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Kathleen and Bill Adams – Memories of Old Friends

About 55 years ago when we were engaged to be married, Ruth came down from Scotland to Coventry for a holiday, and I was concerned to demonstrate to her that Warwickshire had much to offer to the visitor and prospective resident. Having, as I thought, exhausted the possibilities of Coventry, Kenilworth, Warwick etc., I asked her if there was anywhere else she would like to visit. I ought not to have been surprised, knowing that she had an English degree and was an English teacher, when she expressed a wish to discover more about George Eliot. So we took the Midland Red bus (no car in those days!) to Nuneaton and made for the local library to seek information about Marian Evans. The response of the librarian took us aback. "Oh, we've nothing here. You'll have to go to Coventry." So back we travelled and continued our search where we had started – not an auspicious start to our literary partnership!

A few years later, now firmly established in a teaching career in Coventry, Ruth had discovered the existence of a group called the George Eliot Fellowship, and we decided to attend one of its meetings that we had seen advertised. So once again we made the pilgrimage to Nuneaton, this time with greater success as we did indeed find the venue and sat through the meeting. Before it began however our attention was drawn to a couple who seemed to be in charge: a somewhat forbidding lady who reminded me of the words of Joyce Grenfell in one of her inimitable songs – 'stately as a galleon' – and a short, red-faced man with a mane of white hair, a red face, an aquiline nose and a cheerful demeanour. We were to discover that they were Kathleen and Bill Adams, the Secretary and Chairman of the Fellowship and its guiding spirits for over forty years.

We soon made their acquaintance and, as we lived only just over a mile apart in Coventry, started to visit each other's homes. We had much in common: Ruth by now was teaching at Barrs Hill School where Kathleen had been a pupil, and Bill and I, despite the fact that he had been at King Henry VIII and I at Bablake, were both proud of Coventry and its history. Soon we, together with Kathleen Porter, Vice-Chairman of the Fellowship and her husband Walter, made up a sextet that met regularly in each other's homes for excellent dinners, or went to local pubs for hearty lunches.

Over the years we shared many family occasions and supported each other in times of anxiety as well as joy. Our interests coincided – a love of the music of Elgar, pleasure in the English countryside and the majestic scenery of Scotland, historic houses, and of course the life and works of George Eliot. We were never quite as enthusiastic about Queen Victoria and Prince Albert as was Kathleen, however, and I was often guilty of praising Dickens whenever I felt the others were becoming too obviously infatuated with G.E. Our one failure in our relationship, or rather my failure, was that I never managed to persuade Kathleen to jettison her typewriter and enter the age of the word-processor and computer. As Bill said to me on one of our frequent trips to his bank and building society just before he died, 'I'm afraid the digital revolution managed to pass us by'.

But very few other things passed them by, and I long ago ceased to be surprised, when I attended any function relating to the King Henry VIII School, the Philip Larkin Society, the Historical Association, the Coventry & District Archaeological Society, the J. B. Shelton Lectures, etc. to find Bill present, showing both interest and commitment. And of course he was always at Kathleen's side, as for so many years she demonstrated

her remarkable organizing ability in bringing the fame of George Eliot to an ever-widening audience, writing her persuasive letters, negotiating with the authorities at Arbury Hall and Westminster Abbey, founding the Association of Literary Societies, arranging readings, lectures and memorial events in Nuneaton and further afield. They made a formidable partnership.

As time went by we were saddened by Kathleen's increasing physical weakness and inspired by Bill's unfailing and loving care – an example to so many of us. It was a privilege to be invited by Will and Tricia to lead the services of memorial and thanksgiving when Bill and Kathleen died within a few weeks of each other in the summer of 2016 and the large numbers of people on both occasions were testimony to the affection and respect with which they were held.

Michael and Ruth Harris

Editors' Note

We are sad to announce the death on 1 April 2017 of Paul Baker who, from 2005 to 2016, was the very capable typesetter of the *George Eliot Review*. He died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-nine just a year after the death of his mother.