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## Review of A Community of Interest- the Story of the George Eliot Fellowship 1930-2000

Kathleen Adams

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**Kathleen Adams, *A Community of Interest – the Story of the George Eliot Fellowship 1930-2000* (George Eliot Fellowship, 2000). pp. 56**

On November 22nd 1930 an inaugural supper for the George Eliot Fellowship was held at the Newdegate Arms in Nuneaton, at which Sir Francis Newdegate GCMG of Arbury Hall presided. He told the assembled company that it was high time that those who lived Nuneaton should pay every honour they could to George Eliot. He went on to say 'I cannot myself speak of her writings as an expert, but I do know that she has done a great deal for the neighbourhood in the way she has reproduced Warwickshire as it was 100 years ago and has preserved the characters of many people who lived in the neighbourhood at the time'. Sir Francis ended by saying he hoped the Fellowship would prove successful.

In *A Community of Interest* – an update of an earlier book published in 1980 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary – Kathleen Adams charts the course of the Fellowship from 1930-2000. She tells us that its Founder, A. F. Cross, a Leicestershire man by birth, had been on the editorial staff of the Nuneaton Advertiser from 1895, and in 1905 had acquired the Nuneaton Chronicle – the oldest established local paper. It took him twenty-five years of hard struggle to overcome the apathy of George Eliot's home town and for his campaign for some sort of memorial to bear fruit. His words written in the Chronicle a week after that inaugural supper, reporting that 'The George Eliot Fellowship will probably develop into an organisation known throughout the world-wide realm of art and literature', have proved prophetic. From those early beginnings in 1930, the Fellowship has seen many ups and downs. The membership has fluctuated, as have the finances, which by 1939 were in the red. The Fellowship was re-formed in October 1947 after a break of eight years when the Second World War intervened. In 1950 there were less than fifty members with a total of £4 in the kitty – but the lowest ebb was in 1967 with twenty-one members and five life members.

Since then the Fellowship has gone from strength to strength. A number of factors and people have contributed to its success. The climate has changed. George Eliot, a woman before her time, is now recognized and appreciated for her intellect, breadth of vision and humanity by a wide public. Radio, stage, television, film, biography and scholarship have all played their part. At a time when our English literature heritage is under threat, it is vitally important that such organizations as the George Eliot Fellowship should be seen to exist.

Kathleen Adams – Secretary since 1968, with Bill Adams as Chairman – has worked tirelessly for George Eliot. She has devoted time and untold energy – drawing in interested people, writing, organizing and widening the base of the Fellowship. The plaque in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner, the *Review*, overseas members and now the Essay Competition have all been part of her achievement. Inevitably *Community of Interest*, a most valuable record of the Fellowship, deals, for the most part, with dates, figures and events; but the last five or six pages are devoted to three profiles: A. F. Cross, Founder of the Fellowship; Elizabeth Haldane, CH LLD, the first President; and Mrs L. C. S. Fitzroy Newdegate OBE, the first Patron. These profiles enable Kathleen Adams to write in a more flowing style. That of Mrs Fitzroy Newdegate has the most personal note. I found the picture of this brave woman alone in her large Gothic home at Arbury Hall moving.

**Margaret Wolfit**