

George Eliot Fellowship

Newsletter
February 2025



“If ever an author has the literary society they deserve, it is surely George Eliot. The George Eliot Fellowship is as passionate, knowledgeable, and open to ideas, as Eliot.”
Deirdre Shields, adaptor of script for ‘George’, at St Mary’s Guildhall

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Study Group

Friday 7 March 2025 at 7.30
Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre
Avenue Road, Nuneaton
CV11 4LU

led by our president
Dr John Rignall

Daniel Deronda

An early encouragement to familiarise ourselves with the novel in anticipation of the 150th anniversary in 2026.

It will be helpful if you have read it, but not essential. Coming to John’s discussion will encourage you to read or re-read it. For this first 2025 event, to invite new members we are charging member rate for all.

For anyone local without a copy, Astley Book Farm has six new copies of the Wordsworth edition, in their George Eliot section, for £4.99, probably as cheap as anywhere; there are bargain copies second hand via online sites Abebooks or Ebay (lots at £3.50 post-free)

Admission price is £5.00

payable via the website or on the door.
Refreshments at the end of the session.

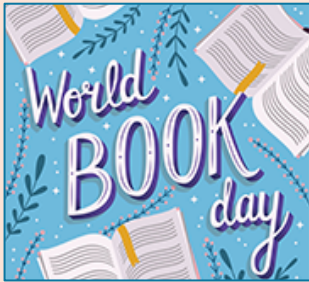
Essay Prize Winner



Congratulation to Isabella Brooks-Ward on winning this year’s essay prize, £500 and membership of the Fellowship. Her essay is called *Eliot’s Onion: Perfecting Taste in George Eliot’s Philosophical Poetry*.

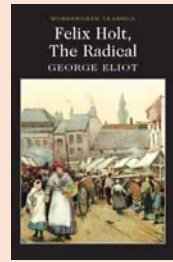
Issy is interested in the systems of self-help used and developed in the 19th century, notably by Samuel Smiles. Her PhD examined George Eliot and George Meredith in that light. She won a Nineteenth-Century Matters Fellowship in 2024 and has lectured at Pembroke College, Oxford and Birkbeck, University of London. She has extensive knowledge of Spinoza, Feuerbach and Comte and has a chapter on *George Eliot’s Aphorisms and Maxims* in the 2025 *Oxford Handbook to George Eliot*. We plan to invite Issy to deliver a paper this year to the Fellowship.

Also in March 2025



**Thursday
6th
March**

The Fellowship has arranged with Astley Book Farm to give away copies of our edition of *Felix Holt* to any interested customers on 6th March. Copies will be FREE at Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre that day as well.



The Fellowship will also be contacting schools in the Nuneaton area to offer samples of text and activity sheets for pupils to enjoy on or around World Book Day. Maddy Hughes will be in touch!

 International Women's Day



**Saturday
8th
March**

**George Eliot
Warwickshire
Cycle Ride**



Rose Selwyn, in 2007, with Nuneaton Cycle Club, reading from 'Amos Barton' at the launch of Britain in Bloom.

Juliet Hopper has advised Coventry CTC on a route and is taking part in a 26 mile ride visiting significant Eliot sites, starting from her old school in Warwick Row, Coventry, then along the canal towpath to Bedworth and Nuneaton. They will stop at Nuneaton Museum, the obelisk in the Memorial Gardens, the statue and a break at the George Eliot pub. The return skirts the Arbury Estate, through Astley, Corley and Brownhill Green and back to the Starley Memorial.

In the next Newsletter we hope to show pictures of Juliet taking part – to join the archive like the picture on the left!

**Saturday
22nd
March**

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
At 2.00pm
Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre
Avenue Road, Nuneaton CV11 4LU**

Full details of the minutes from 2024 plus the agenda and background notes for the 2025 AGM will accompany this Newsletter for members.

They will also be in the members' section of the website.

After a refreshment break – a chance to see more of our archive.

George Eliot Weekend, 24-26 May

Continuing the theme of **People Important in George Eliot's Life**

Saturday 24 May 10.00 am – 4.30pm, Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre



Dr John Rignall will talk about Herbert Spencer, a hugely important figure in Eliot's life, especially during her early years in London.

Herbert Spencer's Unwrinkled Brow: Serious Thinking and Comic Complacency



Jonathan Ouvry is the great-great-grandson of George Henry Lewes. He captivated us last year by showing Lewes's pocket watch and personal items. Jonathan will share with us unique insights into his illustrious forebear.

George Henry Lewes

LUNCH BREAK 12.30 – 2.00



Simon Sargent contributed a superb article to the GE Review about his family connections to the Cash family in Coventry. His paper expands on this article.

Foleshill Friends: George Eliot and Mary Sibree Cash



John Burton is interested in the Congreves. They became close friends of George Eliot in the last years of her life in London. They also had a local North Warwickshire connection.

Richard and Maria Congreve: Positivist Friends



Katherine Fear will be remembered for her superb folk opera **Polly Button**, about the murder of a Nuneaton woman when Mary Ann was a teenager. Katherine used George Eliot as the narrator, and her musicians will sing songs from the opera and others specially written for today, relevant to George Eliot.

REFRESHMENTS AND CHAT TO SEE YOU ON YOUR WAY

TICKETS: £45 MEMBERS, £50 VISITORS. SEE BOOKING FORM FOR DETAILS

George Eliot Weekend, 24-26 May

**Sunday 25 May 2025 – George Eliot Country Tour
Starts and finishes at Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre
11.00 am – 6.30pm**



South Farm



Arbury Hall



Chilvers Coton



Griff House



Astley church



Town centre statue

Tickets £45 members: £50 visitors
Book online or via the order form at the end of this Newsletter. We suggest sensible shoes! Bring plenty to drink, and a picnic or packed lunch which can be enjoyed in Arbury Park. Full details of the itinerary will be sent when you book. There will be a commemorative programme. Maximum of 27.

'Janet's Repentance' in Nuneaton – Monday 26 May



Enjoy a guided tour of the parts of Nuneaton town centre depicted in George Eliot's story *Janet's Repentance*, one of three short stories in *Scenes of Clerical Life* in 1857/8.

There are readings at key points on the walk. Numbers are limited, please book early.

Starts at 2.30pm and finishes at obelisk at approx. 4.30pm in GE Memorial Gardens.

Charge is £5 for members: £6 for visitors. Book online or use the order form with this Newsletter.

For Your Diary:

Sunday 29 June: Wreathlaying in Nuneaton at 3.00pm

Saturday 20 September: Annual Lecture. Venue and speaker tbc.

Friday 24 October: 12.30 – 1.30

Readings from George Eliot at Nuneaton Museum

Sunday 23 November: Annual Birthday Lunch. Speaker tbc.

At 104, Hilda Gunn was our oldest member. We know, from some of our existing members, how much she, as Miss Webster, inspired pupils to love reading, and to love George Eliot. One of those pupils read *The Choir Invisible* at her funeral.

Hilda joined the Fellowship in 1968 during the early years of the Kathleen and Bill Adams era. She was present at the unveiling of the plaque in Westminster Abbey and for a while was Vice-Chair of the Fellowship. She was always keen and ready to show visitors around the George Eliot sites and was an enthusiastic guide.

Hilda had a full life, with many close family ties. After a fall at 99, she moved to a care home, bought a Kindle when she was 100, and the last book she re-read was *Daniel Deronda*. Hilda was certainly one of the Fellowship's greatest supporters, an amazing teacher, and an example to us all.

Hilda Gunn

9th February 1920
to
26th October 2024



Philippa Rees



Philippa Rees wrote in November 2024 to tell us about her latest book, an extended family history and journey of discovery for her, which involves George Eliot.

Philippa inherited a signed first edition of *Daniel Deronda*, "in grateful remembrance of kindnesses shown to those no longer living". Her relations had mentored Thornton and Herbert Lewes in South Africa and then had to notify GE and GHL of Herbert's death. We hope to invite Philippa to a later meeting of the GEF to tell us more.

John Freeman

John Freeman has recently joined the GEF and has been reading Eliot with great interest. He is an artist who specialises in wood and lino cuts. John has exhibited widely in the Nuneaton area, including at the Museum and Station Gallery. He will be on the GE Country Tour in May, making sketches and taking photos for a series of art works on George Eliot Country. It will be an interesting project, with interesting possibilities. Here is a sample.





'Katie O'

In our last Newsletter we showed a mural near the George Eliot statue in Nuneaton, on a window in the former Debenhams, and part of an Art-based weekend. Katie O is gaining praise for her large-scale art on walls, windows and buildings. She is based in Coventry and we were delighted to see her use of birds and flowers to depict the art of George Eliot.

It is always good to see local artists engaging with George Eliot. We are happy to publicise them and hope to give display space to them in the Visitor Centre.

We also hope to commission some George Eliot postcards and pictures to go on sale there.



From Nuneaton (Katie O) to the USA. This poster was spotted in Delaware.

Elizabeth Haldane (1862-1937)

Elizabeth Haldane was an accomplished woman and the first president of the George Eliot Fellowship in 1930.

We are in correspondence with an academic in Australia who has come across some 78 RPM recordings of lectures by her. We expressed an interest, and are hoping to acquire them for the Fellowship archive. We will keep members informed as the story evolves. It might be another item for the Visitor Centre.

A Look Back at November 2024



This was a superb evening of excellence – food, the medieval setting at St Mary’s Guildhall, the Orchestra of the Swan, SuRie’s music, and Harriet Walter’s beautifully delivered script, chosen by Deirdre Shields and performed to a sell-out audience – including, from Japan, our member Akiko Higuchi, in the UK on another literary tour. We had prepared eight A1 panels about 'George Eliot and Coventry' which were on display and remain on show at Drapers’ Hall during February.

The audience at St Mary’s Hall knew we had witnessed something very special. The good news is - you can see it too.

The Orchestra of the Swan and SuRie will be in all the shows. Other actors may play George Eliot. See venues for details.

Wilton’s Music Hall, London E1 8JB
Wednesday 16, Thursday 17 April at 7.30pm.

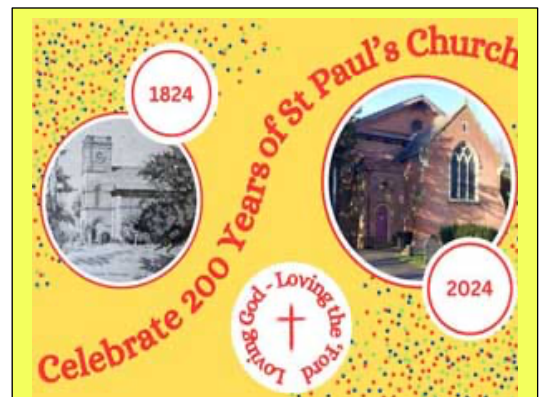
Oxford Playhouse, OX1 2LW, Tuesday 22 April at 7.30pm.

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry CV1 1GS, Friday 16 May at 7.30pm.



Above: Chair John Burton, Mayoress Sheila Hancox, guest of honour Andrew Copson & Mayor Bill Hancox.

A happy event, made successful by the huge efforts of our team behind the scenes. Our **Birth Day Luncheon** was held at Weston Hall, Bulkington,. The excellent address by Andrew Copson, CEO of Humanists UK will appear in the 2025 George Eliot Review.



A delightful evening at 'Paddiford' Church with an excellent audience, a successful sales table and lots of lovely cake! Huge thanks to Kate and her team for letting us celebrate George Eliot’s birthday with readings from 'Janet’s Repentance', whose Rev’d Tryan was based in the parish.

George Eliot Visitor Centre Latest News

Members will recall some elements of this long-running saga which has taxed the patience of the Griff Preservation Trust since 2012. One thing we observed in the last year was a marked deterioration of the building, which gives us concern since the plan includes the re-use of suitable bricks and tiles, and many tiles were damaged in the last roof fall in October 2024.



So it is good to report that we now have planning permission for our proposed George Eliot Visitor Centre.

The GPT trustees all attended the Planning Committee meeting on Tuesday, 11 February.

It was a long ten month wait from submission of our plans to the decision and there were significant objections from several conservation groups. The Officer went into detail explaining the planners' thinking and their recommendation to the committee that they should approve the application. Their decision was a unanimous vote of approval.

In view of objections, the recommendation will now go to the Secretary of State who will decide whether to confirm the decision or call it in for a closer examination by her officials. We will know in a month's time.



Front Elevation

BOOKING FORM

There are two ways of purchasing tickets for the events in this Newsletter:

EITHER Go to the website www.georgeeliot.org and follow guidance to EVENTS. Members and non-members can book in this way. Payment is then by debit or credit card. PayPal is offered as a method of payment but you can by-pass that, if required, and go to payment by card. This is an efficient way of paying and booking.

OR Use the order form below, fill in the details and include a cheque payable to George Eliot Fellowship and send both to the address shown on the cut-off slip below.

READING GROUP – *Daniel Deronda* on Friday 7 March at 7.30pm
Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre, Avenue Road, Nuneaton CV11 4LU
Admission, to include refreshments, is £5 for members and visitors.
Please book.....places at £5.

GEORGE ELIOT DAY – Saturday 24 May at 10.00am – 4.30pm
Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre, Avenue Road, Nuneaton CV11 4LU
Admission, to include buffet lunch, is £45 for members, £50 for visitors
without buffet lunch, is £37 for members, £42 for visitors
Please book.....places at £..... ..

GEORGE ELIOT COUNTRY TOUR – Sunday 25 May start and finish at
Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre, Avenue Road, Nuneaton CV11 4LU
The Centre will be open from 10.30am for an 11.00am start. We aim to
return to the Centre for 6.30pm.
Admission, to include coach, admission to Arbury, and guides is
£45 for members, £50 for visitors, £35 for students under 21
Please book places at £..... ..

JANET'S REPENTANCE WALK Monday 26 May starting at
George Eliot obelisk, George Eliot Memorial Gardens, Nuneaton at 2.30pm
Admission £5 for members, £6 for visitors.
Please book places at £..... ..

TOTAL

Please add any notes or requests on the back of this order form

.....

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE.....

I/We enclose cheque (payable to George Eliot Fellowship) for £.....

Please return this form and your cheque to George Eliot Fellowship,
39 Lower Road, Barnacle, Coventry CV7 9LD