For thirteen years Mollie embellished and enlivened the Master’s Lodge at Trinity. This was not a large part of her marvellously long life, which had theretofore been much more animated and varied, with lots of ups and downs. But if Trinity was not a large part of her life, she was a large part of ours, Fellows and students and staff.

Mollie was of course no stranger to the College. After all, she had been to six May Balls, and danced at one of them with August, then an undergraduate, as three of their sons were to be. I don’t suppose she danced in the Chapel, but it is no surprise that later she could say that ‘One of the major pleasures of our new life was the Chapel’, for Christopher was Chaplain then, Harry Williams the Dean, and Raymond Leppard the Director of Music. And she was very fond of the Choir, then all male.

On RAB’s installation as Master, after fourteen years of high office, the then Vice-Master said very prettily that ‘It is pleasant to think that the Bursars can now seek guidance from a Chancellor of the Exchequer and a Minister of Labour, the Senior Tutor from a Minister of Education, and the Dean of College from a Home Secretary. Our relations with other Colleges can be conducted by a Foreign Secretary.’ But he had prefaced this by saying that Lady Butler’s wit and charm were already known to many of the Fellows, and that all of them could see the imprint of her artistic taste when visiting the drawing rooms of the Master’s Lodge.

The drawing rooms he mentioned, though always handsome, had become a bit dowdy. They were, however, to be very grandly enhanced by Mollie’s exuberant flower arrangements. Indeed, these almost outdid the Courtauld pictures, though these included a Monet, a Manet, a Cézanne, and a Renoir. Apart from the public rooms, however, the Lodge was perhaps less than ideal. One of my crustier colleagues muttered that it was very good of the Butlers to come to Trinity seeing that the lodgings were so very abject, and Mollie is said, on introducing her successor, a much less imposing chatelaine, to have observed that there wasn’t even a gun-room. This was relevant enough, perhaps, as RAB was a good shot, and a keen one. I recall his saying that he couldn’t attend the next meeting of the College Council since he had to be in Essex that day, and we supposed that he had to preside in his capacity as Chancellor at some function of the University there. Actually he was going pigeon-shooting.

I don’t think RAB’s interest in shooting was shared by Mollie, who stoically went sailing in seas even rougher than the Minch and trudged happily over the heath of Mull, avoiding the bogs. It was music that was Mollie’s great enthusiasm: ‘Music’, she wrote, ‘was drink to me in the way literature was food.’ RAB’s indifference to music was virtually complete. One night in the Combination Room he lamented that he couldn’t take his fellow port-drinkers through into the Lodge – ‘because Mollie’s got a concert raging in there.’
Nor were their tastes in literature entirely congruent, for Mollie was a great admirer of Jane Austen and a devotee of Proust. Indeed, when Mollie held a Proust dinner in the Lodge for those who had read the great work, including George Painter, the biographer, RAB wasn’t allowed in until the cheese and coffee.

Can one find a picture of Mollie herself anywhere in her favourite music and literature? There is no one like her in Proust, so far as I can see, for though, like the Duchesse de Guermantes, Mollie could certainly make the sharp remark, all the sharper for being so perceptive, Proust’s society women are too bitchy and his female relatives too soft-grained. Again, none of Jane Austen’s characters, superfine as they are, seem to have the rich texture which Mollie’s experiences had given her. What about music? In a piano piece the right hand would have to be fluid without being flighty, the left hand stately but not solemn. Yet we need a middle line, and Mollie’s proper voice always seemed to me to be that of the viola. Could we not add to the stateliness of Elgar’s Nimrod, which you heard at the start of this service and may hear again, the delicacy of a previous Enigma variation with a prominent part for the viola? Of Ysobel, whom it purports to describe, Sir Donald Tovey wrote ‘She must in her quiet way be a perfect hostess, discussing the whole theme in a delightful dialogue, led by a solo viola and shared by all the nicest conversationalists in the orchestra. No tea-cup ever had a more delicate aroma.’

But it wasn’t just tea that Mollie dispensed in the Lodge: it was hospitality on a grand scale, infused with warmth, Nimrod and Ysobel. Some of the Fellows could be unappreciative and unresponsive, perhaps miffed that the Prime Minister had lured to the Lodge a politician whom they very erroneously supposed to be less clever than they thought themselves, but the young, whom Mollie cherished, adored it. No less than a dozen cohorts of freshmen arrived during her thirteen years, two and a half thousand in all, many ill-at-ease in novel surroundings, youths from the North as socially challenged as those from places far distant who came to embark on research. Mollie not only invited them all, and remembered their names and backgrounds, but managed to make them feel at home in a Lodge which was often very different from their own homes. Her warmth and skill were remembered over thirty years later by a recent note in *The Times* from one who as a student had been enraptured by them.

All this was hard work. But Mollie always worked hard, and did exactly as it should be done everything she had to do. Her great contributions to Trinity were not, I think, principally out of love for the institution, though she was fond of many of its members, but mainly out of a determination to produce in the College an ambience worthy of its Master to whom she was devoted with the whole of her great heart. As I said at the outset, the thirteen years in the Master’s Lodge were not the largest part of Mollie’s long life. True, after leaving it she had only four years in which to enjoy the company of her beloved husband, but she had twenty-five more in which to regret him.

The fell sergeant makes too many premature arrests, but we who survive cannot but give thanks, as we do today, that the great length of Mollie’s life was commensurate with its marvellously high quality.

TONY WEIR