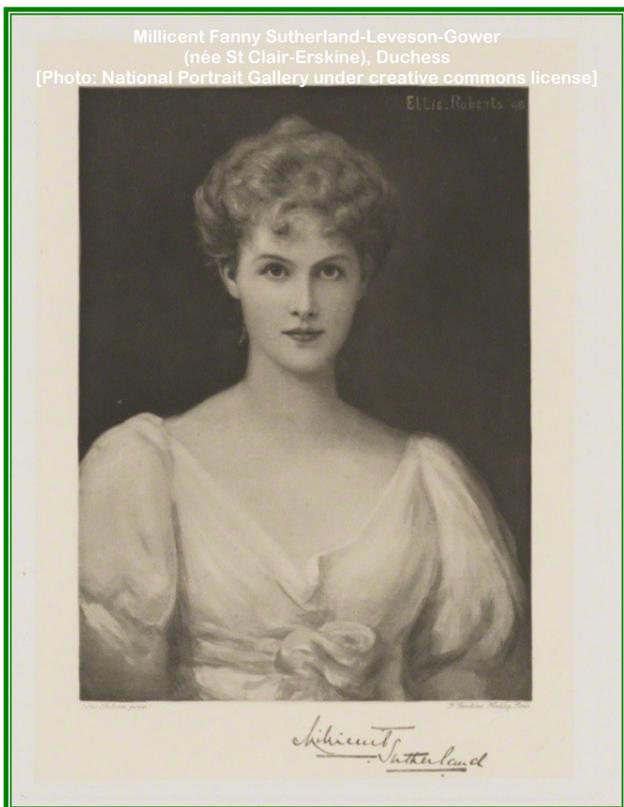


Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland



Millicent Fanny St-Clair Erskine was born in Fife on 20th October 1867, the eldest child of the 5th Earl of Rosslyn and Blanche Fitzroy.

The Earl encouraged education and opinion in his children. Millicent developed as a reader and writer and learned to read and speak fluent French and German. Her mother fostered a religious conviction and compassion for the poor.

Millicent married Cromartie, heir to the Dukedom of Sutherland, in 1884. She was 17 and Cromartie 32. Initially they lived at Tittensor Chase and Millicent was able to pursue her own interests. She and Cromartie had four children: Victoria, George Granville, Alistair and Rosemary. Victoria died at just two years old and is buried in the churchyard at Tittensor.

In 1892 Cromartie became the 4th Duke of Sutherland and Millicent moved to Trentham Hall. In London she was recognized as a beautiful and accomplished society hostess, entertaining all the 'great names' at Stafford House. She had a growing reputation as a democratic duchess and had a social conscience that prompted her to be pro-active in social welfare ventures around both Dunrobin in Scotland and Trentham.



The Cripples Guild

Millicent was a social reformer and used her influence to improve working lives in North Staffordshire. She campaigned against the use of lead in the pottery industry, earning herself the title 'Meddlesome Millie' from the manufacturers. She was parodied by Arnold Bennett as 'Interfering Iris, the Countess of Chell' in his novel "The Card" set in the Five Towns.

Millicent established a holiday home in Hanchurch, funded by Cromartie, where poor children could enjoy an annual holiday in the fresh air and there were 'cripples treats' outings to Trentham Hall. She set up the Cripples Guild, raising money with a grand bazaar and fete at the Hall. A convalescent home for cripples was built adjoining the Hanchurch holiday home to provide 'open air' medical treatment.



Millicent wanted to instruct those who were able in a trade or craft. The most notable venture was in Art-metal work. Francis Arthur Edwardes, a skilled artist, became the chief instructor and articles were produced in the Arts and Crafts style to a very high standard. The Duchess of Sutherland's Cripples' Guild of Handicrafts was formed as a limited company with new workshops constructed adjacent to the Dairy House in Trentham Park and a shop in London.

A Trentham Estate Report for 1916 mentions the conversion of these workshops to make detonator caps for the war effort. The buildings still exist and are now private homes.



War Service

Widowed in 1913, Millicent formed an ambulance car convoy in 1914 and spent the war organizing the transport of wounded soldiers and running an evacuation Red Cross hospital in France. She was awarded Red Cross honours from Belgium, France and Britain for this service.

She lived in France following the war and died there in 1955. Her ashes were buried in the Sutherland private cemetery at Dunrobin in Scotland.