

## Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair: Inspirational musical director and teacher

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Throughout her long life, June Boissier, the Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, remained quintessentially the effective and hugely enthusiastic music teacher which she had once been, at the Bromley High School for Girls in the three years before the Second World War. As Marchioness she became chatelaine of the beautiful house of Haddo, near Ellon in Aberdeenshire, which since 1974 has been in the care of the National Trust for Scotland. She was musical director of the Haddo House Choral Society, now the Choral and Operatic Society, for 60 years. "What she is like as a Marchioness, I do not know," the late violinist Yfrah Neaman told me on a Parliamentary visit to the Guildhall School of Music. "What I do know is that at Bromley and subsequently she has been an inspirational leader and teacher of music."

In the north-east of Scotland, June Aberdeen was much loved across the social and political spectrum. She was born the daughter of Arthur Paul Boissier, then an assistant master and teacher of mathematics at the Royal Naval College at Osborne. In infancy she hardly saw her father, who was in naval service throughout the First World War. He became a Master at Harrow in 1919 and subsequently served as headmaster from January 1940 until late 1942, when he became head of public relations at the Ministry of Fuel and Power.

He was upset that his daughter did not take up the place she had won at Oxford University. Instead, she took the advice of Sir Percy Buck – King Edward Professor of Music at the University of London from 1925-38 – to go to the Royal College of Music. In 1939 she married David Gordon, later the fourth Marquess of Aberdeen.

The third Marquis of Aberdeen had been a distinguished engineer who succeeded to the title at the age of 81. He was president of the Federation of British Industries from 1940-43, and, blessed with a natural tenor voice, sang with the London Bach Choir, later becoming its chairman and eventually president. He died in 1972 aged 88. So June's husband, David, was Marquis of Aberdeen for only two years before he died in 1974.

June was dowager for nearly a third of a century, during that time nurturing the Choral Society which she and her husband founded after the war. The citation she was given on her election to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1981 encapsulated her: "Distinguished for her unique contribution to music in Scotland, she has been musical director and conductor of the Haddo House Choral and Operatic Society since founding it jointly with her husband in 1945. The special qualities of music-making at Haddo, increasingly widely recognised by the arts critics, stem from her achievement in fostering the involvement of a local audience and amateur chorus with professional instrumentalists and singers – some highly illustrious, some young but always perceptibly chosen. About 30 operas and 30 oratorios have been performed by the society, representing the period extending from Purcell to Britten and Richard Rodney Bennett. There have been several first performances, including works by Parry, Rodney Bennett and a newly-commissioned composition by William Mathias. British composers, especially Elgar, are her special interest and in their works she excels: the first musician of her generation to grasp the importance of performing 'The Apostles' and 'The Kingdom' together."

The third Marquis was very happy that David Gordon, June's husband, should live at Haddo and run the estate. Educated at Harrow and Balliol like his father-in-law, David served in France and Egypt in the Second World War and was mentioned in dispatches. He trained as a land agent and worked on the Fawley Court and Knowsley Hall estates before going to Haddo. The Haddo House Choral Society was their joint brainchild; from small beginnings it became one of Scotland's major cultural ventures.

The Gordons loved children and, dismayed that they were unable to have their own, adopted two boys and two girls. A close friend wrote: "The great house was wide open, like their hearts, to every sort and kind of friend. And their friends became friends of each other in that special warmth. David combined huge strength with huge gentleness, great possessions with great generosity. These gifts, in partnership with his wife's creative talent, made Haddo not so much a place as an experience." Knowing that he was dying he opened negotiations to transfer Haddo into the care of the National Trust for Scotland and the 180 acres of the park to Grampian Regional Council as a Country Park.

Being taken round Haddo by June Aberdeen was an experience. I remember a group of us being entranced by the drawing room in particular. Above the fireplace is a wonderful picture of David and Goliath by Domenichino (1581-1641). Other paintings are landscapes by James Giles, Sir Walter Scott and his daughter by Sir William Allen, a couple of Van Dycks and the head of St Peter as well as a large, full-length portrait of Archie Gordon in the costume of a page to his father the Governor General of Canada. June would shake her head sadly and say that Archie died in 1909 at the age of 25 as a result of one of the earliest motor accidents.

June Aberdeen was a governor of Gordonstoun School, of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and of the Royal College of Music. She was made an MBE in 1971 and a CBE in 1989. The latter honour was partly on account of another interest, the chairmanship of the Scottish Children's League. When I last visited her, in October 2007 in her apartment at Haddo – part of the reconstructed former servant's quarters – at the age of 95 she was as clear as a bell about events seven decades earlier.

**Tam Dalyell**

**Beatrice Mary June Boissier, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair. Born 29 December 1913. Elected FRSE 1983. Died 22 June 2009.**