



NEWSLETTER NUMBER FOUR

Welcome to the Spring 2002 edition of the Newsletter - and thank you to all contributors. Please keep on sending your contributions: they are most welcome!

SUBSCRIPTIONS: a reminder

If you haven't yet paid for 2002, please send your subscription to Judith Bond, 26 Portwey Close, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 8RF. UK members £10, overseas members \$20. Cheques should be made payable to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society.

PROGRAMME FOR 2002

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society will be held in the library of the Dorset County Museum, High West Street, Dorchester, at 2.00pm on Saturday, March 23rd, 2002.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the AGM held on March 24th, 2001.
3. Matters Arising.
4. Chairman's Report.
5. Treasurer's Report.
6. Membership Officer's Report.
7. Programme for the year.
8. Election of new Chairman.
9. Any Other Business.

Resolutions for discussion at the AGM must be received in writing by the Secretary at least one month before the meeting, and must include proposer and seconder.

EAST CHALDON MEETING

This will take place on Wednesday May 1st. Meet at 12 noon for lunch at the Sailor's Return, before walking round the church and graveyard. If the weather is fine, it would be possible to walk over the hill to Chydyok and on to the cliffs.

NORFOLK WEEKEND

We have talked in Committee about the possibility of having a weekend (Friday night to Sunday afternoon) visit to Norfolk, which would probably include Winterton, Salthouse, and Frankfort Manor. We would plan to stay in Norwich.

We would like to know if members are interested in the idea. If you are, please contact Eileen Johnson by letter or phone.

THE WILLOWES PATTERN

A report by Eileen Johnson

Our first day school took place on August 17th last year, and was pronounced a success by all participants. Twenty-two members assembled in the library of the County Museum in Dorchester to hear Rosemary Sykes deliver her memorable lecture on *Lolly Willowes*. (You will have already read an edited version in the recent Journal.) This was followed by a stimulating seminar session, which took us nicely to lunchtime.



At the Saxon Arms. Left to right: Rosemary Sykes, Annie Rhodes, Ren Dreyer and Stephen Mottram.

It had been decided to patronise a newly-opened pub, the Saxon Arms at Stratton - handily about half way to Maiden Newton, our afternoon destination. A good choice, we thought, as we sat sipping and eating in the sunshine. (Yes, it was a brilliantly fine, hot day.) From there we drove to Sylvia's house at Maiden Newton, to be welcomed into the garden by the owners. We were able to wander at leisure and take photographs and ask questions, or simply ponder.

Then we made our farewells, although a few of us walked round to the tiny medieval church at Frome Vauchurch to round off the day. The whole day was a lovely experience, and it was good to meet members and finally put faces to names. We shall try something similar next year.



Lolling in the willows? Members in the garden at Maiden Newton.

CONSTITUTION OF THE SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER SOCIETY

1. Objectives

The Society is formed to promote a wider readership and better understanding of the writings of Sylvia Townsend Warner.

2. Membership

2.1 Membership of the Society is open to all persons interested in furthering the objectives of the Society, on payment of the annual subscription fee.

2.2 Annual subscriptions are due on the 1st January each year, except for new members joining after the 31st December, when they shall not be asked to pay the first renewal subscription of that year.

2.3 A member who fails to pay the annual subscription fee within three months of the due date will be so notified by the Treasurer. If that member fails to pay within a further three months, then his or her membership shall be terminated.

2.4 Every member shall receive a copy of the constitution.

2.5 The Committee reserves the right to refuse membership to any individual if that is its agreed opinion.

2.6 The Committee has the right to accord Honorary membership to any person who in their opinion so deserves. Honorary membership is for life or for such a period determined by the Committee.

3. Administration

3.1 The general conduct of the affairs of the Society is the responsibility of, and determined by, the Committee. All roles of the Committee shall be honorary in nature.

3.2 The Committee shall be composed of five members, of which three comprise a quorum.

3.3 The following duties of the Society shall be allocated and divided between the Committee members:

- (a) Chair of the Society.
- (b) Secretary of the Society.
- (c) Treasurer of the Society.
- (d) Responsibility for advertising, promotion of events etc.
- (e) Responsibility for the publication of the Society's Journal.
- (f) Responsibility for other Society publications.

3.4 Certain agreed functions may be delegated by the Committee to those members expressing an interest in such matters. They may be brought on to the Committee on a temporary basis to give help and/or advice if the members are in agreement.

3.5 The responsibilities of the Committee are as follows:

- (a) Controlling the management, policies and financial affairs of the Society.
- (b) Ensuring that the objectives of the Society are maintained.
- (c) Publicising the work of the Society in accordance with agreed criteria.
- (d) Maintaining and increasing the membership of the Society.
- (e) Arranging and conducting the Annual General Meeting and other agreed functions.

All members to receive adequate advance warning of the dates and venues of such events.

(f) Ensuring that an appropriate annual audit of the Society's finances is carried out prior to the AGM, and duly presented by the Treasurer at the AGM.

(g) Determining the annual subscription rate.

(h) Receiving donations and bequests.

(i) Meeting at least twice each year to discuss Society affairs.

In all matters relating to the Society, the Committee has absolute authority to act as it sees fit between the AGMs of the Society. All actions taken are to be reported at the next AGM.

3.6 The term of office of any Committee member shall not exceed three years, when new elections must be held. Committee members whose term of office has expired may register for re-election.

3.7 The copyright holder of Sylvia Townsend Warner is entitled to appoint a person to attend Committee meetings as a non-voting, honorary member.

4. *The Annual General Meetings*

4.1 Notice of the AGM shall be sent to every member, together with the agenda and any necessary voting papers.

4.2 The agenda must as a minimum include:

- (a) A presentation of reports on membership, finance and the activities of the Committee.
- (b) The election where required of the Committee members.
- (c) Allowance for discussions and comments from the floor.
- (d) The appointment of a person responsible for auditing.

4.3 The Chair of the Society is the chair of the AGM.

4.4 Voting shall be by a show of hands, a simple majority being sufficient for a decision. The casting vote if tied being by the Chair.

4.5 Resolutions for discussion at the AGM must be received in writing at least one

month before the meeting, and must include the proposer and seconder.

4.6 An Extraordinary General Meeting may be convened at six weeks notice, either at the wish of the Committee, or by not less than 25 ordinary members.

5. *Publications*

5.1 The Journal should contain a balance between all aspects of the life and writings of Sylvia Townsend Warner.

5.2 The Journal shall be published annually in the Autumn.

5.3 The editor of the Journal will be appointed for three years, but can be re-appointed for a further period by a majority vote of the Committee.

5.4 The copyright holder will allow the Journal to use material without a copyright fee, so long as permission has been agreed by the copyright holder, and with the understanding that the material is to be used for non-commercial purposes.

5.5 The newsletter will be published in the Spring and Summer.

6. *Amendments to the Constitution*

6.1 These shall be made only through the conducting of a mail ballot by the Committee of all the members of the society, with the approval of two-thirds of the members who vote.

6.2 A mail ballot cannot be used to effect the termination of the Society. This can only be carried out by a two-thirds majority vote at the AGM.

(Further copies of the constitution are available on application to the Secretary, Eileen Johnson.)

VALENTINE ACKLAND

A forthcoming biography

Frances Bingham writes:

I am writing a biography of Valentine Ackland, which will be published by The Women's Press in 2006, to coincide with the centenary of her birth. The book will focus on Valentine's work, while putting it in the context of her life. This combination of biography and literary criticism is particularly suited to a book about Valentine, whose life was linked with her work so intensely that her art almost always contained autobiographical elements. There is currently a resurgence of interest in Valentine's poetry, and it has appeared in several recent anthologies, but not yet received the critical attention it is so often said to deserve. I aim for the book to redress this situation, and contribute to the long-overdue reassessment of her poetry.

'Sylvia Townsend Warner was, of course, a great champion of Valentine's work, while remaining a perceptive critic of its weaknesses. Sylvia was also one of Valentine's great poetic subjects - her muse and mentor - and certainly the only character who appears almost as frequently as Valentine herself. A book focused on Valentine's work will inevitably include much about Sylvia and *her* writing. Valentine believed passionately

in Sylvia's genius, and tried to make it as easy as possible for her to write, carefully nurturing an environment in which creativity was paramount. Within this world they shared an imaginative landscape, and influenced each other's work profoundly. Above all, they were mutually supportive of creative effort, assisting one another in a way few partnerships have paralleled.

Rather than continue listing aspects of the book which may be of interest to members of the STW Society (which could take up the entire newsletter), I'll conclude by saying how much I am enjoying the research. I receive a great deal of friendly help and encouragement on my visits to Dorset and the vast resources of the Warner/Ackland archive. Although I've already met many people who have been able to provide important and fascinating material, I'm aware that there are still people I need to interview. I particularly want to speak to anyone who met or knew Valentine personally, but I'd be pleased to hear from anybody with information about her or Sylvia and their circle.'

Frances Bingham can be contacted at 2A East Mount Street, London E1 1BA

UNCONSIDERED TRIFLES Valentine Ackland's antique shop

In 1952, for the first time since she had begun to write in 1926, Valentine Ackland made no money from her writing. Resourcefully, she hit upon another way to earn an income. A shrewd and clever antiques collector, she had been going to auctions with her friend Vera Hickson, where she was (according to Sylvia Townsend Warner) a compassionate buyer of 'small objects which had seen better days'. Her purchases accumulated, and it was decided that the long sun parlour, which had been built along the landward side of the Frome Vauchurch house, would be a suitable place for a shop. All in a day, Sylvia 'revived by Beaujolais' made willow-pattern curtains 'to fig-leaf the bookshelves where Marx and Engels, Casanova and Mrs Henry Wood were wrapped in the same cobwebs'. Meanwhile, Valentine cleaned the windows and weeded the pathway. They laid out the pieces on Sylvia's piano, adding some 'old forgotten loves' of their own before they retired to bed. (In their enthusiastic haste, they forgot to price the goods.)

So many customers came that 'Valentine felt justified in putting a bell on the door', Sylvia wrote to Marchette Chute on December 19th of that same year. In the following May, she wrote to Alyse Gregory that the shop was still doing well, and that there was 'an inexhaustible demand for plated spoons and forks', whilst 'early nineteenth century flower prints and china' were ignored. Sylvia claimed that she herself served as a touchstone for the shop: what she admired, the customers disdained; what she disliked, the customers invariably bought.

Together, Sylvia and Valentine picked up new stock in junk and antiques shops in Sturminster Newton, Weymouth and Bridgwater, and further afield in Suffolk and

Norfolk. Whilst buying was enjoyable, Valentine found that the endless list-making, book-keeping and parcelling became wearying.

Letters have recently come to light which reveal just how conscientious a shop-keeper Valentine proved to be. Correspondence from Valentine to a regular customer, Joyce Scudamore, during the years 1959 to 1969, are full of detailed descriptions of the antiques she has found (including three stock lists from 1962). Book-keeping seems not to have been her strong point - there are several apologetically-scribbled postcards adjusting the bills. But what Valentine obviously did offer - as well as individually selected pieces - was a personal approach. Her letters offer glimpses of friends like Reynolds Stone, Nancy Cunard and Helen Thomas. The Frome Vauchurch cats make frequent appearances, and there are brief, stoical references to Valentine's battle with breast cancer. The two women became friends: as Joyce Scudamore lived in Parkstone, Valentine would sometimes personally deliver her purchases.

There are also a number of letters in the collection to Mrs Scudamore from Sylvia. In May, 1970, six months after Valentine's death, Sylvia wrote, 'I am so glad - as she would have been - to know you love the artless little candlestick. I remember her finding it and saying it was what might please you. It was that sort of thing, her loving attention to other people's wishes and tastes, which made the shop a pleasure to her as well as to others. And you were one of her dearest customers because you were so often pleased, and told her so.' Little-mentioned, Valentine's shop became an integral part of her later life.

The letters of Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner to Joyce Scudamore are being donated to the Dorset County Museum by Mrs Scudamore's daughter, Amoret Tanner. The other main sources for this article are Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Letters*, edited by William Maxwell, Chatto & Windus, 1982, and *I'll Stand by You: The Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner & Valentine Ackland*, Pimlico, 1998.

Judith Stinton

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THE MUSIC AT LONG VERNEY

A revue by Alex Clark of the latest selection of Sylvia Townsend Warner's short stories

In Sylvia Townsend Warner's case, a collection of 20 short stories - many published in the *New Yorker* but none before appearing in book form - feels...like the discovery of something unaccountably overlooked. Warner is squandered on equilibrium; the best approach to these diminutive masterpieces is to wait for a freak wind of depression or a bout of toothache and then hand yourself over to be enchanted. Her tableaux seem to break open the world, despite their long-disappeared settings and minor keys. Each is perfectly complete but highly suggestive, filled with quotidian trivia and then floated free on a gently rippling surface. Distant wars summarily subtract sons and husbands; scorching milk pans throw together disagreeable companions; random Christmas presents lurk beneath the surface of devoted marriages.

At the heart of the book are five stories set in an old-fashioned connoisseurial antiques shop, in which Warner moves effortlessly between Wodehousian comedy and unbearably poignant reminiscence. "English Mystic" sees Mr Edom, the shop's proprietor, convinced of an imminent attack on his china collection by a troublesome assistant; he sits guard all night with claret and grouse sandwiches, only for the utterly harmless Miss Hartley to disappear on the arm of a handsome customer. Her successor, far more Mr Edom's glass of claret, suddenly sheds the mantle of deference to narrate an extraordinary boyhood tale in "The Candles". From this antiques shop, a repository for discarded objects and a magnet for those searching for something lost, Warner could have magicked a novel, if not several.

This revue of Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Music at Long Verney*, published by Harvill @ £14.99, first appeared in the *Guardian*, November 10, 2001. It is reprinted by kind permission of the *Guardian*.

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Another book to look out for is Frank Kermode's *Pleasing Myself: From Beowulf to Philip Roth* (Allen Lane, £20). This includes an essay on Sylvia Townsend Warner: one of the writers admired by Kermode.

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AS BETWEEN TWO JOURNALS

An American member of the STW Society, Page Nelson, has contributed the following article to the *Newsletter*.

The young writer is sitting at the desk in the front room of her small, two-room Boston apartment. It is a bright, bay-windowed space, with a sixth floor view of cityscape and the nearby river. She is recording in her diary an impression of a *New Yorker* short story that she read with enhanced interest since she has not been successful in having her own stories published there. She writes: 'A story by ---. The usual flawlessly realised stuff with a pathos-or-bathos point; 'The Quality of Mercy'. I think I could, with work, write for them. But am far, far from it.' [May 3, 1959]

We can know, as she could not, the author's own feelings about this story. A few months earlier Sylvia Townsend Warner had written in her journal: 'Typed, revised and finished 'The Quality of Mercy'. Surprised, as usual, to find that it is the kind of story I write; I never feel, when I am making, that there is anything typical or characteristic about what is in hand - but the brand is there. I hope not too much there, that's all.' [Jan. 14, 1959]