

2003

Annual Report 2002

Kathleen Adams

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger>

 Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Adams, Kathleen, "Annual Report 2002" (2003). *The George Eliot Review*. 455.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger/455>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The George Eliot Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

ANNUAL REPORT 2002

By Kathleen Adams

2002 was, as always, a busy year, and the one in which we published our *Pitkin Guide to George Eliot*. This was something of a milestone for us as Pitkin Guides are so well known around the UK and it seemed right that George Eliot should be included in the vast number of Pitkin titles.

We held our Annual General Meeting on 15 March and re-elected, with great pleasure, our President, Jonathan Ouvry, for another three-year term. Jonathan is so supportive of everything we do. We had been again without a treasurer until Jill Bridgewater agreed to replace Sophie Pavier and we were delighted to confirm her election. Jill has been an excellent Treasurer – very efficient and so pleasant to work with. After the business meeting the Secretary and John Burton gave a talk about their work on the Pitkin Guide.

On 17 February there was a service in Astley ('Knebley') Church at which the Chairman, on behalf of the Fellowship, handed over to the church a fine hand-made oak bookcase in memory of our late Patron, the third Viscount Daventry, who had died two years earlier. Mr Adams spoke about the close association between the Fellowship and Arbury and how pleased we are to have the late Lord Daventry's daughter-in-law, the present Viscountess Daventry, as our new Patron.

In April Gabriel Woolf and Rosalind Shanks gave their annual programme of readings in the Council Chamber at Nuneaton Town Hall. After thirty-two years of these programmes we wonder how Gabriel can find a new theme but he had devised a delightful presentation about animals entitled 'Reigning Cats and Dogs' and this was received with great pleasure by a large audience. We regretted that a second performance was not possible in 2002 – the first time for some years because we had found it difficult and expensive to mount two, but it did mean a much larger audience in Nuneaton than in past years.

The George Eliot Day on 18 May on 'Aspects of George Eliot' (rather than on one or more of the novels) was a great success although we were presented with a huge problem a few days before when Professor Rosemary Ashton was unavoidably prevented from coming to present her paper on George Eliot and the *Westminster Review*. Shortly after hearing this news I had a phone call from Gabriel Woolf. When I told him about this problem he immediately said he would come and help out with readings from the *Westminster Review*. This he did most successfully; not only readings but he gave us the background to George Eliot's work with the periodical. What a very good friend he is to us! We also had papers on music, poetry, and George Eliot's friends, together with good company and excellent food.

Lady Daventry invited us to Arbury on 8 May for a coffee morning and a tour of the Hall. We were delighted to accept and the proceeds from this were given to the Mary Ann Evans Hospice – £230 in all. A lovely morning and an excellent donation to the hospice. Lady Daventry made us most welcome in her lovely home.

A memorial to George Eliot's beloved Coventry friend, Caroline (Cara) Bray, was erected many years ago in Coventry. It was combined with a horse trough as Mrs Bray had founded

the Coventry Branch of the RSPCA. When horses no longer used the streets of Coventry the trough was dismantled and the trough and the memorial tablet were separated. Some years ago the Fellowship found the memorial and in June it was reunited with the trough – no longer for horses but filled with flowers. At a ceremony in Greyfriars Green, very close to George Eliot's Coventry school, it was 'unveiled' and is now a reminder of Cara's warm friendship with George Eliot.

Our annual visit to Westminster Abbey was a rather special one in 2002 as we combined it with a visit to the British Library where we were allowed to see and handle a lot of George Eliot material. This was followed by a very good tea provided for us at Westminster School and then the service at the memorial stone in the Abbey where Margaret Wolfitt was our principal guest. We had readings from Jonathan Ouvry and John Burton and managed to get the whole service fitted into the twenty minutes the Dean of Westminster allows us, not really a sufficient amount of time for many of us who have travelled 100 miles to be there. However, it is always a pleasant and significant ceremony and it allows some of our London members to join us.

Our Nuneaton wreath-laying on 30 June was more significant than usual as we were also marking the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the George Eliot Memorial Garden in 1952 as well as George Eliot's 'official' birthday. We had hoped that Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council would have organized suitable events to mark this anniversary but whatever plans they had envisaged fell by the wayside. The appeal for funds to establish the Garden had been made over fifty years earlier by the Hon. Mrs L. C. B. FitzRoy Newdegate of Arbury, our then President; together with the Mayor of Nuneaton, so it was appropriate that our current President, Jonathan Ouvry, should lay the wreath and that Viscountess Daventry should read for us, the memorial having been a gift from Arbury to the Garden. To emphasize the importance of the anniversary (to us if not the Borough Council) we had a splendid anniversary cake at tea in the museum afterwards which Lady Daventry ceremoniously cut and distributed to our many guests. At the same time we also launched the *Pitkin Guide to George Eliot* – which sold like hot cakes! The *Pitkin Guide* has been most warmly received and has sold very well in Japan and the UK but, to our disappointment, not so well in the USA although we made it easy for them to buy it with dollars. With glossy pages and lovely illustrations, many of which had not been published before, it is a bargain at only £3.50.

The annual literary outing, most efficiently organized by Anna Craig with help from Helen Mills and Daphne Paton, was a huge success, despite being more expensive than usual, a factor which we initially felt might put people off, but didn't. The venue was Kelmscott Manor, the home of William Morris, and Buscot Park and a very pleasant day was enjoyed. We are most grateful to Miss Craig for all the work involved,

Professor Joanne Shattock of Leicester University gave the Thirty-First George Eliot Memorial Lecture on 19 October. Entitled 'Jane Austen and George Eliot: Afterlives and Letters', it was a most interesting look at nineteenth-century biographies of both authors.

The same month we were responsible for the annual lecture at the George Eliot Hospital and engaged Professor Rosemary Ashton to speak on a most appropriate subject, '*Middlemarch*

and Medicine'. Many of our members attended as well as medical and administrative staff from the hospital and we were provided, as always, with a delicious supper – all free!

The George Eliot Birthday Luncheon took place on 24 November in the Raveloe Restaurant at the George Eliot Hospital. Jonathan Ouvry placed the usual wreath at the foot of the hospital's George Eliot statue before everyone met for a sherry reception in the restaurant and lunch. Our Guest of Honour was Andrew Davies who adapted *Daniel Deronda* for BBC TV and which was showing in November. He gave us a fascinating insight into the background of the adaptation and proposed the Toast to the Immortal Memory of the lady who would have been utterly amazed to know that her book, in visual form, had been seen by millions of people in their own homes 126 years after its publication!

Daniel Deronda was shown in three three-hour episodes thirty-two years after the novel's first adaptation in 1970 in six hourly episodes. Inevitably, in half the time, parts of the story had to be condensed but many of us thoroughly enjoyed the serialization and were grateful that Andrew Davies had stuck as faithfully as possible to the book in the time allowed to him. We know that there are always purists who do not like the translation of a great novel to an entirely different medium, but we know that many viewers went to the novel afterwards for the first time – and that must be good.

Running at the same time there was a drama documentary called 'George Eliot – a Scandalous Life' – a title which initially filled us with foreboding. We had been consulted by the BBC about locations for filming (but they did not take our advice) and on someone suitable to narrate the programme. I had no hesitation in suggesting actress Maureen Lipman, a great George Eliot admirer, as they wanted a 'famous face' to encourage viewers to watch. Harriet Walter made a fine George Eliot with John Sessions as a great G. H. Lewes look-alike. We were sorry that much of George Eliot's early life was covered so very briefly (and without the inclusion of scenes from the George Eliot country or Coventry) but, on the whole, it was not a bad attempt and not as salacious as the title at first suggested!

The Fellowship Council met ten times during the year, each time at the Town Hall, Nuneaton and the meetings have been well attended. A great deal of time has been spent on discussions about our proposed web-site. It was clearly a subject on which the majority of us knew very little and were, understandably, a bit bewildered and anxious at the potential cost of a worthwhile site. However, John Burton was much more knowledgeable than most of us and has under-taken all the work and negotiations involved. We look forward to the final presentation and the interest it may arouse in the Fellowship.

We were pleased to hear early in the year that a plaque had been placed on 2 Bridge Street in Tenby in Pembrokeshire to mark the visit of George Eliot and G. H. Lewes in 1856. We had contributed to the cost and the plaque had been part of an initiative by a civic group in the town to mark the houses where many great persons had stayed from time to time. No. 2 is a large house on the seafront at Tenby and not the cottage I had thought I found some time ago; there are two No. 2s in Bridge Street and I had 'discovered' the wrong one!

The Study Group which had been immensely successful at one time had had a diminishing attendance and it was decided to hold no more sessions for the time being. The speaker's work

in preparing for the session is considerable and is not justified for such a small number of people. It will be reviewed again later.

The Fellowship had voiced a strong protest against industrial development very close to Griff House and were glad to hear in the spring that owing to public pressure the plans had been abandoned.

Miss Craig and Mrs Green represented the Fellowship at the opening of a new building at the George Eliot Community College.

Over 250 leaflets about the George Eliot Fellowship Prize had been sent to all university English departments during the year but only five entries were received for the 2003 prize as against twelve for the 2002 one, which was won by Daniel Tyler, lately of Pembroke College, Oxford. Our congratulations to Daniel.

We were pleased and moved to hear the Archbishop of Canterbury quote from George Eliot's poem 'O May I Join the Choir Invisible' at the funeral of Her late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. The Secretary wrote to the Archbishop who replied, speaking warmly of the greatness of George Eliot. A facsimile of a Victorian print of the poem was sent to the Queen and this was acknowledged by her Private Secretary at a time when she must have been inundated by expressions of condolence on the death of her mother.

The Fellowship was well represented at the Annual General Meeting of the Alliance of Literary Societies in Burslem, the Arnold Bennett Society being the host in 2002.

The 2002 *George Eliot Review* had been an excellent issue and was warmly received. We are most grateful for the immense amount of work undertaken by the editors, Drs Beryl Gray and John Rignall and for the continuing quality of the publication. Working parties had been organized to help with packing 600 copies of the Review and the Secretary was grateful, too, for the help she received in completing more than 250 customs declarations for overseas copies.

At the invitation of the Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire, the Secretary and Chairman attended the Golden Jubilee Service at St Mary's Warwick in June and to a reception in the Shire Hall afterwards. They have also represented the Fellowship at meetings in Nuneaton of the Heritage Forum

The Fellowship added Dr A. G. van den Broek to its list of distinguished Vice Presidents in recognition of his work on George Eliot. He is also one of the three judges for the George Eliot Fellowship Prize and to all three of them we record our grateful thanks for the work they do in reading and judging the entries each year.

The Chairman and Secretary attended a meeting with Nuneaton library staff in November to discuss ways of making the George Eliot collection more accessible and attractive to the general public.

George Eliot Country tours continue each year between May and September. Organized by Rose Selwyn, the Borough's indefatigable Tourism Officer, they are guided by Bill Adams,

Joan Bunn and Anne O'Callaghan and are immensely successful and popular. Talks about George Eliot are regularly given by Ruth Harris and Anne Pavitt to groups around the county, always arousing great interest in her fascinating life. I am so pleased that Anne and Ruth do this as I am no longer able to. I have also had to give up guiding on the tours because of decreasing mobility. I still love my work for the Fellowship although the same problems make the events more difficult to manage. I can't believe the energy I had when I became Secretary thirty-five years ago.

Our membership for 2002 rose to 611, two more than in the previous year. This includes 356 annual members and 255 life members. In 2002 we had eighty-one members in the USA, 164 in Japan and twenty-nine in other overseas countries, including France, Germany, Austria, Norway, Israel, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Korea, Poland and Spain. In the mid sixties we had about fifty members, mostly in Warwickshire so we have made considerable progress in extending George Eliot's influence over the years.

I always conclude this report with my thanks to those who help us during the year. Top of the list must be my husband who is ready at all times to assist me in a multitude of ways. Without this constant support the job would be impossible. Rose Selwyn, too, is most supportive and John Burton has been an invaluable colleague ever since he joined the Fellowship Council and more particularly this year. We are so fortunate to benefit from his many areas of expertise. All members of the Council help in different ways and this is very much appreciated, particularly when I have a demanding job on hand like packing and sending out the 600 copies of the *Review*, more than 250 of which have to have customs declarations completed and attached. And in the USA we have the help of Dr Linda Robertson who collects subscriptions and issues our newsletters to the American members. We are a good team!



The Viscountess Daventry, Patron of the George Eliot Fellowship, cutting the cake which commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the George Eliot Memorial Garden in Nuneaton on 1 May 1952 (30 June 2002)