

**From a Devon History Society article on Devon Suffrage Activists submitted by
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Elizabeth Elliott-Drake (née Douglas), Nutwell Court, Lymington

Lady Elliott-Drake née Douglas (1840-1923) was born on 10 May 1840 at Mahébourg, Mauritius, the daughter of an army officer, Sir Robert Andrews Douglas, 2nd baronet Douglas of Glenbervie, and his wife Martha Elizabeth née Rouse, the middle of three children (Robert b.1837, Elizabeth, and Kenneth b.1843). She was baptised on 14 June 1840 in the protestant church of Port Louis, Mauritius. Her father died in 1843 and by 1861 Martha and Elizabeth were settled in Dawlish, at Burslesdon House.

On 6 August 1861 Douglas married Sir Francis George Augustus Fuller-Elliott-Drake, (1837–1916), at Holy Trinity, Paddington, London. Their only child, Elizabeth Beatrice, known as Beatrice, was born in London in 1862.

In 1870, Sir Francis inherited the baronetcy of Fuller-Elliott-Drake of Nutwell Court and Yarcombe, from his uncle Sir Thomas Trayton Fuller-Elliott-Drake, becoming the 2nd baronet Fuller-Elliott-Drake. Sir Francis and Lady Elizabeth took up residence at Nutwell Court, a forty-roomed country mansion with accompanying gardens and park of 76 acres.

Sir Francis had already suffered one period of mental ill health in March 1868, which lasted for about three months, but in November 1873 he was taken ill again and the following March he was admitted to Ticehurst Asylum, Sussex, where he was to spend the rest of his life. Ticehurst catered for well-to-do patients. Many patients during the period of Sir Francis's residence were from the gentry and aristocracy. It appears to have had a liberal regime with a great deal of freedom afforded to those residents who were not thought to be dangerous.

It is difficult to ascertain how active Sir Francis was in the management of his affairs after his admission to the asylum. The patients' bills show, for example, that he maintained his own horse, carriage, and coachman, and spent a great deal on stationery, clothing, and travel, including by railway and later by hired motor car. In part, at least, the travel costs will have been accounted for by frequent trips to Ticehurst's seaside facility at St Leonards-on-Sea. However it seems likely that he will have maintained a degree of involvement both by correspondence and by occasional visits to Nutwell Court. What is clear, however, is that Lady Elliott-Drake became the public face of the family. She

concerned herself with many matters which, in other circumstances, would have been considered the business of her husband, as well as those which would have been deemed more appropriate for a woman of her station in life.

She was frequently referred to as the owner of the Nutwell Court estate, although directories of the time always referred to Nutwell Court as 'the seat of' Sir Francis.

In February 1884, as a representative of the Drake family, Lady Elliott-Drake was invited to unveil the statue of Sir Francis Drake, Elizabethan seafarer and circumnavigator, on Plymouth Hoe. The Drake chair, made from the wood of Drake's ship, the Pelican, was brought from the Bodleian Library, for her to use for the occasion. She also made a short speech at the celebratory luncheon which followed the unveiling.

On the marriage of her daughter Beatrice to the Hon. Reginald Colbourne (later Lord Seaton), and in the absence of Sir Francis, Lady Elliott-Drake accompanied the bride to the church, although she was 'given away' by her cousin.

Lady Elliott-Drake took a keen interest in all matters related to the estates of Nutwell and Yarcombe, making donations and supporting local events. She supported Lymington Parish Council in its efforts to acquire land for a parish recreation ground, and the provision of a fisherman's shelter. She was said to have given pensions to all who could no longer work for her even before the introduction of a national pension scheme. She had a particular interest in the provision of education, and very largely contributed to the building of the schools in Woodbury. Her expressed desire was that every child should have an equal opportunity to succeed. She was also a subscriber to the University Extension Scheme.

She was patron of numerous organisations including the Devon and Exeter Female Penitentiary, and contributed substantially to a wide range of good causes such as local hospitals, funds supporting the Yeomanry during the Boer Wars, and international disaster relief such as after the 1907 earthquake in Jamaica, amongst many others.

In the early years of the twentieth century Lady Elliott-Drake turned to literary pursuits. She compiled and published two works – an edited collection *Lady Knight's Letters from France and Italy 1776-1795*, published in 1905, and in 1911 her authored two volume work *The Family and Heirs of Sir Francis Drake* was published. In the 1911 census she described her occupation as "Author". Both

works were well received, the London Daily News referring to 'her graphic and lucid style' and suggesting that a real art had gone into their making.

In February 1909, Lady Elliott-Drake was one of the supporters at a meeting in the Barnfield Hall, Exeter, which had been called to support the extension of the franchise to qualified women. After the speeches it was agreed to form an Exeter branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and she accepted a proposal to become one of the Vice-Presidents. Proposing a vote of thanks to Sir Robert Newman for presiding at the meeting she commented that 'She was more convinced than ever, after hearing the speeches, of the justice of the cause for which they were fighting. She remained as one of the Vice-Presidents until at least 1913.

Sir Francis died at Ticehurst Asylum on 25 July 1916. His body was conveyed to Nutwell Court and then on to Buckland Monachorum, where he was buried after a quiet funeral service. Probate was granted to his widow Lady Elliott-Drake, his effects being valued at £297464 18s 11d. Nutwell Court itself was inherited by Lady Elliott-Drake's daughter, who lived at Buckland Abbey with her husband, Lord Seaton.

Lady Elliott-Drake continued to live at Nutwell Court, supporting local good causes and managing the estates until her own death in 1923. She died on 11 December 1923 at Nutwell Court, aged 83. Like her husband, her funeral service was held at St Andrew's Church, Buckland Monachorum. Her body was interred in the churchyard. Memorial services were also held at Lymptstone, Woodbury and Yarcombe. An appreciation of her life described her as 'a lady of erudition, sympathetic generous and wise' and her literary works as 'interesting and scholarly'. Probate records show that her wealth at death amounted to £15,629 18s.

No likenesses of her have so far been identified, although Edward Onslow Ford RA exhibited a medallion in marble of Lady Elliott-Drake at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1901.