

Lady Bonham Carter



Lady Bonham Carter: A dedicated gardener

LADY BONHAM CARTER, who has died aged 96, was a remarkable patron of the arts; a tireless supporter of good causes and a perennial presence at cultural gatherings.

Charlotte Bonham Carter's ubiquity became part of folklore: people across the British Isles would swear they had all seen her benevolent figure — clad in her customarily eccentric clothes — contemporaneously at multifarious events.

The only daughter of a colonel in the King's Royal Rifle Corps and a scion of the Ogilvy Baronets of Inverquhar, Charlotte Helen Ogilvy was born in London on Aug 22, 1893. She was educated at Miss Wolff's School, Eastbourne, and then "finished" in Dresden.

She came out as debutante in 1912 and enjoyed the social round of *la belle époque*, retaining vivid memories of dancing at the newly-built Ritz Hotel to Casani's orchestra.

During the 1914-18 War she served in the Foreign Office. At one stage she was seconded to the infant M15, where she was involved in the tracking down of Lenin before the Russian Revolution as he crossed Germany.

In 1919 she was assigned to the British Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. Afterwards she occasionally attended lectures at the London School of Economics. In 1926 she became a founding director of the Ballet Rambert.

In 1927 she married Sir Edgar Bonham Carter, one of three knights among 11 brothers, and a brother-in-law of Lady Violet Bonham Carter. Sir Edgar, a legal public servant and chairman of the First Garden City (Letchworth), died in 1956.

In the 1930s Lady Bonham Carter gained a pilot's licence and on the outbreak of the 1939-45 War she joined the WAAF, being commissioned in 1941 and working in the photographic interpretation department.

She also served in the Ministry of Economic Warfare and afterwards presided over the Women's Advisory Housing Council.

In 1947 she inherited the estate of Binsted Wyck in Hampshire, where she became a dedicated gardener and dairy farmer. She was a county councillor and chairman of the Hampshire planning committee,

as well as sitting on the Paddington Borough Council.

Passionately fond of music, Lady Bonham Carter was a champion of the Aldeburgh, Windsor and other festivals and gave many treasures to museums. Her other special interests included archaeology and travel.

In 1978 her devoted circle of friends commissioned a portrait of her by Peter Greenham which now hangs in the Tate Gallery.

Nathalie Brooke writes: Charlotte Bonham Carter, for anyone who had the joy and privilege of knowing her, was one of the Immortals.

For who else remained who had actually been present at performances of Diaghilev's *Ballet Russe* before the 1914 War? Who else had visited Fortuny's establishment in Venice and bought dresses there from the *couturier* himself. Who else had attended every artistic, musical and learned event for the past 75 years?

Charlotte was possessed of the greatest curiosity and interest in all aspects of *La Vie Humaine* — but she did not remain buried in the past. For her, the new, the forward-looking and, above all, young people, were overriding interests.

It was for this reason that she will be remembered as one of the last great hostesses, both in London and in Hampshire, at her celebrated "aconite" lunches in February — for her love of bringing together of people of all ages, all professions, all ways of life.

All learned, musical and amenity societies and charities will feel her loss most keenly. There was never an appeal unanswered, never a charity auction without a gift from her, never an event for which tickets were not taken.

The most vivid memories of this indomitable, unique personality remain. Standing in the crush bar of the Royal Opera House at some glittering first night, saluting all her countless friends; apparently fast asleep in a drawing room filled with people, yet suddenly waking to make the most penetrating and apposite comment on the conversation.

And, finally, a fragile, tiny body being carried off the Royal Yacht in teeming rain by a burly sailor.

HAMPSHIRE and Alton — and Binsted in particular — have lost a beloved and remarkable personality with the death at the age of 96 of Lady Charlotte Bonham Carter of Binsted Wyck.

She died on December 21st and at the funeral, on Tuesday, at Binsted, the address was given by the former Bishop of Winchester, the Rt. Rev. John V. Taylor, a personal friend of the family.

It will be a long time before Binsted realises that Lady Charlotte is no longer there. She has outlived the oldest residents — and they used to recall the days when she drove round the lanes in a pony and trap, and later a car. In fact she became a veteran car driver many times over, driving in her late eighties. She loved the village from her earliest years and when she inherited Binsted Wyck in 1947 on the death of Mrs. Ogilvy, became absorbed in the life of the district. The Church, the WI, the flower show and fete, all attracted her interest and patronage.

In Alton, she was also a familiar figure, and a supporter of many organisations, none more so than the art society and for many an annual exhibition, she was there at the opening ceremony.

She loved meeting people and it was one of her greatest pleasures each year to invite the public in February to see the carpets of aconites at her Binsted home. She was often there to welcome them, busying herself in the garden in the meantime. She was in London last year, but was in the village in the summer, appearing at the fete in a wheelchair, but with a mind as fresh as ever.

Visitors to Binsted Wyck or to village events might have been amazed to learn what an eventful life the rather eccentric looking and benevolent old lady had had.

She came out as a debutante in 1912 and took part in the whirl of London society life before the first world war. She was one of the few people who could say they had seen Diaghilev's *Ballet Russe* before 1914 and had danced in the newly built Ritz Hotel. She appreciated the arts in all its forms; was a founder director of the Ballet Rambert and the keenest of theatregoers.

Pilot's licence

But there was a serious side. During the first world war she served in the Foreign Office and in 1919 was assigned to the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. In the second world war, she joined the WAAF, being commissioned in 1941 and working in the photographic interpretation department. (She had gained her pilot's certificate in the thirties).

BONHAM CARTER: Peacefully on 22 December, Charlotte Helen, widow of Sir Edgar Bonham Carter KCMG CBE, daughter of Col Lewis Ogilvy and Mrs Ogilvy and granddaughter of William Wickham MP DL and Mrs Wickham (née Shaw-Lefevre). A loving daughter, devoted wife and generous friend. Funeral at the Church of the Holy Cross, Binsted, Hants, on Tuesday 2 January 1990 at 12 noon. Also a memorial service in London to be announced at a later date.

A great figure of Hampshire Death of Lady Bonham Carter

She also served in the Ministry of Economic Warfare and afterwards presided over the Women's Advisory Housing Council.

At one time she was a member of Paddington Borough Council and on inheriting Binsted Wyck became a Hampshire county councillor and at one time was chairman of the planning committee.

In Farnham, she was known especially in Redgrave Theatre circles. She was a founder member of the new theatre and regularly attended the annual founders' luncheons.

Lady Charlotte was the only daughter of Colonel Ogilvy of the King's Royal Rifle Corps and a member of the Ogilvy Baronets of Inverquhar. She married Sir Edgar Bonham Carter in 1927. He died in 1956.

County's tribute

Tribute to her work and interest for Hampshire has been paid by the chairman of the county council, Maurice Jones. "She was an extremely gracious lady of enormously wide interests. I shall always remember her courtesy and how she never allowed ill health to deter her attending the county council's social occasions."

Freddie Emery-Wallis, leader of the county council, added: "Lady Bonham Carter was a great figure of Hampshire; a great supporter of the county, their institutions and the arts. In the county council's centenary year she attended a number of celebrations as the surviving link with our foundation. She was the grand-daughter of William Wickham, High Sheriff of Hampshire, who took the chair at the first meeting of the county council in 1889."

Lady Bonham Carter's great, great grandfather, another William Wickham, was Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department from 1798 and Chief Secretary for Ireland from 1802-4. His extensive papers form one of the greatest treasures in the Hampshire Record Office, deposited there by Lady Charlotte between 1949 and the present day, as her house at Binsted Wyck revealed more and more documents over the years. In order to secure public access to the collection for all time, she generously converted the loan of the papers into an outright gift in 1986.

She became vice president of the Hampshire Archives Trust at their creation in 1986. She was also a supporter of Winchester Cathedral and the Hampshire Field Club, as well as many other local organisations.

The county archivist, Miss Rosemary Dunhill, recalls Lady Bonham Carter remarking on the many changes she had seen since she was a child "and every one for the better".

The county joined with the village, relatives, friends and staff in a final tribute at the funeral at

Binsted Parish Church on Tuesday. The church was full.

The service was conducted by the vicar, the Rev. Bill Rogers and the lessons were read by the Rev. Canon Gervase Markham, a cousin, and the Rev. Gerrard Bonham Carter, a great nephew.

During the service Handel's "I Know Thy Redeemer Liveth" was sung.

In his address the Very Rev. John V. Taylor who said that throughout the remarkable span of her life Lady Charlotte had retained a great zest for life. It was a life full of love, and full of interest. How often had they not heard her say "Oh, my dear, how fascinating."

They had memories of her carrying her plastic carrier bag, but she had been one of the great hostesses and many would remember her celebrated "aconite" lunches in February. The guest list for these occasions were like a page from Who's Who.

She always looked on the positive side, always forward and was always interested in young people and what they were doing.

Interment followed in the churchyard.



Lady Charlotte in her latter years, busy among the aconites at Binsted Wyck.