

Oxford DNB: May 2019

The May 2019 update adds 29 new articles featuring 30 lives and 8 portrait likenesses. The main body of these are 25 early modern women curated by Professor Marie-Louise Coolahan of the National University of Ireland, Galway, and Dr Anders Ingram of the ODNB. We are also commemorating the centenary of the Women's Engineering Society in June 2019 by adding the lives of four trailblazing women engineers.

Early Modern Women

The early modern lives in this release reach beyond Britain to Ireland, Denmark, the Virginia colony, the Mughal empire, and Persia. They reflect England's expanding commercial and growing imperial connections during this period. The gamut of lives encompasses the entire social range, from a court jester, prophetess, and printer through to settlers and a military leader, book collectors and travellers, as well as prominent noblewomen – recusant Catholic activists, a royal consort, and a notorious adulteress among them.

The most socially elevated woman included in this release is **Princess Louisa (1724–1751)**, queen of Denmark and Norway, and consort of Frederick V. A daughter of George II, Louisa's marriage was a matter of high politics, cementing the British–Danish alliance. **Frances Devereux, [née Walsingham, other married names Sidney and Burke], countess of Essex and Clanricarde (c.1568–1632)** was the daughter of Francis Walsingham; she married first Sir Philip Sidney, then Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex, and finally Richard Burke, fourth earl of Clanricarde. Drawing ably on these noble kin and marriage networks throughout her life, she acted with considerable agency in the tumultuous later years of Essex's career culminating in his rebellion against the Queen and execution. **Magdalen Herbert [née Newport, second married name Lady Danvers] (d.1627)** was mother of the diplomat and philosopher Edward Herbert and the poet George Herbert, as well as a friend and patron of John Donne who corresponded extensively with her and wrote a sermon for her funeral.

Perhaps unsurprisingly this release contains a significant number of noblewomen. Born into a staunchly Catholic family **Mary Wriothsley [née Browne; other married names Heneage, Hervey], countess of Southampton (in or before 1552, d. 1607)** was connected to some of

the leading Catholic figures in early modern England. She married Henry Wriothesley, second earl of Southampton, whose Catholicism led to his repeated imprisonment in the 1570s. Although during this time Mary advocated for him, they were subsequently severely estranged, leading to a rift with her son Thomas, which was only resolved when she successfully pleaded for his life following his involvement in Essex's rebellion. Although not born into the nobility, **Elizabeth Heneage [married name Elizabeth Finch] (1556–1634)** became the richest widow in England following the death of her husband. However, despite numerous offers she never re-married, instead aggressively pursuing a noble title for herself and her issue, and at length purchasing the title Viscountess Maidstone followed by the earldom of Winchilsea. Her son Sir Heneage Finch became Speaker of the House of Commons. **Anne Erroll [née Drummond; married name Hay], countess of Erroll (1656–1719)**, was the only female contributor to the pioneering natural history work *Scotia Illustrata* (1684). She was also a leading agent in the Jacobite underground, serving as a contact for people and information coming to Scotland from the court in exile and corresponding regularly with James II and VII.

Early modern society could be quick to persecute women who were perceived to have transgressed sexual or social

mores. After a severely contested marriage negotiation in which the Privy Council was forced to intervene, **Frances Villiers [née Coke], Viscountess Purbeck (1602–1645)** married John Villiers. However, it quickly became apparent that he suffered from severe depressive and manic episodes and the couple rapidly became estranged. Frances began a relationship with Sir Robert Howard and when this was discovered she was tried for adultery, in what was to become one of the most notorious affairs of the seventeenth century. Found guilty she was sentenced to a 500 mark fine and to public penance in the Savoy church. Instead she fled first to Shropshire and then to France. **Elizabeth [known as Lady Betty] Howard [married name Felton] (1656–1681)** was the daughter of James, third earl of Suffolk. After eloping with Thomas Felton at the age of fifteen gossips (perhaps slanderously) accused her of affairs with at least three court celebrities including the Duke of Monmouth (Charles II illegitimate son) and she was a frequent and prominent target of numerous harsh and often pornographic satires of the 1670s and 80s.

Two lives in the release relate to the period of the Irish rebellion of 1641. Of a settler family in Munster, and the daughter of the poet Anne Southwell, **Elizabeth Dowdall [née Southwell], (fl. 1640–1642)** successfully led the

defence of Kilfinny Castle, besieged by a force of some 3,000 men, in 1642. Also a settler, **Elizabeth Price (fl. 1641–1643)** had married a captain in the English army and purchased lands in county Armagh. These were seized in 1641, and in 1643 she gave a deposition of her experiences of imprisonment, starvation, and torture. Her account was included by Sir John Temple in his sensationalist work *The Irish Rebellion* (1646), and has become one of the best known contemporary depositions.

The imperial and commercial aspirations of early modern England reached far beyond Ireland, and these global connections are also reflected in this release.

Cockacoeske (d. before 1 July 1686) was chief of the Pamunkey Indians of the Virginia colony. An astute politician who negotiated the chaos of the Susquehannock war and Bacon's Rebellion (1676), Cockacoeske was one of the most prominent signatories of the Treaty of Middle Plantation in 1677, and tried unsuccessfully to restore the Pamunkey to their traditional paramountcy in the Powhatan chiefdom. Connected to Britain through English commercial rather than colonial ambitions **Mariam Khan [married name Hawkins; second married name Towerson] (fl. 1611–1619)** was the daughter of a Christian Armenian courtier of the Mughal emperor Jalalud-din Akbar. Her marriage to the English Captain

William Hawkins was arranged by Akbar's son and successor Jahangir. Following Hawkins' death on a voyage to England, Mariam married another East India Captain, Gabriel Towerson, and returned to India taking with her **Frances Steele [née Webbe] (fl. 1617)**, a merchant's wife who became the first English woman to visit the Mughal harem. **Lady Teresa Sampsonia Sherley (c. 1589–1668)** was the daughter of a Circassian ruler who married Robert Shirley, an English nobleman who had sought to instigate diplomatic and economic ties between England and Safavid Persia. Teresa accompanied her husband on many of his travels throughout Europe and Asia on diplomatic missions of limited success. Following his death in Persia she travelled to Istanbul and later Rome where she lived out her life.

While many of these lives relate to women of high status, we have also included a number of exceptional women from across the social spectrum. **Jane, the Queen's Fool (fl. 1535–1558)** is the only example of a female court jester recorded in British history. Jane served the women of the Tudor court as a female fool for twenty-three years, earning the support and enduring affection of two queens, Mary I, and Mary's stepmother, Katherine Parr. **Elizabeth Jeake [née Hartshorne; other married name Tucker] (1667–1736)** is an exemplar of the ways in which

women's work was key to the marital economy. However, while such work is often absent from the historical record, in this case much information is recorded in the surviving letters between Elizabeth and her husband Samuel Jeake, an astrologer and merchant. These letters reveal Elizabeth managing the business in Samuel's absence, negotiating with his partners, borrowing and lending money, managing tenancies and employments, and other tasks.

Anne Griffin (b. 1595?) was one of the most active widow stationers of the early modern period. Following the death of her husband Edward, Griffin entered into a number of partnerships acting as a printer or publisher. These included working with other women who were active in the contemporary print trade. Her name survives on some 19 extant editions and she entered nearly three times that number of works into the Stationers' Register (an early form of copyright). **Elizabeth Whipp [née Worsup] (d. 1646)** was a licensed midwife who practised over decades. Whipp, alongside another midwife Hester Shaw, successfully petitioned Charles I to resist the encroachment of Dr Peter Chamberlin, a member of the College of Physicians, who had petitioned the king to put the regulation of midwives under his sole jurisdiction.

The release includes a diverse range of religious women including a nun, but also a wandering prophet, a folk

healer, the author of a spiritual autobiography, and a prominent member of the Catholic underground. The extraordinary **Esther Wheelwright [name in religion Marie-Joseph de l'Enfant Jésus, known as Mother Esther] (1696–1780)** was born in the English colony of Massachusetts. Abducted at a young age by the French-allied Wabanaki during Queen Anne's War, she was later taken to Québec where she joined an Ursuline convent.

She rose to become mother superior, helping the convent survive the four-year British occupation of Québec in the 1760s. A religious figure in a far less formal sense,

itinerant prophetess **Anna Walker [née Busch]**

(1567x74–1620/1621) was born in Denmark. Around 1607 she addressed a manuscript devotional work to the queen consort, Anne of Denmark. Shortly after this Walker experienced a series of visions and travelled extensively preaching a chiliastic message in Lübeck, Hamburg, and London, until falsely predicting the death of the King in Copenhagen in 1620, leading to accusations of treason. Subject of a well-known Cornish fairy tale,

Ann Jeffries [married name Warden] (1626–1698?)

first encountered the fairies in 1645, following which she manifested intense religious devotion and healing powers. As word spread patients from across Cornwall and as far afield as London resorted to her, which brought her to the attention of authorities and led to her imprisonment.

Dionys Fitzherbert (c.1580– c.1641) is the author of a

remarkable manuscript account of a period of breakdown in her life when she suffered from delusions, despair, and terror. While these symptoms looked to her contemporaries like madness (and were treated as such) Fitzherbert's account identifies and understands this as a period of spiritual affliction and recovery. Born to a significant Oxfordshire Catholic family **Isabel Hampden (fl. 1577–88)** and her role in the Catholic underground is known to us from a pursuivant raid made on her home in 1584 by a puritanical local official. The records of the raid meticulously detail the items seized – including illicit books, religious images, and even a letter from the pope – casting rare light on the devotional material culture of the catholic lay gentry.

Other women in this release feature as authors or book collectors, reflecting a recent growth in research on women's writing and reading practices. Writer, poet, and schoolteacher **Anne Ley [née Norman] (d. 1641)** established a parish school with her husband Roger Ley, to supplement their income. Anne's commonplace book, poetry, and writing were later gathered by him after her death, in a manuscript which also featured his theological writings and verse. **Bridget Bennet [née Howe] (fl. 1668–1699)**, wife of MP and peer Sir John Bennet, was an extensive collector of books. No less than three complete

catalogues of her books survive and an assessment of the family library in 1722 identified some 659 works. These records of the large collection that she built up over some twenty years provide insights into an impressive library by the standards of the contemporary gentry. **Elizabeth Rookwood [married name Gage] (1684–1759)** was born to a prominent Suffolk recusant family. Following the death of her husband Elizabeth managed large estates throughout South Suffolk and North Essex. In addition, she continued her father Thomas' bibliographical work – completing a bibliography of the lives and works of 161 English Catholic authors – and producing a complete inventory of the 1889 volumes of her library.

Women Engineers

To celebrate the centenary of the Women's Engineering Society (WES) in June 2019, we are also adding the lives of four of the early generation of women engineers. The first three, chronologically, studied at Cambridge (all at Newnham College) and entered the engineering profession during the First World War. **Eily Marguerite Leifchild Keary (1892–1975)** took honours in the Cambridge mechanical sciences tripos in 1915, and undertook work for the Admiralty before joining the prestigious new William Froude Laboratory at the National Physical Laboratory, where she worked on the

hydrodynamic properties of ships' and seaplanes. In 1917 she became the first female associate fellow of the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain and one of the first female associates of the Institution of Naval Architects.

Frances Beatrice Bradfield (1895–1967) took both parts of the Cambridge mathematical tripos followed by physics in the natural sciences tripos before being recruited to the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE) in 1918. By the end of the Second World War she was one of three women principal scientific officers working for the Ministry of Aircraft Production. Her work in aerodynamics was recognized through her election in 1944 as a fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society, and in 1947 when she was appointed OBE. In 1948 she was the first woman to receive the Bronze Medal of the Royal Aeronautical Society. Born in Market Weighton, Yorkshire, **Hilda Margaret Lyon (1896–1946)** gained honours in both parts of the Cambridge mathematical tripos, took a training course in aircraft stress analysis in 1918, and went on to work on airship design at the Royal Airship Works, Cardington. She was the first woman to win the R38 memorial prize of the Royal Aeronautical Society using this to study, and later lecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), also later working at Göttingen. At MIT she invented the so called 'Lyon shape' used for airships and submarines. Returning to the RAE she became head of the Theoretical Stability Group – making pioneering

contributions in this emerging field – she rose to the ranks of senior scientific officer and principal scientific officer. She joined the WES and served on its council. The WES played a role in encouraging the early career of **Beatrice Shilling (1909–1990)**, who from childhood had mechanical interests, dismantling and rebuilding a second-hand motorcycle. After leaving school in the 1920s, she was apprenticed to the WES members Margaret Partridge and Dorothy Rowbotham, took a degree in electrical engineering at Manchester University, and joined the (RAE). She was promoted and took charge of carburettor research, while maintaining her motorcycle enthusiasm, racing at Brooklands. Her greatest war-time contribution was a solution to a mechanical problem with Hurricane and Spitfire planes which caused them to stall while diving. The Beatrice Shilling building, opened in 2018 as home of the department of electrical engineering at Royal Holloway, University of London, commemorates her.