

THE SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting 2025

Saturday 10 May online by Zoom, 4-6 pm BST

Present: Kate Macdonald (minutes), Peter Swaab (minutes), Gill Davies, Janet Montefiore (Chair), Jay Barksdale, Scott Herrick, Sarah Pattison, Judith Bond, Will N Burns, Maud Ellmann, Andrew McDonald, Hilary Bedder, Carolyn Maxim, Rose McMahan, Russell Pierce Foster, Ren Draya, Cody Bates, Howard Booth, Hannah Berry, Annie Rhodes.

MINUTES

1. Jan welcomed everybody attending, especially our US members Jay, Carolyn, Rose, Russell, Ren and Cody. There were apologies for absence: Page Nelson, Jennifer Nesbitt, Clare Mabey, Judith Stinton and Helen Jones.
2. Approval of Minutes of AGM 2024 (report 1).
3. Matters arising:
 - a. Mary Jacobs Essay Competition. It was agreed to hold the competition in 2026, and announcements will be sent out shortly. **Action: Peter Swaab.**
 - b. The next Society Lecture will be given by Harriet Baker on 22 October 2025 at the Institute for Advanced Studies, UCL, the event starting at 5.30pm.
 - c. Norfolk trip (see report 2). Kate proposed an itinerary running from north to south, from Salthouse to Sloley (location of Frankfort Manor) or Horning for the night, and then Winterton and St Benet's Gateway, to take place on the last weekend in July. Hilary offered to help with planning. The itinerary will be sent with more details in a separate email to members soon. **Action: Kate**
4. Two new officers were proposed: Annie Rhodes as our new Treasurer, to succeed Helen Jones, and Hilary Bedder to succeed Sarah Jane Pattison as Membership Secretary. These were accepted unanimously. Jan recorded her heartfelt thanks to Helen for her work for the Society over the years, and for continuing for so long with no successor in sight.
5. Treasurer's report (report 3) and accounts of 2024-25 (report 4), presented by Helen Jones and Annie Rhodes. The Society has a healthy balance but it would be helpful to regain the recent reduction in membership income. Peter noted that there had been a recent purchase by the University of Göttingen of some back numbers of the Journal (£42).
6. There are important decisions to be made about how we should bank. We considered four questions raised by Helen and Annie:
 - a. We ask **Annie** to research an alternative to PayPal, and report back to the Chair about the best way forward.

- b. Conversion fees for non-UK members: it was agreed that the subscriptions cover this.
 - c. We ask **Hilary** to chase members who have not paid increased subscription fees, and liaise with Annie, bearing in mind that we could offer reduced fees for those unable to pay.
 - d. We decided not to raise the subscription rate for this year, and asked **Annie** to consider the matter for next year.
 - e. Sarah Jane Pattison raised the issue of banking with Barclays (report 5) over their hostile policy towards trans users and staff. It was agreed to write a letter to Barclays registering concerns and for the Society to consider a change of banks. Judith Bond noted that Barclays had offered some advantageous arrangements. We ask **Annie** to research alternative banking arrangements and report back to the next AGM. **Action: Sarah and Pete** to write to Barclays.
7. Sarah presented the Membership Secretary's report (report 6). Jan expressed her thanks to Sarah for all her work, and for continuing to serve the Society in difficult circumstances. **Hilary** and **Annie** are asked to liaise with Sarah and Helen to make sure we know who the current members are.
8. Jan presented her Chair's report (report 7), describing the achievements and difficulties of the past year, and announcing that for reasons of health and other pressures, she is stepping down from this role as soon as a replacement can be found. The meeting warmly concurred when Pete thanked Jan for her huge contribution to the Society in her nine years as its Chair, and in particular for taking on the increasingly onerous further role of Secretary when nobody else was available for that post.

Following discussion after the meeting Professor Maud Ellmann was approached to see if she would be willing to take on the role of Society Chair, and she has said that she would be willing. If any members wish to put forward another candidate or to raise any objections, **they should contact The Society Secretary, Kate Macdonald** (kmacdonald@brookes.ac.uk), by 1st June. Otherwise Prof Ellmann will be confirmed as Chair, starting from 2nd June.

9. Kate Macdonald offered to take on the role of Secretary for the Society, which was accepted.
10. Reports from other officers:
- a. Hannah Berry reported on her work as the Online officer (report 8). She plans to be more proactive with the website, asks for more input from members and on Society activities that she can post, plans to move the Society's social media presence from Twitter/X to Bluesky, and to work with Karina on the Facebook page. Jan thanked Hannah for her work.
 - b. Pete reported on the progress of the Journal (report 9), a high point of which this year has been a count of over a third of a million downloads of Journal articles since it was made Open Access by UCL Press. UCL Press in effect subsidise the journal's digital production by waiving its usual fees, and Pete pointed out that this arrangement depends on a UCL staff member remaining as an editor of the Journal. Jan expressed her deep thanks to Pete for his work as Journal Editor, and congratulated him for

the high quality of the Journal. **Pete** agreed to Annie's suggestion to bring the existing link to the Society more prominently onto the Journal's webpage when articles are downloaded.

- c. Kate reported on the Newsletter (report 10), and on the new leaflet. She will send leaflets to Dorset County Museum, Dorchester Library, the Dorset History Centre and the church at Chaldon. **Action: Kate.**

11. Peter reported on planning for the *Lolly Willowes* centenary conference. This will be held at UCL 100 years after *Lolly Willowes* was published. The title has yet to be finalised, but will encompass STW, LW, religion and the supernatural. UCL will host the conference (which coincides with a 200-year anniversary for UCL itself) on 29-30 May 2026 at the UCL Institute for Advanced Studies (not the one at Senate House). Adam Mars-Jones, who wrote an excellent introduction for *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, will be the keynote speaker. It is hoped and fairly confidently expected that UCL will support a good deal of the costs for the conference.

1. Jan and Sarah reported on the progress of the STW statue in Dorchester. Sarah told us that this will be unveiled at 12 noon on Sunday 14th December 2025 as part of Dorchester Council's Christmas festival market. Five people at the meeting indicated that they want to attend the event. Jan said that as the town will be crowded, those needing accommodation in Dorchester in order to be there at midday on a Sunday should book it early. **Action: Hannah**, to post this on the website.

2. AOB

- a. Jay has some old Journals to redistribute: he will liaise with Kate.
- b. Jan has some of Lyn Mutti's STW library to redistribute, and offered the books to Will Burns, who was happy to accept them.

Michael Lyons is selling a 1922 translation of Bunin's stories, signed by STW on the flyleaf, for which he wants £300. This seems rather too much for the Society, and **Kate** will send Quair Books' details to Jan to forward to Mr Lyons.

- c. Jan asked if people were happy with the change to an online AGM instead of a hybrid meeting in Dorchester as before, with some members present in person and others attending online. There was general agreement this Zoom meeting has been far more satisfactory, by enabling members living at a distance or overseas to contribute to the discussions, and to talk to one another, which hasn't been possible with the hybrid meetings. We agreed to continue having the AGM online, and to try to have in-person opportunities to meet, both at Dorchester and elsewhere, which was unanimously agreed.

Jan then thanked all the members attending, and the meeting closed at 6pm.

Kate Macdonald (Secretary)
12 May 2025

Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Annual General Meeting

**11 May 2024, 11.15 a.m. The Learning Room, Shire Hall, Dorchester
and on Zoom**

Present at the meeting In person: Peter Swaab, Judith Bond, Judith Stinton, Rowan Bright, Sarah Jane Pattison. Online Janet Montefiore, Annie Rhodes, Gill Davies, Kate Macdonald, Russell Foster, Hannah Berry, Mercedes Aguirre, John Sanders.

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

As JM was not present in person, this meeting was chaired by Peter Swaab, while Janet Montefiore took the minutes.

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NB: The AGM Minutes which JM took down on 11 May and wrote up on 29 May 2024 for circulation to members in June and were posted by Hannah Berry on the STW website, lacked any mention of the Journal report and Kate Macdonald's offer to take on the Newsletter, and were also incomplete in other respects. The minutes shown here for members' approval therefore incorporate some subsequent amendments and additions, highlighted in yellow.

1. The Minutes of AGM 2024 were approved
2. The Minutes of 2023 AGM were approved
3. **Matters arising:**
 - (i) **Mary Jacobs Prize** Peter Swaab pointed out 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 costs £145, which we can afford. It was agreed that we run the next competition in 2025-6. The deadline for 2022 was 31 January, perhaps we should push it to 1st March?

Changing subscription downwards 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 6 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 to by any overseas member to her - those who left had

done did 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 members if they are happy with the sub as it stands. **She agreed to individuals who may be finding the fee difficult.**

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.

- (ii) **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.

4. **Chair's report** Janet Montefiore spoke to her report, which had been already circulated. The Society had held two successful live events: the Sylvia Townsend Warner Lecture given in October 2023 by Claire Harman, which had been an outstanding lecture and very well attended (including by Ksenia Shmydkaya, whose essay on STW and George Lukacs appeared in the 2023 Journal), and in February 2024 the 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 8 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 Journal Editor*. 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 would be closing Handheld Press in 2025. JM thanked Kate for the splendid work Handheld 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 she suggested celebrating it with a conference. Peter Swaab said this could be held at UCL, broadening the scope to witchcraft and religion. Kate Macdonald suggested putting on a literary competition, in which we invited competitors to write the stories of minor characters in the novel, which will mean that the competition needs to be put on well before the conference. Both can be advertised on the FB page of Unburied Books. 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 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 of three: himself and his postgraduate assistant Will Burns and JM. This was agreed, and reports from officers followed.

5. **Membership Secretary** Sarah Jane Pattison spoke to her report, which had to be both **informal and incomplete**, because although in May 2023 our outgoing Membership

Secretary Mercedes Aguirre had sent the spreadsheet of members, Sarah has not been able to obtain the further information which is necessary to update the list. She reported that we have 97 members in all, including 7 honorary members. A few people had joined the Society since May, but she did not know how many had resigned since, or which were paying a reduced rate, or were students. She apologised for her report's shortcomings although these were obviously not her fault. She hoped by 2025 to produce a detailed account of our membership, how many are overseas and which are students and/ or paying reduced fees. **Action: SP**

JM thanked Sarah and congratulated her on having done all she possibly could in such very difficult circumstances. The meeting joined in these congratulations, thanking Sarah warmly for offering to carry on as Membership Secretary until the May 2024 AGM, by which time we need to find a replacement Membership Secretary.

6. 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 awarding two prizes, £400 in all, plus 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 YSE account and it was agreed to investigate this.

We discussed at some length how to replace Helen: difficult, as nobody else present had the requisite fiscal training or experience. JM suggested that in the absence of a suitable candidate, we look for a qualified outside person who could handle out finances without charging too much. Kate Macdonald said she would contact Farah Mendlesohn who is trained in accountancy. **Action: KM and JM**

7. **Online report:** Hannah Berry, who has been our *de facto* online officer since May 2023, has agreed to become our official web editor, for which JM thanked her. Hannah has already been updating the website and will do so more often, announcing events and adding information, including the AGM papers. **Action: HB**

8. Journal Report

Peter Swaab the Editor of the *JSTWS*, began with the encouraging news that since 2019, there have been over 100,000 downloads 125 countries of the *Journal* on the UCL Press digital hosting platform. Two issues of the *Journal* had since our May 2023 AGM been published, in July 2023 and December 2023.

It had been agreed at the 2023 AGM that as from now, the *Journal* would be published only once a year, and this year's will come out in November or December 2024.

Finally, Peter was pleased to announce that UCL English Department has given financial support for a postgraduate student to act as his assistant editor. Will Burns, whose PhD is on twentieth-century British and American poetry, had been appointed

to this role. The meeting were delighted with this excellent news, and thanked Peter for all his work. It was agreed that new members would be sent a copy of the present journal **Action: PS**

9. ‘Sheroes’ project for a statue in in Dorchester Sarah Pattison reported on the situation in Dorchester regarding t a possible statue of STW. Dorchester has several statues of men, but none of a woman, and the project plans to remedy this. They have agreed a shortlist of 6 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. 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 meeting agreed that the Society will sponsor the project with a donation of £300, and will offer our enthusiastic support to the project. **Action: HB and JM.**

10. The Sylvia Townsend Warner Lecture for 2025: We need to nominate a lecturer. Several names were suggested, including Sarah LeFanu, whom JM will contact her with the invitation. **Action: JM.**

11. Online activities: These had been in abeyance last year, but we are keen to revive them. Peter Swaab would set up another reading and discussion group shortly, and Janet Montefiore would arrange and chair an online reading by members of their own selections from STW and VA. The first of these would take place this summer, and if it’s successful she would set up another on 21 October, the birthday of our eminent late member Ursula Le Guin (1929-2018).

12. 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. We have lacked an Events Officer since Richard Searle had to resign the role in 2019, but it was hoped that an enterprising member would take on the challenge of organising it.

12 . A.O.B.

Kate Macdonald volunteered to become Editor of the STW Society’s *Newsletter*, which has been in abeyance since Jay Barksdale resigned in May 2023. This offer was enthusiastically accepted by the meeting, and the Chair thanked Kate for this generous offer. **Action: KM**

Janet Montefiore thanked everyone attending the meeting, and closed the AGM.

Janet Montefiore, Chair and Acting Secretary
29 April 2025

Proposed summer outing for the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society to Norfolk

This revisits sites previously visited by the Society, and more can added.

Saturday

- meet at Salthouse for lunch at The DunCow (<https://www.salthouseduncow.com/>)
- walk about the town to work out where Great Eye Folly was
- drive to The Shell Museum, Glandford (<https://www.shellmuseum.org.uk/>). This normally closes at 3pm but will keep it open for us to complete our visit (I rang and asked).
- Drive to near Sloley to stay the night. Suggested accommodation: King's Head, Coltishall (<https://kingsheadcoltishall.co.uk/>), or The Swan Inn, Horning (<https://www.vintageinn.co.uk/restaurants/east/theswaninnhorning#/>), which has added excitement for being an Arthur Ransome setting). See also Sloley Old Hall stable cottage (<https://www.holidaycottages.co.uk/cottage/36880-sloley-old-stables>)
- We can eat dinner together at either of the inns.

Sunday

- Visit Sloley Old Hall. They haven't replied to my letter about a visit to the grounds, but since the Sloley Old Hall stable cottage is rentable as a holiday stay I might be able to reach the owner via the lettings agency. Or, if someone stays at the cottage they could let us in ...
- Drive to Winterton for lunch, perhaps at The Fisherman's Return (<https://www.fishermansreturn.com/>)
- Walk about Winterton
- Drive to St Benet's Abbey Gatehouse. This is remote, and apparently needs a 25 min walk from a tiny car park. I can ask the North Norfolk Archaeological Trust if someone would give us a tour and a talk?
<https://www.norfarchtrust.org.uk/project/st-benets-abbey/>

And then disperse.

Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Annual General Meeting May 2025

Retiring Treasurer's Report

Accounting Methods

As in previous accounts, I have used the cash basis, accounting for items of income and expenditure as they are paid.

For clarity, and to help with budgeting, I have also noted significant expenses incurred during the year that had not been paid at the year end.

Summary

As you can see from the accounts, we will have roughly broken even this year, once the costs of the 2024 Journal have been considered; this year's expenditure also includes a one-off donation to the Sylvia Townsend Warner statue fund.

Although we do have reserves to carry forward at 31 March 2025, and look to be in a stable financial position, it is worth noting that subscription income fell by over £200 this year, which we should look to reverse if we can.

New Treasurer

On a brighter note, Annie Rhodes has kindly volunteered to take over from me as Society Treasurer. I am very grateful to her and am currently in the process of arranging the bank authorisation forms, so that she will be able to begin running the accounts in the coming months.

Overseas Subscribers

If you are outside the UK and have a PayPal account, it is very easy to pay your subscription using this PayPal-me link without incurring disproportionate bank charges, which I understand is an issue for some members in the USA.

<https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/STWSociety>

I can also raise an invoice through PayPal, which you can settle online in US\$ using your normal credit or debit card and thus avoiding foreign currency charges, without having to join PayPal yourself.

If you haven't paid your 2025 Subscription yet, please do let me know if you would like me to raise an invoice for you.

Banking choices

We benefit from a special community business account with Barclays: we don't pay a monthly fee and there are no charges on receipts or payments. So far, I haven't been able to find another bank that would give us such favourable terms as a new customer, so I have stuck with them for another year.

Paypal, as noted above, has been useful for receiving overseas members' subs, and has been helpful for some UK members too as it automatically requests renewal payments. It does take a percentage of the funds we receive though, and the percentage varies according to the source country and amount. For example, a UK individual subscriber pays £18, and 0.82 goes to PayPal, leaving us with £17.18. A member in the USA might send us £28, and after charges, we receive £26.33. In view of this I would encourage members to pay by standing order to the Barclays account if they can, as the Society will then receive the full amount of the funds.

Old Subscription Rates

A few longstanding founder members are still paying old subscription rates by standing order. Over the last couple of years, they have sometimes made top up payments to correct this, but it would be much easier if they could amend their standing orders with their banks, as we are unable to make changes to these from our side.

Helen Jones
Treasurer

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER SOCIETY**Income and Expenditure Account to 31st March 2025**

	2024-25		2023-24	
	£	£	£	£
Income				
Income from study day with the Thomas Hardy Society.		-		£321.76
Bank account subscriptions and donations		£986.00		£1,088.39
PayPal subscriptions	£599.00		£741.00	
Less transaction fees	<u>-£31.46</u>		<u>-£39.13</u>	
		<u>£567.54</u>		<u>£701.87</u>
Net Income		£1,553.54		£2,112.02
Current Year Expenditure				
Journal production and mailing		-		£1,516.92
Newsletter production and mailing		£136.99		£398.00
Website hosting		£182.87		£84.00
Assistance from website designer		-		£75.00
AGM Venue costs		-		£80.00
Alliance of Literary Societies		<u>£15.00</u>		<u>£15.00</u>
		-£334.86		-£2,168.92
Extraordinary Expenditure				
Donation to Sylvia Townsend Warner Statue fund		£300.00		
Mary Jacobs Prize		-		£300.00
Additional Essay Award		<u>-</u>		<u>£100.00</u>
		-£300.00		-£400.00
Net receipts (expenses) during the financial year		<u>£918.68</u>		<u>-£456.90</u>
Statement of Assets				
Balance brought forward		£4,081.26		£4,538.16
Net receipts (expenses) during the financial year		<u>£918.68</u>		<u>-£456.90</u>
Cash balance carried forward		<u>£4,999.94</u>		<u>£4,081.26</u>
Significant expenses due but not yet paid at 31st March:				
2024 Journal print and postage		-£800.00		
Available Balance at 31 March		<u>£4,199.94</u>		<u>£4,081.26</u>

Should the STW Society continue to bank at Barclay's?

Barclays bank posed a ban on trans gender, trans sexual and intersex staff using the appropriate toilet facilities for their sex/gender. In the light of Valentine's masculine identification, while accepting Frances Bingham's assertion in her biography *Valentine Ackland: A Transgressive Life* (Handheld Press. 2021) that Valentine was male-identified but not transgender, I would wonder how appropriate it is that the Sylvia Townsend Society continues to bank with Barclays.

Our legal advice is that regardless of the position of the position of Equalities and Human Rights, the government and the Supreme Court the stance is almost certainly not compliant with Article of the European Convention on Human Rights and the case of *Goodwin v UK* (2002) 35 EHRR 447 amongst other legislation. Barclays has so as they say 'jumped the gun' on this one. We are presently advising employers to seek independent legal advice to avoid the potential of claims. Where cases did occur such as the Twi women in Burnley who were dismissed last week for refusing to use male toilets we are passing information straight in to our legal team.

Sarah Jane Pattison

4 May 2025

Sylvia Townsend Warner Society – Membership Report

May 2024 – May 2025

The Society has struggled without a finance officer for the last two years. This has led to problems because of the difficulty in obtaining a clear understanding of who and how many people have actually paid a subscription. The 2022-3 report was able to provide a reasonable degree of accuracy. This passed to the 2023-4 report, because we have maintained a policy of keeping lapsed members on the membership list for a year after they were last full subscription paying members. This approach was taken in the hope that anyone who simply forgot to pay a subscription could easily catch up. By this year, 2024-5, without accurate data on who has paid a subscription this report must be seen as based on the limited data available. At the time of writing we do have reasonable bank account data, but the data that we have from the societies PayPal account is partial.

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society has 71 known members. This represents a decline from that recorded in 2023-24. This is however a conservative figure. It is to be expected that there will be more members to be listed once the new finance officer starts and is able to devote time to a full analysis of the situation. I have left all members on the membership and email lists for the present until the situation becomes clearer.

We are aware that a small number of members have not updated payment in line with the last membership subscription increase. Whilst members have received a reminder of the subscription rate with the request and reminder for subscription payment that is circulated at the beginning of the year in order to reset the situation it may be necessary to write to individual members whilst remembering that two AGMs ago we agreed to show some flexibility in the case of members who were facing financial difficulties. This option has been offered to a number of members on a completely confidential basis, but so far no one has seen it as necessary.

Some of our membership is comprised of newly joined members, but it is not possible from the finance data available to obtain a clear understanding of membership recruitment. It is to be hoped that this will become available in the coming weeks.

On a personal note I want to apologise for the lack of meaningful data in this report. I have many other commitments and issues both personal and political. More recently the political persecution of minorities in the UK has led to residency here becoming increasingly dangerous for some. Many are now doing all in their power to escape to safety overseas. I am no exception and this creates obvious practical problems with continuing in the role of membership secretary. I would like to thank all of you for your tolerance and the kind support that I have received from so many of you over the years that I have carried out the role. It's now time to hand it on to new more capable hands. Once again a huge thank you.

Sarah Jane Pattison

5th May 2024

Chair's Report May 2025

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society has had a rather difficult year, apart from another splendid issue of the Journal in 2024, with excellent material by and about STW, and at 183 pages almost a book, but no live events since Claire Harman gave her outstanding STW lecture in London (now published in the Journal 2024), and only a small amount of online activity. The little we managed was very good indeed;

- on October 21st, the birthday of our late eminent member Ursula Le Guin, I set up and chaired an online group reading of texts from her and STW
- on April 4 Peter Swaab directed an excellent group reading of STW's stories about animals.
- The *STWS Newsletter* has now been digitised and can be read on our website
- although it had been in abeyance since Jay Barksdale resigned as Editor after his swansong No. 46 in April 2024, Kate Macdonald offered in May 2024 to become its Editor, and her first issue, No. 47, was distributed in September 2024.

Journal. The *JSTWS* 2024 appeared in January 2025, its bulk and excellence showing that members are not losing by the decision at AGM 2024 to produce it once yearly.

Publications and publicity I am not aware of any new publications of or by STW since May 2024, apart from:

- Peter Robinson's piece in the June 2024 number of the *Fortnightly Review* about the Hardy/STW conference in February, mentioned by Hannah Berry in the STW website
- the very welcome issuing by Routledge in paperback edition of Ailsa Granne's excellent book *Life-Writing, Genre and Criticism in the Texts of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland* (2020, belatedly reviewed by me in the December 2023 Journal)
- a chapter on STW and VA in a recent book about women in the Spanish War.

On the other hand, Sylvia's reputation has grown amazingly in the UK thanks to the statue of STW by Denise Dutton (without Valentine but holding one of her own books and with cat) in Dorchester City Centre, which achieved its fund-raising target, has been mentioned in the *TLS* and the *Guardian*, has been officially approved, and will be unveiled in Dorchester on Sunday 14 December 2025 at midday, which looks like being a turning point. (I am told that Dorchester will be crowded, so I advise members living far from Dorset who want to attend the meeting to book accommodation early). The London conference at UCL in May 2026 to mark the centenary of *Lolly Willowes* will further advance recognition. I have been in touch with Simon Tillotson, the administrative officer of Radio 4's programme *In Our Time*, for which I spoke on Auden in December 2019 and Kipling in 2015, proposing that in light of the *Lolly Willowes* centenary that they should run a session on STW for 2026, and I hope this will happen.

Online Hannah Berry was confirmed as our Online Officer, and has been doing a good job on the website, updating it with new material such as reports from the STW/ Hardy conference in February 2024 and advertising the crowd-funder for the proposed statue of STW in Dorchester city centre.

Finance. This has been a difficult matter, as we've had no Treasurer to replace the admirable Helen Jones who stepped down at AGM 2024 until Annie Rhodes volunteered to take on the post before the 2025 AGM. In the absence of a replacement, Helen has been our *de facto* acting Treasurer; in October 2024 she saw to the payment of our donation, and despite having retired is actually presenting the Treasurer's Report at this meeting. I cannot thank Helen enough for this generosity, which has been far beyond the line of duty. For full information, see her Finance report for this meeting, to be discussed in item 3 on our Agenda.

Membership has also been difficult. Sarah Jane Pattison who took on the job from AGM 2023 after Mercedes Aguirre resigned, has been frustrated in this role by lack of information and for this and other reasons she cannot continue beyond 10 May, when Hilary Bedder is kindly taking over. For full information, see Sarah's report Membership for this meeting, to be discussed in item 4 on our Agenda.

Future Plans

The Society is going to need a **new Chair** because illness and other pressures are making it impossible for me to continue in this role much longer and I shall step down as soon as a new Chair is found. We also badly need a new **Secretary**, a post which I have till now doubled with being Chair (except when Judith Bond generously took over for a year, in 2018, and a brief period when Harry Daniels, winner of the 2017 Mary Jacobs Essay Prize, was persuaded to take it for on a few months). Being Secretary wasn't too onerous when all I had to do was booking a place in Dorchester for the AGM and getting the reports, both fairly easy jobs, and fielding the occasional query about STW (two this year about copyright, one from person wanting to dramatise an STW story and another from a person wanting permission for a musical setting of a poem by her). These are both encouraging signs, but now that STW's reputation has begun to grow I've had more to do as Chair, as I've been closely involved with publicity for the statue of STW mentioned above.

I don't think my replacement as Chair would agree, or should be asked, to combine it with the role of Secretary, which is clearly going to increase if the Society begins to flourish as I hope that in the near future it will.

Janet Montefiore

4 May 2024

Online Report

The STW Society website, townsendwarner.com, is designed to be largely static and evergreen, with occasional posts appearing on the News and Events page. I also update the newsletter list manually, but the Journal page links through to UCL Press so doesn't require any work, though I should definitely start announcing new issues on our socials.

The website isn't running any analytics to track visits and engagement, but the SEO must be pretty good as it comes second in a Google search on Sylvia Townsend Warner, only pipped by Sylvia's Wikipedia entry. Steve Xerri keeps an overview of plugin updates to make sure links don't break and that the site is loading correctly.

There was a brief panic recently over permissions, which led to the removal of much of the website image gallery, but only for a few hours until Harriet Baker confirmed that everything was covered by Creative Commons fair use licensing. I took the opportunity to add some missing credits to the restored photos, as well as alternative text to make them accessible to those using screen readers.

The @ReadingSylvia Twitter/X feed on the News and Events page has unfortunately been broken since Elon Musk seized control of the platform, and the effect is to reduce a sense of imperative to post regularly. I've had the login details for a year, but not been very proactive, just posting a few announcements and not doing much to increase followers or engagement. We have 350 followers - I'm not sure how this compares to 2024 but numbers and interactions are generally falling on Twitter for well-known reasons.

As you'll have seen in the Spring Newsletter, Kate Macdonald found some appreciative mentions of Sylvia and Valentine on Bluesky, and has suggested we launch an STW account there. It does seem a friendlier place and is gradually growing in popularity, and it should be easy enough to embed a Bluesky feed on the News and Events page. I could cross-post to Twitter (if we wanted to keep it) and also to facebook.com/sylviatownsendwarnersociety? Having read that Karina Taubert would appreciate help posting and engaging with our nearly 500 followers on Facebook, I've realised it could work both ways to boost our socials if we collaborated in this way.

Hannah Berry

May 2025

Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Society report

Last year we decided to scale back by publishing a single yearly issue rather than two. This has had at least two welcome effects, first in considerably lowering the production costs of the Journal, and secondly in taking a good deal of pressure off the editor. The single issue and longer lead-up time was part of what enabled the unusual length of the 2024 Journal, coming in at 183 pages, by some way the longest issue in the Society's history. The 2024 Journal was quite varied as well as long. It drew for one of its sections on the study weekend jointly organised by the Hardy and Warner Societies in Dorchester in February 2024. Another section brought together pieces by Judith Bond, Sam Johnston and Kate Macdonald that in different ways spoke to the public accessibility of Warner's writings, whether in archives and publications. The issue also included two especially rich and substantial essays, one of them the 2023 Society Lecture given by Claire Harman, the other an analytic exploration by Jan Montefiore of Warner's relation to feminism. It also featured three pieces by Warner herself, two of them among her finest previously unpublished pieces from the Dorset archive.

The life of the editor has been a good deal easier as editor by the appointment of Will Burns, a postgraduate student at UCL, as editorial assistant. I'd like to thank him here for his energetic and expert contributions, and also to acknowledge the English department at UCL for providing a small stipend. The English department also helps with the mailout of the Journal.

UCL Press continues to publish the Journal online and to provide type-setting, copy-editing and proof-reading services as well as help with marketing and publicity. The Press is planning to bring in further statistical reviews of the Journals they host, including for instance figures for downloads and citations. It has provided a figure of 334,432 for downloads of the Journal since 2019. The protocols for a university press journal are sometimes onerous, but the work this involves seems a small price to pay for such a level of outreach.

Peter Swaab, 30 April 2025

Report on the Newsletter of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

I took on the role of Newsletter Editor for issue 47 in autumn 2024. Jay Barksdale had run the Newsletter very successfully for many years, so the format and six-monthly frequency were well established. I adapted the cover design slightly but otherwise have changed nothing. I try to include in the content a record of what Society members are doing, formal reports of Society's activities and events, STW items of interest, and news that touches on the wider world of STW and her life and works.

I decided to make the Newsletter digital by default, which has reduced our print costs. Our Membership officer sends the Newsletter by email to all members, and I post printed copies to those who have asked for them: currently seventeen. I will be taking the spare Newsletters to distribute at the Alliance of Literary Societies AGM and conference in Brighton in May.

We also have a leaflet, distributed with the spring 2025 newsletter, which will be used at the ALS AGM as well to raise awareness and perhaps gain new members. I plan to create an index to the newsletter to go out with issue 50 in spring 2026.

Kate Macdonald

April 2025