



Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Oxford DNB: July 2023

Welcome to the one hundredth update of the *Oxford DNB*, which adds ten new articles, comprising eleven new lives, accompanied by three portrait likenesses, with a special focus on women in science and literature, active from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

From July 2023, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*Oxford DNB*) offers biographies of 64,849 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 62,438 articles. 11,996 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

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colleges, universities, and other institutions worldwide. Full details of participating British public libraries, and how to gain access to the complete dictionary, are available [here](#).

July 2023: summary of new articles

This update includes the lives of three women who followed scientific pursuits, two as amateurs and one professionally. By birth and marriage a member of an Irish landowning family, the novelist and botanist **Maria Catherine La Touche [*née* Price], (1824–1906)** is known through her collaborations with John Ruskin, whom she met in London in 1858 and who in turn became obsessed with her daughter Rose La Touche. La Touche's botanical knowledge, developed over years of gardening and studying natural history, was valuable to Ruskin and he acknowledged it in his published work. The mother of the entomologist, watercolourist, and political hostess **Alice Blanche Balfour** (1850–1936) encouraged her and her siblings (who included the future prime minister Arthur Balfour) to develop their interests in art, philosophy, religion, and science. Alice Balfour was a keen entomologist and undertook research on the lepidoptera of East Lothian. Her findings continue to inform research in the entomology and ecology of the region. She

combined her scientific activity with managing her prime minister brother's properties, while also acting as a social hostess for guests belonging to his political and intellectual circles. The parents of the chemist **Edith Ellen Humphrey (1875-1978)** attached as much importance to the education of their daughters as their sons. After graduating from London University, she undertook research at the University of Zürich, under Alfred Werner, who actively encouraged women to study in his laboratory. She gained her PhD in 1901 and was probably the first British woman to hold that degree in chemistry. She subsequently made a career in Britain as chief research chemist at Sanderson, wallpaper manufacturers based in Chiswick. She was also active in the fifteen-year campaign (1904-1919) to allow women chemists to become members Chemistry Society, forerunner of the Royal Chemistry Society.

Two of the women in the update had careers in occupations newly opened to women. Born in New York, the photographer **Catharine Weed Ward [*née* Barnes; *other name* Catharine Weed Barnes Ward]** (1851–1913), took up photography initially as a leisure activity and an artistic expression, but she began working professionally and publishing on the subject. She met her future husband, the British

photographer and publisher Henry Snowden Ward in 1892, and undertook a tour to photograph historic sites in England, Scotland, and Wales. She settled with him in England where they collaborated on numerous publications. Throughout her career she was an advocate of women's role in photography and its organizations. The gynaecological surgeon **Ethel May Vaughan-Sawyer [née Vaughan]** (1868–1949) was a prize-winning student at the London School of Medicine for Women, with which she had a lifelong association as a member of the medical staff and lecturer. She maintained an interest in new surgical procedures and combined her work as a surgeon with marriage and motherhood. She invoked this in a public response to the arguments against women's suffrage raised by some male members of the medical profession. She was a popular speaker on women's health, and a member of the Fabian Women's Group.

The lives of six women who were authors or translators are included in this update. The translator and author **Jane Sinnett [née Fry] (1804–1870)** is mainly known through her association with Marian Evans (George Eliot). Married into a literary family, Sinnett spent much time in Germany with her journalist husband. Needing to support herself and her children in widowhood, she regularly contributed reviews of German

literature to contemporary periodicals and was also known for her translations of travel literature. The writer and translator **Leonora Blanche [Nora] Lang [née Alleyne]**, (1851–1933), born into a Bristol family, was married to the man of letters, Andrew Lang. She became an author and reviewer, and researched, translated, and contributed to his successful series of fairy books, which he acknowledged. Her unmarried sister, the promoter of women's education and translator **Sarah Frances Alleyne** (1836-1884) was an organizer of the Clifton Association for the Higher Education of Women and embarked on a series of translations of the works of the German philosopher Eduard Zeller. The novelist and Roman Catholic laywoman **Josephine Mary Ward [née Hope]** (1864–1932), the daughter of an Anglican convert to Catholicism, was married to the biographer and ecclesiastical historian, Wilfrid Philip Ward, with whom she formed a literary partnership. Their position as leading members of the Catholic laity informed her novels. She contributed to public life as a Catholic intellectual and anti-suffragist, engaged in new forms of Catholic social action, and wrote on Catholic marriage. The poet and social activist **Elizabeth Gibson [married name Cheyne; known as Elizabeth Gibson Cheyne]** (1869–1931) was the elder sister of the poet Wilfrid Wilson Gibson. Her own poetry dated from the 1890s and by 1909

she had produced some twenty small collections of poetry and aphorisms, which were widely reprinted and were influential in ethical churches and among social reformers. Initially supporting herself through paid employment, she established herself as a writer. Identified as a suffragist, socialist, and freethinker, she married the controversial biblical scholar, Thomas Kelly Cheyne, with whom she developed common interests. Christianity became central to her outlook, and she studied theology at King's College, London. While a student at Oxford, the novelist and rural campaigner, **Dora Eileen Agnew Wallace [married name Rash] [known as Doreen Wallace]** (1897–1989) she was among a generation of women writers at the university who included Dorothy L. Sayers, Vera Brittain, Muriel Jaeger, Margaret Kennedy, and Winifred Holtby. Her marriage to a farmer in East Anglia cut her off from this world, and many of her subsequent novels explored the limitations which she experienced as a result of her gender. She came to wider public attention through her leading role in the 'tithe war' of the 1930s, when farmers – particularly in East Anglia – protested against the payment of tithes to support the Church of England. She led a campaign of passive resistance by refusing to pay the tithes, thereby incurring the distraint of livestock to pay the arrears.