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JOHN LETTS, THE GIFTED WARWICKSHIRE RE SCULPTOR.

John Letts

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JOHN LETTS, THE GIFTED WARWICKSHIRE
SCULPTOR, produced the first portrayal of
George Eliot 'in the round' when he sculpted a
bust of the novelist for the hospital in her native
Nuneaton which bears her name.

When the George Eliot Fellowship wanted to
commission a statue of George Eliot for the centre
of the town, we had no doubt who should be the
sculptor.

Here, with his tongue firmly in his cheek, is
JOHN LETTS' own account of the relationship he
formed with the lady he created in clay

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Some four years have elapsed since my first brief
encounter with Mary Ann Evans – or 'Ann' as I had
called her at that time. It had been a strange,
emotional experience with moments of deep passion
and quiet companionship. But, it was not to last.
The affair ended as it began, with a suddenness
that was, in itself, an awakening. One does not
easily get over such an experience except,
perhaps, by the passing of time. And time had
passed.

It was a surprise, therefore, when I discovered
that a few of her close 'friends', knowing of our
fondness for each other, (it would seem that 'Ann'
had conveyed her feelings on this matter to them)
arranged that 'Ann' and I should renew our
acquaintance. I still do not know what careful
planning went into this reunion.

The first sight of Ann brought back all the old
feelings that I had taken so long trying to forget.
It was then the end of May, and I knew that Ann

would be leaving me again in the following October.

I began to observe her, and with gentleness find the way to her inner self, for a germ of an idea had presented itself which I could not shut out of my mind – to create her likeness in clay as a permanent reminder for me of her inner beauty. This form of art was not unknown to me and would grant me many hours of pleasure.

During the next few months my knowledge and admiration grew. Her face, strong of character, would soften when in deep thought and I would observe her as she sat on a favourite garden wall with the obligatory book always at her side. It was at these times that her deepest thoughts and creative ability could be sensed. Her face, indeed her whole form would become softer and gentler in meditation, and this was how I decided to portray her. In October I kissed this vision of her in my mind a sad good-bye ... she was destined for greater things.

My observation time was over. Would my memories prove sufficient for the task ahead of me? After making several small models, the germ of the idea became a reality. I had decided that larger than life would do more justice to my feelings for her.

I worked at speed and for many long hours, often into the early morning. Her inspiration had overcome my normal caution. I worked on until the Ann in my mind looked back at me ... and then I was satisfied. Having handled a ton of clay, and climbed a four foot plinth on which I had modelled her, my back ached and tiredness hit me. But it was this which helped me to get over her sudden departure. The statue was worthy of being cast in

bronze and a foundry was to take her away from me. But first I had to make a plaster cast from which I could take a fibre glass master copy. This would, in due course, be used to impress into a sand cast for the bronze. The various problems that this process caused me would take too long to tell. Suffice to say that my language was not always at its best!

However, my work is finished. I can now only hope that when the bronze casters return her to her native town, others will see how much I felt her to be 'My Ann'.



Photograph of John Letts and the statue reproduced by kind permission of Nuneaton Observer Extra