

Oxford DNB: April 2019

From April 2019, the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford DNB) offers biographies of 63,290 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 61,023 articles. 11,687 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

The April 2019 update adds 13 articles, containing 13 biographies, accompanied by 2 portrait likenesses. The particular focus is on regional authors and thriller writers, and women in pharmacy.

April 2019: summary of newly-added lives

This update includes the lives of four writers strongly associated with the places where they worked. Born at Ambleside in Westmorland, the poet and novelist **James Allan Mackereth (1871–1948)** settled in the village of Cottingley, on the outskirts of Bradford, Yorkshire, where he worked for a bank. He published collections of poetry and two novels, and shortly before his death was granted a civil list pension for his services to literature. Brought up in poverty in a working-class household at Brighouse in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the actor, dramatist, and broadcaster, **James Richard Gregson, (1889–1981)**, made his performing debut at the Wesleyan mission in Brighouse. In the 1920s he became a leading figure in repertory theatre in the West Riding, and wrote popular dialect comedies. From 1924 he was also a BBC broadcaster. The University of Leeds awarded him an honorary degree in 1969 in

recognition of his contribution to northern culture. A Bradford wool trader by profession, **Alfred John Brown (1894–1969)**, contracted diphtheria during military service in the First World War. During six years' of recovery, he developed a love of classical literature and poetry. His Yorkshire tramping trilogy, published between 1931 and 1938 established his reputation as a topographical writer on the Yorkshire landscape. Belfast-born playwright **Samuel [Sam] Thompson (1916–1965)** served an apprenticeship as a painter at Harland and Wolff shipyard, and witnessed the sectarianism which inspired his first full-length and most famous play, *Over the Bridge*. This was eventually staged in 1960 after being withdrawn in 1959 when the board of the Ulster Group Theatre found it too controversial. Seen by over 40,000 people over its original six-week run, the play is seen as seminal in the recent history of Northern Ireland both for its 'frank depiction of sectarianism and for the eventual victory over provincial censorship'. Television broadcast of his third and final play, *Cemented with Love* (1964) was also postponed until after the general election, on account its political content. Thompson died in 1965 and in the early twenty-first century has been commemorated in Belfast.

These are accompanied by two lives of thriller writers. Born in Hull, where his Jewish immigrant parents from Poland and Lithuania had settled, **Lionel Davidson (1922–2009)**, author of eight crime and thriller novels, was brought up in Streatham, London, and began writing short stories which led to freelance journalism. His first novel *The Night of Wenceslas* (1960) won the Gold Dagger of the Crime Writers' Association. His best-selling thriller, *A Long Way to Shiloh* (1966) marked his growing interest in Israeli, where he emigrated in 1968, before returning to London in 1976 and

writing his prize-winning detective story *The Chelsea Murders* (1978). **Gavin Tudor Lyall (1932–2003)** began his writing career as a journalist, when he wrote his first thriller, *The Wrong Side of the Sky* (1961). After the success of his prize-winning second novel *The Most Dangerous Game* (1964), he became a full-time writer and in the 1980s wrote four espionage novels.

As part of the Dictionary's coverage of women and the professions to make the centenary of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, this release marks an earlier anniversary, the 150th anniversary of the first woman to register (February 1869) as a chemist and druggist under the Pharmacy Act of 1868. She was **Frances Elizabeth [Fanny] Potter (married name Deacon) (1837–1930)**, whose father was a chemist at Kibworth Beauchamp, Leicestershire. She married a draper and settled at Fleckney, Leicestershire, where she carried on her pharmacy business in the post office which her husband ran. Born in Birmingham and brought up in the East End of London, **Rose Coombes Minshull (1845–1905)** was among the women who were supported by the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women in pursuing pharmacy as an occupation. She took the examinations of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (PSGB) and was among the women who petitioned the society to admit them to its laboratories. She registered as a chemist and druggist in 1877, and as a pharmaceutical chemist in 1879. In 1879 she was also elected a full member of the PSGB and subsequently worked as a dispenser to the North East London Hospital for children. The other woman elected to membership of the PSGB in 1879, **Isabella Skinner Clarke-Keer [née Clarke] (1842–1926)**, had been the first woman to qualify as a pharmaceutical chemist, when in

1875 she passed the examination of the PSGB. She established her own pharmacy business in London in 1876, taught pharmacy at the Royal Free School of Medicine for Women, and in 1905 became first president of the newly-founded Association of Women Pharmacists. A driving force in the foundation of the association was **Margaret Elizabeth Buchanan, (1865–1940)**, who was its president in 1909. She established the Gordon Hall School of Pharmacy for Women, and encouraged girls to aspire beyond dispensing and to qualify as pharmaceutical chemists. In 1918 she was elected the first female member of the council of the PSGB. She was succeeded as proprietor of the Gordon Hall School of Pharmacy by **Elsie Seville Hooper (married name: Higgon) (1879–1969)**, who registered as a pharmaceutical chemist in 1902, having studied at the PSGB School of Pharmacy. She held research scholarships awarded by the society, and went on to graduate in botany and chemistry from London University. In 1911 she joined the science section of the women's suffrage march in London. She apprenticed female pharmacy students at the two pharmacies which she owned. After serving an apprenticeship to a pharmacist in Melrose, and studying at the Edinburgh School of Pharmacy and the PSGB's school in London, **Agnes Thomson Borrowman (1881–1955)**, worked on the British Pharmaceutical Codex. She went to become sole proprietor of the pharmacy at 17 The Pavement, Clapham which became renowned for training women pharmacists. The daughter of a Hawick bookseller, **Jean Kennedy Irvine [née Kennedy] (1876–1962)** served an apprenticeship to a Hawick pharmacist before qualifying in 1900 and joining the staff of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. Settling in London during the First World War, she was employed in checking the pricing of prescriptions under the National Health Insurance scheme, for which she was appointed MBE in 1928. She

held leading positions in the organizations representing staff employed on the insurance scheme, was president of the National Association of Women Pharmacists. In 1947 she was elected first woman president of the PSGB, at a time when women made up 10 per cent of pharmacists.

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