

LIFFITON FAMILY HISTORY
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*Lady Eleanor Douglas,
Eleanor Liffiton of New Zealand*

by Thomas Liffiton

Eleanor Louisa Liffiton, the eldest daughter of Thomas Huntley Liffiton (1819 - 1881) and Caroline (Nolloth) Liffiton (1823 - 1878), was born in Littleham at Exmouth, in the county of Devonshire , England, on 17 May, 1845.[\[i\]](#) Eleanor and Edward, her elder brother by two years (born 1843), and her three younger sisters, Caroline (born 1847), Maria (born 1848), and Annie (born 1850), were all from Devonshire.[\[ii\]](#)

All were baptized in Littleham at Exmouth on the same day, 25 March, 1854 .[\[iii\]](#) Their father, Thomas Liffiton, a tailor and woolen draper, and his wife Caroline, sold the family business and Caroline's share of ownership in a sailing vessel, the "Favourite," to finance a move to New Zealand where they hoped to purchase and operate a sheep farm.[\[iv\]](#)

At the age of eleven, Eleanor sailed with her family to New Zealand. They departed England's port at Gravesend on June 1st 1856, aboard the sailing ship *Hastings*. The passengers on the *Hastings* numbered sixteen, including the Liffiton family and the Joseph Burnett family, relatives and partners in the proposed venture.[\[v\]](#) On 14 October, 1856, the *Hastings* arrived in Wellington on New Zealand 's North Island. Contrary to their earlier plans, the Liffiton and Burnett families decided not to pursue sheep farming. The Burnetts opened a general store, and Thomas Liffiton presumably took up tailoring again. Both families however settled in or near Wanganui, a town on the west coast of North Island .[\[vi\]](#) Also at some point a conflict developed between Eleanor's parents, as sometime between 1858 and 1866, Thomas Liffiton left his family and returned to Devonshire. In 1858, Eleanor's mother Caroline is known to have been teaching music lessons in Wanganui. In October of that same year Caroline Liffiton's parents, Joseph and Sarah Nolloth, immigrated to New Zealand .[\[vii\]](#)

When Eleanor was fourteen, she married Frederick Smith, a soldier with the British Imperial 65th Regiment of Foot. The register of the St. Paul 's Presbyterian Church, Wanganui,

documents the ceremony took place on February 28, 1859, at the house of the officiating minister, Reverend David Hogg. It indicates Ellen Liffiton, age 15 (sic), spinster, with the signature "Eleanor Liffiton," (sic) married Frederick Smith, age 28, a Military Corporal in the 65th, in the presence of William Snelling and Sarah Hogg.[\[viii\]](#) The following year, on 12 May, 1860, Eleanor and Frederick had a child, Frederick Smith, Jr., but on 2 July, 1861, Frederick Smith the elder died. Discharge records for the 65th indicate Number 2879, Private Frederick Smith, born in Newcastle (but given as Cumberland), enlisted 5 February, 1851, and sailed on the *Egmont* from Cowes (England) on 7 March 1854, arriving at Auckland on 26 June, 1854. He had a child named Frederick, and died at Wanganui in hospital pending discharge.[\[ix\]](#) *The Index to Casualty Returns of the 65th Foot* indicates No. 2879 Frederick Smith died on 2 July, 1861.[\[x\]](#) Civilian records for the District of Wanganui indicate Frederick Smith, a tailor, age 28 years, died of consumption in hospital.[\[xi\]](#) There is some confusion as to the location of Smith when he died, as Eleanor and her son are said to have been with Smith at his death of a lingering illness in hospital at Auckland, not Wanganui.[\[xii\]](#)

The 65th Regiment of Foot, also known also as the 2nd Yorkshire North Riding and "The Royal Tigers," recruited from Yorkshire, England. In 1847, the entire regiment was stationed in New Zealand after previously supplying guards for convict ships to Australia. Part of the 65th relieved the 58th Regiment at Wanganui, remaining fourteen years, and participating there in the fighting against the warring Maori tribes. While the regimental headquarters was located at various times in Wellington, Auckland, and Taranaki, in 1860, six officers and two hundred other ranks were stationed at Wanganui. By 30 April, 1861, the entire regiment was at Albert Barracks, Auckland, except for 84 men in New Plymouth, Taranaki. The Taranaki force rejoined the regiment in Auckland in June, 1863, and the entire regiment left New Zealand in 1866. Altogether, the 65th took part in engagements in the First New Zealand War, the Second New Zealand War, the Third New Zealand War, and the Hauhau Wars. Maori warriors called the regiment the "Hikity Pips," their pronunciation of 65th.[\[xiii\]](#)

After the death of her husband, Eleanor became the housekeeper for Sir Robert Douglas, 3rd Baronet of Glenberrie, and an officer of the 57th British Imperial Regiment of Foot, known as "The Die Hards." Although Eleanor and Sir Robert would marry in 1866, their first and only child, Robert D. Douglas, was born in 1863. On 31 March, 1866, however, at the age of twenty Eleanor became Lady Eleanor Douglas.

Sir Robert Douglas married Eleanor when he was twenty-eight, having been born in London, England, in 1837. At the age of seventeen, by purchase he had joined the 57th, a Middlesex Regiment, as an ensign, and he had served in the Crimea, the Arab Peninsula, and India before being ordered to New Zealand.[\[xiv\]](#) Just a few months prior to wedding Eleanor, on 20 January, 1866, Douglas commanded a detachment of the 57th Regiment of Foot in an attack on a Hauhau village as part of a column led by a Lieutenant-Colonel Butler.[\[xv\]](#)

Although they initially planned to build a house in Wanganui, Eleanor and her husband built their house, at Glenberrie, North Auckland. They called it "Bleak House," perhaps a reference to the Charles Dickens novel.[\[xvi\]](#) Sir Robert became prominent in New Zealand local and national politics, but died in 1884 at the age of forty-seven. On 28 February, 1884, the *Wanganui Herald* reported his death earlier in the day at the house of his brother-in-law, Mr. C. H. Ashcroft, the husband of Eleanor's sister Maria Huntley Liffiton.[\[xvii\]](#) Eleanor outlived her second husband by almost thirty years, as she died in Whangarei, New Zealand, on 4 December, 1914.[\[xviii\]](#) Eleanor's eldest son, Frederick Smith, Jr., married Emily Clotworthy, and their descendants live today in New Zealand and Australia. Her son Robert married Mary Helen Shore in 1895, and they had several children. Like his father, however, Robert Douglas the younger died early, in 1910, at the age of forty-seven.[\[xix\]](#)

A Note on Sources:

Very hearty thanks go to Bruce E. Liffiton (USA), Kathryn Mercer (NZ), Eleanor Neil (NZ, UK), Robyn Pearce (NZ), Stuart Roberts (UK), Peg Vause (NZ), and Robin Ward (NZ) for the information used in the narrative of the life of Eleanor Liffiton. It is anticipated that photographs of Lady Eleanor Douglas and Sir Robert Douglas will be available at this site in the near future. At the present, permission to use them is pending. The site will also include a photograph of Maria Huntley Liffiton, Mrs. C. H. Ashcroft, used by permission through the courtesy of M.N.E. Bethune. The photographs were provided by Eleanor Neil.

Photographs Added in 2005:

In 2005, Peg Vause provided copies of photographs from the album of Eleanor Liffiton's sister, Maria Huntley Liffiton. Here are a two.

1. **Eleanor Louisa Liffiton (1845 - 1914)** before 1860. Eleanor was fourteen in 1859, when she married Frederick Smith. Smith, a corporal with the British Imperial 65th Regiment of Foot, was stationed in Wanganui, NZ, where Eleanor and her family lived..
2. **Eleanor Louisa Liffiton** about 1861, as Mrs. Frederick Smith, a widow and a mother at the age of sixteen. Her son, Frederick Smith, Jr., was born on May 12 1860, and her husband died on July 2, 1861.



While Eleanor Liffiton's obituary is still to be located, Sir Robert's is available through the National Library of New Zealand newspaper project (see <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>), in the pages of the *Wanganui Herald* and the *Wanganui Chronicle*. Here is the obituary from the *Herald* in its entirety:

The Death of Sir Robert Douglas (from the Wanganui Chronicle)

For some time past the serious illness of Sir Robert Douglas has in a measure prepared his friends for the intelligence that at an early hour this morning he passed away. Since his arrival from Auckland he has been residing with his brother-in-law, Mr. C. H. Ashforth, the change of air being considered beneficial. Notwithstanding the most assiduous care and attention, Sir Robert gradually sank, the end arriving at four o'clock .

Sir Robert Douglas was born in July 1837. He was educated at first in Jersey, completing his studies in Hampshire. He was gazetted into the 57th Regiment in 1854 and very quickly was on active service in the Crimean war. He was present at the storming of Sebastopol , and the capture of Kinburn, receiving the Crimean medal and clasp, and the Turkish War medal. He next served against the Arabs at Aden, and was present at the capture at Sheikothman. From Arabia to India was but a short step, and the young officer took part in the suppression of the terrible Indian mutiny. The 57th were afterwards dispatched to New Zealand, and Sir Robert served in the campaign on this Coast, being present at various skirmishes, and at Nukumarū, receiving the honor of mention in general orders. For ten years he commanded a company of the old "Die Hards," finally retiring by sale of commission, and settling in this colony where he had married and was possessed of property.

There are many members of the old Regiment settled in this district who will hear with sincere sorrow of the early death of their old commander. Sir Robert was exceedingly popular in the Regiment, the men looking upon him as a fearless leader and a considerate and liberal officer. From his residence on this Coast during a stirring period, he naturally made many warm friends, and we feel sure the news of his decease will be received with deep regret.

Sir Robert Douglas was a public man, well known in political circles. For many years he was member of the Auckland Provincial Council, and at the general election of 1876 he was returned to the House of Representatives for the district of Marsden, which he represented until 1879. During the time he was a representative he was distinguished by great activity and energy, and perhaps did more than any other man in the House to keep the Opposition from falling to pieces during the ascendancy of Sir George Grey. He was never disheartened, and fought a losing battle perhaps better than any man in the house. He was a man of the most generous and kindly disposition, sparing no exertions to serve his party or his friend.

We understand that the funeral will take place at 3 p.m.

SOURCES:

[i] Littleham at Exmouth Parish Records.

[ii] 1851 U.K. Census, Devon , in correspondence of Stuart Roberts, 26 April, 1996 .

[iii] Littleham at Exmouth Parish Records, related in correspondence of Stuart Roberts 17 July, 1995 .

[iv] Correspondence of Robin M. Ward, 28 August, 2001 .

[v] Diary of Cornelius Burnett, transcript provided by Robin M. Ward in correspondence of 28 August, 2001 .

[vi] From *Oneida* by Robin M. Ward, published 1978, quoted in correspondence of Bruce E. Liffiton, 22 June, 1992 .

[vii] Correspondence of Robin M. Ward, 28 August, 2001.

[viii] 1859, Marriages in the District of Wanganui, No. 3 (St. Paul 's Presbyterian Church register deposited with the Wanganui Museum.

[ix] Hugh and Lyn Hughes, *Discharged in New Zealand* by Hugh and Lyn Hughes (New Zealand Society of Genealogists, 1988), page 96, with information provided in correspondence of Eleanor Neil, 26 October, 2002 .

[x] *Index to Casualty Returns of the 65th Foot*, Public Records Office (PRO) reference number WO 25/3412, as related in correspondence of Eleanor Neil, 18 October, 2002 .

[xi] New Zealand Deaths & Marriages Central Registry, Folio No. 1861/117, Registrar's Return of all entires of deaths in the districkt of Wanganui during the quarter ending the thirtieth of September, 1861, No. 14.

[xii] Correspondence of Robin M. Ward, 28 August, 2001 .

[xiii] Tim Ryan notes regarding the 65th Regiment of Foot (<http://hicketypip.tripod.com/history.htm>).

[xiv] "Death of Sir Robert Douglas," *Wanganui Herald*, 28 February, 1874 , page 2. (www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz).

[xv] James Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars*, Vol. 2, (P.D. Hasselberg, Government Printers, 1923, reprinted 1983) page 71.

[xvii] Correspondence of Robin M. Ward, 24 August, 2001

