**Douglas Leslie Gordon Davidson (1900–1960)**

Douglas Davidson was fifth son of Henry Oliver Duncan Davidson, a master at Harrow School, and his wife Ethel Leslie (née Robinson). His paternal grandfather, Alexander Gordon Davidson, was a Royal Naval captain, and the family had a long Scottish gentry background shared by the notable deaf painter Thomas Davidson (1842–1919), though in his case through a prosperous ‘trade’ route. Douglas was born at Harrow on 7 December 1900 and baptised there in February 1901. His notably handsome elder brother was Arthur Henry Gordon Davidson, known as Angus, who was a translator and writer, including as a biographer of Edward Lear.

The Davidsons were educated at Harrow and both Angus and Douglas went on to Magdalene College, Cambridge. They were socially very well-connected from school days on and had artistic eyes and interests.

Douglas was a largely self-taught painter. In his 20s, in London, he lodged in the upper two floors of Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell’s house in Gordon Square, having reportedly been introduced to the Bloomsbury circle by the sculptor Stephen Tomlin (who made a bronze bust of Grant). Another friend, Sebastian Sprott, also took him early on to Charleston, where Grant thought him ‘exquisite’ though on subsequent acquaintance rather lightweight. Both he and later Angus were apparently briefly Grant’s lovers (among a long list) and Angus – who accompanied Bell and Grant to Venice remained one of the latter’s close supporters. Douglas was greatly influenced by Grant as a painter and, like him and Bell, also designed embroidery and rugs. Three of his rugs formed part of his 1927 decoration – subsequently augmented by Dora Carrington – of the rooms in King’s College, Cambridge, occupied by his university friend George ‘Dadie’ Rylands. Rylands was a Fellow of King’s (English Literature) and poet, who also worked for Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s Hogarth Press, as did Angus Davidson. Douglas Davidson and Sprott went together to Munich to learn German and Douglas also visited America but into the 1930s otherwise worked in London.

By September 1939 he was living at 136 Gloucester Place, Kensington, and had a record back to at least 1929 of exhibiting primarily with the London Group and the London Artists’ Association. His brother Angus was also secretary of the Association, which was mainly a preserve of the Bloomsbury/Charleston set and their wealthy supporters. He appears to have had his final (solo) exhibition of some three dozen works at the Adams Gallery in London in 1948, when a brief review in *The Scotsman* (13 March) said that his previous public appearance had been 12 years earlier at the Redfern Gallery (1936). While his style had remained admirably coloured, the reviewer also thought his manner had become rather too restrained.

In later life Davidson became resident National Trust manager at Ickworth House, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, after that largely passed into Trust care in 1956. His brother Angus also appears to have become a curator there and they jointly wrote an early history of the house for the Trust. Davidson died at Ickworth, aged 59, on 8 May 1960, leaving an estate valued at just over £23,845. He was cremated at Dry Drayton, Cambridge, on the 11th.

*Summarised from Art UK discussion on Davidson’s ‘The Black Barn’ in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.*

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