

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

Lynn Mutti

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Abstract

Lynn Mutti is remembered by four friends and colleagues in the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society. The article touches on her work as Secretary of the Society and on her PhD thesis on Warner and music.

Keywords Lynn Mutti; Sylvia Townsend Warner; music; Tudor Church Music; Peter Pears.

Warner Society member Lynn Mutti died in March 2022 after a long illness. She was for many years the Secretary of the Society. Here, some of her friends and fellow members celebrate her life.

Richard Searle writes: I first met Lynn while I was working as a librarian for the Property Services Agency (PSA – formerly the Ministry of Public Building and Works) in the 1970s when Lynn was introduced to me as the new assistant to the PSA's official archivist.

Having fairly recently completed her postgraduate diploma in archives administration at the University of London, this post was Lynn's dream job. The PSA and its predecessors had responsibility as the government's building arm for the design, build, upkeep and maintenance of all government property, including historic buildings such as royal palaces and castles. To support its work the PSA maintained a valuable and comprehensive archive collection of historic plans, drawings,

photographs and texts relating to the properties in its care. Lynn was in her element.

Some years later, I retired to Dorset. Lynn in the meantime had also left the PSA, had worked for architectural practices in London, spent time in Canada with her husband Paul and become a mother. Before Paul's retirement we renewed contact, and I later told her of my interest in Warner and the STW Society. First inspired by reading Sylvia's published letters, Lynn too came to love Warner's writing.

Back in England, Lynn and her husband settled in Hemel Hempstead, where Lynn obtained another ideal position, cataloguing J. Paul Getty Jr's vast collection of opera recordings (many of them old and rare and some unique) housed at the Getty mansion at Wormsley Park in Buckinghamshire. Lynn already had a love of opera in live performance.

When she and Paul began thinking about his upcoming retirement to the country, Dorset and in particular the villages close to Dorchester, with its County Museum and Sylvia Townsend Warner archive, offered the perfect location. Lynn wasted no time in getting involved in exploring the collection's contents, which signally helped in her research for her PhD and the articles she wrote and contributed to the literature on Warner.

Judith Bond writes: Lynn joined the Society in 2006 and immediately brought her energy, enthusiasm and devotion to Sylvia Townsend Warner to the Society's activities. She joined in all the Society events and became Secretary in 2009. Now she had the opportunity to pursue her main ambition – to bring Sylvia to the attention of a much wider audience, to put her 'out there', as she expressed it.

One of the ways in which she did this was by contacting over 70 university English Departments (no mean feat in itself) to make their staff and students aware of the work of the Society and of the Mary Jacobs Essay Prize. We are seeing the benefits of this now as an increasing number of students are working on Warner and contributing their findings to conferences and symposiums.

She was also keen to provide Society members with events that would be memorable. In 2009 she arranged for Society members to visit the archive of Norwich Cathedral to view material that Sylvia would have used in her researches for the Tudor Church Music project. It was very interesting to see some of the part-books used by choristers with their own, not always polite, annotations!

In 2011 she arranged for the Society's annual general meeting (AGM) to take place in the splendid setting of Bath's Guildhall. We breakfasted there on cream doughnuts and chocolate eclairs, and enjoyed the grandeur of the Aix-en-Provence Room. The AGM was quite good too!

Lynn's other passion was music, and she was able to combine this with her promotion of Sylvia Townsend Warner as an important figure. In 2012, at the symposium in Dorchester entitled 'Revisiting Sylvia Townsend Warner', she gave a paper on 'Music, Death-in-Life and Paradise in *The Corner That Held Them*'. Following the symposium, she organised a concert for the Society and the general public entitled 'Words and Music', with songs and music by Warner and readings from her works. Lynn read an extract from Warner's guidebook on Somerset and the music was provided by Dr Richard Hall and the Barn Choir. This was a huge success with a much greater attendance than we had expected. The work of Sylvia Townsend Warner was really 'out there'.

From a personal point of view, one of my greatest memories of Lynn is when four of the Society Committee members – Lynn, Judith Stinton, Eileen Johnson and myself – went on a picnic at Chaldon's Green Valley. After an erudite reading of some of Sylvia's poems about the area, we ended up having to climb in a very ungainly fashion over a barbed-wire fence to escape a herd of lively bullocks in a field. I think Sylvia would have been much amused – we certainly were, once we reached safety!

Thanks, Lynn, for all you did for Sylvia Townsend Warner and for the Society. More people now know about her than before – you really did put her 'out there'.

Judith Stinton writes: Although Lynn and I lived in neighbouring villages, we didn't often meet but when we did we would talk for hours. She was a very warm and impulsive person. Once, when she heard that – in the dead of winter – my heating had failed, she drove over and scooped me up to sit by her fire while she cooked a hot lunch.

Judith Bond has already mentioned our memorable trip to Chaldon. Faced with the barbed-wire fence, which was our only escape route, Lynn, like a bull-fighter, promptly threw her precious white mac over its spikes. If she hadn't, I don't know what we would have done!

The last time I saw her, shortly before she died, she made me a lemon drizzle cake. This was a great honour as, although Lynn was a good cook, she never usually baked cakes. She was undergoing a number of

harrowing treatments, to which she made brief, brisk reference. She did not intend to be defined by her illness, and faced it very bravely indeed.

Peter Swaab writes: Lynn's retirement project was a PhD thesis on Warner and music. When her supervisor at Lincoln University relocated and the university couldn't provide anybody suitably informed to take the reins, I was able to arrange for her to transfer to UCL. We would meet there every month or two to discuss her progress. Lynn would usually arrive with a very heavy bag stuffed with books and especially with copies of manuscripts. Her heart lay in manuscript work. She was tireless and very resourceful in hunting down archival truffles. As her supervisor I sometimes had to calm the truffling and urge that previously published materials could have their interest too. But Lynn's skilful archival research genuinely unearthed a wealth of things that were previously unknown. In particular her thesis chapters on the Tudor Church Music edition drew on the Oxford University Press archives to add a great deal to our knowledge of that 10-year project. Lynn supplied a vivid narrative of its inter-necine tussles and transitions, and described Warner's canny detachment from the power struggles, along with her central importance in the actual researches into church records and copies of the music.

Like most PhD supervisors, part of my role was being a carping nag, anticipating what the examiners might challenge her about. Lynn was keen to get from me what older-fashioned types might call criticisms but we now call areas for development. She said she really wanted to improve her writing and that's why she was doing the thesis – that and the wish to leave behind a study that others would find useful. She took my criticisms on the chin and never hit the deck. She was quite a worrier but indomitable in not letting that stop her in her tracks, a diffident person but full of energy and resolve. She always had a mass of questions and ideas to discuss so our meetings were usually fun and never short – keeping her to the thesis word limit (a mere 100,000 words!) was one of my challenges.

The finished thesis was passed with enthusiasm by Jan Montefiore and Julia Jordan in the summer of 2019. She was keen for scholars and others to make use of the copy now in the Dorset History Centre. She published in the *Warner Journal* two articles mainly drawn from the PhD. First, a meticulous investigation of the hugely appealing idea that Warner was going to study composition with Arnold Schoenberg in Vienna before this was prevented by the advent of the First World War.¹ Second, a

splendidly researched and really moving discussion of Warner's relationship with Peter Pears in the years of their widow- and widowerhoods.²

Through and after the thesis we became good friends and would meet up in London or sometimes Dorset, where Andrew and I were warmly entertained by Paul and herself in their house in Frampton. She was brisk and laconic about her illness, not pretending it wasn't serious, but not letting it inhibit her fun and warmth. She wanted her collection of Warner's books to find good new STW homes and it was a pleasure as well as a sadness to see them all snapped up by Society members after the 2022 AGM, with the proceeds going to Cancer Research. A modest, kind, vigorous and warmly conscientious person, she would have been pleased by that and touched by the fondness with which she was remembered.

Note on Contributors

Richard Searle, Judith Bond, Judith Stinton, and Peter Swaab are all long-standing members of the Warner Society.

Notes

- 1 Lynn Mutti, 'Notes on Warner and Schoenberg', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* 17, no. 2 (2017), pp. 31–8.
- 2 Lynn Mutti, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and Peter Pears: Loss and friendship', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* 21, no. 1 (2021), pp. 62–85.

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