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Speech at the Nuneaton Wreath-laying

Len Struebig

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The Guest of Honour at the Nuneaton Wreath-laying in June 1986 was Mr. Len Struebig who had recently retired as Curator of Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery

Almost twenty years ago, for the first time, I joined the small group of admirers who annually pay tribute to the memory of Nuneaton's famous daughter.

It is perhaps fitting that my last public duty, albeit as ex-Curator, should be connected with George Eliot. Over the years I have listened with interest to the various speakers, each with their own particular reason for being honoured with the responsibility for laying the Fellowship tribute.

I have heard Lewes and Evans descendants recount family memories handed down with pride. Last year we heard John Letts tell us of the close bond which developed between Sculptor and Authoress as his wonderful interpretation of George Eliot was being created.

With John last year you had the sublime; this year, with me, you have the ridiculous, or, at least, the mundane. For, over the years, with that part of my work connected with George Eliot, I developed the feeling that I was her housekeeper. I kept her 'home' in good order, I polished her piano and cleaned her shoes. I received her visitors and showed them the Mistress's needlework, her father's wood carving and the art work of her friends.

By a quirk of circumstance, the other part of my museum life was spent teaching the various ethnic cultures of the world to Nuneatonians. In contrast, George Eliot brought members of diverse cultures to me, my circle of acquaintances grew and, therefore, my life has been enriched because of her.

Most of you at today's ceremony are here because you value the stories she told and the quality of the writing in telling them. To me, the written word is a means

by which knowledge is transmitted. George Eliot has given me not only a record of local places but information about the social conditions of her time.

Thanks to the hard work of the George Eliot Fellowship this year has seen the fulfilment of a long treasured dream of mine - the erection of a statue of George Eliot in Nuneaton. As a work of art it shows an exceptional degree of professionalism; as a tribute to George Eliot it shows that, slowly but surely, the prophet will attain honour in her own home town.

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