

The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Diffuse, Twelve Poems, Lolly Willowses, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, 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 Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Lolly Willowses, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, 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 Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Lolly Willowses, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, 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 Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Lolly Willowses, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, 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 Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned,

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Newsletter Number Forty-Five

Poems, The Flint Anchor, The Winter in the Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, The Flint Anchor, Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and the Guilty, Kingdoms of Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Lolly Willowses, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, 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 Elfin, The Museum

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

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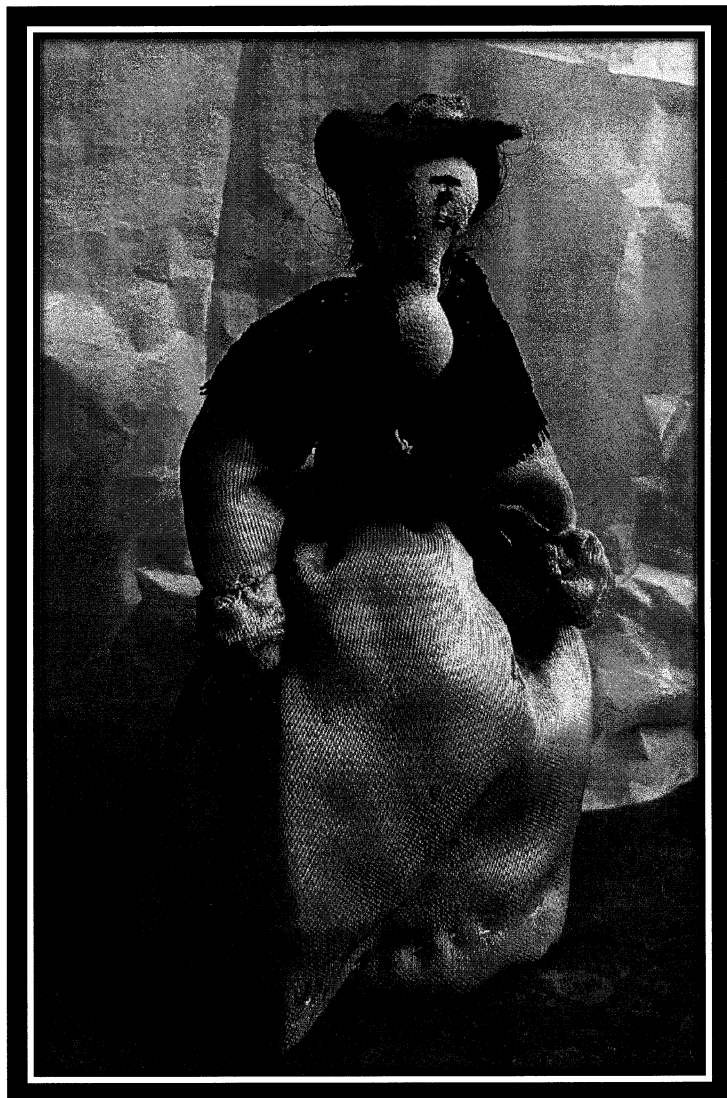
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NEWSLETTER NUMBER FORTY-FIVE

The 2022 Weekend and AGM * sartorial musings * dissertations
The ALS * Societal excursions * Mrs Marjorie Dobson
candlesticks & antiques & dolls * sin-eating * a poem & a book

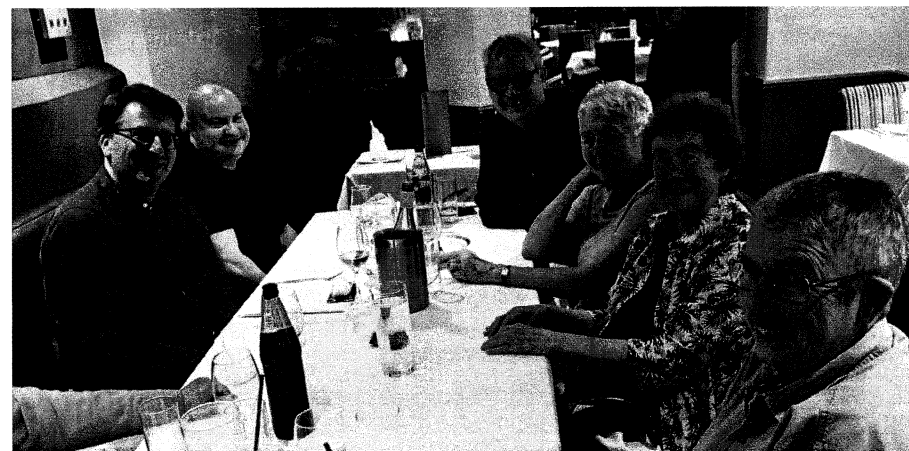
Thanks to Andrew McDonald, Michael Richards, Judith Stinton, and Peter Swaab
for their contributions.

Sylvia Townsend Warner Society AGM and Weekend 14-15 May

After the long months of lock-down, our Society met for the Annual General Meeting of 2022 on Saturday May 14th. In Dorchester at the Shire Hall Historic Courthouse, we enjoyed a buffet lunch and a chance to mingle and catch up. Then a most interesting tour of the Courthouse, now the Shire Hall Museum. With a combination of docent and free-form viewing, we saw not only the court-room, but the holding cells and the stairs up which the accused climbed to their trial. Going from the dank and dark to the sunlit bar, all eyes upon them, must have been un-nerving. The two exhibits - one of Dorset women's experiences with justice in the 19th century, the other on Agatha Christie, object-rich with tea-cups and hat-pins, were worth exploring.

We then travelled to Litton Cheney.

Dinner was at the Rajpoot on the High Street in Dorchester. We feasted on Indian food family style, with plenty of it, and good conversation. Then to bed, presumably.

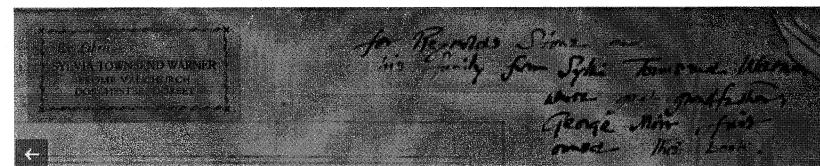
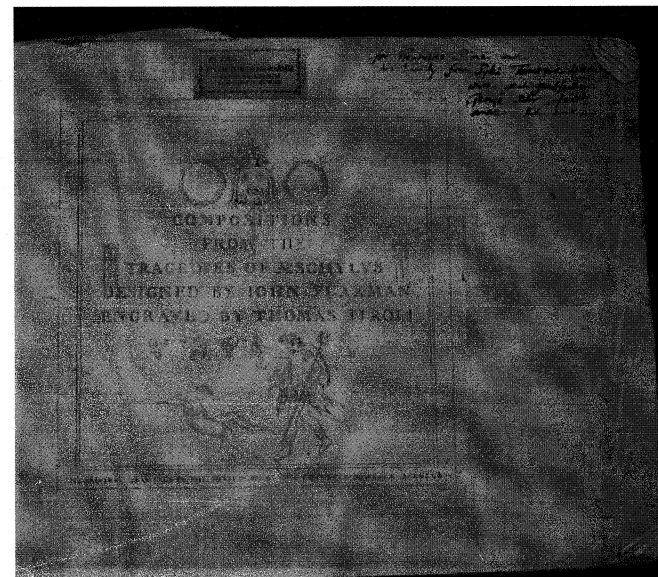


On Sunday we enjoyed a tour of the Church of St Basil at Toller Fratrum, conducted by Judith Stinton, who knows the place better than anyone. Here is the description by Rosemary Sykes from Newsletter 10. "... strikingly-named hamlet of Toller Fratrum, meaning Toller of the Brothers, not to be confused with the nearby Toller Porcorum (Pigs' Toller). The 'Brothers' in question are thought to have been Knights Hospitallers, and remains of their foundation can be spotted in the fabric of a glorious farmhouse which combines post-dissolution ornate chimneys (plus carved monkey finial) with the earlier building. Next to the farmhouse is the church of St Basil. Despite being an eighteenth-century building it contains treasure ancient and modern, one of the modern ones being a visitors' book containing the signatures of such luminaries as John Piper and (of course) Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland. The ancient treasures include a fragment of a carving depicting Mary Magdalene washing Christ's feet, and an eleventh-century (or earlier) font, which appeared to have Saxon or Celtic influences. Indeed, with its cover decked out in haws and travellers' joy (wild clematis) in readiness for the Harvest Festival [not this time], it had more than a hint of the pagan about it."



Later and in a light rain turning to mist we lunched and ambled through Sculpture by the Lakes. The food was from the Lakes' gardens, and the paths were well-tended, with ducks, and flowers, twists and turns to view many an unusual sculpture, some in the lake itself. A pleasant end to a very successful weekend.

Lovely May
 Upon whose bosom Nature lies
 And smiles her joyous youth away.
 --- John Clare



The next newsletter, Number 46, will be the 16th that I have edited, and will also be my last. Creating them has been a joy and I thank you for the privilege. The next editor will surely have as grand a time. By the way, for those kind enough to wonder, my health is fine. Please let any officer know of your intention to take it over.

Grey was the unawakened air, the steadfast arch of the down
Stretched like the curving wings of a gull that unswerving sleeps
Onward its way, grey on a cloud of grey,
And onward went I, careless as one in a sleepwalking swound,
And cold in my cotton gown.

I was proud as I went, I scorned the fields that had given increase
And awaited now like slaves the certain ploughing of winter
I turned to those acres I knew unfruitful and forsaken;
But behold, my bitter pasture was whitened like a fleece
With mushrooms, and lay at peace.

In a night they had come, whence and how, who could tell? –
Myriads of rounded mushrooms everywhere surrounding me,
Thrusting out tender from the harsh earth, ungendered,
Frail, with the cleaving grasses broken by their upswell
That no bondage could quell.

I was a peace with them, seeing them so undefiled,
Knowing the gills so delicate hidden under the chilly flesh;
At a birth so meek and marvellous, so secret and maiden-sleek,
I knelt on the grass then, I gave thanks and was mild,
Knowing myself with child.

Sylvia Townsend Warner
The New Statesman and Nation – February 11, 1933

From the Diaries : 4 December 1955

“The amiable Stones came to the shop in the morning, and I carried out my intention, and gave them my great-grandfather’s Flaxman. The parting with its familiar flopping weight, and stained grey cover was harder than I thought (and it was a queer shock to see my bookplate in it: it has scarcely become *my* book even in the 45 years I’ve owned it). But Reynolds was really pleased, and it will have a good chance with an intelligent new generation.”

and available

as of December 7, 2022 from Collinge and Clark, London (abebooks.com) : “Engraved plates in excellent condition. Original grey paper wrappers showing signs of distress, titled by hand 'Aeschylus, Iliad & Odyssey' by Flaxman. Ex libris Sylvia Townsend Warner. Inscribed by her: 'For Reynolds Stone and his family from Sylvia Townsend Warner whose great-grandfather, George Moir, first owned this book.' Compositions from the Tragedies of Aeschylus. Engraved by Thomas Piroli, title and 30 engraved plates (ex 36); Iliade d'Homere, title and 33 plates (ex 34); Odysse d'Homere, title and 27 plates (ex 28). Seller Inventory # 13410”

Visiting the Old Rectory, Litton Cheney, 14 May 2022

One of the highlights of the weekend was a visit to the Old Rectory, Litton Cheney, the home formerly of Warner’s good friends Reynolds and Janet Stone. The visit had been arranged with the current owners Richard and Emily Cave, who moved there in 2009. Emily was away in Norfolk on a Charity Walk, but her husband Richard received us with great kindness and hospitality, welcoming our quite large and not infrequently eccentric and unruly party with tea, cake and a copy of *Through the Lens of Janet Stone: Portraits, 1953-1979* (reviewed by Judith Aronson in the 2021 Society Journal).

Sylvia and Valentine were frequent visitors to the Old Rectory. Sylvia gives a flavour of the house in a letter to George Plank, from 30 December 1958: ‘You asked me if I knew Reynolds Stone. Yes, we know him very well, he is a neighbour of ours – as country neighbours go, about ten miles away – and a delightful neighbour, since there is always something going on, two hand-presses, and a great long table heaped with blocks, tools, paintbrushes, books, leaves, specimen papers, an indescribably confusion with Reynolds serenely finding whatever it is he wants, like a bumble-bee over a flower-bed’. Reynolds was still a bit like a bee in a letter from 9 January 1972, describing the drawing-room which we moved to after tea. ‘I wish you knew Reynolds Stone. He has a soft voice like bees in a lime-tree, and I have never heard him exclaim or known him talk for nothing; and he will fight like a tiger to save a tree, a badger, an old printing-press. [...] He works at one end of a large long room, walled with books, corniced with stuffed birds in glass cases. He works at a massive table, matted with every variety of confusion & untidiness, graving minutely on a small block. The other end of the room is a turmoil of wife, children, distinguished visitors, people dropping in – Janet’s roaring lion-house, for she is a bishop’s daughter & has lion-hunting in her blood. And there sits Reynolds not merely immune, but liking it. He likes to work amid a number of conversations he needn’t attend to, he likes to feel people within touching distance of his glass case.’

We were also joined for the occasion by the Stones’ daughter Phillida Gili, who had kindly made the trip from London to Dorchester for the occasion. A younger version of Phillida is glimpsed rather enigmatically in one of Warner’s letters to William Maxwell (4 May 1957): ‘I went in a splendid merry-go-round at Portland Fair last autumn.... My companion was a little girl called Phillida Stone, and she sat there like the heir of the ages.’ Eleven years later Warner writes about the day that Phillida was married to Jonathan Gili at the end of July 1968: ‘It was a wonderful wedding, high and low... The bride looked like a swan in a morning mist. I wore my hat. Valentine enjoyed it all very much and looked like the Empress Theodora. We are both much the better for it. Oh yes, and a detail I mustn’t forget. The long tables under the awning were trimmed with vases of peacock feathers, gently twiddling in the light breeze.’ Phillida said that Sylvia’s letter had got some of the details of the day wrong but the spirit of her evocation was matchlessly right.

Phillida had brought from London three dolls that Sylvia had made for her. One of Sylvia's diary entries (9 June 1956) recounts the process: 'At Valentine's suggestion I spent an afternoon making two dolls to sit in the deckchairs she had bought for Phillida and Emma. Personality is queer – when one of these dolls is entamé something happens, it develops a character and after that I have no more say in it. It is what the psalm means when it says, Go on, and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.' Here in Sylvia's diary the dolls take on a mysterious life of their own, much like figures in her fiction. Andrew McDonald's photos convey something of their uncanniness and the cunning of Sylvia's hand. Seeing them in the house where they had been presented sixty-six years earlier had a strange power to bridge the years between.

Our visit ended with a visit to the local church and a leisurely stroll round the four acres of gardens, which have been lovingly tended and developed by Emily and Richard Cave. Jan Montefiore and Phillida Gili compared notes on being the daughter (JM) and granddaughter (PG) of a bishop, while other Society members less episcopally descended enjoyed seeing the gardens in the early evening sun.

Peter Swaab



Poem

After my marriage night, she said, what with love and hate
So mixed and crossed in me, and my own body lost to me,
Heavy with newness of love, like grass drenched down with dew,
And myself, it seemed, with nothing to do but sit and await
The upshot of their debate,

I lost my count of time, she said, I covered low
Under passing of time, astray in the chime of day
On day clashed and dissolving, night on night a flash
Of darkness smiting anew and lingering on slow
And booming as the echo

Of the tenor bell that rules whatsoever the change
From its root escaping, I lay as mute, she said,
Under the sound of time passing as underground
The dead lie listless and amazed, hearing the strange
Overheard music range.

The noise of harvest went by, I heard the sighing stooks
And the shouts of those who carried them as though they had married them.
Beribboned the harvest baby was nailed over the hearth,
And over the silent acres went the whirring of rooks.
Shrill from the hedgerow nooks

I heard the bicker of starlings tugging at the elder-tree
Or the cries of rambling children among the bramble bushes;
And at every thud of a ripened apple falling my blood
Was bruised and fled outward as though it were falling through me
With a menace of what might be.

And then came a morning when there was no sound at all.
And I surprised as might be the dead could rise up free
To steal out early as I did when I was a girl.
Between the two cockcrowings it was, and the sky was tall
With the first looks of the fall

Of the year, standing off naked and remote from an earth that yet
Green-muffled its breast as though loth to be undressed of summer;
But I with the tall sky was done with it all,
And my feet through the snow-cold dew waded with a well-met
To that washing and whet.

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 reveal just how conscientious a shop-keeper Valentine proved to be. Correspondence [now in the STW/VA Archive] 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 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.

Sin Eating

This old folk custom, explored in Newsletters 38 (Peter Tolhurst) and 40 (Jan Montefiore) makes a late, but significant appearance in Elinor Mordaunt's short story *The Country-side*, which can be found in Mordaunt's collection, *The Villa and The Vortex* (Handheld Press, 2021).

...When you get back, if you find her gone" – those were her very words, as I stand here, sir – "if you find her gone, put a saucer of salt on her breast" [.....] 'It's what they do here – in the country – for – for the sin eater.' Her voice sank to the merest whisper on the last words. [.....] 'Yes, you're right.' It was Mary who spoke, turning to Trixie as she did so – drawing her apart, as it were – so that the matter now hung between the two women. 'That's what she said of the mistress. She has suffered for the sins of others, now let them others eat her sin, which it is they as have druv her to.'

THE SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting 2022

Saturday 14 May at 11.15am in the Learning Room, Shire Hall, Dorchester (and via Zoom)

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of AGM 2021
3. Matters Arising
 - (i) Membership and subscriptions (see Matters Arising 2021: Treasurer's Report): how well Gift Aid and Gift Memberships have worked
 - (ii) The possibility of moving to hybrid publication of the JSTWS, partly online and partly hard copy. (See Matters Arising 2021: Publication method)
4. Chair's report (already circulated) and discussion
5. Membership Report (already circulated) and discussion
6. Treasurer's Report (already circulated) and discussion
7. Website report (already circulated) and discussion
8. Publications reports from *JSTWS* and Newsletter (both already circulated) and discussion
9. Possibility of hosting the AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies in Dorchester, jointly with the Hardy Society, in 2024 or 2025
10. Mary Jacobs competition
11. Sylvia Townsend Warner lecture 2023: nominations
12. A.O.B.

Present at the meeting: Jan Montefiore, Mercedes Aguirre, Sarah-Jane Pattison, Gill Davies, Ren Draya, Tess Ormrod, Jay Barksdale, Rowan Bright, Judith Stinton, Judith Bond, Ruth Williams, Eileen Johnson, Peter Swaab.

The meeting started with a tribute to our former Secretary, Lynn Mutti, who died on 12 April 2022. The next issue of the Society Journal will carry a further tribute.

1. There were **apologies for absence** from Helen Sutherland, Harriet Baker and Kate Macdonald.
2. **The Minutes of the 2021 AGM** were approved, with the correction that Ruth Williams should have been added to those attending.
3. **Matters arising.** (i) It was noted that two gift subscriptions had been made, both by UK members. (ii) The discussion of hybrid publication of the Society Journal took place under Item 8.

4. **Chair's report.** Jan Montefiore spoke to her report, and in particular to the need to boost membership and especially if possible to recruit younger members. It was agreed that social media and an online presence are the best ways to do this.
5. **Membership report.** Mercedes Aguirre spoke to her report, and noted that we may have lost 20 members in the last year. It was agreed to chase these up individually as some may have let things lapse inadvertently during the worst of the covid period.
6. **Treasurer's report.** Helen Jones had planned to attend the meeting remotely but wasn't in the end able to owing to illness. She had however submitted very clear, full and detailed reports, which enabled a discussion of the Society's finances.
7. **Website report.** Harriet Baker's report was received, and it led to a wider discussion of how to boost the Society's online presence and outreach. Among the ideas mooted were a further conference, a letter to the TLS, approaching documentarists, and attending relevant academic conferences such as the British Association of Modernist Studies. Twitter was also considered, and Andrew McDonald agreed to take on the managing of the Society's Twitter account and to get it tweeting more often.
8. **Publications Reports: Journal and Newsletter.** Peter Swaab spoke to his Journal report. He noted that David Trotter had accepted his invitation to join the editorial board and reported the sad news that Laura Marcus had died. He emphasised that the Journal would very much welcome academic and non-academic contributions from members and others. There had been very few of these recently, adding to the difficulty of producing issues in a timely way. He said he would be approaching the UCL English Department to see if it would support the post of an editorial assistant.
 As per Item 3 (ii) the idea of producing the Journal in a hybrid way was discussed. This would entail the Journal appearing twice yearly in electronic form, and once only in printed form, consolidating the two issues into a single print one. The electronic Journals would come out in May and November, and the print one in November. This plan would save both work and money, and it was agreed to implement it from 2023, initially on a trial basis awaiting the responses of the Society membership.
 Jay Barksdale spoke to his Newsletter report. He gave notice that he would probably carry on with editing the Newsletter only for a few years more.
9. Sarah-Jane Pattison said that Mark Chutter of the Hardy Society had expressed an interest in collaborating with the Warner Society, perhaps around the Alliance of Literary Societies. It was agreed the Society would be interested in exploring possibilities of collaboration.

VALENTINE ACKLAND
 FROME VAUCHURCH, MAIDEN NEWTON
 DORCHESTER, DORSET
 January, 1954.

Small antiques; silver, brass, wooden boxes, papier-mache, etc. Prints and Frames. Secondhand Books. Textiles and lace. Occasional small pieces of antique furniture.

Collections of Miscellaneous Antiques and Oddments, all priced at 2/6 and 5/-.

Tray of Books all priced at 1/-.

Present stock includes:—

Staffordshire Figure of an Actor in Turkish Costume.	10/6
Deep saucer-dish painted with moss-rose spray.	2/6
18th C. Horn Caddy Spoon, 5½" X 2". Bowl 3½" long.	10/6
Silhouette Portrait of a Young Gentleman, circa 1800, in oval gilt frame.	10/-
3 dark blue glass liqueur glasses, about 3" high, with spiralled stems.	each 2/6
Battersea Enamel Patch-Box (original glass lid slightly cracked) with flowers & insects delicately painted.	10/-
Fine pair of Sheffield Plate Snuffers (guillotine-action) bearing Maker's Mark, 1803.	25/-
Leeds China Mug, with Chinese figures (cracked but not tampered with)	12/6
Papier-Mache Snuff Box, with portrait of Lady circa 1820. 4" X 1½" X 1". Perfect condition.	21/-

*
 All prices are plainly marked and you are invited with no obligation to buy.

*
 Open all day on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and other days by appointment. To reach the house, take turning on right, going through Maiden Newton towards Dorchester (road signposted Frome Vauchurch). The house is on the right just before you cross the bridge over the river. There is a drive leading to the house, which stands about 100 yards from the road.

***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) 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

Maiden Newton. Dorchester. Dorset.

26: 11: 1966.

Dear Mrs Dobson.

Thank you for Rosemary London address. I will certainly get in touch with her and hope to see her here or in London.

I envy them their long cosy voyage – and especially the last stages and the Thames approach – I wish they could go on further. The Thames at any rate has not changed since Rosemary saw it last. London has. It is now both statelier and smellier. In rush hours the smell of petrol and diesel exhaust is abominable.

One of the improvements is the great increase in music. Many of the City churches now have admirable recitals, as well as the organ concerts going on at the Festival Hall.

I'm afraid you will very bereft if Ruth goes to Europe too. Do you know how you should enjoy their absence? Write your memoirs. Not for publication, which entails so much that is boring, but for family use. My [...?] grandmother's account of her childhood and youth has been a delight to me all my life – and as times increasingly change become more absorbing and incredible and touching.

With kindest regards from us both. Sylvia Townsend Warner

23rd. June. 1968.

Dear Mrs Dobson.

I was so sorry to read of your arthritis and of your own influenza. I'm afraid it was a sad trip for you. I hope that your ambling rambling sea-trip will revive you and that further news of Rosemary will tell of a lightening of her load. I am full of compassion for those who can't call their time their own. Not to be able to write is a cruel deprivation, whatever the good cause, husband, three children, they impose it.

I too have had much reason for anxiety in these last months. Valentine became incredibly unwell. For it was found that she had a cancer in the breast. The operation was done at Guy's Hospital by their best surgeon in such cases, and is thought it had every chance of being successful. But that we cannot be sure of this he sees her again, tomorrow. Meanwhile her course of radio-therapy has left her extremely exhausted. It is a commonplace that this should be so, but I feel very sad and sorry for her, if it had not been for this I would have tried to visit you in London; but though I feel useless, as one does in these circumstances, I can not be spared.

Let us hope that the second half of 1968 will be more fortunate for us both, you and I.

Yours sincerely

Sylvia Townsend Warner

This stock-list was included in the pdf of the Dobson letters above. And from Newsletter Four, with her permission is Judith Stinton's

10. Mary Jacobs Prize. It was agreed that the competition should run again, with a closing date of 31 Dec 2022. A first prize of £300 would be offered, together with two runners-up prizes of £100. Essays could be on any topic, but two areas would be flagged up: first, Warner's writings after 1945, and second, Warner and her relations with another writer or writers.

11. Sylvia Townsend Warner Lecture 2023. It was agreed to invite Claire Harman to give the lecture.

12. AOB. The Society gratefully received a gift of many volumes by Warner and others from Lynn Mutti's library. She had asked that these be offered for sale to members of the Society, with the proceeds supporting its continuing work. £160 was raised and warmly acknowledged.

Peter Swaab

The STW Reading Group

There were three meetings in 2022, all on zoom. The first was on *The True Heart* on 15 March, the second on *Opus 7* on 14 June, and the third on 25 August on *The Flint Anchor*. There were between ten and twenty attendees at each meeting, and the gathering was never less than lively and multi-national.

The Patron Saints of Material Girls

Claire Maybe

Excerpted from an article in *The Spinoff* (thespinoff.co.nz) of July 2, 2022. It discusses the clothing of not only Sylvia and Valentine, but of Rita Angus and Saint Hildegard as well.

...I have a pair of brown velvet pants that I bought in Melbourne about 12 years ago. They were designed and made by an up-and-coming Australian designer and buying them cleaned out my bank account. They are high-waisted, pleated and the fabric is a dense, short-haired velvet that feels like the pelt of a baby deer. The fit of them reminds me of the word "esquire". After all these years the seams are still sure and the fabric still thick in all the places where regular pants might start to thin after a while. When I wear them I feel like business mixed with pleasure. I picture them on one of my young female heroines in the middle grade novel I am writing. In her world, her choice of clothing signifies her bravery. When she must depart her home and all she knows for a journey certain to be perilous and unpredictable, her clothes are comfort, they harbour tools, and are a form of communication. What she chooses to wear, what utilities her garments offer, and what they might say to the unknown world through which she must travel, are important.

The writers Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland, who lived in Dorset together between the World Wars and in the years following, were communists and lovers. As such they were deemed subversive enough to be of high interest to M15 who intercepted their letters, had them followed and blacklisted their names so that their attempts to work for the war effort were mysteriously and consistently blocked. A police constable sent by M15 to observe the couple noted that they liked to wear men's clothing and shoot rabbits. Photos of Valentine show a tall, muscular woman with short, thick hair, wearing what looks to be fine tailored trousers with crisp white shirts and the luxurious, wide style of tie that preceded the mean, thin kind of the 60s. Her elegant, Wildean face is serene: unsmiling but not unamused.

My favourite photo of Sylvia is reproduced in colour on the cover of Claire Harman's biography of her. Sylvia stands wrapped in an ornate fur-trimmed coat, red stockings, black mary-janes, and a flapper hat with a wide brown ribbon. Her glasses are round, like Harry Potter's or John Lennon's, and on her face is a Mona Lisa smile. Under her feet there is grass clipped and tidy, and behind her an almost sinister sort of wilderness of plants, and grasses and trees. Perhaps, there, in the distance is a grand house and to her left a lake. She looks both out of place and perfectly situated.

Both women wrote, and loved, and hated Nazis and championed the Communist Manifesto. Valentine wore pants, and woollen vests and sometimes plunged her hands deep into her trouser pockets in a way that reminds me of an old-school Hollywood actor. Sylvia wore shirts with frills, full skirts and puffed sleeves. She wrote novels, short stories and translated Proust. Her garden was prodigious and she was known locally for her preserves and her inventive approach to home cooking.

Now, when I wear trousers — Helen Cherry's from the 90s, or my Melbourne velvet, or my op-shop slacks — I think of Valentine and her attempt to look like herself, and there is a complexity to my day: a hum of Valentine and her determinations. When I wear an Etsy-sleuthed vintage Laura Ashley with puffed sleeves, I evoke Sylvia. And a thread of something playful, something fearless, links me to her.

I'm not sure if I want to know them or be them.

Two doctoral dissertations
Montclair State University, New Jersey, USA

May 2016 : *Bridging the Gap between Manner and Matter : the Friction of Reticence and Resistance in Sylvia Townsend Warner's Intimate Poems* – Giana Milazzo

May 2021 : *Marital and Maternal Mourning : Gravesite Domesticity in Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Epitaphs"* – Alexis Grainger

Both may be found with full text download or on-screen reading by searching 'Sylvia Townsend Warner' at digitalcommons.montclair.edu

If you were to visit us again – how pleasant that would be – I suppose you would see more changes than we do, who see the changes happening little by little. The willow trees which Valentine set have grown tall and flourishing. I have persuaded many more roses to grow in a soil which is not really very well suited to them, and instead of the little Pekinese and the old grey cat whom you met, there are now two Siamese cats, who twine about the place as graceful as leopards and are full of love and conversation. But there is one definite change, for Valentine now keeps a shop in the long untidy room which was sometimes used for music and more often for housing geraniums and the sewing machine. She began about eighteen months ago, from a rather crusading motive of trying to rescue some small antiques from the claws of dealers, who go through the country attending sales, poking into cottages, combing junkshops, and selling everything they can lay hands on to USA. The really valuable antiques can more or less look after themselves, their actual value protects them; but the small fry are really sold into captivity, embroideries are cut up into handbags, old prints are made into lampshades, snuff-boxes turned into powder-compacts, and after a brief life of being quaint, are thrown away. So she decided to buy small antiques and sell them, like kittens, to good homes. She has prospered, so far, far beyond any expectations, even mine, though I was more sanguine than she since I know she has good taste and very quick eye for spotting real princesses disguised in cinders. Even with honest prices, there is enough profit to enable us to make tours round the country for new stock, and we have had some delightful explorations, all the fun of touring and the stimulus of business into the bargain. There have been one or two very exciting finds. A king of Prussia mug at a charity bazaar, for instance, and a picture of Dorothy Wordsworth, which was in a mixed lot at a country auction, mixed with some old fire-irons, a potato-masher, a broken camera, a dog-whip, and a crockery soap-dish, all reposing in a baby's bath. What was particularly pleasant about this was that it was sold to an old lady who lives at Racedown, the house where Coleridge first visited the Wordsworths. Rosemary will like this example of find a good home. I think she has a list of some of her present stock, and if there is a spare copy I will put it in, so that you can see the sort of thing she finds.

As for me, I have just finished another novel. Five years, since the last one, so nobody can accuse me of undue haste. I wish I could say that I enjoyed the state of having finished it; but in fact feel perfectly miserable and as though I been turned out of a kingdom. I hung on as long as I possibly could, on the plea of revising, and re-revising, no bear could have made more of a trackle-tin than I.

With our best wishes for this New Year and affectionate remembrances to Rosemary and yourself,

[signed] Sylvia Townsend Warner

you might have hankered for in your son-in-law, it will be all the better and more secure because Rosemary will have had a hand in winning it, instead of finding it ready made among her wedding presents. Positions are very much like clothes, when all's said and done. The ready made ones are never a really good fit, it is much better to wait and save up until one can get it made to measure.

I like to think you remember our house by the river, and I wish you could see it just now, with its lawn newly mown for the first time this year, and the flower-beds still in a state of having more flowers than weeds in them, and the vegetables coming up in neat rows: everything in a state of Eden-like virtue and obedience. The winter before last we left our house by the river and rented for the winter months a house by the sea. It really was by the sea, too; nothing between it and the North Sea but a narrow shingle beach and the little turfy hillock on which it stood, and only a causeway across the marshes to connect us with the mainland. In storms – and we have several fine ones – the spray was thrown against our windows, and our little dog used to run over the hillock trying to catch the spindrift, snapping at it, and being perpetually surprised because there was nothing there for all his efforts but a slight taste of salt. It was a most romantic adventure. Every one said what fools we were to rent such a house at such a season, and the people we rented it from found it rather hard to conceal their private conviction that we were either lunatics or bad characters looking for a hide-out; but we were very happy there, and felt curiously mutilated and unreal when we came home and did not have the noise of the sea in our ears day and night. The last winter, however, we spent cosily and dozily at home.

Please give our remembrances to Rosemary and to Douglas when next you see him.

With best wishes from us both,

yours sincerely [signed] Sylvia Townsend Warner

Frome Vauchurch Maiden Newton Dorset.

3. i. 1954.

Dear Mrs Dobson.

We are both so very sorry to hear this sad news about Rosemary's baby. It is a tragic thing to have happened, and for you too it must have been a great blow as well as a great anxiety. I am glad she is well again, and I hope this means that she may have a baby later on. It would not make her forget about this one, and indeed, it should not, for no love should ever be forgotten; but it would re-establish her confidence in life. Besides, I can see from the story you sent me, that it would be another tragedy for a child not to have Rosemary for its mother. The child Catherine is drawn with such delicacy and understanding and rightness that there must be a talent for maternity as well as a talent for writing. Please tell her that I think it is a very good short story, beautifully composed and constructed, and with a quite unusual control over non-essentials. A sure choice over what to leave out is quite as important as knowing what to put in, and a rarer gift. One false step could have ruined this story, but there is no false step. Thank you very much for sending me a copy•

Alliance of Literary Societies

allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com

This most worthy organization publishes both a journal and newsletter, online only. It also hosts an annual meeting, next year's at Winchester, 21 – 23 April 2023, hosted by the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship. Their 2022 Journal focuses on writers' day jobs. The ALS also highlights a Society of the Month, October 2022 featuring The [Samuel] Johnson Society (Lichfield). Any takers to contact them to feature us?

The Worlds of Charles Dodgson and Lewis Carroll	Stephen Folan
Charlotte Mary Yonge (1823 – 1901): Teacher, Author – and Lady of the Parish	Clemence Schultze
Franz Kafka at the Office	Simon Keeton
Nevil Shute: The Day Job	Christopher Martin
Three Ways of Looking at Wallace Stevens	Marty Ross
'Very well then, journalism...': the Day Job of Geoffrey Grigson	R. M. Healey

Society Trips & Weekends

Member Ren Draya suggested that a list of our trips would be an enjoyable read.

I agree, and here are some from the first ten years of the Society. It was bit confusing separating the AGM weekends from the trips proper, but I hope this is good enough. n.b. Newsletters 1-39 are digitised on the Society's webpage.

The September weekends, at least in the early days, were usually in Dorchester, with a walk, often over the Five Marys, and a visit to St. Nicholas' Church to pay due respects at the gravesites of S & V.

The first trip outside Dorchester was to East Anglia in 2002, to Frankfort Manor (or Soley Old Hall, now called), the Shell Museum in Glandford with its John Craske needlework of the Norfolk coast, Salthouse, and the University of East Anglia. (Newsletter 6 – Eileen Johnson)

2003 – Good weather all around in Aldeburgh (more Craske), Stoke-by-Nayland, and Wormingfold, home to the secluded house of Ronald Blythe, who served tea and talked of memories of Sylvia, Britten and John Nash. (8 – Eileen Johnson)

2004 found us closer to ‘home’ – Litton Cheney, Toller Fratrum, and Lulworth Castle. (10 – Rosemary Sykes)

Hampshire – 2005 – a splendid write-up by Rosemary Sykes about Chawton and Jane Austen, and the Selborne of Gilbert White. (11)

Somerset – 2005 – Montachute, Ham Hill, Martok church, Muchelney, Huish Episcopi church (painted by Edward Burne-Jones), Langport, West Tisbury (home of Humphrey Stone), Fonthill Giford, and Higher Odcombe : a busy weekend. Sylvia visited this last, remarking ‘Odcombe churchyard has just such views as I remembered. I lay on a flat stone in company with several grasshoppers for some time’. (12 - Graham Pechy & Rosemary Sykes)

Oxford – 2006 – Kettles Yard, home cum art gallery, displaying ‘oak chairs, pebbles, a tiny box, paintings, sculptures, geraniums and a grand piano’ with a glass candlestick donated by Sylvia. Then to Hilton Hall, home of David Garnett, at which we were kindly welcomed by his son Richard. Sylvia described the front of the house as ‘nobly grammatical’. (14 – Jenny Wildblood)

Wells – 2007 – Glastonbury and the Abbey ruins; the village Priddy and ‘the most startling view in Somerset’; Wrington, the burial place of Hannah More and her four sisters, and ‘an elderly, hand-produced guide which seemed to be the one Sylvia consulted during her travel research for Somerset’ (written up by Stephen Mottram). Sunday was spent near the Cathedral. (16 - Judith Stinton)

Oxford – 2008 – visiting the Bodleian Library, hearing music from the choir of Keble College, then the next day touring the Cotswolds, Idbury in particular. We saw the tomb of John Meade Falkner, which ‘looked every bit like Blackbeard’s vault’. We saw where *The Countryman* had begun, and met Neil Philip, local resident and writer, who showed us a register signed by, among others, Sylvia, with a musical inscription of her own. (17 – Lynn Mutti / Peter Tolhurst)

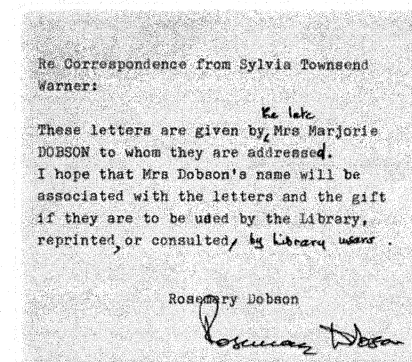
Lyme Regis – 2009 – at which we saw the famous Cobb, from which Louis Musgrove (*Persuasion*) fell. Steep and vicious, it’s a wonder she didn’t kill herself. Later, near ‘home’ we visited Granny Moxon’s cottage and heard JS speak on witches. (19 – Judith Stinton)

Norfolk – 2009 – at which we were guided through the Cathedral Archives, and later rode bus X29, otherwise known as the ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner’, shopped for books, and visited Blickling Hall on Sunday. (20 – Lynn Mutti / Judith Stinton)

Weymouth, Yeovil’s Pen Mill Hotel and Lytes Cary Manor – 2010 – In *Somerset* (1949), Sylvia writes “A feminine river, shy, sly and gentle, the Cary imposes its ladylike character on a pastoral landscape of poplar screens dividing peculiarly slender fields, and wears like a family jewel the manor-house of Lytes Carey, with a garden full of clipped yew compartments, and a pair of very handsome gateposts rising from the scrambling margin of a county lane...”. Judith Bond, in Newsletter 21 writes of the Hotel’s sad significance in Sylvia’s life.

Letters at The National Library of Australia

Member Michael Richards, of the Vagantes Press, notifies us of the letters below, from Sylvia to Mrs Marjorie Dobson, mother of the Australian poet Rosemary Dobson (cf. Newsletter 44, STW letter of 14.vi 1948 to Douglas Stewart). The first two are typed, the others in script.



Frome Vauchurch Maiden Newton Dorset.

12. iv. 1952.

Dear Mrs Dobson.

I was so pleased to get you letter, and to hear the news of Rosemary’s marriage; and I hope soon the hear the further news that you are a grandmother. I am sure you would make a particularly good one. My own grandmother assured me that it was a most delightful profession. Mme de Sevigne seems to have been of the same mind, Mrs Dobson, and I am sure, [Rosemary] will concur when her time comes. And if Rosemary and Alexander have not very much money – well, who has in these odd days? Certainly not the wealthy, who seem on the whole more impoverished and hard put to it than the poor. I do not suppose it will make much difference, or any difference, to their happiness; the more so, since they are both young. And when that established position comes, which