

# Woodbury History Society Newsletter 2021

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## Letter from the Chairman

After a difficult year in 2020, 2021 has continued to be uncertain and unpredictable for everyone, with further severe restrictions imposed due to Covid19. The activities of the Woodbury History Society have necessarily been considerably curtailed. Events had to be cancelled or postponed and decisions made about what we could or could not do, in line with the frequently changing Covid19 restrictions. Members who had paid their subscription had not had the full benefits of membership; the Committee agreed that these subscriptions should now be extended into 2021, to cover the three postponed meetings. Membership fees will not be collected again until early 2022.

We were able to hold our Annual General Meeting by Zoom in February, which fulfilled the requirements of our Constitution. The Committee has also held regular Zoom meetings to keep the Society alive and viable, and has provided a total of 70 weekly instalments of "Times Gone By", as well as other items of interest, circulated to members by email and often appearing in Woodbury News. The Society has also been able to hold two lecture meetings for members by Zoom.

In September, with Covid restrictions easing, we were able to hold our first "live" meeting since March 2020 when the Society's Archivist Gill Selley gave a talk on "The Origins of Woodbury Parish and its Manors". In November Todd Gray gave a talk on "The Blackshirts of Devon". Both talks were very well attended, with strict Covid restrictions being observed.

At the time of writing, it seems that it may be possible to hold a live AGM on Thursday 3 February 2022.

The proposed Talks programme for the Society in 2022 is as follows: Thursday 3 March: Julian Ware "A Changing World".

Thursday 5 May: Mike Sampson "A Short History of Tiverton". Thursday 2 Sept: To be confirmed

Thursday 3 November: Todd Gray "Devon and African Enslavement"

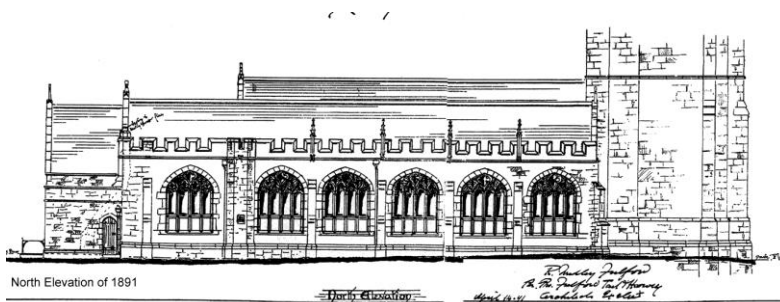
We are also hoping to re-instate our traditional Annual Outing on Wednesday 15 June.

I am grateful to you all for your loyalty and support, particularly to the members of the Committee. We must look forward to an easier year in 2022, being optimistic as well as realistic, when we can all get together again.

Professor Nick Burgess  
December 2021

## St Swithun's Church Drains 2021

St Swithun's Church, parts of which date from the 13th century, has for many years suffered from rising damp through the floor and walls, principally in the North Aisle (Haydon's) which was completed in about 1533.



In recent years this has become more evident due to decaying Victorian wooden floor blocks and dado wall panelling. Exacerbated by the almost complete absence of ventilation within the building, the problem was becoming more apparent even to the well seasoned nose!

### 3

Professional, external drain and internal damp surveys carried out in 2018 recommended a number of remedial actions, the initial one being to excavate and remove the high ground against the north wall down to a lower level than the



BEFORE



DURING

internal floor level. The second to replace the existing cracked and dislodged Victorian drains with a new system of land and rainwater drains set below the new ground level.

Having obtained a Faculty (Anglican Church planning permission) a group of nine "Friends of St. Swithun's" (FoSS) volunteers successfully completed these first two works over three weeks during August and September this year. In excess of forty tons of spoil was removed to lower the ground to the required depth.

During the excavations, part of a gargoyle face and some fragments of stained glass were discovered, but the origins of both are unknown at present. They are on view in the display cabinet at the rear of the church. Three nineteenth century headstones were



AFTER



temporarily removed while the ground was re-profiled then replaced on the new incline in their original positions.

New brick walls topped with popples were built to support two stone chest tombs, one dated 1676 and the other without inscription, where the ground level had been lowered along one side of the tombs.

Inevitably when excavating, although only to a relatively shallow depth in an ancient churchyard, some remains would be unearthed. These were carefully

collected and reinterred in a new grave close by, during a service of re-burial of bones conducted by Rev. Margaret Scrivener on 10th September.

It is hoped that moisture levels in the floor and walls will gradually reduce over the coming months such that the internal work of replacing the decayed flooring etc can commence.



There is no central funding for the upkeep of church buildings, hence the materials for this work were purchased by FoSS through members subscriptions, donations and fund raising concerts held within the Church.

***Chris Sheppard***

### **The History of Church Stile Cottages**



In the middle of Woodbury village, beside the parish church, stands the cob and thatched house, now divided into two or three dwellings, of an ancient farm, now known as Church Stile Cottages. Its position indicates the importance of the farm, and the fact that it was a freehold

estate of about 106 acres with lands scattered around the village. The present house dates possibly from Tudor times, though it may not be the original house.



The house shows some 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century details including beams and plaster ceilings. If the farm is as old as surmised then the house must have been rebuilt at this period, but there is no evidence to show what it would have looked like.

From the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries Woodbury had a Lord of the Manor who resided in the village. So where did he live? There is no written evidence of where his house could have stood so it is necessary to look at early documents and maps to try and find a clue. The most important site in the village is undoubtedly the land stretching from Oakhays Lane down to the Arch. This area was a freehold site on which the old Church Stile Farm was situated on the side overlooking the church, and half way down the plot. The importance of the site was the fact that it overlooked the church, and was well-placed on the major roads with crossroads at either end. Possibly the original house was built of wood, or perhaps cob – stone was not available locally and the only stone buildings were the church and the tithe barn at the back of the old Parsonage House. The Inquisition Post Mortem of William Albermarle, dated 1288 (a list of all the properties of the departed which was compiled on the death of gentry and aristocracy), lists all the properties, land, woodlands, watermills, and tenants and rents in the Manor, but does not mention the Lord's dwelling house. Another Inquisition was taken on the death of Geoffrey Albermarle in 1320 listing all the properties etc within the Manor, but this one mentions a 'capital messuage with a garden worth yearly 6s. 8d', but it is not clear whether it is the house and garden, or the garden alone which is worth 6s. 8d.

The Inquisition for the last of the Albermarle family, William, who died in 1361,

records that there is 'one capital messuage worth nought beyond reprises', i.e. rents, annuities etc paid out of the domain lands. All that these records do is tell us that the Lord lived in Woodbury and the state the size of his Manor. This William was the last of the Albermarles, and after his death the manor was inherited by his daughter who had married William Bonville of Shute, and lived in his manor house there. It is likely that the manor house and its lands would have been sold off by Margaret Bonville to a family with money.



The 1796 map (p.7) shows the size of the site of Church Stile Farm and its owner with the inscription on the map of 'Property of Mr Northcott'. It was divided into three dwellings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was a substantial house and still shows some early features. It is possible that the entry in the survey of the Manor in 1523 is referring to what later became Church Stile, but this is just surmise. It records that a Richard Hopping (alias Holwell) held the capital messuage entirely in decay excepting one tenement built upon it with nine acres of arable land and 40 acres of pasture. It is obvious that the cottages are very old and any rebuilding would have been done on the same site, as it was one of such importance. So was this farm built on the remains of the old manor house and, as can be seen by the 1839 tithe map and apportionment, was of a reasonably large size for the parish. The Holwell/Hopping family was a very influential and substantial family in the parish, who were

**Beams and panelling in one of the cottages** merchants, serge-makers and farmers – they also held estates in other East Devon parishes. John Holwell owned and occupied the farm in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and on his death it passed to his widow's second husband, a Joseph Huggins. There is an interesting note in the records of Devon marriage licences which says 'Let no licence be granted to John Holwell of Church Stile, before Mary Huggins (widow of John Holwell and wife of Joseph Huggins) his mother, is first called – 16 years of age'. This John died in 1739 when he was described as a free tenant of the Manor of Woodbury for a tenement called Church Stile.

On the death of John Holwell the estate was bought by George Barons (also recorded as Barnes), and on the first year of his ownership he was taken before the

Manor Court for 'taking soil from the highway nigh the Three Elms and carrying the same on to Church Stile Tenement'. George occupied the farm until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it was sold to a Robert Northcott of Lymptone. The new owner did not move to Woodbury but leased the estate to a farmer called Philip White.

ENLARGEMENT, SLIDE 20, WOODBURY VILLAGE & SURROUNDS. BEST PRINT, FROM FLOPPY VIA MS. WORD

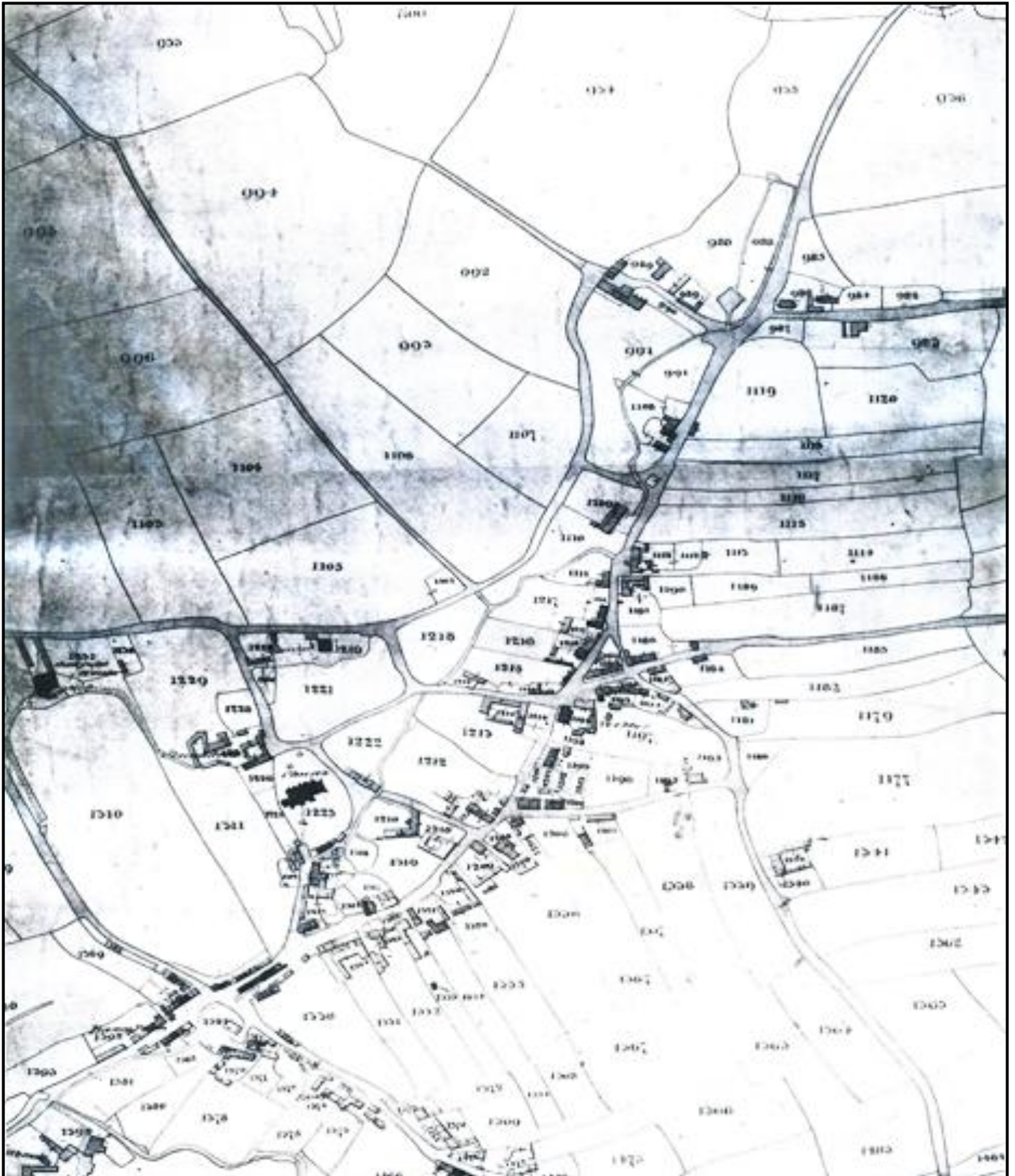


**1796 map of Church Stile Farm and its site**

Official records are scanty, but fortunately the local newspapers give quite a lot of information about the house and its contents. In September 1819 the farm was advertised as for sale by auction, at the time of which it was occupied by Charles Salter. The names and acreage of the fields was given amounting to 88 acres in all – a postscript notes that 'the house at a very trifling expense is capable of being made fit for the residence of a genteel family'. The whole estate was bought by Henry B Pennell Esq. who was a close relative of the Lee family of Ebford Barton.

In the early 1830s he sold the estate to the Reverend Francis Filmer, a wealthy retired clergyman from Kent, who proceeded to divide the site on which the farm and its court and outbuilding stood. On the top part, opening onto Oakhays Lane he built a mansion house which he called Oakfield – this area must have always been

covered with oak trees as the crossroads was known, from the 1700s as 'Okeys Cross'. The land he kept for the property consisted of the main house and gardens, and an additional house and garden, and cottage and garden, as well as a lawn of pasture of 6 acres, which ran down the length of the site parallel to Globe Hill. The estate consisted also of three arable fields and one meadow and comprised about 29 acres in its entirety. Francis Filmer occupied this estate, but he leased the old Church Stile Farm and all its lands to Richard Wilcocks.



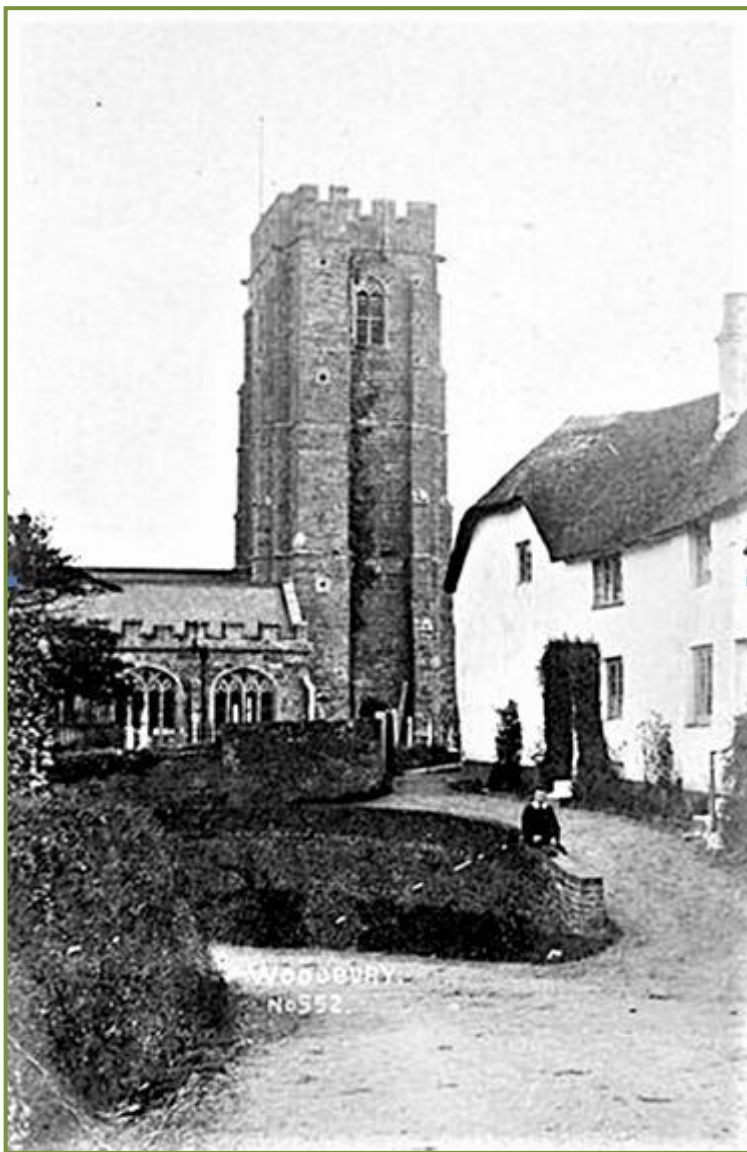
**1839 tithe map of Church Stile Farm site**

The farm, now detached from Oakfield House, though still owned by Filmer, had a new use. The 1839 tithe map clearly shows the large area of pasture called 'lawn'



on the apportionment marked 1310, the adjoining plot 1311 was part of Church Stile and was recorded as an orchard. Church Stile which was now farmed by Richard Wilcocks, but with an undertenant living in the house. This had now been turned into a school and was occupied by the schoolmaster, Thomas Skinner. This was known as Broadmead's Endowed School and partly funded by the trust which was established from the will of Esaias Broadmead, who had left £120 in his will of 1728 for the purchase of land, the income of £16 per annum to be used for the education of the children of Woodbury. Henry Pennell possibly started the school before the whole estate was sold. He was an Evangelical Protestant and worshipped at the Unitarian Meeting House at Gulliford. The school was supported by the evangelical community and was regularly visited by the Pennell and Lee family from Ebford – Henry Pennell's mother was the daughter of Matthew Lee of Ebford Barton. By 1851 Skinner had left Woodbury and there was a new headmaster called William Coventry.

In 1859 the history of the site changed. Firstly, the Reverend Francis Filmer died, and secondly Richard Wilcocks advertised the sale of the farm:



*'Auction at Church Stile of the animals and farm stock of Richard Wilcocks who will quit the farm next Michaelmas – comprising: three cows and calves, sic cows in milk (the calves gone but a short time), two heifers in calf, two yearling heifers, two rearing calves, one sow and farrow, one sow in farrow, one large slip pig, three horses; ten hogsheads of good cider; part of a rick of hay; wagon with lades, two narrow-wheel carts, one broad-wheel cart; horse harness, hackney saddle; three ploughs, two pair drags, two wood rollers, one stone roller, scarifier, plough drafts and chains; 12 corn bags; screen, sieve and measures; seed butt, three ladders; beam, scales and weights; arish rakes, crosscut saw, hay knife, iron bar, barley stamp and various farming tools etc. and 35 acres of grass in six lots.'*

A significant new owner now appeared for the whole estate of Oakfield House and Church Stile Farm – Dr Robert Brent, who was adding to his portfolio of important houses and lands in the

**Vintage Postcard**  
parish. The school would be safe to continue as Brent and his wife were ardent Evangelical Protestants, Brent having been brought up as a Baptist. Over the next ten years there were three different schoolmasters, Angus McClaren, William Arthur Philpott, Mr Gardner and finally William Hayson. A tragedy occurred in 1868 when Mr Gardner accidentally shot himself and died three weeks later from his injuries. Robert

Brent's sisters, who were now living on Broadway, were regular visitors to the school and sometimes listened to the children reading. There was a very strong Evangelical influence in the school from the wealthy visitors. When the newly built Church of England National School in Town Lane opened the Church Stile School closed and its remaining scholars joined the new one.

The following year the Exeter Flying Post published the following:

*'Church Stile Farm in Woodbury – public competition by auction for the following, the property of Robert Brent Esq. MD.*

*A purely bred North Devon bull, calved October 1858, (sire Tory, grand-sire Richmond); a well-bred Devon cow (vide Davy's Devon herd book); three fat heifers, 2 large-size prime grazing heifers, 44 hat sheep, four ewes, four lambs, two hog rams (by Mr G Turner's prize ram at Newton), eight large size pigs, and apples in the following orchards: Higher Church Stile Orchard (1.2.8 acres), Lower Church Stile Orchard (1.2.30 acres), Nine Acres Orchard (1.3.8 acres), Sowhill Orchard (1.1.0 acres), and Sowhill Orchard (0.3.3 acres)'*

Robert Brent died in 1872 and his properties were now in the hands of his widow, Louisa Brent. She took as an undertenant for the farm John Rew, who continued to occupy the premises until his death. His widow remained in the farmhouse and the cottage adjoining was occupied by a lacemaker.



**A Wintry Scene at Church Stile Cottages**

By 1901 Walter Knott was running the farm, but in 1903, on the death of Louisa

Brent, all the properties of her husband, including Church Stile Farm and Oakhays House (as it was now called), were sold, according to the will of Robert Brent, the proceeds to go to his brother's family in Tasmania. The auction particulars given were for a farmhouse, three cottages, outbuildings, and two parcels of orchard, in the occupation of William Copp. Among the fixtures were a cider press, apple engine and threshing machine, which were also to be sold. The farmlands appear to have been sold in individual lots and so the Church Stile Farm Estate vanished, and what remains are the old cottages which must have so much history hidden within their walls.

There is an interesting right of way through the front of the cottages from Church Stile lane to the graveyard. The old postcard shows it as a path that was frequently used, whereas it appears to be almost an intrusion onto the property nowadays. The snow covered picture was probably taken during the heavy snowfalls in the 1970

*Gill Selley*

## The History of Nutwell Court - Part 3

### Addendum to Part II

In Part II of The History of Nutwell Court (2020 Newsletter) I commenced by describing how, in 1501, Nutwell Court was inherited by Joan Dynham (Dinham) upon the death of her brother, Sir John Dynham (Dinham) and thence to the Zouche family via the 7<sup>th</sup> Baron to whom Joan was married. Gill Selley has kindly sent me some information which, from further research, I have been able to fill the gaps.

At the time of writing I had been unable to ascertain which members of the Zouche family had resided at Nutwell, if any. From the information now received it seems fairly certain that a Margaret Zouche was residing there in 1527. Below is a resume of a letter which appears to have been written on her behalf to her cousin Arundel (or she is writing it in the third person) in which she pleaded for his assistance in bettering her lot:

### Enrolled Deeds

*19 Hen VIII p1574*

*Margaret Zouche to her cousin Arundel: begs him to have pity upon his poor kinswoman, who has lived in the greatest thraldom ever since the death of her good lady and Mother and requests him to ask my Lord Cardinal to speak to the King and Queen that she may get taken into their service, or that of my Lady Princess. Arundel would marvel if he knew how we were dealt with 'for we see nothing that should be to our comfort'. Her mother-in-law, who never loved any of them, now rules everything, and makes her father worse to them than he used to be. Sorrow was the cause of her mother's death and so it will be of theirs.*

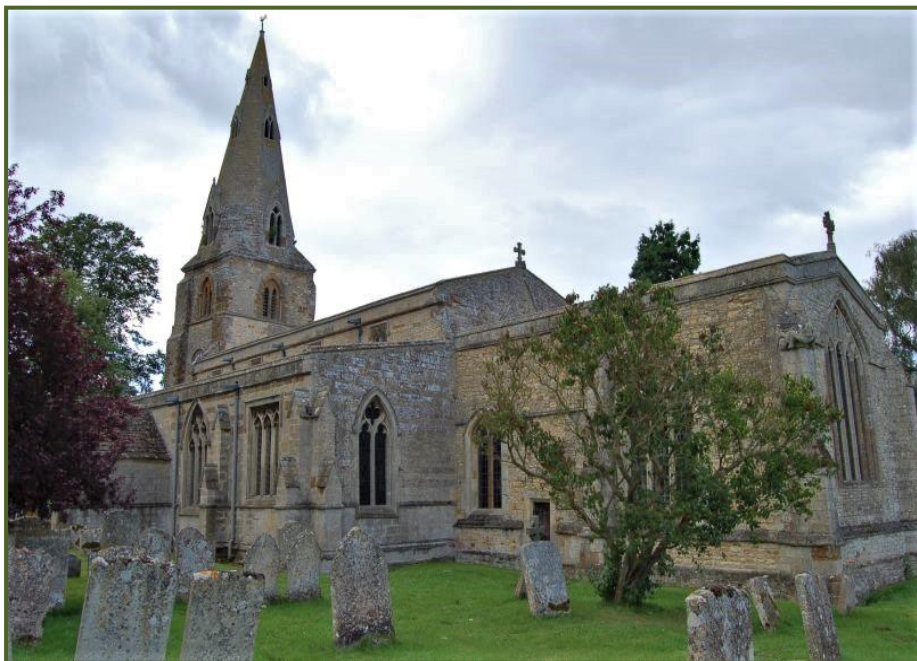
*Nutwell 8<sup>th</sup> October 1527*

So who was this sad young Margaret? She was in fact Margaret la Zouche, born in 1517 at Harringworth, Northants (seat of the Zouche barony)\* which would make her



**Arms of 7<sup>th</sup> Baron la Zouche**

aged around 10 at the time of the letter. Her father was John, the 8<sup>th</sup> Baron Zouche who was also born at Harringworth circa 1485. He married Dorothy Capell whose grandfather was Sir John Arundell of Lanherne, (near Newquay) Cornwall. It seems most likely that Margaret was appealing to Sir John Arundell (1474-1545) whose mother was Catherine Dinham, sister of Margaret's grandmother Joan Dinham (Zouche), which, I believe, would have made him her cousin. The Arundells were a powerful Cornish family who completely fell from grace in the latter part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century for their refusal to embrace the Protestant religion. (An enrolled deed reference dated 15<sup>th</sup> October 1512 exists relating to the Nutwell estate in which both Baron John Zouche, and Sir John Arundell were involved).



In 1527 the 8<sup>th</sup> Baron John la Zouche had remarried to Susan Davenport a widow who originated from Bulwick, Northants (not far from Harringworth). All this leads me to believe that the Zouches visited Nutwell occasionally but it was not by any means their main home.

\*During the medieval period, Harringworth was the seat of the la Zouche, family. The 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Zouche, and his descendants, were summoned to Parliament as Barons.

### **Church of St John the Baptist, Harringworth (12<sup>th</sup> c)**

As to Margaret's fate, I have found a reference that suggests she married an Edward Mompesson, born in 1515 at Maiden Bradley, Wiltshire but I have been unable to explore this any further.

Margaret's father, the 8<sup>th</sup> Baron, died on 10th August 1550 and was succeeded by his son, Richard, the 9<sup>th</sup> Baron. He died only two years later on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1552 but not before Nutwell had been partially sold (1/4) to Sir John Prideaux MP in 1551. It wasn't until 1573 that it was finally transferred to the Prideaux family, verified via further similar references to transactions involving John Arundell and latterly Sir Henry Compton (possibly the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Compton) but I cannot pretend to understand the complexities of them.

By 1649 Sir Thomas Prideaux, and particularly his son, Amias, had amassed such debts that the only way of discharging them was for Amias to sell Nutwell, which he did to Sir Henry Ford of Chagford in 1649.

## **The Drake family**

### **Sir Francis Drake, (3<sup>rd</sup> baronet) 1642 - 1718**

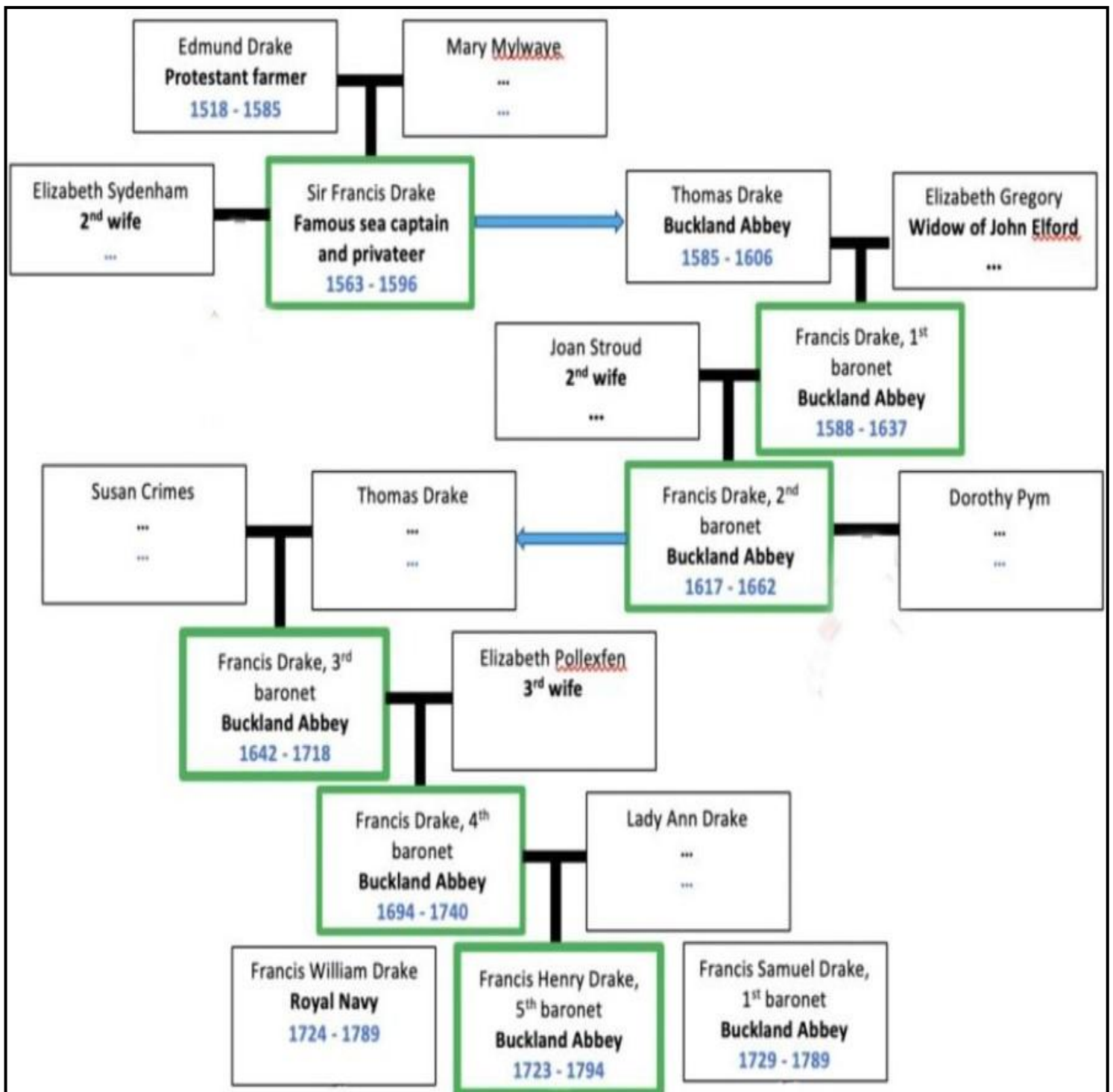
To continue from where I left off in the previous newsletter; when Henry Pollexfen died in 1732 he had no heir, therefore Nutwell passed to the Drake family of Buckland Abbey via Henry's sister Elizabeth. She had married Sir Francis Drake, the 3<sup>rd</sup> baronet in February 1690. He was born at Buckland in 1642 and was a descendant, (via his uncle, Sir Francis Drake the 2<sup>nd</sup> baronet) of the famous Elizabethan seafarer and hero of the Spanish Armada battle.

I thought it might be useful to include a description of the term "baronet"

### **Baronet**

A baronet is the holder of a hereditary baronetcy awarded by the British Crown. The practice of awarding baronetcies was originally introduced in England in the 1300s and was used by James I of England in 1611 in order to raise funds. A baronetcy is the only hereditary honour which is not a peerage. A baronet is styled "Sir" like a knight, but ranks above all knighthoods except for the Order of the Garter and, in Scotland, the Order of the Thistle. However, the baronetage, as a class, rank above the knightage. A baronetcy is not a knighthood and the recipient does not receive an accolade. A Baronet is considered a member of the Gentry and not a titled dignity.

Also, this abbreviated family tree of the Drake family below may be of assistance



**Family tree of the Drake family showing seven generations**

Although Sir Francis never owned Nutwell I think it is worth saying a bit about him before I go any further with the story.

Sir Francis was first returned as MP for Tavistock in April 1673 to the Cavalier Parliament (the first English Parliament after the restoration of Charles II which lasted from 1661 to 1679) He was elected for the Tavistock seat on a further seven occasions with his last election being in 1698. He was a very active member being elected to numerous committees and making many speeches. For most of his time in Parliament he was in opposition and during the concluding session of the Cavalier Parliament he was added to the committee of inquiry into the Popish Plot.



**The Arms of Drake in St Andrews Church, Buckland** Due to his opposition to King James II, Sir Francis, a staunch protestant, fell out of favour and had to go into exile overseas for awhile until restored by William of Orange in 1689. As already stated, he continued to serve as MP for Tavistock until 1698

Sir Francis married three times. His first wife was Dorothy Bampfylde, daughter of Sir John Bampfylde, 1st Bt of Poltimore. They had at least one child, Gertrude, who (as mentioned earlier) had married Henry Pollexfen in 1699 (making Sir Francis Henry's father in law). Dorothy died in 1679. His second wife was Anne Boone who he married in 1680 but she died childless in 1685. On 17 February 1690, he married Elizabeth Pollexfen (sister of Henry Pollexfen). With Elizabeth they had seven daughters and one son, who predictably, they named Francis.

During this period Henry Pollexfen (now Sir Francis' brother in law) continued to reside at Nutwell. Whether Sir Francis and Elizabeth visited him is not known although I would imagine they would have done so on at least one occasion if not more. Elizabeth died in March 1717 and Sir Francis died 10 months later, in January 1718. Both were buried at the nearby village of Meavy.



**Meavy – resting place of Sir Francis 3<sup>rd</sup> baronet and his wife.**

Meavy is a small village just under four miles to the east of Buckland Abbey. At the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 the manor was held by Robert le Bastard then later by the Meavy family followed by other notable families from the area. At sometime (probably in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century) Sir Francis bought Meavy, which included the Manor House, where he sometimes resided. It has external stonework inscribed with the date "1705" and the "Drake star" from his coat of arms. The parish church, St Peters (next to the Manor House) is at least partly Norman, with additions of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. It also has the "Drake Aisle" or manorial chapel. An oak tree on the village green in front of the churchyard wall is known as the Meavy Oak and is believed to be over 900 years old.

### **Sir Francis Drake, (4th baronet) 1694 - 1740**

Sir Francis was born at Buckland in 1694. In the 1715 general election, before he came of age, he was elected as MP for Tavistock, which seat he occupied until 1734 when he was "turned out" by the new Duke of Bedford. However, the same year he was returned for Bere Alston (not far from Buckland) which is described as the "family seat" in which he remained until his death in 1740. By all accounts, unlike his father, he did not play a very active role in Parliament.

Sir Francis succeeded to the baronetcy in 1718. At that time the Buckland estate was heavily encumbered with debt. However, on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1720 he made a financially advantageous marriage to Anne, the daughter of Samuel Heathcote a successful merchant of Hackney, Middlesex. She was also the sister of Sir William Heathcote. As a result Sir Francis was able to pay off his debts with his wife's money.



**Nutwell Court as it was at the time of Henry Pollexfen's death**  
(Painting by the Rev John Swete)

In 1732, when Henry Pollexfen died, Sir Francis, in effect became the owner of Nutwell Court. Many references state that Nutwell descended to the Drake family via Elizabeth Pollexfen, Henry's sister, to Sir Francis the 3<sup>rd</sup> baronet.

Other references imply that all four of Henry's sisters were given equal parts of Nutwell Court but no specific mention was made about Henry who continued to reside at Nutwell and outlived Elizabeth by 15 years. If Elizabeth's share transferred to her husband, the 3<sup>rd</sup> baronet who died in 1718, then it would have passed to his son who couldn't claim his inheritance until Henry died. This still doesn't explain what happened to the shares of the other three sisters but that would involve a lot more research. The fact remains that Nutwell did eventually pass to the Drake family so I will leave it there.



**The Village of Buckland Monachorum with St Andrews Church on right, the resting place of many of the Drake family**

What is also unclear is how much time Sir Henry and his wife Anne actually spent at Nutwell. I have been unable to find any reference to indicate his direct involvement so presumably he relied on his estate manager. However I would have thought they probably visited whilst en route between London and Buckland.

Sir Francis and Anne had three sons:

Sir Francis Henry Drake, 5th Baronet who succeeded to the baronetcy and was the last to hold it.

Sir Francis Samuel Drake, who became a baronet in his own right

Francis William Drake, who in 1763 married, his first cousin, Elizabeth. She was the daughter of Sir William Heathcote.

Sir Francis died of 'pleuritic fever' (pleurisy) at his lodgings at Covent Garden on 26th January 1740. Lady Ann Drake was buried at Hackney on 5 November 1768.

### **Sir Francis Henry Drake, (5th Baronet) 1723 –1794**

He was educated at Winchester School (1734–39), Eton College (1740) and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He then went on to study law at Lincoln's Inn.

Sir Francis represented the family seat of Bere Alston continuously as a Member of Parliament for 23 years from 1747 to 1771. Between 1753 and 1770 he served as a 'Clerk of the Green Cloth' (a position in the British royal household in which the clerk acts as secretary to the Board of Green Cloth) and was therefore responsible for organising royal journeys and assisting in the administration of the Royal Household. In July 1761 he was sent, with Lord Harcourt, to bring Princess Charlotte (the future Queen of King George III) over to England. On 6th January 1771 Sir Francis vacated his Parliamentary seat when he became 'Master of the Household' in which role he continued until his death. In effect he was the operational head of the "below stairs" elements of the Royal households in which he had charge of the domestic staff from



the royal kitchens, the pages and footmen and the housekeeper and their staff. The position has existed since 1602 and still exists today but since 1845 has been occupied by retired military officers.

Although in 1771 Sir Francis had vacated his seat in Parliament he returned to the Bere Alston seat in 1774, in which he remained until 1780. George Selwyn, writing to Lord Carlisle on 9th December 1775, referred to Drake as "the most conscientious man in the House who was attentive to matters within the range of his real interests, but he was no politician". A good summary of his parliamentary career was given by the Public Ledger in 1779: *'He is a silent, eccentric man, votes always with the ministry ...'* There is no record of a speech by him during his 30 years in the House, and only of one vote against an Administration. Averse to standing again, he sold his share in the borough of Bere Alston to the Duke of Northumberland before the next general election. In addition to all his other responsibilities Sir Francis was a Ranger of Dartmoor Forest from 1752 for the rest of his life. (In name only I would suggest!)

With his interests spread so far and wide the question arises as to how long Sir Francis actually spent at Nutwell. However, he did manage to initiate some radical alterations. He is said by W G Hoskins in his book *New Survey of England* 1954; *"to have wrecked the fine medieval house with his improvements, demolishing the two-storied gatehouse with great difficulty in 1755-6 and cutting through the timbered roof of the 14th century chapel to make a plaster ceiling"*. The Devon topographer Rev. John Swete visited Nutwell while the Drake era house was still standing and made at least four watercolour paintings of it and one of the gothic chapel. He described the 5th Baronet as: *"Though refined in his manners and from his appointment at court versed in the fashionable world, he was yet one of the shyest men; very few of the principal gentlemen of the county had any acquaintance with him and not many knew him personally"*.

A reference from the Devon Gardens Trust (DGT) website reads

*The garden at Nutwell Court was an enterprise of great interest to Sir Francis Henry Drake, although resident in either London or Hampshire for most of the year. Drake was greatly concerned with a large variety of plants - fig trees in 1752, cedars in 1754, and laurels and evergreen oaks in 1755. By 1756 he had grape vines, a raspberry tree, a strawberry tree, a weeping willow, plane trees, cypresses, Newfoundland firs, larch trees, and a cistus. Further planting followed with black poplars, apricot trees, orange trees, Weymouth pines, myrtle and Scotch pines. The growing of fruit trees featured prominently"*



**Memorial by Sir John Bacon (snr) to Sir Francis Drake 5th baronet, above his burial vault**

In a vault beneath are interred the remains  
of SIR *FRANCIS HENRY DRAKE*, BARONET,  
of *Buckland Abbey*, in the county of *Devon*,  
Who died on the 19th of February 1794, aged 70 years.  
His Descent was illustrious,  
being lineally derived from the NAVAL WARRIOR of the 16th Century .  
His natural and acquired endowments were such,  
That had the strength of his constitution been equal to the powers of his mind,  
He might justly have aspired to the first offices of the State .  
He was Clerk Comptroller of the Board of Green Cloth ,  
in the reigns of Their Majesties King George the 2d and King George the 3d;  
and for more than twenty years immediately preceding his death  
was Master of the King's Household :  
The duties of which stations  
he discharged with Fidelity to the King, and Honor to himself .  
*In Testimony of the respect due to his memory*  
His Nephew, the Rt. Hon. FRANCIS AUGUSTUS LORD HEATHFIELD,  
BARON of GIBRALTAR ,

**The inscription below the monument shown on previous page**

Sir Francis died unmarried on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1794 and the baronetcy became extinct. He was buried in a vault at St Andrews Church, Buckland Monachorum. He bequeathed almost his whole fortune, including his Nutwell estate and his other lands, to his nephew Francis Augustus Eliott, the 2nd Baron Heathfield, the son of the hero of Gibraltar, George Augustus Eliott, 1st Baron Heathfield (1717-1790).

**Note:** A publication entitled "Letters from the Country, Letters from the City" is available. It contains 320 letters between Sir Francis and his Devon overseer and London agent. 215 of the letters relate to the alterations made to the house. I have now bought this book.

**Francis Augustus Eliott, 2nd Baron Heathfield (1750 – 1813)**

Francis Augustus Eliott was born on 31 Dec 1750. He was the son of Lieutenant



General George Augustus Eliott, 1st Baron Heathfield of Gibraltar. His mother was Anne Pollexfen Drake. Francis was an officer rising to the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons. He was appointed Colonel of the 20th Light Dragoons on 23 Mar 1797, which he later exchanged to become Colonel of the Kings Dragoon Guards.

He largely demolished Nutwell and built in its place a neo-classical house faced with tiles

**The new Nutwell Court by Rev John Swete**

imitating Portland stone. In May 1799 the Rev John Swete again visited Nutwell and made a painting of the new house. He recorded in his journal:



*"the new mansion erected by the present proprietor Lord Heathfield, tho' yet unfinished exhibits itself most charmingly to the view"*

He described him as equally defensive of his privacy as his uncle Sir Francis Drake, (5<sup>th</sup> baronet) denying access to Nutwell and its grounds to neighbours and strangers alike. Lord Heathfield's visits to Nutwell were said to be "seldom and of short duration"

On 4 April 1810 he became Colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> King's Dragoon Guards and served as a lord of the bedchamber under George IV from 1812 until his death on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1813. He did not marry; had no children and the barony became extinct when he died on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1813

### **Francis Augustus Elliott 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Heathfield**

#### **Sir Thomas Fuller-Elliott-Drake, 1st Baronet (1785-1870)**

The Nutwell and Buckland estates were inherited by Thomas Fuller the grandson of the first Lord Heathfield and grand-nephew of Sir Francis Henry Drake the 5<sup>th</sup> baronet. Originally surnamed just 'Fuller', he had adopted the additional surnames Elliott and Drake upon his inheritance.

The 'Fuller-Elliott-Drake Baronetcy', of Nutwell Court, Buckland Abbey, Yacombe and Sherwood in the County of Devon was created on 22 August 1821 for Sir Thomas with a *remainder* in default of male issue of his own to his next two younger brothers.

Sir Thomas was an officer in the 52<sup>nd</sup> (Oxfordshire) Regiment of Foot, joining in 1804 and serving under Sir John Moore (known as Moore of Corunna) during the 1808 expedition to Sweden, and in the Battle of Corunna on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1809 (the Iberian Peninsula). Later in 1809 he was involved in an expedition to the Netherlands then in the same year returned to Iberia where he was present at four more battles. At the last of these, San Munos, he was severely wounded. He left the Peninsula in 1812. Sir Thomas was awarded the Military General Service Medal with two clasps.

On 5<sup>th</sup> August 1819 he married Eleanor Halford. They don't seem to have had any children, or any that lived, and Eleanor died on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1841. He was appointed as Sherriff of Devon in 1822. From 1838 to 1843 he had a London home in Mayfair.

Sir Thomas was succeeded by his nephew, the son of his younger brother.

## Sir Francis George Augustus Fuller Elliot-Drake, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet (1837-1916) and Lady Elizabeth Elliot-Drake (1840 – 1923)

Sir Francis also added the name Elliot-Drake to his name and became a baronet by virtue of the special remainder attached to the creation of his uncle's baronetcy.

On 6 August 1861 Sir Francis married Elizabeth Douglas at Holy Trinity, Paddington, London. She was born on 10 May 1840 at Mahébourg, Mauritius, the daughter of an army officer Sir Robert Andrews Douglas, 2<sup>nd</sup> baronet of Glenbervie (N E Scotland) and his wife Martha Elizabeth Rouse. Elizabeth was baptised on 14 June 1840 in the protestant church of Port Louis, Mauritius. Her father died in 1843 and by 1861 both Elizabeth and her mother were settled at Bursledon House which is now a block of modern flats.



**St Paul's Church, Port Louis, Mauritius**  
(where Lady Elizabeth was baptised in 1840)

Their only child, Elizabeth Beatrice Fuller-Eliott-Drake was born on 7 July 1862 at St George, Hanover Square. She was known as Beatrice. When Sir Francis inherited Nutwell Court in 1870 he and Lady Elizabeth took up residence there. 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 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.

There is no doubt that for her time Lady Elliott-Drake was a remarkable lady. 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. Much of the

following account has been reproduced from an article about Lady Elliott-Drake on the website of the Devon History Society.

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

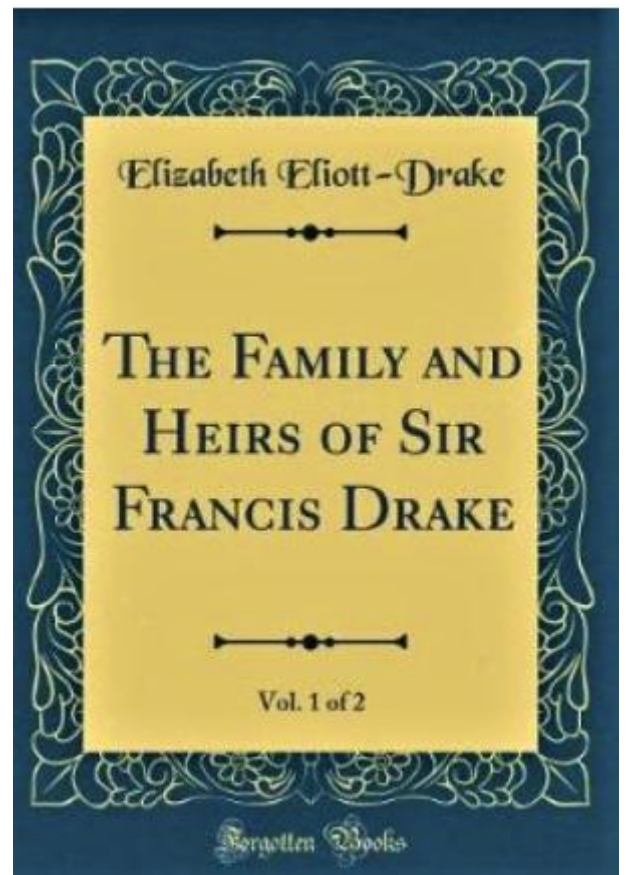
On the marriage of her daughter Beatrice to the Hon. John Colbourne (later Lord Seaton), and in the absence of Sir Francis, Lady Elliott-Drake accompanied the bride to the church, although she was 'given away' by her cousin.

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 Lypstone 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 £29,746 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 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 Lymptone, 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.

\* I have bought Volume 1 of the '*Family and Heirs of Sir Francis Drake*'. It ends at the 2nd baronet so I will probably buy Volume 2.

### **Elizabeth Beatrice Fuller Elliott Drake (1862 - 1937 and John Reginald Upton Elliott Drake Colborne 3rd Baron Seaton (1854 - 1933)**



When the 2<sup>nd</sup> baronet died on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1916, his only child Elizabeth Beatrice inherited Nutwell Court. At that time she was residing at Buckland Abbey with her husband, John Reginald Colborne, the 3rd Baron Seaton who she married on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1887 at St Paul, Wilton Place, London. He was a Major in the Royal 1st Devon Yeomanry who fought in the Second Boer War and in the First World War. In 1917 he assumed by Royal Licence, the additional surnames of Elliott-Drake.

Lord Seaton and Elizabeth had no children. When he died in 1933 the title passed to his younger brother, the fourth Baron.

Lady Elizabeth died on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1937 aged 74 and was buried at St Andrews Churchyard, Buckland Monachorum.

**Lady Elizabeth Beatrice Drake - Lady Seaton (1884) by Edwin Long (Plymouth City Council Museum and Art Gallery)**

<https://www.gogmsite.net/the-bustle-eras-1870-1890/1884-elizabeth-beatrice.html>

## The Belvedere

Before concluding this article on the history of Nutwell I need to say a few words about the Belvedere which was built primarily as a dower house, (a house intended as the residence of a widow, typically one near the main house on her late husband's estate). Belvedere is the term for a building (or part of a building) with a view. It derives from two Italian words, *bel*, meaning "beautiful," and *vedere*, which means "view."

It is a Georgian crenelated waterfront property and was Grade II listed in 1952. The oldest part dates to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century and has later additions in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Adjacent to Burgmanns Hill at Lymptone it is now privately owned and no longer part of the Nutwell estate. It was recently valued at £5,000,000.



**Belvedere as seen from the R.Exe**

(Sarah Charlesworth [geograph.org.uk](http://geograph.org.uk) 1285689)

Apart from the above there is not a lot of further information but I did find the following interesting account which gives an insight to the personality of Lady Elizabeth:

In 1894 Lady Elliott Drake let the Belvedere to a Mr White, a local farmer, whose eldest daughter, Annie, compiled a memoir of those early years:

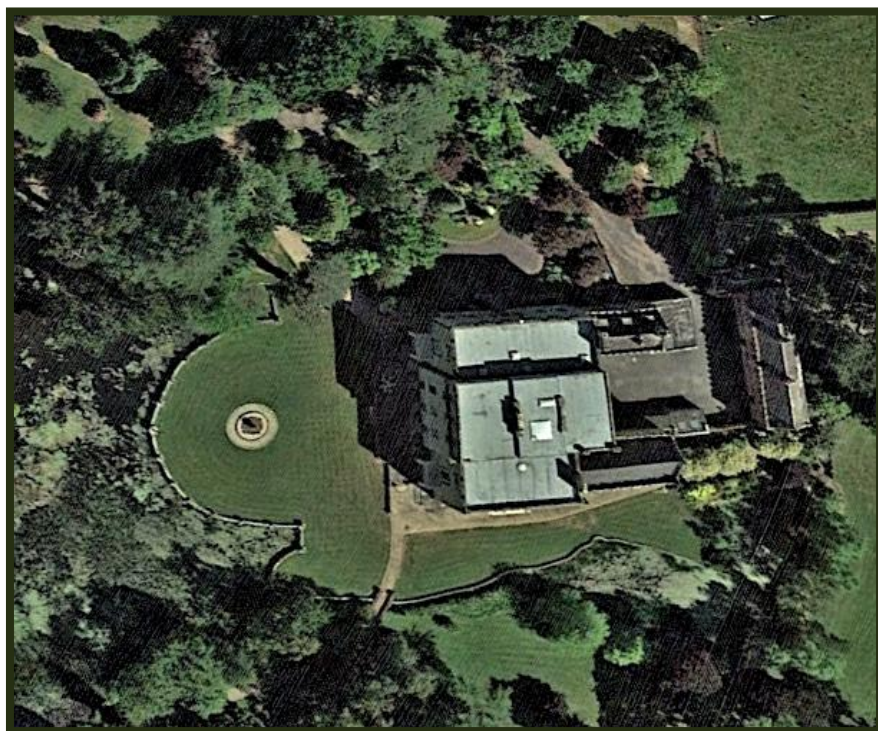
*'Sir Francis was an invalid and did not live long after their arrival, but Lady Drake was an able and revered ruler of the little kingdom set like a fortress within its high brick walls... [she] was always The Ladyship and her orders were simply given and firmly enforced. Sometimes she would call to inspect the trees in the avenue which formed a beautiful crescent around part of the field in front of our house, for trees were her great delight.*

*Little girls were neither to be seen nor heard on the occasions of these state visits. The early Georgian front of Belvedere was built on to a much earlier structure which could be conveniently shut off from the rest of the house, so we were whisked off to the kitchens or up the back stair to the old attic room under the roof where the letters "A. S. 1747" and another date less distinct of the 17th century, were cut deep into the sloping ceiling.'*

Although I have been unable to authenticate this account I do feel that it has the ring of authenticity. It sounds very much as I imagine she would have been after what I have read about her.

## Conclusion

I feel that the appropriate place to leave this account of Nutwell's history is with the demise of Elizabeth Beatrice in 1937. It is worth noting that all those members of the Drake family that owned Nutwell continued throughout to also own Buckland Abbey as well as other estates. They probably considered Buckland as their main home as many of them were buried at St Andrews Church and have memorials of some sort in



the church. Possibly they used their other houses, such as Nutwell, in much the same way as people who have second or third homes nowadays.

Whilst Nutwell Court continues to remain in private ownership, Buckland Abbey has been owned by the National Trust since 1948 when the last member of the Drake family died. He was Captain Richard Owen Tapps-Gervis-Meyrick a 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin twice removed to Lady Elizabeth Beatrice Drake. Both are listed buildings, Nutwell Grade 2 and Buckland Grade 1.

**Aerial view of Nutwell Court**  
(courtesy of Google Earth)

***Malcolm Randle***

## NOTICES

### Programme 2022

The letter from our chairman on page 2 outlines the programme for next year as far as it has been fixed. Discussions are taking place to finalise it and to arrange the 2023 programme..

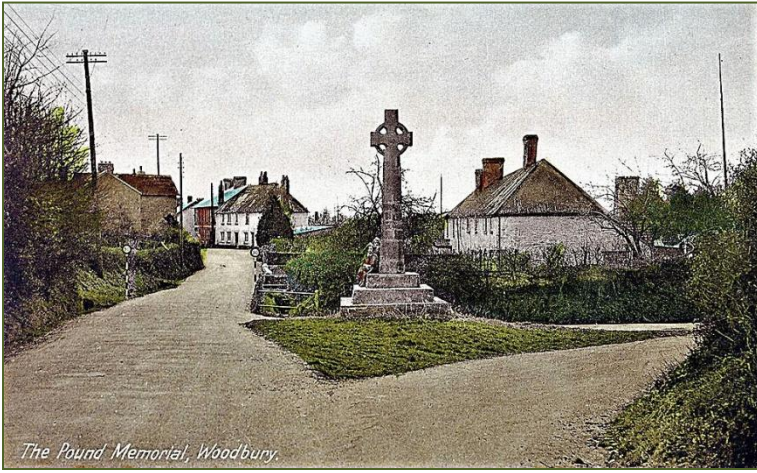
I would just draw attention to the AGM on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> February when the biennial elections for the society's officers and committee will take place. The venue will be as usual, at the Village Hall. This event will of course be subject to the Covid regulations existing at the time. If you can, please come along and register your vote. If it is not possible to hold it at the village hall then it will probably be held via Zoom

***Malcolm Randle***

### The Pound Cross

Most people will be aware of the Pound Cross, which stands on the way out towards Woodbury Salterton. Many people also have no idea what it represents, and think it is a religious thing, not being able to read the inscription chiselled in to it anymore, due to 100 years of weathering. It does of course represent the old village Pound, where stray animals were impounded over 100 years ago. Next year is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary





of its construction, and more detail will be provided then. However, the Parish Council have kindly agreed to fund the cost of a new plaque to be fixed on it, which will give further details of its construction.

**Roger Stokes**

## Obituary

Sadly, this year we have lost two of our founding members, Esme Thomson and Nigel Tucker. Both were part of the original small group who started the Woodbury History Society in 1994.

Esme was born and bred in Woodbury, as a member of the Ware family in October 1922. Following a short wartime career as a radar operator at Branscombe, she met her husband to be Allan, a Canadian service man. Following their wedding on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1944, the day before D day, the couple eventually returned to live at Gilbrook House in 1948.

Esme has always been heavily involved in matters of Woodbury throughout her lifetime, and her knowledge of what has happened here in the past in the village, was second to none. On one occasion she gave society members a guided tour of Gilbrook House, and told us about the 'upstairs and downstairs' lifestyle in her early years, which was quite different to that of today! She has been a member of many village groups, and was in at the start of the Woodbury News in 1964. For many years she bundled the magazine for various other people to deliver, and retired from that at the age of 90. In 2002, she became Chairman of the WN for a period.



**Esme Thomson**

Esme has always been a stalwart member of Woodbury society, and to find anyone else to carry on such a tradition now, unfortunately seems very remote. God rest her soul!



**Nigel Tucker**

Nigel Tucker has not always lived in Woodbury, but came here following his retirement as a lecturer at St Lukes College in Exeter. He immediately involved himself into Woodbury life, along with his wife, and became another stalwart of the village. He became a very experienced metal detectorist, and spent much of his spare time scanning the fields of the parish to see what he could find. Not only that, he became quite an authority on all the things that he did find, many of which are now shown on the History Society website. Everything was documented, and labelled, in the best manner, in display boxes that he made himself for the purpose. About five

About five years ago he bequeathed the whole of his collection to the Society, which now resides in the Archive room. For this in particular, we must be extremely grateful. He was also the first Chairman of our History Society.

He was also a skilled model maker, and made many scale model planes which he used to fly from the small airstrip on the Common. He was meticulous in every detail. He was also a highly skilled artist, and sketched various aspects of the village scene, which were sold in limited editions, and still adorn the walls of many Woodbury houses. He even made the frames for all the pictures! People like Nigel don't come along very often, and he was a true gentleman who would get on with anyone. His presence is also sadly missed.

***Roger Stokes***