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The George Eliot Review

English, Department of

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8-2017

## Newsletter: August 2017

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# The George Eliot Fellowship

## Newsletter August 2017

[www.georgeeliot.org](http://www.georgeeliot.org)



TWITTER  
@GeorgeEliotLove

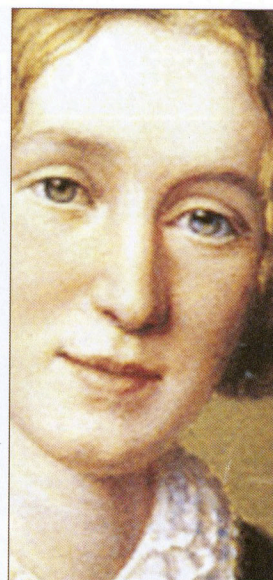


FACEBOOK  
George Eliot Fellowship

From the Chairman  
John Burton  
39 Lower Road  
Barnacle  
Coventry  
CV7 9LD

(02476) 619126  
07773 413907

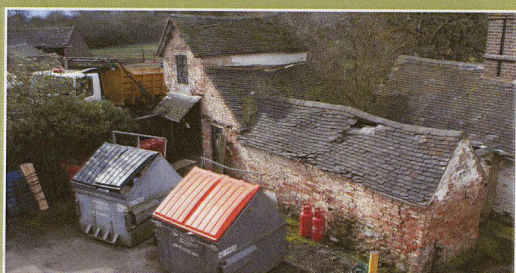
[johnkburton43@gmail.com](mailto:johnkburton43@gmail.com) or  
[gevisitorcentre@gmail.com](mailto:gevisitorcentre@gmail.com)



### Building News...

#### 4 Cheyne Walk

George Eliot's last home for a few weeks. Purchased for £15m two years ago by billionaire Michael Bloomberg, the house is empty and appears to be undergoing major alterations. We suggested a donation towards our Visitor Centre from the Bloomberg Foundation but answer came there none.



#### Building at Griff - GE Visitor Centre

Five years on, the building is in a parlous state. We are resubmitting planning applications and Whitbread is still committed to up to £80K but we are now at the paperwork and legal stage with Whitbread, necessary before submitting HLF application, which will happen in the next six weeks.

Members have contributed £6652 so far and once HLF is granted we think local businesses will give more.

We are bursting with ideas for using the Centre when it is open, and it will be fabulous as a base for the 2019 bi-centenary celebrations.

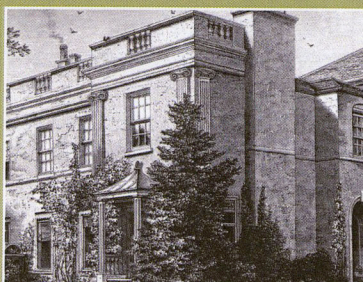
#### Bird Grove

First the good news. Four years after we

complained to Coventry City Council they have replaced the sign which had spelt Eliot with two 'I's, one of which they painted white!



Unfortunately, the building associated with the road, Bird Grove, is empty, neglected and up to let. It has had a chequered career since 1850, as a private residence (the only early pictures of the interior date from the centenary 1919 celebrations in Coventry), more recently as an evangelical church which dug a baptismal pool in the sitting room, and latterly a Bangladeshi community centre which did great work in the area until EU money dried up.



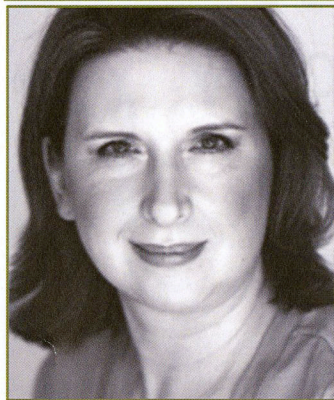
*Above: Bird Grove in 1885. Right and below: Bird Grove August 2017.*



Coventry hopes to be City of Culture in 2021. What a fantastic opportunity for the city to establish in this building, so important in the making of George Eliot, a cultural centre to celebrate the city's now diverse population. We have written to appeal to the city council and Coventry University to find a way together to find a useful function for this Grade II Listed building which would do justice to the memory of the great writer who spent her intellectually formative years here.



## First Adams Memorial Lecture



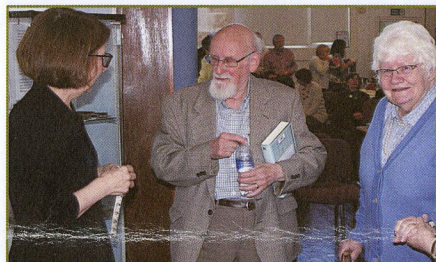
Our distinguished guest for the inaugural Adams Memorial Lecture in April was Professor Kathryn Hughes (UEA).

Kathryn is a Vice-President of the Fellowship, a frequent broadcaster, with a string of outstanding biographies, notably on George Eliot and Mrs Beeton.



There was a good deal of interest in Kathryn's latest book since we knew it contained a section on George Eliot's hand. It gained exceptional reviews in the print media, *The Guardian* devoting three pages to it.

The lecture was well attended and very well received. Copies of *Victorians Undone* were available for purchase at a discount price for members, and signed by Kathryn. The usual Fellowship practice of providing tea and cakes brought a delightful ending to the day. **Copies still available on our website; a review is in the 2017 GER.** The pictures show Kathryn with Michael & Ruth Harris; and a broad demographic in the lecture room at Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre!



## George Eliot Day - May

The theme for 2017 is 'George Eliot and Faith' and our annual day provided a fascinating cross section of thoughts about Eliot's writing about and attitude to faith.

Professor Valentine Cunningham stressed the impossibility of ignoring faith and religious ideas in any of Eliot's work, as well as her prodigious knowledge about it.

Revd Canon Edward Pogmore spoke movingly about the influence he felt when working as chaplain at the GE hospital, inspired by a comment from Michael Sadgrove that the work of a novelist and a priest is 'to read the map of the human heart'. He also brought news to many of us of the links between Hinckley unitarians and Eliot's circle.

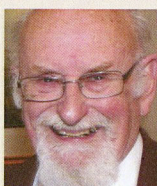
Michael Harris gave a splendid account of some of Eliot's more colourful clerics, summing up their humour, their idiosyncracies and their amazing number – some 65 walk through her pages. Viv Wood used a fascinating book on Buddhism and Eliot by a leader of the Japanese branch to explore aspects of religion and thought outside the usual clerical range.

We are grateful to all speakers, but also to our members who gave up a day to take part in a fascinating series of lectures and discussions.



Far left: Professor Valentine Cunningham  
Left: Revd Edward Pogmore

Right: Michael Harris  
Far Right: Vivienne Wood



## Solihull NT

In April we welcomed members of Solihull National Trust and gave them



a George Eliot Country Tour, including a buffet lunch at Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre. They are shown here at the front door of Griff House. They also visited Coton, Arbury and Astley.

## Women's Day

Pam Weight and some friends decided to celebrate International Women's Day in Nuneaton, and needless to say, our own George Eliot featured as a great example of achievement. Visitors were also given free copies of *Felix Holt*.



## GE Tour



Over the Spring Bank Holiday we took a George Eliot Country Tour. A few late bookings meant we covered our costs and we had a great day. There were participants from America, Dublin, Portugal, Lancashire and London, as well as from our local area and the Midlands.

By choosing a Bank Holiday we can be sure of access to Arbury even if our numbers are below 25, and Arbury does its best to accommodate our needs. All the post-tour comments were good, which makes it worthwhile for our guides.



# Digitising our archive

The George Eliot Review Digitization Project is Live at <http://georgeeliotreview.org/>



Thanks to a productive transatlantic collaboration between the GE Fellowship and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, back issues of the *George Eliot Review* (1992-2016) and the *George Eliot Fellowship Review* (1970-1991) are now freely available online for any interested reader. Type in the link above or simply search for "George Eliot Review" to find the project website. There will be a link from our own GEF website as well.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln research team, led by Dr. Beverley Rilett (above) will be adding more documents and making upgrades towards a full launch in December 2017, but the basic site is now functioning. The site offers free access up to the previous year's issue; the current year's issue is available only to subscribing members of the GEF. In other words, the 2017 issue will be added to the online site when the 2018 issue is sent to members. Hard, paper copies of recent years are still available to purchase!

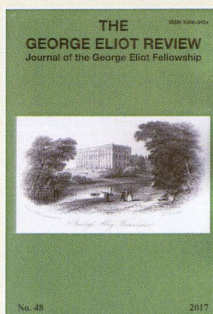
Rilett and her team, with support from grants provided by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, have digitized the entire 46-year collection and created the website that will link to the GEF site. Visitors to the *George Eliot Review Online* < <http://georgeeliotreview.org/> > can search for whole issues or for individual documents, such as articles, reviews, speeches, and annual reports by title, author, date, and (increasingly) by subject. A Creative Commons license allows readers to download as many OCR-optimized PDF files as they want, provided any excerpts of republished portions properly reference the source.

This easy access to hundreds of George Eliot-related materials will encourage further scholarship of this extraordinarily important author and help maintain her literary legacy for future readers. We also trust our members will enjoy the stroll down memory lane as they rediscover the rich history of our Fellowship. You are welcome to send feedback, corrections, and suggestions to Dr. Rilett at [brilett2@unl.edu](mailto:brilett2@unl.edu).

The George Eliot Fellowship is hugely indebted to Dr Rilett for her commitment to this project, and of course delighted that it will all be well established in time for the worldwide interest we hope for in 2019.

Dr Rilett herself is working on a book which looks afresh at the relationship between George Eliot and George Henry Lewes.

Right: the cover of the 2017 *George Eliot Review* (No 48). It is free to members; or buy it online; It will be free online in September 2018.



## Nuneaton Wreathlaying - June 2017



*The 18 wreaths in position on the obelisk in the GE Memorial Gardens*



*Nieve Chandler and Rebekah Neail from Whitestone Infants*



*Mayor and consort, Cllr Bill Hancox & Sheila*



*Guest of Honour Saul Bache*



*Viscountess Daventry Patron of the GEF*



*Will Gisbourne from Chilvers Coton, Len Brandreth, Michelle Boff from Astley*



*Summer Taylor & Tom Other from The George Eliot School*

It was another very successful event and we are always very grateful to the groups who agree to take part. Our Guest of Honour this year was Saul Bache, the actor who played Felix in last year's Edinburgh Fringe production of *Felix Holt*.

Wreaths were laid by representatives of

The George Eliot Fellowship  
Nuneaton & Bedworth BC  
Arbury Hall  
George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust  
The George Eliot School  
Nuneaton Library Service  
St Nicolas Parish Church  
Chilvers Coton Parish Church  
Astley Parish Church  
Stockingford Parish Church  
The Bedworth Society  
Nuneaton Civic Society  
Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre  
Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery  
Mary Ann Evans Hospice  
Nuneaton Memories  
Nuneaton Festival of Arts  
Whitestone Infant School

We found this snippet in a local newspaper dated Saturday 25 May 1907

"We announced a short time ago that Mr F A Newdegate had decided to erect a memorial to George Eliot in Arbury Park. The monument has now been completed. It is cut from stone quarried at Griff and stands about 9ft high."

The memorial obelisk was moved to its present position when the Memorial Gardens opened in 1952

There were also representatives present from the Herbert Museum & Art Gallery and from King Edward College. Tea and cake followed at the Museum



# More events from the year so far...



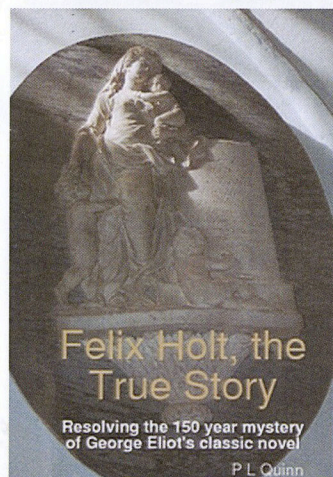
## Is this a lost portrait of George Eliot?

Kathryn Hughes and Nacy Henry think it likely and there is huge interest in the portrait.

For full details go online for Kathryn Hughes's article at:

[https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/05/george-eliot-is-this-a-new-portrait-of-the-author-as-a-young-woman-?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/05/george-eliot-is-this-a-new-portrait-of-the-author-as-a-young-woman-?CMP=share_btn_link)

An alternative is to go to our Facebook page and scroll back to find the article from *The Guardian*



This closely argued 422 page book was published in July, too late for review this year. Peter Quinn attends many of our meetings and has been researching *Felix Holt* for several years. He argues that Treby is not Nuneaton and finds a more convincing place to be Leicester. He argues that Eliot wanted to write a novel with a similar impact to *Cranford*. The book is priced at £14.99 in paperback by lulu.com ISBN 9780244611507

## The second Adams Memorial Lecture

### George Eliot's Clerics

We were delighted that Connie Fulmer was in the UK during July, delivering papers at conferences, so we invited her to give a paper on an area of her expertise. 'George Eliot's Clerics' showed Connie at her best - succinct, thoughtful, with a fascinating look at clerics in Eliot's novels. Home made cake and conversation extended the afternoon over tea and coffee. Connie's paper is likely to be printed in next year's GER.

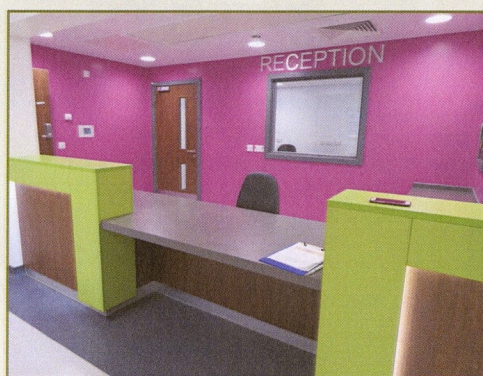
Joy Redfern accommodated Connie and Margaret in her lovely Warwickshire home and we had an impromptu tea and cakes in the English country garden the day before the lecture. Some of the party brought reading along to entertain the party.



Above: Professor Connie Fulmer, Joy Redfern & Margaret Barfield.  
Above right: Connie, Pam Weight and Joy with Denis Baylis reading from 'The Spanish Gypsy'.  
Right: Tea and cakes after the talk.



## The Solomon Macey Endoscopy Unit at George Eliot Hospital



Top: John Burton with Mary Somerville, Linda Mayne, Anna Reynolds (i/c the unit) and Jill Bridgewater alongside the panel which picks up the colours from Reception.



The Fellowship was asked some time ago for names for the new unit. We made suggestions but Solomon Macey was not among them. He is such a minor character; Mr Macey's brother from another village who plays the fiddle and leads the dancers at the New Year's Eve party at the Red House. So, working with designers Nine Point High in Nuneaton, we devised a panel to explain the character and to tell more about *Silas Marner*. The official opening on 26 July was attended by Kay Alexander, a local MP, the Mayor and Hospital officials. The panel was a gift from the Fellowship and we hope to work closely with the Hospital to provide similar panels elsewhere - a great way to celebrate the 2019 bi-centenary.



# Programme of Events - Rest of 2017

Saturday 16 September at 2.30pm

## 46th Annual George Eliot Lecture

Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre, Avenue Road, Nuneaton CV11 4LU

### Secret Sisterhood; George Eliot's Literary Friendship

by Emily Midorikawa and Emma Claire Sweeney

Emily and Emma's book *A Secret Sisterhood* was published in June with a Foreword by Margaret Atwood.

It deals with literary friendships of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Virginia Woolf and George Eliot - specifically Eliot's friendship with Harriet Beecher Stowe which will be main subject matter of the paper.

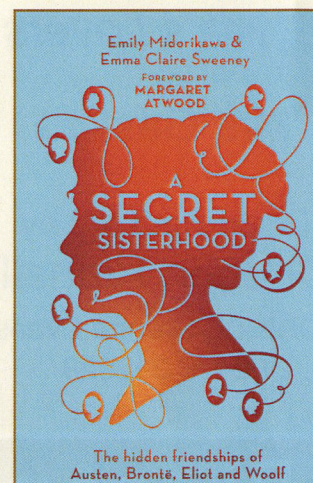


Emily Midorikawa and Emma Claire Sweeney

A friendship forged at the start of their literary and academic careers nearly 20 years ago led the authors into examining female literary friendships where historically they had seemed less common than male friendships and collaborations.

They have uncovered some fascinating material and written a well-reviewed and interesting book, praised by Margaret Atwood - "in digging up the forgotten friendships chronicled in *A Secret Sisterhood* they have done much service to literary history."

Copies of the book available on the day



Tickets: Members £4 Visitors £5

Saturday 7 October at 2.00pm

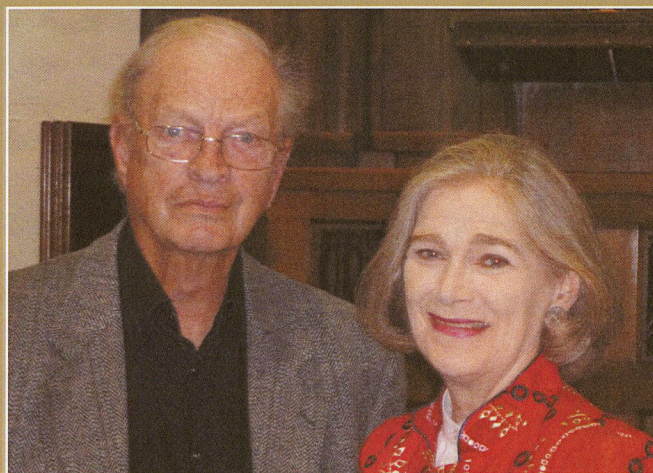
The Old Meeting URC, Leicester Street, Bedworth CV12 8JR

## George Eliot Annual Readings

### 'Beyond Belief'

Gabriel  
Woolf

Gabriel Woolf has performed his incomparable readings from George Eliot every year since 1970 in what is an extraordinary contribution to the spoken word and to our appreciation of George Eliot.



Rosalind  
Shanks

Both Gabriel and Rosalind have performed all over the world to appreciative audiences. We are fortunate that they are still happy to bring their professional skills to Nuneaton and Bedworth

There can be no better way of concluding our theme for the year of 'George Eliot and Faith' than by listening to the readings about clerics, preachers and sinners in the setting of a church which Mary Ann knew.

Tickets: Members £10 Visitors £12

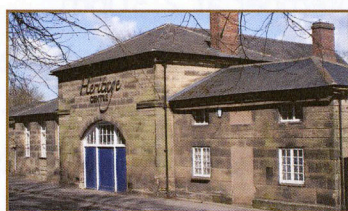


# Programme of Events – 2017

**Study Group**  
Friday 8 September  
at 7.00pm  
Aldersgate  
Rose Lane  
Nuneaton CV11 5TR

***Sylvia's Lovers***  
by  
**Mrs Gaskell**

Discussion led by  
**Dr John Rignall**  
contact: Brenda Evans  
02476 392828



Professor Davis's book *The Transferred Life of George Eliot: The Biography of a Novelist* was published earlier this year by OUP.

It is reviewed by John Rignall in the *GER* 2017 and has been enthusiastically received by other reviewers as a book which, in a field teeming with rivals, breaks new ground in its meticulous analysis of the links between Eliot's life, her thinking, her influences and her novels.

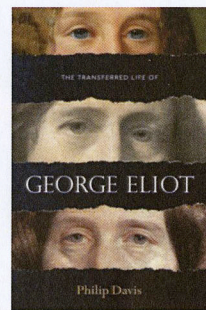
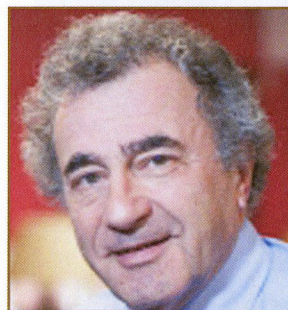
We are delighted that Professor Davis has accepted our invitation to the annual luncheon.

Copies of the book will be available to purchase on the day, or earlier via our website.

**Sunday 19 November at 12.30 for 1.00**  
**at Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre**  
**Avenue Road, Nuneaton CV11 4LU**

## **Annual George Eliot Birthday Luncheon**

**Guest of honour**  
**Professor Philip Davis**  
**£20 per head**



# Bi-centenary Planning News

We do not want our members to think we have forgotten 2019. Every Newsletter from now will carry details of our forward planning for the bi-centenary. A great deal has already been done....

In London there is great enthusiasm and lots of ideas from Gail Marshall and Rosemary Ashton who are working with the British Library to create an exhibition in its Treasures Gallery. They are in contact with the RSL and the NPG, who are keen to be involved. A special birthday cake and a virtual *Middlemarch* reading group are other possibilities.

There will be a service in Westminster Abbey on Friday 22 November and some of the London events will take place around that weekend, with coaches from the Midlands in support, we hope.

Members of the GEF, including me, have attended two Day Conferences in London and Leeds with a view to academic involvement in a project built round 1819.

We hope that a longer conference will be held in 2019 in Leicester which has hotels and venues and is in easy reach of Nuneaton. Further afield we hope for some celebratory events in the USA and Japan.

In Nuneaton we have been laying the groundwork for some time, most notably to have a Visitor Centre up and running. The ALS AGM will be in Nuneaton in 2019. We now have a sub-committee to plan events. It met for the first time on 1st August and spent time sifting through ideas already suggested and adding more. We have to reduce them to what is practical and feasible. We will measure success locally by how many people gain a first, or renewed acquaintance with George Eliot. We will work closely with schools and already have some willing to take lead roles. Local community group involvement is crucial. Already the Festival of Arts, WIs and art groups are involved. The Borough Council has a new Town Centre Manager who is very aware of the potential. Simon Winterman's drama group will be very important in bringing Eliot to life. Viscountess Daventry supports the idea for a dramatised *Mr Gilfil's Love Story* outdoors at Arbury - where it is set. We are hoping for some original music to accompany some Eliot poetry and we want all four churches from *Scenes* to take part. We have had an initial planning meeting with Nuneaton Museum and The Herbert in Coventry and will also involve the county tourism office and libraries. We have a website [georgeeliot2019](http://georgeeliot2019) and will be adding plans and ideas to the site as we firm them up.



# Booking form

It is possible to book these events via the website – [www.georgeeliot.org](http://www.georgeeliot.org). Payment is by PayPal and an immediate notification of your booking is emailed to me and you, and I can send tickets or confirm your booking. This form will be returned with your tickets.

We are not using the ‘logging on as a member’ on the website since it has caused many problems for our members. Apologies if there are still some hitches – we are trying to resolve them.

I am happy to receive telephone booking if that is easier for you: 02476 619126

[www.georgeeliot.org](http://www.georgeeliot.org)



George Eliot Fellowship



@GeorgeEliotLove

## Please send me tickets for the following events

.....Ticket/s for 46th Annual Lecture by Emily Midorikawa & Emma Claire Sweeney at Chilvers Coton HC on Saturday 16 Sept at £4 members, or £5 non-members .....

.....Ticket/s for Annual readings by Gabriel Woolf and Rosalind Shanks on Saturday 7 October at The Old Meeting URC, Bedworth at £10 members £12 non-members .....

.....Ticket/s for Annual Luncheon at Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre, Avenue Road, Nuneaton on Sunday 19 November at £20 .....

Total enclosed .....

### Griff Appeal – another chance to support the George Eliot Visitor Centre

I wish to purchase.....brick/s at £5 per brick to build GEVC .....

I wish to purchase .....tile/s at £10 per tile to roof GEVC .....

I’m not bothered about bricks and tiles but want to donate this amount .....

If your cheque is just for the Visitor Centre it can be made payable to Griff Preservation Trust and sent to the same address. If it includes tickets and donation make it payable to the GEF

My name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Tel:.....Email.....

I enclose a cheque for £.....made payable to The George Eliot Fellowship for tickets detailed above.

**Full details & maps of each event will accompany your tickets if they are required.**

Please send your completed order form and cheque to:

The George Eliot Fellowship, 39 Lower Road, Barnacle, Coventry CV7 9LD