Sir Francis Henry Drake (1723–1794)

Letters from the Country, Letters from the City

Edited by
Charity Scott-Stokes and **Alan Lumb**

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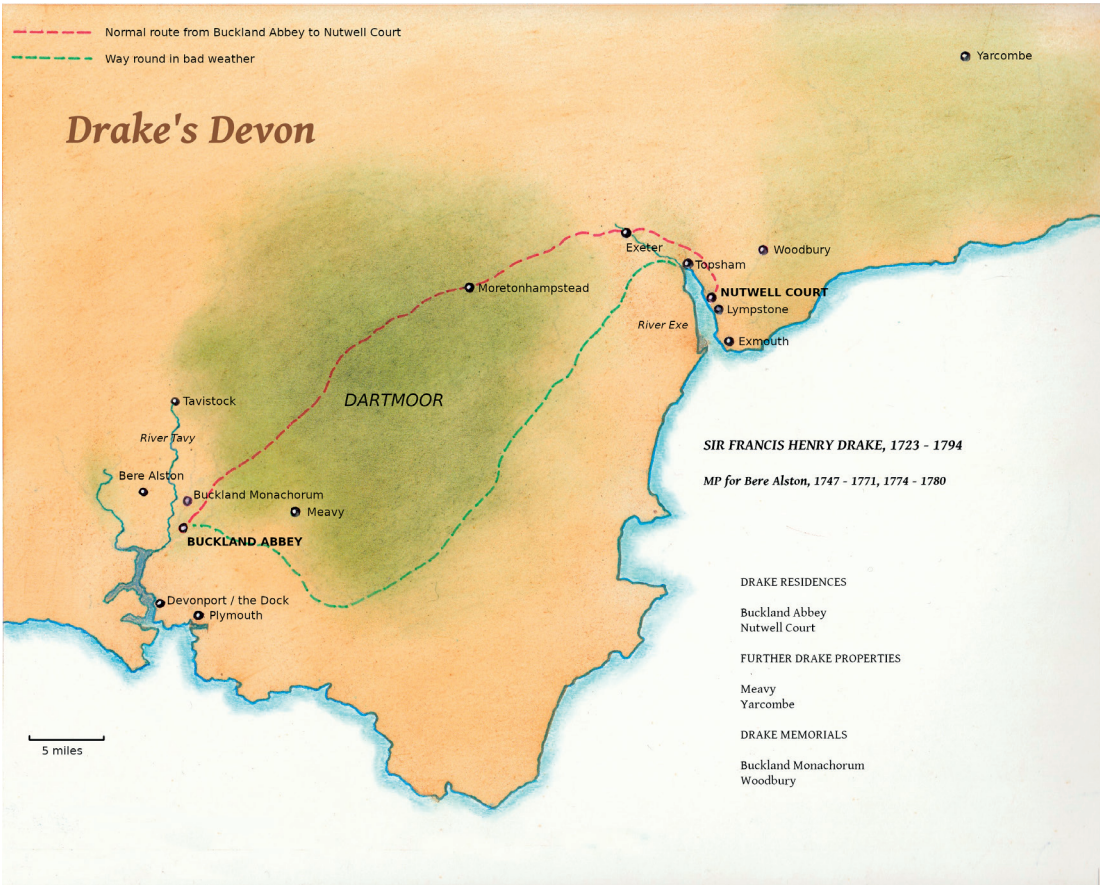

Frontispiece: Map of Drake's Devon. Design: Aziz Khan and Jonathan Hepworth

SIR FRANCIS HENRY DRAKE (1723–1794)

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Contents

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Acknowledgements

We thank the Devon Heritage Centre (DHC) for permission to publish the Drake letters (DHC 346M/F166–F485), and illustrations of Buckland Abbey and Nutwell Court by the Reverend John Swete (DHC 564M/F3 and 564M/F16; see *Travels in Georgian Devon*). We gratefully acknowledge the help over several years of the DHC staff.

We thank the Trustees of the Devon and Cornwall Record Society and the Boydell & Brewer team for supporting and overseeing the edition.

The project owes its inception, and significant initiatives along the way, to Dr Todd Gray. In 1993 Dr Gray came across the four bundles of letters in DHC 346M from Nicholas Rowe and William Hudson to Sir Francis Henry Drake, 5th Baronet. It was during his time as Chair of the History Section of the Devonshire Association (DA) in 2015–2016 that the Section, under the leadership of Alan Lumb, launched a project to transcribe the letters. During Dr Gray's year as President the transcriptions were completed, and in early 2017 a proposal for publication was submitted to the DCRS, with his encouragement. We are grateful for his continuing interest and support, and for his contribution of illustrations as well as written text to the introduction.

One of the initiatives that came to fruition during Dr Gray's year as DA President was the celebration of the Devon–Newfoundland Story that took place during the first two weeks of April 2017. A fortunate outcome of this celebration was a meeting with Professor John Crellin, a historian of medicine and Honorary Research Professor at Memorial University, Newfoundland. A concern with medical matters is a thread that can be traced through many of the Drake Letters, and we are grateful to Professor Crellin for his scholarly contribution to the introduction, and for numerous helpful discussions on the project as a whole.

This project was conceived as a collaboration between members of the DA. The transcribers Alan Lumb, Charity Scott-Stokes, and Dee and Mike Tracey have also contributed chapters to the introduction, alongside Dr Gray and Professor Crellin. Further members of the transcription team, whose work we gratefully acknowledge, were Marcia Babington and Irene Derczynska. Irene Derczynska also checked the transcriptions of the Hudson letters and helped to decipher problematic readings.

Charity Scott-Stokes checked two-thirds of the transcriptions, edited the letters, generated notes, bibliography, and index, and co-ordinated the introduction. Alan Lumb oversaw the initial photographing and transcription of the letters and subsequent circulation of the transcriptions. He checked one-third of the transcriptions, reviewed the edited letters and introduction, and was an active collaborator in the editorial process. We have tried to eliminate tiresome inconsistencies and repetitions between the different chapters of the introduction and ask the reader's indulgence for any that remain.

We thank Dr Sebastian Meier-Ewert, Jonathan Hepworth, and Aziz Khan for technical assistance.

Abbreviations

DA	Devonshire Association
DCRS	Devon & Cornwall Record Society
DHC	Devon Heritage Centre
Family and Heirs	E. D. Fuller-Eliott-Drake, *The Family and Heirs of Sir Francis Drake*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1911)
FHD/Sir Francis	Sir Francis Henry Drake, 5th Baronet
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) online
Travels in Georgian Devon	T. Gray and M. Rowe (eds), *Travels in Georgian Devon: The Illustrated Journals of the Reverend John Swete 1789–1800*, 4 vols (Tiverton: Devon Books, 1997–2000). This is a full edition of Swete's *Picturesque Sketches of Devon*, held in the DHC.

Timeline
1740–1778

FHD = Sir Francis Henry Drake, 5th Baronet

Crown, state, politics, society	**Year**	*Drake family*
War of Austrian Succession	**1740**	*FHD succeeds his father, Sir Francis Henry Drake, 4th Baronet; enters Corpus Christi College (informally known as Bene't College), Cambridge, and enrols at Lincoln's Inn*
General Election	**1741**	
Walpole resigns	**1742**	
Battle of Dettingen	**1743**	
War declared on France	**1744**	
Battle of Fontenoy	**1745**	
Defeat of Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender, at the Battle of Culloden	**1746**	
Naval victories of Finisterre and Belle-Île; General Election	**1747**	*FHD elected MP for Bere Alston*
Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle	**1748**	*Anne Drake, sister of FHD, m. George Augustus Eliott, subsequently Lord Heathfield, Baron of Gibraltar*
Westminster Election	**1749**	
	1750	*Francis Samuel Drake, brother of FHD, m. Elizabeth Hayman;* *b. Francis Augustus Eliott, son of Anne Eliott née Drake and George Augustus Eliott*
d. Frederick, Prince of Wales; William, Duke of Cumberland's hunting accident	**1751**	*b. Francis Thomas, first natural son of FHD's brother Francis William Drake*
	1752	*FHD appointed Ranger of Dartmoor Forest;* *Francis William Drake appointed Governor of Newfoundland (until 1754)*

	1753	*FHD appointed Clerk Comptroller of the Board of Green Cloth (until 1770)*
Death of Pelham; Newcastle ministry; General Election incl. Oxfordshire Election	**1754**	
Oxfordshire Election result declared; Earthquake at Lisbon	**1755**	*d. Francis Drake (cousin of FHD)*
Resignation of Newcastle; Pitt–Devonshire ministry; Beginning of Seven Years' War; Battle of Minorca	**1756**	*d. Henry Drake, brother of 4th Baronet;* *b. Francis Henry, second natural son of Francis William Drake*
Pitt–Newcastle ministry; Execution of Admiral Byng	**1757**	
2nd Treaty of Westminster	**1758**	
Capture of Quebec	**1759**	
Accession of George III	**1760**	*b. Anne Eliott, daughter of Anne Eliott née Drake and George Augustus Eliott*
General Election; Resignation of Pitt	**1761**	*FHD one of those sent to bring future Queen Charlotte to England*
War with Spain; Resignation of Newcastle; Bute ministry; Loss and recapture of Newfoundland	**1762**	
Peace of Paris; Resignation of Bute	**1763**	*Francis William Drake m. Elizabeth Heathcote*
Expulsion of Wilkes from House of Commons	**1764**	*b. Francis William Drake's daughter Marianne*
Dismissal of Grenville; Rockingham ministry	**1765**	*b. Francis William Drake's daughter Sophia*
Dismissal of Rockingham; Chatham ministry	**1766**	
d. Duke of York	**1767**	
General Election incl. Middlesex Election; French annexation of Corsica; Chatham's resignation	**1768**	*d. Lady Drake née Heathcote, widow of 4th Baronet, mother of FHD*
Middlesex Election affair	**1769**	

Grafton's resignation; North ministry; Messenger returns from Spain without King of Spain's answer	**1770**	
Henry, Duke of Cumberland m. Mrs Horton, goes abroad	**1771**	*FHD appointed Master of the King's Household;* *Francis William Drake succeeds FHD as MP for Bere Alston*
Duke of Gloucester unwell, abroad; d. Dowager Princess of Wales; Financial crash	**1772**	*d. Anne Eliott née Drake*
Boston Tea Party	**1773**	
General Election	**1774**	*FHD returns as MP for Bere Alston*
Battles of Lexington and Concord	**1775**	*George Augustus Eliott appointed Governor of Gibraltar*
American Declaration of Independence	**1776**	
Battle of Ticonderoga	**1777**	
War with France	**1778**	

Introduction

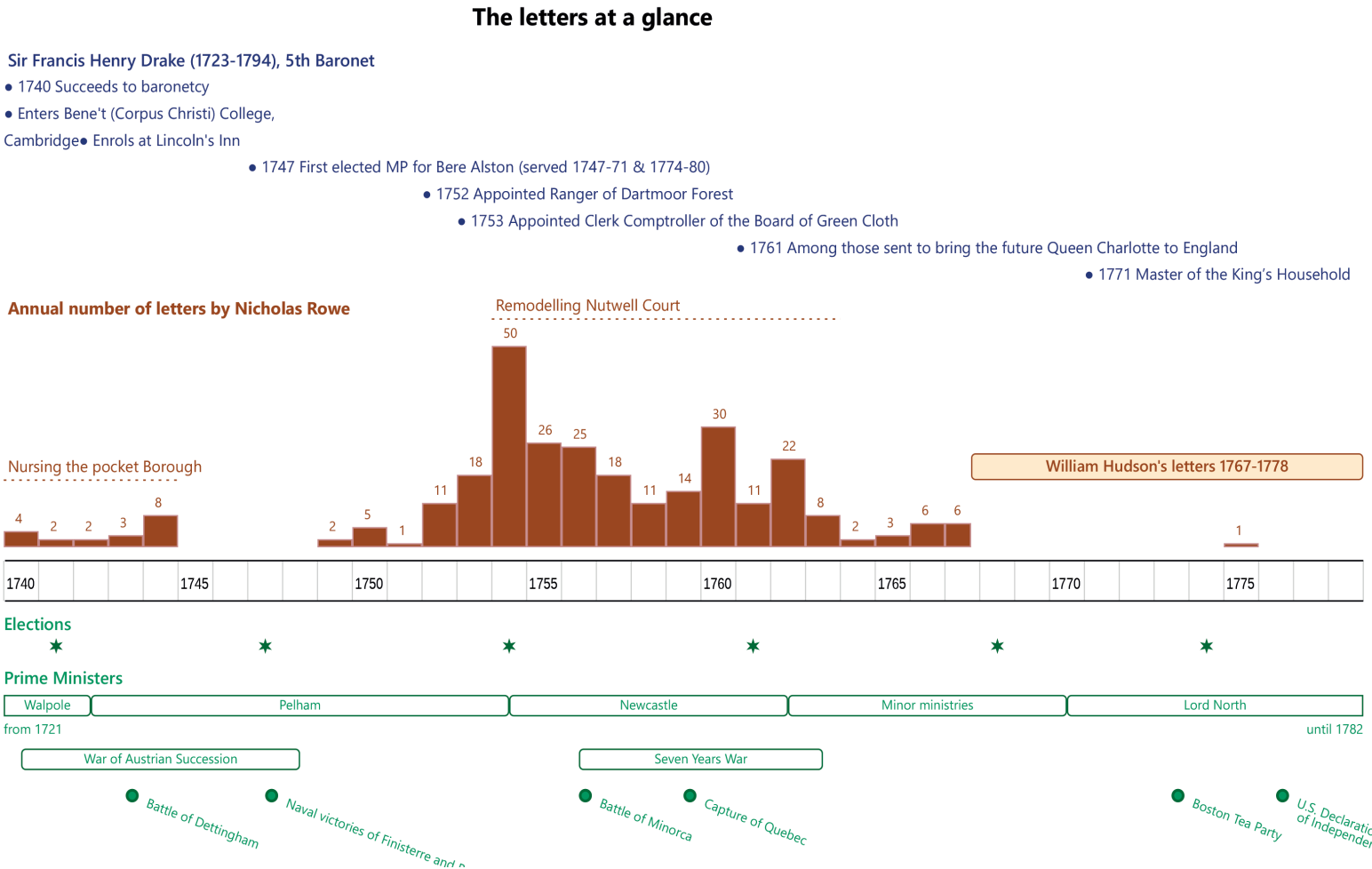

Figure 1. The letters at a glance.

1. General Introduction

Charity Scott-Stokes

1.1. The Letters

In 1957 a collection of Drake family papers was deposited in the Devon Record Office, now the Devon Heritage Centre (DHC), and catalogued as 346M. Most of these papers pertain to collateral descendants of the famous Sir Francis Drake, circumnavigator of the globe, who died without issue in 1596. The DHC introduction to 346M notes that the papers were deposited much as they had been assembled by the last member of this branch of the family, Elizabeth Douglas Fuller-Eliott-Drake, by marriage Baroness Seaton, in the early twentieth century. Lady Fuller-Eliott-Drake wrote a family history that draws extensively on the papers.[1] It has been a useful source of information for the current edition.

The edition comprises letters written during the period 1740–1778, and enclosed, perhaps since the late eighteenth century, in four neatly labelled folders. The time span falls within the reigns of two kings: George II (1727–1760) and his grandson George III (1760–1820). It includes the War of Austrian Succession (1742–1748), the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), and the beginning of the American War of Independence (1775–1783).

The letters were written from the environs of Buckland Abbey on the River Tavy, Nutwell Court on the River Exe, or London. Buckland and Nutwell were the Devon seats of Sir Francis Henry Drake, 5th Baronet, known as Sir Francis (see frontispiece). Of these letters, 282 were written to Sir Francis by Nicholas Rowe, a good friend of the Drake family who became the baronet's gentleman-overseer at Nutwell. A single letter to Rowe written by Sir Francis in 1740 has survived. Twenty-nine of the letters were written to Sir Francis by William Hudson, his London business agent, friend, and medical and scientific adviser. Hudson was a well-known London apothecary and botanist, and author of the acclaimed *Flora Anglica* (1762).

It is hoped that the publication of these letters will help to fill out the picture of the chief letter-writers and their addressee, of eighteenth-century electoral procedures, of Buckland and Nutwell, and of health and wellbeing in both London and Devon. They may also provide material for further specialist studies of topics ranging from parliamentary, social, and naval history to commerce and trade in native and exotic flora.

In this edition the letters are arranged in three parts, as far as is practicable in chronological sequence, which necessitates some deviation from the DHC numbering:

I Letters 1740–March 1754, predominantly written by Nicholas Rowe, from Buckland and environs (DHC 346M/F196–F268);

[1] E. D. Fuller-Eliott-Drake, *The Family and Heirs of Sir Francis Drake*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1911).

II Letters 1754–1767, and 1775, predominantly written by Nicholas Rowe from Nutwell (DHC 346M/F269–F485);
III Letters 1767–1778, written by William Hudson, from London and environs (DHC 346M/F166–F195).

The surviving Rowe letters probably make up not more than one-third of those he wrote. He mentions on several occasions that he customarily writes once a week when Sir Francis is absent (e.g. F290).[2] Since Sir Francis seems to have spent not more than four or five months in Devon in an average year, Rowe may well have written some 1,000 letters in all, before his letters become infrequent from the late 1760s. The surviving Hudson letters are also a selection, rather than a complete set.

Such letters as have survived are sometimes incomplete; occasionally they are little more than notes or fragments. It may be that the letters and parts of letters not preserved were destroyed because they contained material which Sir Francis or his heirs considered damaging to the family's reputation, or to their property interests. The DHC introduction to 346M suggests that Lady Fuller-Eliott-Drake destroyed many documents, particularly deeds and leases.

However, to the present editors it seems likely that Sir Francis made a positive selection of the letters to be retained, for his own interest and use, and perhaps also with his heirs in mind. They reflect his interests during various phases of his life, as do numerous other documents in 346M that are not included in this edition. While the single letter in the collection written by Sir Francis himself (F198) is incomplete, the part retained is concerned with matters of paramount interest to him: the Drake family, and representation of the parliamentary borough of Bere Alston (see Introduction, section 2). Main focuses in the Rowe letters are: parliamentary representation of Bere Alston; patronage; the Drake family; Buckland Abbey and Nutwell Court (see section 3), and further Drake properties; neighbours; tradesmen, workmen, staff, and servants; and health matters (see section 5). The preponderance of Rowe letters from 1754 to the early 1760s corresponds with phases of intense activity on the Nutwell Court buildings. Main focuses in the Hudson letters are: health matters; the royal family, affairs of state and parliamentary business; scientific investigation, horticulture, and books; and personalities, friends and acquaintances, and gossip.

Recurrent topics throughout all the letters include the weather, shipping, travel, and transportation and communications by land and by sea. Human beings and their vital helpmeets, horses, are not the only travellers. Sheep and cattle are driven across Dartmoor, via Moretonhampstead, on the well-trodden track between Buckland and Nutwell (e.g. F341–F343, F359–F360); and live ducks and turkeys are sent from London (**2**–F167). Ships' crews on their return journey from Newfoundland bring fish and whale blubber, and also live dogs and geese (e.g. F325, F470, F471).

There are occasional annotations to the letters which Sir Francis probably made himself, perhaps at the time when he was selecting and arranging those to be retained (see especially notes to F196, F350, F382, F439, F440; **15**–F169, **22**–F171, **28**–F175, **29**–F176). Strikingly, a marginal note from a Rowe letter of April

[2] From this point on, the Rowe letters are cited as F196 etc., the Hudson letters as **1**–F166 etc., and all other DHC 346M documents by the full reference, 346M/F17 etc.

1758 has been retained, while the rest of the letter has been clipped off: 'Here is a report your Mother is very Ill, pray how is She' (F377). Was the body of this letter destroyed because it contained damaging material? Or was the left-hand edge with the marginal note retained because of pressing concern about Lady Drake's health, and the rest discarded as trivial by comparison? That material with potential for damaging the family's reputation was not necessarily destroyed is evident in the retention of Rowe's letters relating to troubles with the servants Joyce and her daughter (F442–F447), and Nanny (F463, F465, F469).

1.2. Sir Francis Henry Drake, 5th Baronet

Sir Francis was born in 1723, as the eldest child of Sir Francis Henry Drake, 4th Baronet, MP, and Anne, daughter of Sir William Heathcote of Hursley, MP. Sir Francis's health was delicate, yet he outlived his sister Anne and her robust husband, George Augustus Eliott, ultimately Lord Heathfield, Baron of Gibraltar. He also outlived his two younger brothers, who both rose to become admirals, and whose lives are more fully documented in biographical reference works than is that of Sir Francis himself. And he outlived his correspondents Nicholas Rowe, who was thirty years older, and William Hudson, who was ten years younger. He never married.

Sir Francis was educated at Winchester College, located not far from his uncle's seat at Hursley, and then for one year at Eton. In 1740, aged seventeen, he succeeded his father. In the same year he began his studies at Corpus Christi College (then generally known as Bene't College), Cambridge, and enrolled at Lincoln's Inn. The Rowe letters begin at this time. During Sir Francis's minority the parliamentary seat of Bere Alston was held for him by his mother's brother Samuel Heathcote (see Introduction, section 2).

Sir Francis became MP for Bere Alston in 1747, at the first election after his coming of age; he held the seat until 1771, and again between 1774 and 1780. He was appointed Ranger of Dartmoor Forest (1752–1794). He was also appointed to increasingly prestigious sinecures at the royal court: first Clerk and then Comptroller of the Green Cloth (1753–1770). Rowe rejoiced in the distinction accorded to Sir Francis when he was one of those chosen to accompany Earl Harcourt to the Elbe in order to escort George III's bride to London in 1761 (F432). Ten years later Sir Francis became Master of the King's Household (1771–1794).

There is a break in the Rowe letters from 1744 to 1749. Lady Fuller-Eliott-Drake suggests that letters may have been unnecessary during these years, given the likelihood that Sir Francis spent considerable time in Devon, following Rowe's advice and making himself familiar with election law and his own affairs, getting to know his constituents, and preparing for the 1747 election. He may also have travelled in Europe and have therefore been beyond the easy reach of letters.[3] It is also possible that Sir Francis simply did not keep Rowe's letters from this period. Indeed, he did not keep many from the years immediately preceding or immediately following the five-year break (see figure 1).

During the late 1740s Sir Francis formed long-lasting friendships with Jeremiah Dyson (1722–1776) and the poet-physician Dr Mark Akenside (1721–1770). Dyson was called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn. He was appointed Clerk to the House of

[3] *Family and Heirs*, vol. 2, p. 251.

Commons in 1748, became an MP in 1762, and gained many offices, eventually becoming a Lord of the Treasury, Cofferer to the Royal Household, and Privy Councillor. Sir Francis presumably made Dyson's acquaintance at Lincoln's Inn and in Parliament, and met Akenside through him. In the 1740s and 1750s all three were staunch Whigs. An ode addressed to Sir Francis by Akenside in 1752, on the occasion of the baronet's failure to appear at a dinner party in London in early November, makes comparisons between London and Devon (DHC 346M/F17; see also p. 46 below). Akenside ironically muses on whether the Devon gentry have discovered loyalty to the king and to the Whigs and have therefore become more congenial companions than hitherto. Fifteen to twenty-five years later, there are numerous references to Dyson, especially to his state of health, in the Hudson letters, continuing until shortly before Dyson's death in 1776. Nor did the association end there: a son, another Jeremiah Dyson, Under Clerk to the Green Cloth, was one of the witnesses to a codicil added to Sir Francis's will in January 1793 (DHC 346M/F845–F847).

During the years without letters, a very important Drake family event occurred: the marriage in London of Sir Francis's sister Anne to George Augustus Eliott in 1748. At the time Eliott was an officer in the Horse Grenadier Guards, and had already served in the War of Austrian Succession, notably at the Battle of Dettingen in 1743 and the Battle of Fontenoy in 1745. From 1756 to 1759 the brothers-in-law both had appointments at the royal court: Sir Francis benefited from his first sinecure as Clerk of the Green Cloth, while Eliott was Aide-de-Camp to George II. The DHC catalogue points out that 346M includes important papers relating to Eliott's later career, during the American War of Independence, when he defended Gibraltar during the siege (1779–1783) and was rewarded with the title 'Lord Heathfield, Baron of Gibraltar'. Among the papers is a cordial correspondence between Sir Francis and his brother-in-law, which is of great interest, but beyond the scope of the present edition. Suffice it to mention that in 1779, notwithstanding the impending siege, Eliott wrote to Sir Francis recording the dispatch of wine by sea, which he would barter for cider, and regretting that Sir Francis and their friend William Hudson were not with him to enjoy botanising in Spain, which was just as 'commodious' as in Wales (346M/F22; and **5**–F187).[4]

There are frequent references in the Rowe letters to Sir Francis's sister and her family, often expressing anxieties for their health and welfare. We read of joint expeditions of the brother and sister to Bath, for the restoration of their health, and of the exploits, and wounds, of her husband. The Eliotts played a more important part in Sir Francis's life than did the other family members, both in London and in the country. Rowe records visits made by the Eliotts to Nutwell, and one by Sir Francis's ailing cousin Captain Frank Drake and his wife (F272), but none by other members of the immediate family. There is a reference in a Hudson letter to the Eliott family's surprise that they did not hear from Sir Francis at their London home (**12**–F192). The Eliotts' son was born in 1750 and Sir Francis made him his heir. This heir, the second Lord Heathfield, erected fine memorials to his uncle as well as to his father in St Andrew's Church, Buckland Monachorum.[5]

[4] See also Introduction, section 4, p. 36, for botanising in the West Country and in Wales.

[5] See p. 9 below.

With regard to other members of the family, the Rowe letters affirm that Sir Francis made the requisite financial provision for all his siblings, secured promotion for his brothers in the Royal Navy, and restored family harmony. He also arranged for his brother Francis William to become a freeholder in Bere Alston, and to replace him as MP during the years 1771–1774.

In reporting family news, knowing that he and Sir Francis were of one mind, Rowe makes no mystery of his shock at the early marriage of the youngest brother, Francis Samuel, in May 1750 (F220). However, mistrustful of the carriers of letters, and mindful, perhaps, of possible complications regarding inheritance, he is more circumspect with regard to Francis William's two natural sons, born in 1751 and 1756.[6] Rowe hopes that there will be 'no matrimony in the case' (F359). There was indeed no matrimony, and the mother of the two sons died young. Francis William married Elizabeth Heathcote, a first cousin, in 1763. Rowe hoped in vain that this marriage would produce a male 'representative' (F472); the couple had two daughters.

In the last year of George II's reign, at the mid-point of the Seven Years' War, Sir Francis was weighed down by personal sadness. From late August to December 1759 Rowe's letters reiterate messages of deep concern, sympathy, condolence, and hope for reprieve from melancholy. He never mentions by name the 'valuable person' who has died, but Lady Fuller-Eliott-Drake tells of a family tradition that Sir Francis was engaged to a Miss Knight of Plymouth and reproached himself for procrastinating until it was too late for a marriage to take place. Miss Knight's portrait, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, reported to be a friend of both families, hung at Nutwell Court.[7]

During her widowhood, Lady Drake chose to live in London most of the time, though not in close proximity to her eldest son. Sir Francis employed a bailiff to manage his share of the Buckland estate, where there was sometimes friction between his staff and his mother's. Several Rowe letters observe that mother and son neglected necessary maintenance and repairs to the Abbey (see Introduction, section 3). The absence of close relations between mother and son at the end of her life is strongly suggested by the nonchalant tone of two letters from Hudson dating from 1768 (**4**–F186, **5**–F187). In the first, Hudson reports, among other things, that he has been to inquire about Lady Drake's health. In the second, he reports that he has made further inquiries, as Sir Francis requested, and heard that she had been dead some time. He goes on to discuss a few seeds enclosed in his letter, and to reflect on shared botanising expeditions.

Sir Francis was in full possession of Nutwell Court from the time of his succession in 1740 until his death, and both during his mother's lifetime and thereafter he often chose to spend time at Nutwell in preference to Buckland when he was in Devon. In 1754 he took Nicholas Rowe with him from Buckland to Nutwell, and entrusted to him the oversight of the estate, the building and landscaping projects, and the estate staff.

Sir Francis made extensive alterations to the Nutwell buildings, gardens and parkland (see sections 3 and 4). A man of science and the Enlightenment, he turned his chapel into a library, to house new acquisitions, as well as books that he brought

[6] See timeline, pp. ix–xi; see also DHC 346M/F29.

[7] *Family and Heirs,* vol. 2, pp. 294–295. We have not been able to trace the painting. Charles Duthie of Topsham History Group kindly drew our attention to an engraving of the painting by Samuel William Reynolds in the National Portrait Gallery.

to Nutwell from Buckland Abbey.[8] A late-nineteenth-century commentator, William Roberts, points out that Sir Francis Drake the great admiral was also a great bibliophile, and reports on the sale of several thousand volumes from Nutwell Court at Sotheby's in 1883.[9] Some of the specialist historical books, especially those on early navigation, fetched very high prices.

The letters provide ample evidence of Sir Francis's interest in the natural sciences, and in collecting. He collected books, botanical specimens, thermometers and barometers, medals, seals, and minerals, as is shown by a letter from the highly regarded Cornish clergyman and natural scientist William Borlase (346M/F21). This letter records the dispatch of a box of pillis seeds and three samples of Elvaen stones from Ludgvan in Cornwall to Sir Francis, at an address in Southernhay, Exeter, in September 1768.[10]

Sir Francis's position as Master of the King's Household, from 1771, will have required some attendance at court; yet the Hudson letters suggest that he found more time than usual to attend to Nutwell at this period, paying particular attention to the planting and cultivation of his garden (see Introduction, section 4). As previously mentioned, he arranged for his brother Francis William to represent Bere Alston as MP during the years 1771–1774.

The Rowe letters show that, in his early adult years, Sir Francis, like Rowe himself, had close social as well as political contacts in and around Buckland, Tavistock, and Plymouth. Some of these contacts were maintained after the move to Nutwell. In addition to professional advisers and estate staff, some friends and acquaintances from the Tavy made their way to the Exe. Mrs Carpenter, wife of the lawyer and accountant John Carpenter, visited for her health (F270), and Mr Porter, freeholder of Bere Alston, active in Plymouth Customs and Excise, and a good friend of the Drake family and of Rowe, rode to Nutwell for his health and spent some days there (F277, F279).

Rowe's letters attest that Sir Francis maintained working relations with neighbours at Nutwell: with Parson Lee of Lympstone, son of the attorney Lee of Exeter, alderman and mayor, an old friend of Sir Francis; and particularly with the entrepreneur Worthington Brice, who sent ships on annual whale-hunting voyages to Newfoundland and invested in prospecting for metals there. Sir Francis, whose two sea-faring brothers had both been in Newfoundland, supported him in such enterprises (F329, F330, F350n., F352, F353). There were contacts between Sir Francis's estate staff and the staff of other great houses on or near the Exe, such as Powderham across the river, and Mamhead (F286, F309, F310, F448, F451). Yet on the whole it seems that Sir Francis did not seek further social contacts in the Nutwell area. Akenside's remarks about Whigs cited above suggest that Sir Francis did not find congenial company on the Exe in the 1750s, and it seems that this did not change. Ten years later, Rowe assured him that his instructions were obeyed, and nobody was admitted to Nutwell house or gardens (F462).[11] This seclusion, and voluntary

[8] The conversion of the chapel reflected the spirit of the age. Across the Exe, at Powderham, the chapel was turned into a drawing room.

[9] W. Roberts, *The Book-Hunter in London* (London: Elliot Stock, 1895), p. 19; see also Introduction, section 4, p. 36.

[10] See also Introduction, section 4, p. 36.

[11] For the continuance of this tradition by several of his successors, see Introduction, section 4, pp. 37–8.

obscurity, sometimes resulted in a lack of understanding, or even downright hostility, on the part of Devon contemporaries, notably Polwhele and Swete (see section 4), and the denizens of Lympstone (F447).

In London, when not at court, Sir Francis seems again to have confined his social contacts to his immediate circle of family and friends. No mention of him has been found in the voluminous historical and epistolary writings of his sociable contemporaries David Hume, Tobias Smollett, and Horace Walpole.

The epitaph installed by Lord Heathfield in St Andrew's Church in Buckland Monachorum commemorates the powers of Sir Francis's mind, while acknowledging the frailty of his constitution, which prevented him from aspiring to great office:

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 Houshold.
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, *caused this Monument to be erected.*

Above the epitaph, the word 'TRUTH' is inscribed on a horizontal slab. Above that again, a female figure, emblem of truth, is placing a garland round an urn, with seeds and flowers. A large magnifying glass at the bottom left of the relief is a further symbol of the pursuit of scientific truth.

Sir Francis chose to let the Drake baronetcy of Buckland become extinct at his death. He did not acknowledge the claim to inheritance put forward by his nephew Francis Henry Drake, sole surviving son of Francis William.[12] Nevertheless, this nephew chose to live as Sir Francis Henry Drake in Cheltenham until 1839, where he died without male issue. Two daughters predeceased him.

Sir Francis may not have been aware of the claim of another branch of the family, descended from a younger brother of the 2nd baronet. However, that something of both these claims was known in the early nineteenth century is shown in some

[12] See timeline, pp. ix–xi; and 346M/F29.

detail by the Reverend Thomas Moore.[13] One hundred years later, Lady Fuller-Eliott-Drake commented in her private papers on the claim put forward in the early twentieth century by American descendants of a younger brother of the 2nd baronet (346M/F700). Such claims may be found in the twenty-first century on the worldwide web.

1.3. Nicholas James Rowe

Lady Fuller-Eliott-Drake surmised that Nicholas Rowe was a grandson of the Oxford graduate Joseph Rowe, vicar of Buckland from 1646 to 1683, and connected with the family of the poet laureate Nicholas Rowe (1674–1718), who owned property at Lamerton, not far from Buckland Monachorum.[14]

Rowe was a freeholder of Bere Alston, and was thoroughly familiar with electoral procedure, including the property transactions that had helped secure the election of a Drake baronet over several generations (see Introduction, section 2). He kept Sir Francis fully informed about electoral proceedings, courts leet, and the individuals involved. His thorough knowledge of electoral law and of the full range of Drake property dealings, evident in the letters over many years in many different situations, suggests that he had received legal training, in addition to the classical education evident in his use of Latin quotations. He sometimes indulged in a flowery turn of phrase, occasionally heaping mixed metaphors and literary and classical allusions one on top of another. Sometimes he deliberately wrote in a manner comprehensible only to Sir Francis.

An entry in Lady Drake's accounts for 1752 deducts payments by Rowe 'made since he delivered in his Account' (346M/F511). This shows that Rowe was not only a good friend of the Drake family but also on their payroll. In John Carpenter's estate accounts with Sir Francis there are two entries for £5 5s 0d paid to Mr Rowe at Nutwell, on 30 December 1758 and 17 October 1759 (DHC 346M/E63). Rowe claimed expenses from Sir Francis's legal and business advisor, William Edgcombe, for his travel between Nutwell and Buckland (F288). The mayor of Plymouth also called on Rowe's services when charters were sought in 1753 (F234). Principally, however, his expertise was put at Sir Francis's disposal.

In 1754, Rowe expressed pleasure in hearing that Sir Francis was making Nutwell comfortable for himself, and wrote that he himself did not expect to see the place again (F231). Little did he know that from that very year he was to spend most of the rest of his life there. Sometimes he had to return from Nutwell to Buckland in order to attend to Sir Francis's business affairs, in particular to locate counterpart documents that nobody else could lay their hands on, relating to historic property deals, but Nutwell became his principal residence for thirty years until his death in 1785 at the age of ninety-three. His burial on 29 July 1785 is recorded in the Woodbury parish register.[15] Notwithstanding his longevity, Rowe suffered from various ills, including lameness and colic. He frequently mentions his health troubles, and expresses concern also about Sir Francis's health (see Introduction, section 5).

[13] T. Moore, *The History of Devonshire from the Earliest Period to the Present*, 2 vols (London: R. Jennings, 1829–1833), vol. 2, pp. 148–149.

[14] *Family and Heirs*, vol. 2, pp. 237–238.

[15] Joseph Rowe, vicar of Buckland Monachorum, had also lived into his nineties.

Whereas at Buckland and Bere Alston Rowe had found satisfaction and even pleasure in frequent business and social calls, close at hand and also in Tavistock, the Dock, and Plymouth, at Nutwell he seems to have sought solitude, as did Sir Francis. When gentry called in the early days, he did not see them. He intended to 'seclude himself from Spiritual and Temporal' and to be very abstemious, wishing to be 'pencioner not at Large' (F269), that is to say, to pay his own way.

When Rowe arrived at Nutwell, he continued his wonted activities on Sir Francis's behalf, inserting himself into negotiations on property, boundaries, and leases, legal proceedings, and manorial courts. An early preoccupation was with a footpath. Local people insisted on an ancient right of way from the river along the wood to the Topsham road. Rowe considered that a court of 'Substantial Neighbours' (F272) was required in order to stop such use of the footpath, and he pursued this over a period of several months. By late June 1754 he already had seven neighbours to hand, and hoped that Parson Lee of Lympstone might head the court (F274). However, Mr Ley, an Exeter attorney, did not consider this procedure advisable (F275, F276); it may have been on his advice that the footpath was blocked instead. Rowe does not mention the matter again until 1761, when he reports that young Farmer Horrell intends to write a letter to Sir Francis complaining that the planned Act of Parliament for re-routing the road by the wood would reduce the value of his property (F433).

Another early and continuing preoccupation for Rowe at Nutwell was Farmer Robert Coleman's lease (see F270, F288–F289, F291, F298, F300, F302, F304, F309–F310, F312, F314–F315, F317–F319). The farmer lived in part of Nutwell Court but desired to have a new house built for his own use only, and demanded the use of meadows that Sir Francis was unwilling to part with. The resolution of this difficulty required the skills of William Edgcombe, who looked after Sir Francis's affairs from Tavistock, and also of his ever-useful Buckland bailiff, John Channon, who was acquainted with Coleman. Both Edgcombe and Channon frequently travelled between the Tavy and the Exe on Sir Francis's behalf.

Rowe never wavered in his attempts to be of service to the 'Drake Interest' and to keep a vigilant eye on spending. He repeatedly asked Sir Francis to stop sending newspapers, which he considered an unnecessary extravagance (F270–F272, F274–F276). He tried to economise on postage costs by having post collected from Exeter, rather than delivered to Topsham, where he considered the cost excessive.

The unfamiliar tasks of overseeing the Nutwell estate and personnel, and the building and landscaping projects, taxed Rowe severely (see Introduction, section 3). For several years after his arrival, the house remained in disorder. Workmen were not always on hand when needed, their work was poorly co-ordinated, pipes burst, gutters failed, rats romped around the garden and in the house (F278, F280, F290), and a barn fell down. Wet penetrated everywhere, the drawing-room needed constant fires, the parlour woodwork was badly done, the brickwork was mouldy, and the chimney had to be taken down because of bad work (F290–F291). A broken pipe at the back door meant that there was no water in the house (F312). Work on the house stalled because of preparations for war, with press gangs arriving on the river; the workmen were frightened and disappeared (F307, F310–F314, F317). Rowe's gloom was deep during Sir Francis's long winter absences in London. The baronet's arrival for the summer months, during the parliamentary recess, always heralded a turn for the better.

Another great challenge for Rowe stemmed from the servants. Particular troubles arose with several individuals whose service with the Drake family had begun at

Buckland, and who had then moved to Nutwell: Sir Francis's first housekeeper at Nutwell Court, Betty Dyer, who wanted to emigrate to Newfoundland, and who had health problems (see Introduction, section 5); Betty's successor, Joyce, and her daughter, and Nanny; Sol, or Solomon, an all-round handyman in garden and park, and his wife, Hannah; and Sol's son Alexander, who went to London with Sir Francis, on Rowe's recommendation, and turned out to be an ungrateful servant and a fool (F228, F330). Rowe also regularly reported difficulties with gardeners, to whom he rarely gave a name. He was severely critical of Sol's and the gardeners' drinking habits.[16] The resourceful Buckland bailiff, John Channon, was particularly helpful when it came to finding accommodation in Buckland Monachorum for the troublesome Joyce in 1762.[17]

Rowe's extant letters became less frequent as he entered his seventies. Towards the end he writes of a great sadness that afflicted him: the loss of his dog, Duchess, who had been his companion. After 1767 there are no extant letters at all until 1775, when a final letter ends with a tranquil postscript, perhaps with some late solace for the loss of Duchess: 'Your Cat is very well, we Converse often Together' (F485).

The sale of books from Nutwell Court in 1938, after the death of Lady Fuller-Eliott-Drake, included three volumes of 'Letters of Nicholas James Rowe to Sir Francis Drake'.[18] The three volumes are presumably the three folders of Rowe's handwritten letters printed in this edition; no trace has been found of previous publication in book form.

As Rowe's extant letters decline, Hudson's begin.

1.4. William Hudson

William Hudson was born in the White Lion Inn, Kendal, and educated at Kendal grammar school.[19] He was then apprenticed to a London apothecary, whose practice he eventually took over. While still an apprentice, he won an important botanical prize given by the Apothecaries' Company. From 1757 to 1758 he was resident sub-librarian at the British Museum. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1761. His Linnean description and classification of British flora, *Flora Anglica*, was first published in London in 1762. From 1765 to 1771 he was *praefectus horti* and botanical demonstrator to the Apothecaries' Company at Chelsea. In 1783 his house in Panton Street caught fire, and his collections of insects and many of his plants were destroyed, as were the materials he had assembled for a book on British fauna. In 1791 he became a member of the newly established Linnean Society. He died in 1793 and was buried at St James's Church, Piccadilly.[20]

[16] For Rowe's strictures on drink, see Introduction, section 4, p. 43; section 5, pp. 50–1.

[17] See 346M/F20; and notes on the letters.

[18] DHC FOR/B/2/164.

[19] This paragraph draws on the O*DNB* account of William Hudson's life. More information on sources is available in R. Desmond, *Dictionary of British & Irish Botanists and Horticulturalists* (London: Natural History Museum, 1993). None of the sources make any mention of Hudson's association with Sir Francis, of the letters to him, or of the bequest in Sir Francis's will.

[20] The O*DNB* article does not record the fact that Hudson's memorial disappeared when the graveyard was destroyed in the Second World War. The article lists a likeness of Hudson in the Linnean Society collection of engravings, but this cannot be found.

During the years when his letters to Sir Francis were written, 1767–1778, Hudson was initially *praefectus horti* at Chelsea, but the duties associated with this appointment became too time-consuming (**9**–F181) and led to his resignation. He was busy with his private medical practice, with meetings of the Royal Society, and with joint enterprises with fellow botanists, notably the young Joseph Banks. Banks had already written a Linnean description of the plants and animals of Newfoundland and Labrador, and joined Hudson as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1766. It is in fact to an early twentieth-century biographer of Banks, Edward Smith, that we owe a snapshot of William Hudson during the early summer of 1768, during the first year of his extant letters to Sir Francis, and shortly before Banks set sail on the *Endeavour* from Plymouth with Captain James Cook:

> Another excursion was taken [by Joseph Banks] this summer, in the company of two companions. They spent a week or two in North Wales, mostly botanizing. William Hudson was one of this party; in all likelihood a very good comrade for the occasion. His social merits were high, the outcome of a tranquil but genial disposition. He had studied with an apothecary, and practised medicine. An acquaintance with Benjamin Stillingfleet, together with an ardent study of the Sloane Collections [in the British Museum], made him a botanist. He acquired a European fame by the publication of his *Flora Anglica* (London, 1762).[21]

Could it be that the second of the 'two companions' was the less gregarious Sir Francis? There are no letters from Hudson to Sir Francis between January and autumn 1768, and it is conceivable that they were together in Wales, with Joseph Banks, in the early summer months.

Be that as it may, there were clearly ties of friendship as well as shared scientific interests and business links between Hudson and Sir Francis. Although Sir Francis left most of his property and fortune to his nephew, the second Lord Heathfield, his lengthy and complex will begins with a straightforward bequest of an annuity of £100 per year to William Hudson, for the duration of his life (DHC 346M/F845–F847). In the event, Hudson did not live to receive this bequest; he died one year before Sir Francis, in 1793.

Hudson's letters provide ample evidence of the social merits and genial disposition noted by Smith, in which he differed so markedly from Sir Francis himself, and from Nicholas Rowe. He keeps Sir Francis up to date with what is happening in London. The two opening letters are good examples of his flamboyant style and panache. His comments on parliamentary business are informative and often entertaining. With society gossip, ghost stories, and lottery tickets he is in his element. Sir Francis and William Hudson shared a keen interest in lottery tickets, which are mentioned several times in the letters, as well as in a note probably added by Sir Francis (**15**–F169 note).[22] That Hudson hoped to appease Lady Luck by asking Mrs Otway, the coachman's wife, to buy a ticket, rather than buying it himself,

[21] E. Smith, *The Life of Sir Joseph Banks* (London: John Lane, 1911), p. 13.

[22] See also Bob Harris, 'Lottery Adventuring in Britain, c. 1710–1760', *English Historical Review* 133(561) (2018), 284–322, for the complicated eighteenth-century lottery marketplace, 'driven by both rational calculation and fantasy'.

demonstrates the incursion of irrational fantasy into the spirit of the Enlightenment, as does Hudson's susceptibility to the story of the Stockwell ghost (**17**–F177).

At the same time, he is a reliable purveyor of news about scientific publications (see particularly **12**–F192), an excellent source of botanical information, specimens, and seeds, and a tireless dispenser of remedies for physical afflictions, whether suffered by Sir Francis or by other members of the Nutwell household and estate staff (see Introduction, section 5). With wry humour he reports regularly on the health of Sir Francis's old friend Jeremiah Dyson, whom he regards as something of a hypochondriac. In September 1776 his hope that Mr Dyson is mending is not fulfilled (**27**–F188): Dyson died shortly afterwards. Section 5 places Hudson's discourse and recommendations in the wider context of eighteenth-century medical science.

2. Elections and Infrastructure

Alan Lumb

2.1. Working a Pocket Borough in the Eighteenth Century

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the political impact of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 was still working itself out. Power had shifted to Parliament but the relationship between Parliament, the sovereign, and the ministry was not set out in any constitutional document. The Bill of Rights (1689) limited royal authority and gave Parliament control over money-raising and freedom of speech for MPs, although it was not until the Triennial Act of 1694 that real restrictions were imposed on the Crown.

The Triennial Act was intended to ensure there were regular sessions of Parliament and, by each lasting a maximum of three years, to limit patronage by the ministry, but, despite its good intentions, the Act brought serious unintended consequences. With a new government every three years, and additional ones when there was a new monarch, after 1695 there were ten elections in twenty years. A divided and rapidly changing society led to scurrilous leafleting and street mobs, though not in Bere Alston, where elections were conducted very differently. In the large centres of population, sweeteners and bribes proved costly where the seats were contested and led to constant election fever, talked of as the Rage of Party. One Whig clergyman wrote:

> The Number of Ale-Houses is increas'd near two thirds since the Triennial Act in most Corporations, to the great Corruption of the Age. An idle Fellow who cannot bring his Mind to live by his Labour, is sure, if he has a Vote, to procure a Licence to sell Drink; by this means his Neighbours are drawn in to be as idle as himself. Thus Drunkenness and Idleness march before, and Poverty follows close after, thorough [*sic*] the whole Parish.[1]

There was a growing belief that a longer period for each parliament would lead to greater political stability, yet, as Langford observes: 'An opposition which enjoyed no immediate prospect of an election had an interest in encouraging extra-parliamentary agitation, even violence.'[2]

After a period of Tory rule, in 1715 the Whigs gained an overwhelming majority. Once in power, supporting the Hanoverians, and with no constitution to limit Parliament's powers, their propagandists stretched every sinew to undermine the Triennial Act. In reality, times were very uncertain. Foreign governments needed to know that there was a stable government in London, and there remained the fear among voters that Stuart supporters would press their case in the 1718 elections. So for practical and political reasons the Septennial Act of 1716 was brought in to extend the existing government by four years and fix future ones for seven years. This

[1] O. C. Lease, 'The Septennial Act of 1716', *Journal of Modern History* 22(1) (1950), p. 42.

[2] P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People, England 1727–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 46.

allowed the Whig ministry to establish itself and to win a series of elections through good management and patronage. Such management meant that no ministry lost a general election for a hundred years after 1714. Overall it gave the impression of a period of calm and stability, despite there being many riots over local issues such as bread and food prices and the costs of new turnpikes.[3] In Bere Alston, as in many similar small boroughs, there were no direct parliamentary election contests in the eighteenth century, although there could be a subsequent appeal against an election – as there was against one Bere Alston result (see below).

Robert Walpole, as First Lord of the Treasury between 1721 and 1743, made an art of cultivating electoral interests. He built up a group of ministers from both parties to work with the sovereign. This gave the opportunity for personal advancement and the chance to pursue local interests. Patronage and pensions were skilfully used to create a ministerial majority. The Crown had more than a thousand appointments connected to the royal household. Many of these appointments were sinecures, but MPs were expected to vote loyally; Sir Francis only ever voted against the ministry once. There was effectively a one-party state from Walpole through to Henry Pelham and then the Duke of Newcastle. The Drakes were always in the Whig interest. Sir Francis entered Parliament in 1747; by 1752 he had attracted the attention of Pelham, who had taken over as First Lord of the Treasury, and he invited Sir Francis to join the royal household as a Clerk of the Green Cloth. As he was promoted to more senior positions, he came closer to the centre of government, for the sovereign remained a key political force.

As to the way local elections were organised in boroughs like Bere Alston, 'Local government units formed a jungle whose only rationale lay in history.'[4] There was much local variation in this jungle. In Exeter the magistrates elected their representatives, whereas in Plymouth the Admiralty nominated them. In some cases custom and practice were not well defined; in others the portreeve, the presiding officer, could be lax in his administration. At every election there were appeals over the results, many of which arrived at the Bar of the House of Commons.

Locally these elections were determined by courts leet, which originated in the manorial system and still survive in a handful of places in the 21st century.[5] In rural communities these courts had the authority to transfer property leases, establish standards in the sale of food and drink, maintain local paths and ditches, protect the integrity of common land, and punish low-level offenders. The portreeve ran the court and ensured that its decisions were carried out. He was aided by the steward as clerk, representing the lord of the manor. All the freeholders – burgage holders in the case of Bere Alston – were members and were bound to attend. They were annually sworn in as the jury. This gave them the authority to make legally binding decisions.

[3] See section 2.2 below.

[4] R. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 122.

[5] According to the Wikipedia article on Spaunton, North Yorkshire: 'Spaunton is still the setting for a Court Leet. The court meets annually in October and decides on matters of encroachment onto the common land in the village and hands down fines to offenders. The full title of the court is *The Manor of Spaunton Court Leet and Court Baron with View of Frankpledge*.' This article draws on N. Rhea, 'When Sheep Were Big Business', Darlington & Stockton Times, 22 January 2016, https://www.darlingtonandstocktontimes.co.uk/news/14224382.when-sheep-were-big-business/, and G. W. Darley, 'Court Leet' (2004, rev. 2016), huttonlehole.ryedaleconnect.org.uk/about/court-leet (both accessed June 2019).

(It did not mean trial by jury: that was still evolving in the higher courts.) As we see in several of Nicholas Rowe's letters (F200, F202, F212), there were no more than twenty jurors agreeing who were to be the borough's Members of Parliament.

Burgage plots were an outcome of medieval town planning. The local lord of the manor, wanting to increase economic activity, would create a space for markets and fairs, thus drawing in people from a wide area. This was achieved by planning a main street widened in the centre with the land adjacent divided into long narrow strips measured as multiples of a perch (5 metres). These became known as burgage plots (from borough). Each plot would have a frontage to the market area, where a house or workshop would be built, while the land behind was used for crops or grazing. Burgage plots can be seen in several Devon villages today.

In Bere Alston, as in many other boroughs, burgage plots were owned by freemen, who, by virtue of a trade, were no longer in servitude. They paid a 'tenure' or rent, often conveying it for the duration of the election to another, entitling that person to vote. If the owner of a number of plots kept them to himself, there would only be one vote; if he leased them to tenants there would be several votes. The actual vote was by show of hands: in Bere Alston's case, in the open under a large tree in the middle of Fore Street. To succeed as a Parliamentary candidate the trick was to ensure that the chosen tenants were in one's interest, thus making it a pocket borough. It required some effort to learn the needs or hopes of the individuals in order to work on their behalf. By buying up burgage plots and taking as tenants those in one's interest, it was possible to guarantee the outcome of the vote. This is how local families could ensure that one of 'theirs' was elected. It is one of the main themes in the opening letters from Nicholas Rowe to Sir Francis, which begin by assuring the baronet that there is nothing to worry about: he just needs to complete his education and maintain links with the local freeholders.

> I'm Sorry Mr Harry Drake's application shou'd give you or Lady Drake any Uneasiness; I do assure you there is no Occasion for it. None but Good Dr Creed as I know of, is in his Interest, and He like the Æthiopian, can't Change his Hue. (F196)

Once the Members of Parliament were elected, the monarch chose a first minister and between them they appointed ministers from across the House. The two political parties, Tories and Whigs, worked very differently from today. They represented local interests rather than national policies. What would now be seen as national issues, such as education, transport, and poverty, were addressed spasmodically by private Acts of Parliament, hence there was a very uneven provision of, say, turnpikes (see below), which later generations would see as a wasted opportunity. What parliaments did do was raise money for wars and fund the political system.

As the potential of parliamentary power became understood more widely, the percentage of seats in which there were contests grew, as did the number of appeals against declared results. One of these was in Bere Alston in 1721, when Captain Philip Cavendish was returned at a by-election but one burgess holder, named Elford, claimed that the other candidate, Hon. St John Brodrick, should have been returned because the portreeve, Edward Elliot, a commissioner of excise, was not only barred from meddling in elections but had allowed unqualified persons to vote.

The appeal was upheld, Cavendish was unseated, and a resolution was passed which made it clear who had the right to vote:

> That the right of election for this borough is in the freehold tenants, holding by burgage tenure, and paying threepence per annum or more ancient burgage rent to the Lord of the Borough, and in them only.[6]

This held until the Bere Alston borough was abolished, with other pocket boroughs, in the 1832 Reform Bill. One imagines that Rowe had this appeal in mind when, in 1741, he wrote:

> that Mr Bray (who is Entirely in another Interest), was Chose Portreeve … I won't expatiate Farther upon it, Than to Say if the Steward can Swear, or will any Person on the Jury he Thinks Fit, and admit Free Tenants who have not been presented by your Jury, you have no Remedy but Westminster Hall … (F201)

To focus more closely on Nicholas James Rowe and the 5th Baronet, Sir Francis Henry Drake: in 1740 the 4th baronet, also Francis Henry, died unexpectedly of pleuritic fever, a painful chest condition. It is difficult to determine Rowe's relationship to the family but he was clearly very close and acted in a paternalistic way towards the 5th Baronet, who was still a schoolboy at Winchester College as Rowe's letters begin. If one accepts an account of life at Winchester quoted by Lady Fuller-Elliot-Drake, there was an emphasis on the struggle between Jacobites and Georgites and the 'degrees of social precedence'.[7] An education at Winchester and Cambridge was not one to make Sir Francis aware of the lives of ordinary people or of the details of local politics in Bere Alston, whereas Rowe, the older man, with a freehold in Bere Alston, knew at first hand the local levers of power.

At the time of the 4th baronet's death, neither his eldest son, still only seventeen, nor his two brothers were deemed eligible by the family to promote their interest in Bere Alston. George Drake lived in India, where he had business interests and rarely returned home, and Harry Drake was a pleasure-seeking spendthrift, who was seen as totally unsuitable to be an MP, although it was attractive to him as he constantly feared the debtors' prison, which if he were an MP he could avoid. (He never made Westminster but he did make the Fleet prison.) It appears that the family decided that the late MP's eldest son should continue the family's interest, once of age. In the meantime, it was agreed that Samuel Heathcote, brother of the dowager, should hold the Bere Alston seat for the remaining year of the then current parliament and stand in the 1741 election, continuing to hold the seat until his nephew was of age. Rowe, knowing that there were only about twenty burgage holders, reports that they were unanimous in voting for the Drake candidate, 'as I hope the Majority of your Father's Friends will always be to Serve his Son' (F200).

In the meantime Rowe urges his protégé to ingratiate himself with the local burgesses. Requests for patronage could have been made directly to Heathcote but

[6] J. J. Alexander, 'Bere Alston as a Parliamentary Borough', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association* 41 (1909) 159.

[7] *Family and Heirs*, vol. 2, p. 239.

Rowe, by involving Sir Francis, is promoting him and encouraging him to get to know the local community:

> My Humble Service waits on your Uncle and if you cou'd prevail on him to get Mr John Doidge made an Extraordinary Man at Plymouth, it wou'd be a Service to your Interest to let people See you can provide for your Friends … (F202)

Not that Rowe is over-impressed at the demands of these posts:

> You puzzle me to tell what Mr John Doidge is fit; what he desires, is a Tidewaiter at Plymouth but there is so much time on the hands of those people, which they generally Spend in an Ale-House … (F203)

And further:

> Mrs Bealey too has been Solliciting me to apply to ye all for a place for Her Husband, but how to describe his Qualifications – you can better than I … (F203)

In time, Rowe passes on requests for patronage directly to Sir Francis.[8] There are also a number of references in the letters to government posts in customs and excise at Plymouth. At a time when there was not a widespread civil service, these were sought-after appointments in the government's gift.

Despite Rowe's reassurances, he knew that the first election at which Sir Francis could be elected was that of 1747. Until that time there was, in the background, the unsettling presence of Uncle Harry, who clearly thought he should have one of what he believed were the family boroughs. He arranged a meeting at Cambridge with Sir Francis which is recalled in the one letter that survives from the baronet's hand (F198). Privileged students at that time did not live in hall but with their tutors. Uncle Drake invited himself for breakfast with the tutor to show that everything was 'proper' when he told Sir Francis that his father once had a numbers of boroughs that could be reclaimed. He also tried using a letter from Heathcote in support. When Rowe read this he responded scornfully, clearly thinking little of the chances of reviving the interests in the other boroughs (F199). Rowe continued to advise Sir Francis to contact local burgesses with a friendly word. On 19 May 1741, almost as an afterthought, he says that the 'The Election at Beer was Unanimous' (F200). Thus Samuel Heathcote was elected MP for the next seven years. Well before the end of that time, Sir Francis would have graduated and transferred his activities to Lincoln's Inn, in London. Rowe ends the letter by naming all those present at the court leet of 1741.

In October the same year, while updating Sir Francis on the new portreeve of another interest, who is offering a very loose interpretation of who can and cannot be a juryman, Rowe reminds the baronet of the decision twenty years earlier:

> I must Own I did not think anything of this kind wou'd have been attempted, Considering what has pass'd. It Therefore Behoves you to look about

[8] See e.g. F225, F228, F231, F237–F238, F254–F255, F260, F263, F265, F267–F268, F271, F288, F296, F299–F300, F302, F307, F310, F315–F317.

> betimes, to make yourself Master as Soon as possible, at least of Election Law. (F201)

This anxiety was relieved a year later when the court officials were reappointed and Rowe could report better news and continue to offer more encouragement for Sir Francis to maintain contact with potential supporters. It was also important to watch who inherited tenancies, to try to ensure that they were in one's interest, which is why Rowe would keep Sir Francis abreast of these changes, even if he omitted the details, as the postal service's security was widely mistrusted. Harry Drake was still visiting, this time on a 'Party of pleasure':

> I don't hear anything about Boro's runs in his head now, unless they have a Cornish One in view, Being going There as they Say; Though I Fancy a More Material B[oro] do's or ought to take up his Thoughts. (F204)

The day of the next court leet came and farce ensued, according to Rowe's letter written the following day (F213). We have a note (F212) of the court that met on 2 April 1744 and which dealt with several changes of tenancies. Dr Creed, vicar of Buckland, arrived late, lost his temper and created a scene but without any success. He had a tenancy in October 1742, as he is listed as a sworn juryman. At this particular sitting of the court leet he arrived at the end of the meeting when the 'presentments', the business of the meeting, were over. In order to have a vote in the court, he needed to arrive at the beginning to be sworn in. By presenting his nephew as a tenant, he was presumably aiming to gain another vote in Harry Drake's interest. Perhaps he had a plan to gradually build up that support before the next parliamentary election.

Lady Fuller-Eliott-Drake claims that 'July 2nd 1747 marked the accomplishment of Sir Francis's long cherished desire to be elected Member of Parliament for Berealston',[9] though it is difficult to see support for her view in these letters. Rowe is constantly having to reassure, encourage, or cajole the young Sir Francis to visit the borough more often, to get to know the burgesses, and to do what he can for them with the help of his Uncle Heathcote. The record through the letters is incomplete, as there are none relating to any of Sir Francis's election successes. It is reasonable to assume, however, that he would have been in Bere Alston for these elections so there would be no need to write. The only subsequent reference to elections is one leading up to that of 1752, when anxiety rose again and further reassurance was needed:

> But good Sir, What can H[atch?] or W[ills?] do, if your Friends are True to you, which I Think you have no reason to Doubt of – Therefore I Think you need give yourself no Uneasiness. (F262)

Later letters offer no further insights into the politics of the borough. Rowe continues to keep Sir Francis up to date on local matters but there do not appear to be challenges to his nomination at subsequent elections.

These letters exemplify the eighteenth-century political system – a nationwide oligarchy led by aristocrats and landed gentry. They show how the Drake family achieved electoral success in one small borough, Bere Alston, where the two seats

[9] *Family and Heirs*, vol. 2, p. 253.

were shared between the Hobart and Drake families. Yet that success had to be managed. While the whole process seems to have been relatively calm and ordered, the election result could not be taken for granted as the tenancies could be taken by others who were not in the Drake or Hobart interests. There is no evidence of pamphleteering or rioting, just a little anxiety on the part of some. The tenants needed to know that their MP was on their side. Maybe Lord Hobart as lord of the manor had more opportunities to apply pressure on the tenants than the Drake baronet, who had to rely on maintaining a positive relationship with those in his interest. As a result, the Drakes were obliged to help not just individual burgesses but their family and sometimes their friends, which could amount to a large group of people. We do not know how many people lived in the borough: agricultural work was labour intensive; many households would have had servants. Yet labourers and servants, the majority in the borough, are almost invisible and had no parliamentary representation. At the time, this was accepted as the natural order. There was representation for the few, not for the many.

2.2. Roads, Turnpikes, and the Postal Service

During the period of these letters, turnpike roads linking Devon to London were gradually evolving. A national turnpike system was the major transport outcome of the eighteenth century and must have had a profound effect on the lives of our letter writers. It was an outcome rather than achievement, in that no central authority set out to construct the system; rather, it came about as the result of short radial roads, taking goods to local markets, being gradually linked to longer stretches, across the more rural areas.

Building roads meant that land had to be taken from landowners. To avoid costly local disputes, each initiative needed the protection of its own Act of Parliament. In Devon, new turnpike trusts included Exeter (1753), Devon and Dorset (1754), Axminster and Honiton (1754), and Ashburton (1754).[10] Roads did exist prior to the turnpikes, maintained by local parishes, but once the better-quality roads were built, lighter and faster 'flyers' were developed, halving travel times between major cities.

A letter from Rowe of February 1756 records Mr Porter's pleasure that the turnpike has been fixed according to Sir Francis's system (F333). This presumably refers to a Plymouth turnpike trust for which Sir Francis had some responsibility in Parliament. Mr Porter held a position in the Plymouth customs and excise.

Sir Francis travelled between London and Devon by coach or carriage, or on horseback. In addition to riding horses he kept coach horses (and cart horses) at Nutwell (F480–F482). His goods were sometimes sent by wagon or coach (F257, F312, F314, etc.; **10**–F182, **11**–F180, **13**–F179, **21**–F170, **23**–F172, **25**–F173), and sometimes by sea (F203, F277–F284, F289, F290, F294, F300, etc.; **21**–F170, **22**–F171). Mr Rowe travelled between Nutwell and Buckland on horseback, and suffered severely after one journey from 'a Flead Posteriors' (F381). At Buckland, he went on horseback to Tavistock, and probably to Bere Alston. He went regularly by boat to Plymouth and the dock. At Nutwell he travelled on foot to Exeter, and to the parish

[10] See M. C. Lowe, 'The Turnpike Trusts in Devon and Their Roads: 1753–1889', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association* 122 (1990), 47–69; J. Kanefsky, 'Railway Competition and Turnpike Roads in East Devon', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, 109 (1977), 59–72.

church at Woodbury. He sometimes complained of getting very wet on his travels. Mr Porter rode from Plymouth to Nutwell 'for his health' (F277). William Hudson undertook journeys on horseback to the north of England and Wales (**25**–F173, **26**–F174), riding his pony for not more than thirty miles a day.

Those who were obliged to travel by 'the waggon' suffered very uncomfortable journeys. When Sir Francis's gardener at Nutwell succumbed to a mysterious illness in May 1766, he told Rowe that 'if he had not Fear'd to have Dy'd in the Waggon going up [to London], he shoud have gone when first Taken Ill' (F475). Then, a little later, 'at Intervals he is very Sensible & Says he is not able to do your Business, so Desires to go Directly, & will trye to get up in the Waggon' (F477). It was not until the later part of the eighteenth century that the improvement in the roads, achieved through the coming of the turnpikes, and the development of lighter, faster vehicles, led to a less bumpy ride – and a better postal service.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the poor roads had resulted in a very slow postal service. Throughout the century postal costs depended on distance and the number of sheets of paper used; as an envelope counted as one sheet, the letters themselves were often folded and sealed. The recipient paid for the letter. Postal costs were 'laid down in 1711 as a minimum of 3d. (the price of a good meal in a respectable inn or eating house) for the shortest journeys'.[11] MPs used their privileged position to frank communications for themselves as well as for family and friends. Sir Francis took advantage of this concession.

Outside the main cities there developed a system radiating from London to Edinburgh, Holyhead, Falmouth, and Dover. There were 'posts' about every twenty miles, where horses were exchanged and where the postmaster was required to have at least three horses available for use. Post-boys carried the letters between 'posts'. Buckland Abbey and Nutwell Court were near one of these major routes, Exeter being an important 'post' because of the bridge over the Exe.

Letters could be sent under another person's cover for security, or convenience. Thus Rowe asked Sir Francis to write 'under [Mr Porter's] cover' to Plymouth (F248), and 'under Alderman Lee's cover' to Exeter (F291). Rowe was critical of the expensive Topsham postal arrangements, and tried in vain to persuade the Exeter postmaster to keep letters in Exeter until called for by Nutwell staff (F270, F272). Latterly he preferred to use the Exmouth 'Carryer': 'as I receive & Send my Letters by the Exmouth Carryer, it is Sometimes 2 or 3 Days before they Come to my hands, But I am punctual in Sending answers to any of Consequence' (F461).

Writers were aware that, for 'reasons of State', letters might be read by postmasters, so they often wrote using a prearranged code. Such caution accounts for some of Mr Rowe's circumlocutions, abbreviations, and veiled allusions.

[11] Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p. 408.