

## Lady Eleanor Cecil 1868-1959

### Frances Stenlake, November 2020

Lady Eleanor Lambton, a daughter of the Earl of Durham, married Lord Robert Cecil, a son of the Marquess of Salisbury, in 1899. When the formation of the Conservative Women's Franchise Association (CWFA) was announced in November 1908, 'Lady Robert Cecil' was on its committee. A few weeks later she was among the 'influential ladies' who signed a protest, published widely in the Press, against the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) disruption of the Women Liberals Federation meeting in the Albert Hall on 5 December at which Chancellor Lloyd George was to make a statement about women's suffrage.

In London, Eleanor, as chair of the committee of the Marylebone and Paddington branch of the CWFA, introduced a scheme to canvass municipal women voters in the interests of women's suffrage and induce those who were Conservative to join the CWFA.

On 17 June 1911 Eleanor marched under the CWFA banner in the 'Coronation' suffrage procession from the Embankment to the Albert Hall. In the autumn of 1911, to promote the formation of a Hitchin, Stevenage and District branch of the CWFA, she addressed a meeting in Hitchin, where her husband would soon be elected MP. She also became a Vice-President of the Letchworth and District Women's Suffrage Society.

Chelwood Gate, Danehill, was the Cecils' Sussex home from 1899, and in May 1911 and November 1912 Eleanor led Central Sussex Women's Suffrage Society deputations to the East Grinstead constituency, Conservative MP, Henry Cautley. She chaired National Union of Women's Suffragette Societies (NUWSS) branch meetings at Crowborough and Heathfield, was one of the patrons of the Sweated Industries Exhibition staged in Haywards Heath by the Central Sussex Women's Suffrage Society in February 1912, and opened the corresponding East Grinstead Women's Suffrage Society exhibition a few months later. The Cecils took part in the inauguration of the North Sussex branch of the CWFA in Lindfield in April 1913. Eleanor continued to appear on Central Sussex Women's Suffrage Society platforms, however, presiding over the historic visit of NUWSS President Millicent Garrett Fawcett, to Cuckfield's Queen's Hall on 20 July 1914, and chairing the East Grinstead Women's Suffrage Society AGM in January 1915.

The welfare of women being of paramount interest, in 1916 Eleanor and other leading suffragists formed the Women's Local Government Society to promote the appointment of women to committees and sub-committees concerned with the care of mothers and young children. Active in the National Council of Women, she was on the committee that organised its four-day conference at the Brighton Dome in 1924. After the War she resumed her travels to Canada and other 'British dominions' to study the living conditions of girls brought out by the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women.

Eleanor wrote regularly for the monthly *CWFA Review* and other periodicals. In an article in the *Quarterly Review* of January 1913 on the training of the notoriously anti-suffrage Queen Victoria, she concluded, 'How the Queen herself reconciled her active exercise of authority with her views about feminine duty is a problem before which curiosity must remain unsatisfied.'



*Lady Robert Cecil dressed as Valentine Visconti reproduced with permission from the National Portrait Gallery*