



## Portrait of the Month: June Willielma, Lady Glenorchy (1741–1786)

by an unknown artist

Friend of the Countess of Huntingdon, who founded chapels in C18th Scotland and England to promote Evangelical preaching.



Lady Glenorchy, by an unknown artist

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College in 1768 to train young men for ministry - and who had also built a series of chapels.

Lady Glenorchy built and renovated two more chapels in Scotland, and also endowed the Scottish SPCK. However, as with the Countess of Huntingdon, Lady Glenorchy wished to retain the right to appoint ministers to her own chapels; and as with the Countess of Huntingdon, the established church disagreed. In 1776, Lady Glenorchy left Scotland for England, where she also built chapels in Exmouth, Carlisle, Matlock, Workington, and Bristol. Eventually, all these chapels joined the Congregational church.

Born in 1741, Willielma Campbell was born after her father's death; her mother later remarried to Lord Alva, and mother and daughters joined fashionable Edinburgh society. Both Willielma and her older sister Mary made good marriages: Mary married the 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Sutherland, and Willielma married John Campbell, Viscount Glenorchy.

The first chapel that Lady Glenorchy founded, in Edinburgh in 1770, was ecumenical – she invited Wesleyan, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian ministers to preach in different weeks. When her husband died the following year, she became a patron of Evangelical preachers and decided to dedicate her life and money to building churches. One of the key figures with whom she consulted was her friend Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, who had experienced similar issues, as a peeress and benefactor, when she founded Trevecca

Her contemporary biographer Thomas Snell Jones describes her as what must have been a fascinating mix of a society peeress and a religious benefactor, saying: “her imagination was lively, and her spirits constitutionally gay; [...] and she had a ready vein of wit and pleasantry, which gave a delightful air of ease and frankness to her conversation. Her piety was unaffected and deep; her views of divine truth clear and distinct; and her attachment to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel decided, firm, and not to be shaken” (p513).

Lady Glenorchy died in 1786 and left almost all her money to fund ministers’ education, to the SPCK (the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge), and to her chapels.

*Portrait by an unknown painter of the British (English) School.  
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Helen Weller, Archivist  
2020

**Bibliography and Further Reading:**

‘Willielma Campbell, Viscountess Glenorchy (1741-1786)’, by Edwin Welch, in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (OUP 2004)

*The Life of the Right Honourable Willielma, Viscountess Glenorchy*, by Thomas Snell Jones, (Edinburgh, William Whyte & Co, 1822)

*Spiritual Pilgrim*, by Edwin Welch (Cardiff, University Press, 1995)

“Records of Lady Glenorchy’s Chapel, 1787-1913”, Edinburgh University Library Special Collections, GB 237 COLL-765.