

Helen Scott Lidgett

Helen Scott Lidgett, who has died aged 63, was a master of press and public relations for major cultural institutions, helping to effect their transformation from inward-looking bastions of elitism into considerably more media-savvy and democratic places.

She was born on November 26 1948 to Bernard Finch, a GP who had changed his name from Fink, and his wife Patricia, a portrait sculptor whose best known work, *Golders Hill Girl*, in Golders Hill Park, is a portrait of Helen as a teenager.



Helen Finch was educated at King Alfred School and subsequently at Henrietta Barnet School in Hampstead Garden Suburb. To the annoyance of her parents she chose not to go to university, but to St Martin's School of Art.

In 1974 she took up teaching Art part-time at Camden School for Girls and quickly rose to be Head of Art. There she made friends for life with some of her pupils, including the actress Arabella Weir and the film-maker, Sophie Muller.

She cut a glamorous figure, running a stall on the side in Kensington Market and Camden Lock where, with her first husband, Duncan Scott Lidgett (always known as Scott), she sold vintage and new clothes. This became so successful that she left teaching to concentrate on the business, Scotts, which supplied antique silk and lace wedding dresses to Harrods, Liberty, and Selfridges.

After the breakdown of her marriage in 1982, Helen started working for Time Out, and met Johnny White, a rock musician, acupuncturist and part-time joiner, whom she eventually married in 2002. Meanwhile, in September 1988, she applied to work for Thames and Hudson, the art publishers, as a press officer. Energetic, she quickly rose to become head of marketing and publicity, in 1999 organising the company's 50th anniversary celebrations at the National Gallery.

From there she joined the PR company Hobsbawm Macaulay as its head of arts. It was an exciting time, marked by the launch of many new projects; she worked with clients including the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Arts in Newcastle and the V&A in London as it developed the Spiral and new British Galleries.

When the two principals of the company split, Helen Scott Lidgett moved with Sarah Brown (as Sarah Macaulay had become after marrying the then Chancellor of the Exchequer) to establish Brunswick Arts, a branch of the Brunswick Group. This put arts marketing onto an international footing, as Brunswick had offices in major cities around the world. Helen Scott Lidgett became a fixture of the global art scene, dressed in Prada and wearing dark glasses even in winter; her clients included the British Museum, National Gallery, London Library, British Council, Venice Biennale and Art Dubai. Fond of gossip, her particular talent was for diagnosing the specific characteristics of an organisation. She operated in a low-key and thoughtful way, and this meant that, somewhat oddly, she often recommended not seeking press attention.

In 2008 she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She kept on working – and partying – nonetheless. Two years after her diagnosis she was summoned to No 10 Downing Street as Gordon Brown planned his election campaign. Her official role was as an arts adviser, but she saw the prime minister on a

regular basis. Some commentators suggested that she had been brought in as a “style guru” to remodel the PM. The Telegraph reported that “her job is to give Gordon an intensive pre-election image makeover”. Scott Lidgett, however, did not enjoy the machinations of No 10: “I’m not sure that I could be described as a New Labour type.”

Shortly before she died, she told her colleagues that she wanted to be stuffed, so that she could attend her own funeral, where she expected, as ever, to be in the front row.

Helen Scott Lidgett is survived by her second husband and their son, and by a son and a daughter of her first marriage.

Helen Scott Lidgett, born November 26 1948, died July 31 2012

The Telegraph, 12 Aug 2012