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ON JULY 16TH 1992 THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK CONFERRED AN HONORARY MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE UPON KATHLEEN ADAMS, WHO HAS BEEN SECRETARY OF THE GEORGE ELIOT FELLOWSHIP FOR 25 YEARS. PROFESSOR BERNARD BERGONZI OF THE UNIVERSITY'S ENGLISH DEPARTMENT DELIVERED THE FOLLOWING ORATION:

If William Shakespeare is the most famous writer to have come out of Warwickshire, the runner-up is undoubtedly George Eliot. Her greatest novel, *Middlemarch*, reflects the life of the city of Coventry in the early nineteenth century. Mrs. Kathleen Adams is herself a native of Coventry and has completed 25 years as the secretary of the George Eliot Fellowship. She attended Barr's Hill Grammar School; after leaving school she worked in the local Inland Revenue office where she met her future husband. After the birth of her two children she worked for 23 years as a school secretary at Coundon Junior School.

In 1965 she joined the George Eliot Fellowship and what began as a leisure pursuit soon became a major interest and activity, particularly after she became the Fellowship secretary. When she joined the Fellowship it had only 25 members; now it has several hundreds in 20 different countries. It publishes an academic journal, the *George Eliot Review*, of which Mrs. Adams was joint editor for many years, and it organizes an annual round of well-attended events, including the very popular readings by Gabriel Woolf. It has also commemorated George Eliot in more permanent ways. In the 1970's Mrs. Adams launched an international appeal for funds to place a memorial to her in Westminster Abbey. This was successfully accomplished in 1980, when a congregation of 700 people witnessed the ceremony of dedication. More recently, and nearer home, Mrs. Adams worked hard to convince the local authority in Nuneaton of George Eliot's greatness; in 1986, with the support of the Borough Council, the Fellowship was able to erect a statue to her in the centre of the town.

In addition to her work among lovers of George Eliot in the local community, Mrs. Adams is known and respected by critics and students of the novelist. Gordon S. Haight, author of the definitive life of George Eliot, inscribed a copy of his book with the words 'For Kathleen Adams, George Eliot's foremost disciple'. She has herself written two short biographical accounts of George Eliot and a full-length study of the men in the writer's life, *Those of Us Who Loved Her*, published in 1980. Her other publications include histories of the George Eliot Fellowship and of Barr's Hill School.

Mrs. Adams also communicates her enthusiasm for George Eliot in talks and lectures, given locally and further afield. She is a welcome visitor at the University of Warwick, where she has taught on an Open Studies course, and where Gabriel Woolf's readings are a regular feature in the programme of the Arts Centre. By a happy coincidence of timing the English Department, in conjunction with the George Eliot Fellowship, has just held a weekend conference on George Eliot's life and work, emphasizing the Warwickshire dimension. Mrs. Adams played an active part in the planning and in the conference itself. In honouring Kathleen Adams we are acknowledging the many years of dedicated effort she has devoted to a great English writer, while at the same time bringing to mind George Eliot, who achieved international fame as a novelist, but whose art was rooted in the towns, villages and countryside of Warwickshire. We are also recognizing the importance of maintaining and extending the ties between academic life and the kinds of enthusiasm and interest exemplified, locally and nationally, by the work of Mrs. Adams and the George Eliot Fellowship.