Salvation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cuddle Book, A Garland of Sonnet, The Museum of Cheats, Winter in The Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and The Guilty, Kingdoms of Effin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, Selected Stories, Somerset, Jane Austen, T.M. White, A Biography, Letters, The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner, The Espalier, Time Imporuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boswood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's*

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER THIRTY

This is the twenty-eighth issue of the Newsletter which I have edited. I think it's time for another voice to be heard! I'd like to thank all the people who have contributed articles or provided information over the last fourteen years, and I hope my successor, Jay Barksdale, finds the role as rewarding and interesting as I have done.

Thanks for contributions to this issue go to Jay and to Judith Bond, and also to Morine Krissdóttir for her help.

*Judith Stinton*

Sheila Milton

Sadly, Sheila Milton, one of the founder members of the STW Society, died in October last year.

I first met Sheila in the autumn of 1989, at a book fair in the Corn Exchange in Dorchester. At the time, she and her husband John were much occupied in sorting Dorset County Museum's Elizabeth Muntz archive, which had recently arrived from Ireland. Sheila was also planning to write a biography of Muntz, sculptor and long-term resident of Chaldon Herring.

We became great friends, and would sit for hours in the Miltons' Radipole house talking about books, while John and my young daughter built bonfires in the garden, or watched scary videos indoors.

After John died, Sheila moved to London, to share a house with her elder daughter Jane. She made the most of London, riding around on buses and becoming a Friend of the Royal Academy, but she always missed Weymouth and the sea.

Almost to the end of her long life Sheila continued to read – her greatest love was poetry – and to follow with interest the happenings in the STW Society.

*Judith Stinton*

## The Tree Pruner

UP THE TREE TRUNK we watched him clamber – animal from man emerging as snake from sheath – smoothly ascending the embraced bole, and walking overhead, sure-footed in that swaying chamber of boughs, and half to himself and half to us talking, calling to us who stood uneasily beneath:

*Nor fear of falling. You can trust an apple-tree.*

So unexpectedly into air translated,  
one would have looked to the tree's foot to behold  
his body along with his coat lying there discarded,  
had not the way words, falling as with earth weighted,  
betokened him overhead, still stayed and guarded  
by knowledge of earth, by cunning, like sap from mould  
long-sucked, admonished to trust not to every tree.

*Not walnut, said he, nor plum.* The tree assented,  
swaying with long sighs, with tremblings stirred  
as the pruning-saw gripped on the bough and snarled louder.  
As though a soul and a sorrow shook out, the air was scented  
with apple-harvest, and downward drifted a powder  
of sap-alive sawdust, whitening the winter sward,  
while he haphazard went walking through the tree.

*Sylvia Townsend Warner*

From *The London Mercury*, June 1938

### Sylvia Townsend Warner Weekend, Dorchester, June 12th – 14<sup>th</sup> 2015 Swans and Mazes

#### Friday June 12:

Meet up for a meal at 7.30 pm at No 6,  
6 North Square, Dorchester.

Please let Richard Searle know if you are coming (01305 269202)

#### Saturday June 13:

AGM in the library of Dorset County Museum at 10.30 am.

Followed by a talk by Lynn Muttti on Percy Buck who will be reading his article 'The School Teacher' from the Royal College of Music's magazine of 1916.

Lunch 12.30-1.45 pm. (Please book with Richard Searle) at Café Jagos, 8 High West Street, Dorchester.

2 pm Drive to Abbotsbury Swannery for a visit to the swans and the maze. There is wheelchair access to both sites.

Abbotsbury Swannery dates back to monastic times, when the swans were kept for their meat. (Only the cygnets were edible; the flesh of the adults tastes of mud.) They live on the Fleet, the lagoon on the shore side of Chesil Beach – that great bank of pebbles that reaches from Portland to West Bay – and are free to come and go as they wish. In June, the Swannery is awash with cygnets, so it is a good time to visit. The swans are fed at 4 pm, and this is quite a sight.

The accompanying Maze, a recent addition to Abbotsbury's attractions, is made from willow boughs, and is (of course) in the shape of a swan.

7 pm Meal (Please book with Richard) at La Gondola, 30 Trinity Street, Dorchester.

#### Sunday June 14

11 am Meet at Athelhampton House for an unguided tour of house and gardens.

The earliest parts of this splendid house are Tudor, and the Great Hall is an exceptional example of early Tudor architecture with heraldic glass, linenfold panelling and carved roof beams. The house also contains a remarkable collection of English furniture from Jacobean to late Victorian.

The formal garden, built in 1891, has a topiary court, and is a labyrinth of green rooms linked by pools and fountains.

12.45 pm Lunch in the Martyrs Inn, Tolpuddle. (Please book with Richard)

Tolpuddle is where, in 1834, six agricultural labourers formed a Friendly Society, and were prosecuted for their actions. Despite a great public outcry, they were all transported. Thus Dorset became the rather unlikely cradle of the Trade Union movement. (It is strange – especially since there were extensive centennial celebrations in 1934 – that Sylvia never mentions the Martyrs.)

At the other end of the village is the Martyrs Museum, which is open until 5pm on Sundays. Admission is free.

### **Pre-booking**

Members can save money by pre-booking at Abbotsbury Swannery and Athelhampton House. Admission to Abbotsbury Swannery and Maze costs £9.50 when booked online two days or more in advance (valid only for the day booked). Admission to Athelhampton costs £11.25 for an adult ticket, £9.45 for a senior ticket and £6.45 for a disabled ticket when booked online. (These are open dated tickets valid until December 2015.)

### **‘Swans on an Autumn River’ (or what not to do when visiting the Swannery)**

He hoisted himself from his bed, walked across to the window and looked out. Over the undulating reflection of the yellow house floated two swans. Presently, from under the dark arch of the bridge came another swan, and, presently, another. While he was watching and admiring, three more swans appeared, moving into mid-stream from the near bank where the quay’s parapet had concealed them. Seven swans...That was something, and a lovely sight. A bus came along the quay, and paused, blocking out the river. When it had moved on, he counted the swans as though they were his hoard, his treasure. There were now eleven swans. As he counted them again, to be sure, another sailed out from under the bridge.

They were making their way downstream, but dallied, oaring their way about to inspect floating bits of rubbish, diving their long necks below the surface with a burrowing motion, scavenging with unruffled classical dignity. He hurried into his clothes. Unwashed, unshaved, his shoes untied, he stumbled downstairs. In the hall an idea occurred to him. He turned into the dining room, where a thin young man was already breakfasting, served by the big waitress. ‘Bread!’ he shouted. ‘I want some bread.’ As she came forward, his eye fell on a row of plaited breadbaskets, arranged on the sideboard. He shovelled the sliced bread from half a dozen of these

into one basket, and hurried on out, saying over his shoulder, ‘It’s all right. I’ll pay for it.’

The *garda* directing the traffic by the bridge shouted a warning to him as he scrambled across the road under the nose of a lorry. A group of women waiting for a bus stepped quickly out of his path. It seemed an age before he could look over the parapet. Some of the swans had moved downstream, but others had arrived. Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen...there were eighteen swans. What a total! What a boast! ‘In Dublin I’ve seen eighteen swans within a stone’s throw.’ Drawing a breath that cost him agony, he whistled. They paid no attention. ‘Swans!’ he hallooed. ‘Swans.’ One nearby seemed to be looking at him from its sideways face. He threw a slice of bread at it. It turned. Others turned. They came flocking towards him. Even in the wildness of his excitement and sense of personal glory he admired how skilfully they shaped their course without check or collision, and how, as he scattered the bread among them, they went after it and contested for it with an air of proud negligence, feeding, he said to himself, like lords. He was about to throw in the last slice of bread when it was twitched from his hand, and in an instant the air between him and the river was shaken and noisy with gulls. Flapping, disputing, wheeling round and round, the ugly, greedy, bullying creatures were attacking his swans and stealing their bread. ‘Get out!’ he shouted. ‘Get out, you brutes! Damn you, damn you, damn you.’ Shaking with rage, he hurled the breadbasket into the midst of them. They thinned for a moment, and he saw that the swans had drawn away towards the opposite bank, and were heading downstream.

His rage came up in his throat and choked him. He lost all thought of where he was and who he was, and the hand clenching and unclenching on the rim of the parapet might have been the hand of a stranger. A bit of bread lay beside it. A gull, flying belatedly after the others, saw the bit and swooped down. He struck at the gull with all his force, missed it, lost his balance, struggled to regain it, and fell backwards, his head striking the pavement...

*Sylvia Townsend Warner*

From *A Stranger With a Bag*, 1966

### **John Craske, Norfolk fisherman- painter**

Julia Blackburn has let us know that her book 'Threads - The Delicate Life of John Craske' is to be published on 2 April, price £25.00 (£20.00 on Amazon). There is also to be an exhibition of Craske's paintings at the NUA Gallery in Norwich from 12 May to 6 June, and then at the Peter Pears Gallery in Aldeburgh. Julia Blackburn will be giving a talk at the Aldeburgh Festival about John Craske on 15 June at 3 pm, and there will be a further talk at the NUA Gallery.

For further information see the website [www.nua.ac.uk](http://www.nua.ac.uk)

The following extract is from Julia Blackburn's article in the *Guardian*, 14 March 2015, about Valentine Ackland's discovery of John Craske's seascapes.

Craske began to paint on anything he could find: cardboard and brown wrapping paper, mantelpieces and doors, jugs and teacups. When he and Laura [his wife] had to return to East Dereham, he went on painting, and when they had another spell by the sea in the village of Hemsby, further down the coast, he still went on painting.

While they were in Hemsby, Craske made toy boats to sell to passersby, and that was how the poet Valentine Ackland – she always reminds me of David Cameron in every photograph I see of her – first came across him and persuaded him to sell her one of his works, even though Laura found it absurd to accept payment for such a thing.

Ackland showed the painting to her friend and very tricky lover, Dorothy Warren, who had a new gallery in Maddox Street in London, where she exhibited Henry Moore and Paul Nash as well as DH Lawrence's rather prim nudes. She had been keen to add Craske to her list of artists.

Ackland went to find him. By now he had left Hemsby, but she tracked him down to Dereham. He was in bed and appeared to be in a coma and close to death. Laura thought the tall lady in trousers had come to ask for her money back, but when she was told that more of the same was wanted, she brought out all the paintings her husband had made and in return for £20 in £5 notes, Ackland took a good few away with her.

She and Warren returned to Dereham a few months later and found Craske much improved. He had produced his first embroideries and was more business-like than his wife, selling pieces according to the time he had spent on them...

The exhibition opened at the Warren Gallery in August 1929 and it was deemed a success: "the ship pictures by Mr John Craske are definitely – if crudely – works of art," said the Times. The Daily Mail declared: "the work, though childishly naive, has extraordinary charm and decorative effectiveness", adding, "The hero of the hour himself, a humble and God-fearing man, was not present as he is seriously ill."

A second show did not go so well, mostly because Ackland had fallen out with Warren, having started a love affair with the writer Sylvia Townsend Warner. In a curious way, Craske became part of their romance. When they were first together, Townsend Warner was taken to meet him and was impressed by his speechlessness, his simple poverty and by what she saw as the integrity of his vision. The two women became his patrons, and bought his work whenever they could, persuading their friends to do the same. The Norfolk preservationist Billa Harrod acquired a number of pieces and John Betjeman had a long embroidery which seems to have been lost. For Townsend Warner and Ackland, and for Ackland's wealthy American lover Elizabeth Wade White, who appeared on the scene a few years later, Craske encapsulated not only the beauty of the North Norfolk coast and the North Sea, but also the times when they were most happy.

They had numerous examples of his work on the walls of their houses, the embroideries yellowed by cigarette smoke and bleached by the sun. And it is mostly thanks to them that Craske's work has survived, especially when in the early 1970s, Townsend Warner presented her collection, along with whatever biographical material could be found, to Peter Pears and the Snape Maltings, believing that "Craske is an artist whose work should be on view in east Anglia...enhanced in the sharpened light of a seaboard sky."

***Julia Blackburn***

### **Who is Sylvia?**

I have lived in Maiden Newton for twenty-five years, and during this time I have made intermittent attempts to collect villagers' memories of Sylvia Townsend

Warner. You'd think it would be easy: she lived in Frome Vauchurch for forty years.

Country people are suspicious of questions. They don't like incomers. They can behave as if you've arrived hot-foot from the (late, lamented) *News of the World*. They state the obvious – 'she lived down Frome' – or keep repeating the same meagre scraps of information.

It usually goes like this: Miss Mearns had kept the post office, and told me that Sylvia often went in to post letters. Rhona Crocker, owner of Frome Vauchurch Farm, said that they used to have many 'interesting conversations'. Rather more interestingly, I was told that Sylvia used to talk to Florence House, who ran the bakery for almost all of her long life. Mrs House was, as Sylvia might put it 'village gentry' and we all respected her. Apparently, at Christmas, Sylvia would pay off the debts which some of the poorer villagers had chalked up on bread and pies and lardy cake.

As for Valentine, no one seemed to remember her at all. Nor did they remember her shop, probably because buying antiques was not something most of them would have done – or could afford to do. Once, completely out of the blue, my Dorchester optician told me that, when he was a boy in neighbouring Frampton, Valentine had given him a fob watch. (He also recalled her carrying a shot gun.)

There was one person I was particularly keen to interview, and that was Hilda Cleall, Sylvia's cleaner and friend. Though married to a Dorset man (who used to keep his car in the old fire engine house) Mrs Cleall was a Cockney, and so might be expected to be more forthcoming. She was not. All I gleaned from her friendly but unrewarding conversations – which mainly took place on the market bus – was how fond she was of 'cousin Janet' [Machen].

Alas, apart from my optician, all of these people are now dead. Quite often though, I meet Mrs Cleall's daughter Eve, while she is walking her dog along the old Bridport railway track. So last year, standing by the disused bridge, now orange with lichen, I asked her about her memories.

Eve confirmed that her mother did not like breaking confidences, which was why she had been so reticent. She herself had scarcely spoken to Sylvia, who seldom paid her any attention and disliked children. (Did she, I wonder?) Once, though, when Eve had been playing with an Ouija board, Sylvia warned her against it, warning her not to tamper with the supernatural as it might prove dangerous.

When Sylvia was away, Eve used to look after the tortoise. Another of her tasks was to cook rabbit for the cats. She recalled one occasion when she delivered the cat meat while Joy Finzi was visiting, and Joy thought that Eve was bringing their supper.

Eve was also sent to Dorchester to Parsons' old-fashioned grocery store in South Street close to the Town Pump. She went mostly to buy ground coffee, which was then unavailable in Maiden Newton. When she took the shopping over to Frome Vauchurch she was 'expected to admire the cats'. (Eve says that Sylvia left money in her will to the Cats' Protection League.)

What seems to have struck Eve most was the dividing up of Sylvia's possessions after her death (two other people who witnessed this episode have given me similar accounts). She said Mrs Cleall could have chosen whatever she liked to take, but she – proud woman that she was – chose an old, cracked Rockingham teapot. Eve herself inherited the china figure of a mother cat, reading to her kittens.

Eve Cleall left me with one, last intriguing question – whatever happened to Valentine's death mask?

*Judith Stinton*

### **An Icy Enchantress Hilary Spurling celebrates the country life of a lesbian Communist**

*Sylvia Townsend Warner: a Biography*  
By Claire Harman, Chatto & Windus

*For Sylvia: an Honest Account*  
By Valentine Ackland, Chatto & Windus

Sylvia Townsend Warner's first novel turned its unknown young author into a sensation in London in 1926. *Lolly Willowes* is the story of a smooth young witch. Miss Townsend Warner turned out to be stern, svelte and self-possessed, more than a match even for Virginia Woolf who asked her, at a chic little luncheon given by Madge Garland of Vogue, how she came to know so much about witches. "Because I am one," said Sylvia blandly.

She was tall, bony, bespectacled, black-haired. David Garnett, who said she spoke in sentences like scissors, found her a tough customer in her twenties, “dark, dripping with tassels – like a black and slender Barb caparisoned for war – with jingling earrings, swinging foxtails, black silk acorn hanging from umbrella, black tasselled gloves, dog chains, key rings...”

All her life Sylvia was accustomed to terrorise and fascinate. She was nearly 50 when she bewitched William Maxwell, her young American editor at the New Yorker: “her conversation was so enchanting it made my head swim. I did not want to let her out of my sight.” Sometimes she sewed little dolls – “When I am making them they mean Everything” – and gave them to her close friends as presents. What she did for her enemies one dreads to think.

She lived in a series of perishingly cold houses in the country, often without sanitation or running water let alone electricity. “The east wind sobs and whimpers like a Brontë in the kitchen,” she wrote in a rented tower on the coast of north Norfolk. Another winter, in Dorset, the cats’ litter trays froze solid even indoors, and artichokes had to be hacked from the ice-bound garden with a pickaxe.

As a solitary small child, her earliest familiar had been a cat called Mr Dive, who received shrimps packed in matchboxes through the post from his mistress on seaside holidays. She was seldom without one or more cats – Thomas, Meep, Caspar, Boots, Niou, Kaoru, Quiddity, Pericles, Titus and Moth – who stalked about critically, lamenting to one another in the last months of her life that their mistress was a shadow of her former self.

At a time when it was neither profitable nor popular, at any rate in the respectable English countryside, she was both a lesbian and a Communist. One of the high points of this immensely entertaining book is its account of her progress in 1937 through Republican Spain, where she looked and behaved, according to Stephen Spender (whose dislike she cordially returned), exactly like a vicar’s wife distributing favours at a nation-wide garden party.

“When I die, I hope to think I have annoyed a great people,” she said cheerfully, nettled by T. F. Powys’s sister-in-law, who had wondered aloud whether a lifetime of protest would do any good. One of only two scores on which Sylvia became sentimental was Joseph Stalin, whose death made her grieve and tremble and against whom, throughout the revelations of the 1950s, she would not hear a word spoken. The other was her lover, Valentine Ackland.

Theirs was a tempestuous romance, well documented by love letters, diaries and Ackland’s brief, sombre, touching and totally humourless **For Sylvia**. Summoned by telephone to Valentine’s studio one night, shortly after the pair had plighted their troth in 1930, Sylvia arrived to find the place wrecked, floorboards scarred, rugs ripped up and her lover with two black eyes. She had been surprised by Dorothy Warren – owner of the Maddox Street art gallery, god-daughter to Henry James, and a rival spurned in favour of Sylvia – who had threatened to smash Sylvia’s face with a kettle, tried to strangle her with a tie (the murder weapon is a nice period touch) beaten her up with her fists, and very nearly thrown her limp body out of the window.

Valentine had been, by her own account, an alcoholic from the age of 19. Her symptoms – stupors, fainting fits, malevolent depression and palpitations – frightened Sylvia dreadfully when they first met but thereafter, although Valentine’s consumption rose to a bottle of spirits per day, her companion resolutely noticed nothing. “How Valentine managed to hide the evidence of an addiction from Sylvia over a period of seventeen years is puzzling,” as her biographer remarks.

Clearly Sylvia had no intention whatsoever of letting herself notice anything. She had long practice at this kind of protective blindness. She had been the only child of a scholarly father, a senior master at Harrow who adored his daughter, and a pretty, smart, flirtatious mother who could never forgive Sylvia her sex, her looks or her brain. At 19 Sylvia retaliated by starting an affair with the head of music at Harrow, Dr (later Sir Percy) Buck, a married man old enough to be her father. Three years later, her father’s sudden death left her, as she said, an emotional cripple.

She had schooled herself early in the art of survival, which for her meant cultivating exquisite manners as a defence of control over feeling. It is this icy detachment, coupled with the brilliant, glancing vitality of her sardonic wit, that explains the success of *Lolly Willowes*, and the comparative insipidity of other early novels in which, as Garnett said, she unmistakably patronised the innocent, earthy simpletons she favoured as characters.

Their creator looked down on them, as admittedly she did on ordinary people. The hardest part of the war for her was not the physical hardship, privation or danger but keeping her end up against Mrs Tompkins and Bumkins of the Dorchester WVS. Even in the desperate days after Dunkirk she remained sufficiently a scholar

– magnificently her father’s daughter – to keep her syntactical scorn intact: “Hearing Churchill on the radio in a very bad paragraph announce that we would fight on, etc., I found in myself a sense not only of exasperation at the numbers more who must be killed and maimed – but also the frustrated impatience of an experimental scientist...”

She was always at her best in this spirit. Claire Harman’s biography reveals her as being at times startlingly cold-blooded. But one might argue that cold blood was in the end the making of her as a writer: it is after all the glory of those late, great New Yorker elfin stories which are her most startling, humane and original achievement. On a visit to T.H.White’s house, in preparation for writing his biography, Sylvia said she could feel “His angry, suspicious, furtive stare directed at my back”: if she herself should come back to haunt Claire Harman, it will surely be in the spirit of generosity and composure – “levity, fortitude and cunning” which this book admirably celebrates.

*Hilary Spurling*

*Weekend Telegraph, 8/7/1989*

### Concert of Soviet Music

**A review by Sylvia Townsend Warner**

This concert, at the Aeolian Hall on May 1<sup>st</sup>, represented nine composers (average age, thirty) and included examples of chamber-music, piano-music, songs and an excerpt from an opera.

The outstanding item of the programme was Starokadomsky’s Quartet, opus 11, for clarinet, violin, viola and violoncello. On musical grounds alone the quartet is remarkable for its lucid and laconic style, its unostentatious skill, and a consistent sincerity of statement which stamps it as a work in which the composer has said neither less nor more than he intended to say. As an example of a mind expressing itself naturally and logically in terms of music the quartet would be notable enough. Such minds are rare in any epoch. But in Starokadomsky (who was born

in 1901, in 1921 was in charge of the musical society of a Red Army regiment and became a student in the Moscow State Conservatory in 1922) the mind expressing itself naturally in music is a new type of mind, and of his quartet it can be definitely said that it represents a culture freed from capitalism.

Though none of the other items in that programme displayed this complete enfranchisement of mind, the work of the other composers showed in greater or lesser degree the signs of social intention, from the straightforwardness of presentation which is the Shrinisky Quintet and the Krein songs made clear a sentimental outlook by being honest about it, to the less laudable readiness and rowdiness of Mepurnov’s Caucasian dance and Polovinkin’s Magnets. The piano is a bourgeois instrument. Whether it be sought to proletarianise it by the strumming-in-excelsis methods of Mepurnov and Polovinkin or to purify it by following those invaluable counsels of high-class simplicity, Stravinsky’s Cinq Doigts, as Kabalevsky does in his Sonatina, it stays in the parlour; though Shostakovitch, who is clearly a composer of originality and resource, goes nearer the mark in those Preludes in which he takes over traditional piano idioms and develops them critically and semi-satirically.

The concert ended with settings of folk-songs by Ippolitov-Ivanov and Mossolov. How valuable to Soviet music the folk-song inheritance could be was shown by the song “Remember” – a tune which even Purcell, that master of single-line construction, might have given his ears to sign; how dangerous, the three settings by Mossolov proved. Not even NEP could justify these western cannings of eastern melismata.

The performers were Oda Slobodskaya, Harriet Cohen, Gerald Moore, Pauline Juler, the Brosa String Quartet and Ernest Lush. The concert was voluminously and uncritically attended. An audience anxious to applaud anything from the USSR gave itself away by applauding too vigorously what was most reminiscent of the dear old music of capitalist Russia.

*Sylvia Townsend Warner*

*Left Review, June 1935, vol. 1, no.9, p.384*



## Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

### Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 24 May, 2014

**Present:** Chairman, Eileen Johnson; Secretary/Treasurer, Judith Bond and eight other Society members.

**Apologies** for absence were received from: Lesley Clargo, Gill Davies, Denise DiMarzio, Ren Draya, Judith Fielding, Chris Gostick, Ann Torday Gulden, Rebecca Hahn, Winifred Johnson, Jan Montefiore, Tess Ormrod, Annie Rhodes, Helen Sutherland, Peter Turner and Peter Tolhurst.

**Minutes** of the Annual General Meeting 2013 were approved as a correct record.

**Matters Arising:** all were discussed subsequently under Agenda items.

#### **Elections:**

- (i) Judith Stinton, *Newsletter* editor, reported that Jay Barksdale had volunteered to take over as editor once her resignation takes effect in May 2015. Whilst in many ways this would be an ideal solution, Jay's being based remotely in New York could potentially present problems best solved locally in Dorset. In addition to her editorial duties, Judith liaises with the printer and dispatches the *Newsletter*.
- (ii) She also coordinates the Society's weekends. These activities need not necessarily fall on the *Newsletter* editor but could in future be taken over by another local person.

**Action:** Committee to explore solutions to the local issues.

(ii) Judith Bond, Secretary/Treasurer, who will also resign in 2015, was of the opinion that were physical production of the Society's *Journal* to be taken over by the Edinburgh University Press [currently being explored by the Editor] most of her Membership Secretary duties would be absorbed in that transfer. A replacement Treasurer is being explored and a possible candidate had been identified.

#### **Treasurer's Report:**

Judith Bond distributed her audited Annual Statement of Accounts 2013 -2014 to the meeting and explained the figures. Whilst the cash in hand balance is currently

£5,656.35, the production and distribution costs for the delayed *Journal 2013* had not yet been deducted. Expenditure for the year amounted to £868.17 against an annual income of £1,651.69. Donations to the Society were down on the previous twelve months as were annual subscriptions. Proposed by Richard Searle and seconded by Judith Stinton the Treasurer's report was approved.

#### **Membership:**

Current membership stands at 126 individuals plus nine joint members giving a total of 144. Eighteen members from last year had not yet renewed for the current year. Seven new members had been recruited. Judith Bond presented a pie chart illustrating the methods of payment adopted by members for their annual subscriptions. Of the most popular 51 individuals (38%) pay by standing order; 46 people (34%) pay by UK cheques; and 22 (16%) by overseas cheques.

#### **Society Journal:**

- (i) The Editor gave her apologies for non-attendance at the AGM. She reported the current position via the Chairman. It was regretted that the *Journal* for 2013 had been delayed by several months because the Editor had experienced personal and professional difficulties that had now been largely overcome. It was expected that copy would be sent to the printer before the end of June and published shortly afterwards. Delays with the outstanding issue would not affect the production schedule for the 2014 *Journal* which would be published on time early in 2015.
- (ii) Judith Stinton had received a letter from Peter Tolhurst which she read to the meeting. He raised two issues: the first concerned the impending resignations of Judith Bond and Judith Stinton. Their respective departures would leave a substantial hole in the Committee that would be difficult to fill. His second concern was at the apparent difficulties that had delayed the publication of the *Journal 2013*. Having previously edited the *Journal* he would be willing to resume those responsibilities should the need arise.

**Action** Chairman to thank Peter Tolhurst for his concern and his offer. At this time the Society sees no reason for its Editor to change. His letter would be kept on file in case that position should change.

(iii) Morine Krisdóttir expressed concern at the constraint the cover size imposed on the *Journal* through its inflexible format. When compared with the *Powys Society Journal*, which accommodates articles of any length, this Society's *Journal* is considerably smaller.

The Powys Society has a panel of reviewers to maintain standards of intellectual rigour for the articles it publishes. There was discussion of the review procedure adopted by this Society and whether it could be beneficially altered.

**Action:** Chairman to urge the Editor to pursue a less restricting format for the *Journal* and to explore the potential to include archive material.

#### **Essay competition:**

Two submissions had been made for the 2014 Essay Prize.

Following the discussion at last year's AGM Lynn Mutti had explored two proposals: that we should advertise the Society's Essay Competition in the Times Literary Supplement; and each British university's English department should be made aware of the competition. It was found to be too cost prohibitive to advertise in the Times Literary Supplement. Ninety-three British universities had been identified via their admissions departments but it had been neither possible nor feasible to establish a contact within their English departments.

[Subsequent research produced a list of 70+ University English Department contacts, all of whom were emailed regarding the Essay Competition.]

#### **Society Website:**

Karina Taubert had submitted a graphic illustrating the number of daily visits to the Website from July 2007 to May 2014 and which areas of the site had been visited. Visitor interest had steadily increased.

#### **Other Business:**

**Warner Archives** As honorary archivist of the Sylvia Townsend Warner archives in the Dorset County Museum, Morine Krisdóttir had observed a steady increase in research use of the material by academics and scholars. Combined with their requirement to publish, valuable articles could be lost to the Society if the *Journal* continues to be restricted by its size. She was also of the opinion that there was a substantial amount of material in the S. T. W. Archives, particularly among the letters, that the Society could publish.

**Action:** Lynn Mutti and Judith Stinton to identify suitable documents – initially letters – with Morine Krisdóttir's help.

There being no further business, The Chairman, Eileen Johnson, thanked everyone for their attendance and expressed her gratitude to those members of the Society who contribute to its smooth running.