

The Espalier, Lolly Willowses, Mr Fortune's Maggot, Time Importuned, The Maze, The True Heart, Some World Far From Ours, This Our Brother, Elinor Barley, A Moral Ending and Other Stories, Opus 7, The Salutation, Rainbow, The Week-End Dickens, Whether a Dove or Seagull, More Joy in Heaven, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, Two Poems, The Portrait of a Tortoise, The Museum of Cheats, The Corner That Held Them, Somerset, The Illness of Chi-Liang, Jane Austen, The Flint Anchor, Winter in the Air, Boxwood, Twenty-Eight Poems by Valentine Ackland, By Way of Sainte-Beuve by Marcel Proust, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Place of Shipwreck by Jean-René Huguenin, A Stranger with a Bag, T H White: A Biography, Two Conversation Pieces, King Duffus and Other Poems, Later Poems by Valentine Ackland, The Innocent and the Guilty, The Nature of the Moment by Valentine Ackland, Winter Illness by Valentine Ackland, Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter by Valentine Ackland, Kingdoms of Elfin, Azrael & Other Poems / Twelve Poems.

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

Newsletter Number Forty-Seven

Autumn 2024

Scenes of Childhood and Other Stories, Letters, Collected Poems, One Thing Leading to Another, Selected Poems, Selected Stories, The Music at Long Verney, The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner, Sylvia and David: The Townsend/Garnett Letters, I'll Stand By You: Selected Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland, The Element of Lavishness: Selected Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and William Maxwell, Dorset Stories, New Collected Poems, Cousin and Friend: Sylvia Townsend Warner, Letters to Rachel 1950-1952, With the Hunted: Sylvia Townsend Warner, Selected Writings, The Akeing Heart: Letters Between Sylvia Townsend Warner, Valentine Ackland and Elizabeth Wade White, Of Cats and Elfin: Short Tales and Fantasies, English Climate: Wartime Stories.

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER FORTY-SEVEN AUTUMN 2024



A portrait of Sylvia Townsend Warner by Cecil Beaton.

Jay Barksdale has handed on the Society's Newsletter to a new editor with a sigh of relief, and the members of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society owe him great thanks for his sixteen issues of the Newsletter. He took over the role in 2015 from Judith Stinton, and we hope and expect to continue hearing from him, and to see him online and at future STW Soc gatherings when the cost of air travel permits.

The updated cover design follows the longstanding list of the works of STW, using Russell and Mitchell's *Sylvia Townsend Warner. A Bibliography* (2020) to list all the titles of her works, those she edited and translated and works about her. The titles on the lower half of the cover are those published after her death.

The Newsletter has a new feature, 'My latest Sylvia', in which collectors of interesting editions of STW's works introduce us to their latest or their favourite Warner acquisition. We begin the series with a piece by Michael Caines, an assistant editor at the *Times Literary Supplement*. I spotted a note by him about acquiring his latest Sylvia in his Substack column, *Bibliomania*, and asked him for a fuller account for the Newsletter. I am also delighted to be able to publish a brief article from Quair Books on STW's place in the antiquarian book market. Also featured are the notes from the 2024 AGM.

As you will see on the inside front cover, the Society needs a Secretary, a Treasurer (we have hired a bookkeeper as a temporary measure), an Events organiser (perhaps to plan just one a year?) and someone to manage the Facebook page. Please get in touch if you're interested in any of these roles.

And finally, do share this Newsletter with anyone you think might be interested.

Kate Macdonald

My latest Sylvia

I was about half an hour into the PBFA book fair in Bloomsbury in May 2024, when I bumped into Sylvia Townsend Warner. I had just bumped into Gertrude Stein and Elizabeth Smart on the tempting shelves of Quair Books, run by Fiona Philip, in a middle aisle of the fair's main room. Now here was Sylvia – represented, that is, by her short story collection *A Spirit Rises*, as well as limited editions of *Elinor Barley* and *The Espalier*, and her own copy of Thomas Otway's *Plays*.



My STW collection began modestly, with some second-hand Viragos: in arbitrary fashion, the first acquisitions were *The True Heart* and *After the Death of Don Juan*. To those dark green paperbacks I soon added some smarter oddities, such as *Opus 7* and the miscellany published by Chatto and Windus in which her pen portrait of T F Powys appears. That association remains the key for me, as I spent some years researching the story of his life and works at the Dorset County Museum and elsewhere – a story to which the ingenious Sylvia is, of course, essential. My copy of Sylvia's *Diaries* is

crammed with bookmarks – shortcuts to the Powysian passages.

Working on Powys led me to read his siblings' books with varying degrees of enjoyment; I have never felt anything but pleasure in reading STW. Not least in reading her story collections. The Quair copy of *A Spirit Rises* is a first edition (Chatto and Windus, 1962) and has suffered in the predictable ways: boards lightly mottled, edges lightly foxed, etc. The dust jacket is price-clipped but, to me, charming, thanks to Carol Barker's illustration of the teenage Martin Jones – the protagonist of 'Youth and the Lady', the first story in the collection – lying on his back observing his rare avian discovery through his binoculars. The title story remains, I think, a quintessential piece of Sylvian poignancy; the last story in the book, 'A Work of Art', one of her idiosyncratic, twisted things. I fear that I'll be looking longingly at the Quair Books website in the near future, like one of STW's fictional eccentrics transported to the age of the internet ...

Michael Caines, *Times Literary Supplement*

If you would like to write about your latest Sylvia for the Newsletter, please send your rhapsody to the Editor.

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Valuing Sylvia Townsend Warner

Looking at Ray Russell's 'Price Guide to STW First Editions' in the inaugural issue of the *Newsletter* (2000) twenty-four years later, in many respects not much has changed: the earlier titles – *Lolly Willowes* now, especially – command some of the highest prices, while you'll still expect to pay double or more for any STW title in a smart, bright dust jacket, than without. British editions tend to be priced higher than American, except where the latter was issued first. Then, as now, STW has her devotees and readers, but perhaps more so, with the work of the Society, biographers, scholars, publishers and Dorchester Museum, plus changing times and greater visibility of queer lives, enhancing her reputation. This is the case with Valentine Ackland too. There is certainly an appetite for both women's books in first edition in the UK and US: our Quair Books Spring Short List 2024, featuring numerous inscribed STW & Ackland titles, sold most of those items within days.

In the intervening years since 2000, however, the second-hand and rare book market has changed dramatically, with the internet propelling books of all conditions from dusty shelves onto online marketplaces. Where the 1932 short story collection, *The Salutation*, was once deemed a rarity, there are currently [in July 2024] three jacketed copies, all in promising condition, available to buy on Abebooks. STW's rarer titles – the deluxe edition of *Elinor Barley* (1930), for instance, of which there are only 30 signed and numbered copies – will always command some of the highest prices because of its original scarcity, with a jacketed first edition (first impression) of *Lolly Willowes* going for a similar price range, if not more. Unjacketed signed copies of early STW novels have passed through our hands for lower sums, being unusual but not rare, while later and posthumously published short story and poetry collections, such as *Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977), *Twelve Poems* (1980) and *Scenes of Childhood* (1981) are fairly common and can be picked

up with their original jackets, often within the price range of a new copy in a contemporary edition. STW's mid-century Chatto & Windus publications, in jackets, are scarcer and so you'll expect to pay more.

What Russell's 1999 guide doesn't account for are inscribed and association copies (a copy owned or connected to someone of significance, usually relating to the author or title). These are unique books that capture important, or sometimes little known, relationships or mark key anniversaries or events. While we happily stock first edition copies of STW titles, it is these books that I seek out, for sentimental, political, as well as market reasons. STW was a generous inscriber, and an inveterate letter writer so signed copies, or books with correspondence laid in, do crop up, as do books from her own, and Ackland's, libraries. These do not include those titles that were transferred to the collection of the Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society: see Roger Peers' rather painful account (2017) of rescuing books and papers, in the nick of time, from their Frome Vauchurch home; as well as Frances Bingham's article about Ackland's various bequests, including to the National Poetry Library (2000). We have had the pleasure of handling copies inscribed by STW to Dorset friends and neighbours, to fellow writers and publishers, but have valued most highly those that speak to private lives and significant moments: Sylvia's gift to Valentine in the early years of their relationship, a copy of Lotte Eckener's *Die Welt Der Baume*, inscribed: 'Valentine/ (like a tree)/ May 20th: 1934:' (Fig. 1); a Dorset-related title from Katie Powys' library bequeathed to Ackland and featuring the couple's distinctive book label designed by Reynolds Stone; or, even, Bo Foster's copy of *The Espalier*. Such books, which capture the network of intimate relationships and private lives and provide a fine thread of connection to the past, are (in many ways) invaluable, the hardest to price, and the most difficult from which to part.

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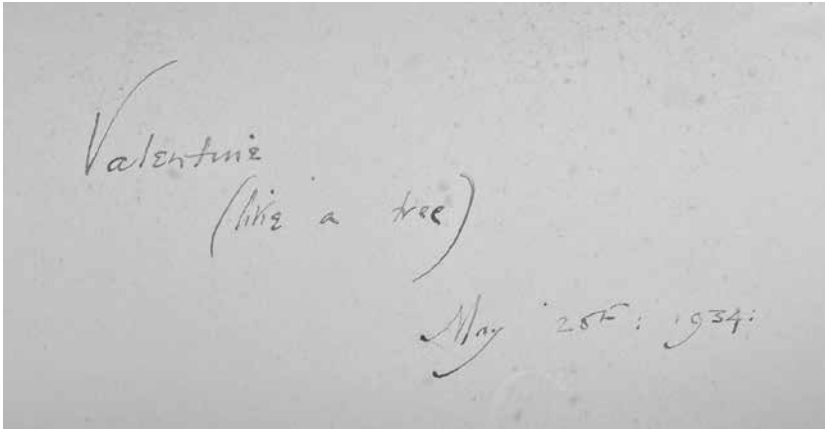


Figure 1. Quair Books Ltd

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The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2024, 11.15 am in The Learning Room, Shire Hall, Dorchester and on Zoom.

Present in person: Peter Swaab, Judith Bond, Judith Stinton, Rowan Bright, Annie Rhodes, Sarah Jane Pattison.

Present online: Janet Montefiore, Gill Davies, Kate Macdonald, Russell Foster, Hannah Berry, Mercedes Aguirre, John Sanders.

Apologies were received from Jay Barksdale, Ren Draya, Helen Jones, Monica Andrade, Andrew McDonald, Maud Ellmann.

1. The Minutes of 2023 AGM were approved.
2. Matters arising.

The Mary Jacobs Prize Peter Swaab reported that the competition announced in 2022 had attracted only one entry, though of high quality – it has been published in the 2023 *JSTWS* – and plainly needs better publicising. JM suggested sending a round robin to the directors of postgraduate English programmes, which Kate Macdonald urged should be done by the middle of the autumn term. Kate Macdonald suggested advertising the competition in the TLS and LRB, where a quarter-page currently costs £175, which we can afford. It was agreed that we run the next competition in 2025-26. The deadline for 2022 was 31 January, which we might change next time to 1st March. **Action: JM**

Reducing the subscription Peter Swaab put it to the meeting that in the past year, our members have not been getting a great deal from us other than the Journal, now that Jay Barksdale no longer edits the six-monthly Newsletters. He was particularly concerned about our overseas members who are not in a position to attend live events. Sarah Jane Pattison said that this had not been raised by any overseas member to her and that those who left had done so for other reasons such as bereavement, or simply not keeping up their subs. It was felt that given the likelihood of rising expenses, it would be unwise to lower our subscription, though Sarah said she would ask the overseas members if they are happy with the sub as it stands and offer the lower rate to anybody who would like it. It was agreed that the Society needs to be a lot more active online (see item 6), with group online readings from STW and a revived online reading group.

Changing AGM venue to online This year's AGM had more attenders on Zoom than in person. We have tended to combine the Society's Annual Trip from Dorchester and its environs, which as Judith Stinton pointed out, have been visited exhaustively by the Society. It was agreed that we should try detaching the AGM from the Annual Trip next year and hold it on Zoom, and that we should try to arrange a weekend trip to Norfolk.

3. **Society Reports**

Chair's report Janet Montefiore spoke to her paper, already circulated. The Society had held two successful live events. (1) The Sylvia Townsend Warner Lecture was given in October 2023 by Claire Harman, and had been an outstanding lecture and very well attended (including an

Estonian visitor, Ksenia Shmydkaya, whose essay on STW and Georg Lukacs appeared in the 2023 Journal). It is now available on youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-mwV444uZ0>. (2) In February 2024 there was a very successful and stimulating Study Weekend on Sylvia Townsend Warner and Thomas Hardy, held jointly by us and the Hardy Society, attended and enjoyed by 30 people including at least eight STWS members.

Publications on STW and VA continue to come out, including Harriet Baker's *Rural Hours: The Country Lives of Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Rosamond Lehmann*. STW's acclaimed 1967 biography *T H White* with a new preface by Gill Davies appeared from Handheld Press in 2023 and had been warmly reviewed by Claire Harman in the TLS. Kate Macdonald will close Handheld Press in 2025. JM thanked Kate for the splendid work Handheld Press has done in making work by and about STW and VA available to 21st century readers, including Frances Bingham's biography of VA.

Our online presence has been in abeyance over the past year, and we need to get our online Reading Group and Group Readings up and running.

The centenary of *Lolly Willowes* is coming up in 2026, an event we want and ought to mark, and JM suggested celebrating it with a conference. Peter Swaab said this could probably be held at UCL, and that we might broaden the scope of the conference title to include religion as well as witchcraft.

Kate Macdonald suggested putting on a literary competition, in which we invite competitors to respond to the book for instance with a sequel or prequel or the story of minor characters; this would mean that the competition needs to be put on well before the conference.

Both plans can be advertised on the FB page Undervalued British Women Writers 1930-1960, and elsewhere. There was general enthusiasm for both proposals, which could be combined with winners reading their stories at the conference. Competition fees were discussed: Kate suggested a fee which would also give competitors a year's membership of the Society at a reduced rate of £10. JM suggested the competition be called 'The Untold Stories of *Lolly Willowes*'. JM said she was happy to work with Kate on the competition. Peter suggested a conference committee, perhaps of three: himself and his postgraduate assistant Will Burns. This was agreed. **Action: PS, JM**

Journal Editor. Peter Swaab spoke to his report. He added that he had heard that some members hadn't received the 2023 Journals that were sent out at the end of last year, and he would be contacting members to see if anybody else needed to be mailed a further copy.

Web Editor Hannah Berry has been doing this job de facto since May 2023, and has agreed to become the official web editor, for which JM thanked her. She has already been updating the website, and will do so more often, announcing events and adding information, including the AGM papers.

Treasurer's Report and 2023-2024 Accounts This is Helen Jones' final report, as she is standing down as Treasurer owing to family and work pressures. The report and the accounts show that the Society's finances are now stable. We now have a total of £4081.26 in the kitty, slightly down from last year's £4,238.16 because of the production of two Journals and the award of two prizes, £400 in all, plus final Newsletter expenses of £398.00. There were occasional problems with overseas members sending non-sterling cheques, which Barclays do not accept, while bank transfers from overseas are very expensive. Kate Macdonald said the latter problem could be solved by setting up a Wise account and it was agreed to investigate this.

We discussed at some length how to replace Helen, which is difficult as none of us has fiscal training or experience. JM suggested that in the absence of a suitable candidate, we look for a qualified outside person who could handle our finances without charging too much. Kate Macdonald said she would contact Farah Mendlesohn who is trained in accountancy.

Action: JM. (Farah has taken on the book-keeping, but we still need an official Treasurer to take charge.)

Membership Secretary Sarah Jane Pattison spoke to her report, which was brief because for various reasons she'd been unable to get hold of some of the available data. We have 97 members, of whom seven are honorary. Next year she will produce a detailed account of our membership, including how many are overseas and which are students and/ or paying reduced fees. It was agreed to offer a discounted membership to members of the Facebook group Undervalued British Women Writers 1930-1960, which is co-hosted by Kate Macdonald and Sue Kennedy.

4. **‘Sheroes’ project in Dorchester** Dorchester has several statues of men, but none of a woman, and the project plans to remedy this. They have agreed a shortlist of six women candidates, of whom STW is one, and are inviting people to vote on which candidate they prefer. The results will be declared in June, after which funding will be organised. We agreed that if STW is the one chosen, the Society will sponsor the project with a donation of £300.

Meanwhile, Hannah Berry will put up a notice on the website, inviting people to cast their vote for STW – or preferably, STW and VA. If STW is the chosen candidate, the Society intends to make a contribution to the costs of the statue. **Action: Hannah**

5. **The Sylvia Townsend Warner Lecture for 2025:** We need to nominate a lecturer. Several names were discussed, including Sarah LeFanu. JM will contact her with the invitation. **Action: JM**
6. **Online activities:** JM will arrange and chair an online reading by members of their own selections from STW and VA. The first of these will take place this summer, and if it’s successful we shall set up another on 21 October, the birthday of our eminent late member Ursula Le Guin. PS would look to arrange a reading group discussion of *After the Death of Don Juan*. **Action: JM**
7. **Society trip in 2025.** There was general enthusiasm for a trip to Norfolk, to visit Frankfort Manor and other places associated with STW and VA.
8. **AOB** There was no other business.

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Rural Hours in Private Eye

Harriet Baker’s recent group biography *Rural Hours: The Country Lives of Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Rosamond Lehmann* which has been well-received elsewhere, got a bit of a kicking in *Private Eye* in June 2024.

Here is most of the last paragraph: ‘Rather than digging up anything new about her subjects, Baker relies on extolling the benefits of nature for writers. It’s biography as balm rather than *nostalgie de la boue*. But there’s no escaping the snobbishness of this trio, who disparaged their fellow villagers for failing to appreciate an antique washstand [this misses the point of the quote about STW they had highlighted earlier] and who had more interest in

the life of a caterpillar than the lives of the lower classes [re Woolf].’

It's rather remarkable to see a mention of STW in *Private Eye* at all. Your editor is not a frequent reader, but Warner is almost the last person we would have imagined featuring in those pages. If anything, Valentine Ackland should be more on their radar for her campaigning on rural pay and housing. So one wonders, why did *Private Eye* bother to review *Rural Hours* at all?

We hear that it will be covered in a future *Journal* of the STW Soc.

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Rural Hours on Woman's Hour

Redressing this rather unhappy episode, we move swiftly on to the triumph of *Rural Hours* being discussed by Harriet on BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour! The episode for 7th August (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0021qs5>) includes this item: 'A new exhibition, Gardening Bohemia, at the Garden Museum in London explores the relationship between women in the Bloomsbury group and gardening. Plus a book out earlier this year, Rural Hours, looks at the influence of time spent in the countryside on three women writers associated with the group, including Virginia Woolf. Curator Claudia Tobin and author Harriet Baker discuss.' Do look for the episode on BBC Sounds to replay it.

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Lost letters from Valentine to Alyse Gregory

Jan Montefiore sent this note that she originally put together in November 2023 which didn't quite reach the Newsletter in time.

I might have a lead to VA's letters to Alyse Gregory, which Rosemary Manning sent to Claire Harman and which she returned, and whose subsequent fate is unknown. I know Lis Whitelaw, who was Manning's lover in her old age, via my sister who is a good friend of hers. I thought Lis must be Rosemary's literary executor, because she once sent me a photocopy of a page from Alyse's typed diary in September / October 1949, at the crisis time when Sylvia was in Pin Mill and visited her.

Rosemary was Alyse Gregory's literary executor and Lis inherited the literary executorship for Alyse. I've just talked with Lis on the phone, and she told me that she donated Rosemary's papers (which had a good deal about STW) to the Women's Library at Glasgow University. Some of the Gregory papers she donated to the Powys archive in Dorchester, but most of them to the Beinecke Library at Yale, and she was pretty sure Valentine's letters were with them.

Lis then rang me back to say she'd just checked her files, and she confirmed that the letters from VA to AG *are* in the Beinecke [Library, at Yale University], in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department. They're filed under American Literature, because they were sent to Alyse, which may be why no one has traced them since Claire read them in the 1980s.

So that's a bit of good news – the letters are not lost for good.

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Membership of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

To join the Society, please contact sarahjanepattison1@gmail.com for further instructions. Yearly membership fees are as follows:

UK individual – £18.00 (student / unwaged £12.00)

UK joint – £20.00 (student / unwaged £15.00)

Overseas individual – £28.00 (student / unwaged £20.00)

Overseas joint – £30.00 (student / unwaged £22.00)

Members receive two issues of the Newsletter each year, and a print copy of the annual issue of the *Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Society*. Individual articles in the *Journal* can be consulted online at <https://journals.uclpress.co.uk/stw/>, but it's much nicer to have the print copies to admire and leaf through at will.

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If anyone has back issues of the *Journal* available for sale or donation, do get in touch with the Editor, who will advertise them in the next issue.

