

Oxford DNB: January 2023

Welcome to the ninety-fourth update of the Oxford DNB, which adds eight new articles, accompanied by two portrait likenesses, on men and women active in the early twentieth century who were admitted to membership of the exclusive Order of Companions of Honour, created in 1917 to recognize 'conspicuous service of national importance'.

From January 2023, the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford DNB) offers biographies of 64,556 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 62,161 articles. 11,928 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Most public libraries across the UK subscribe to the Oxford DNB, which means that you can access the complete dictionary for free via your local library. Libraries offer 'remote access' that enables you to log in at any time at home (or anywhere you have internet access). Elsewhere, the Oxford DNB is available online in schools, 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](#).

January 2023: summary of new articles

The Order of Companions of Honour was instituted in 1917 to recognize 'conspicuous service of national importance'. Unlike the Order of the British Empire, which was created at the same time, the Order of Companions of Honour was unclassified, and conferred no title beyond the honorific CH after the member's name. It enabled the service to the nation of persons who did not wish to receive titles to be acknowledged, especially those in the labour movement who had supported the war effort, and also the clergy of all denominations. Equally, it enabled an additional honour to be conferred on those who already held titles. Unlike the Order of the British Empire, whose membership was unlimited (20,000 appointments to that order were made between 1917 and 1921), the Order of Companions of Honour was initially limited to fifty members (later expanded to sixty-five). In that highly exclusive characteristic it resembled the Order of Merit, instituted in 1902 to mark the coronation of Edward VII, and restricted to twenty-four members. Appointments to the Order of Merit were in the gift of the monarch. Those to the Order of Companions of Honour were made on the recommendation of the prime minister.

Among the first eighteen appointments to the newly-created order in 1917 was the vicereine, political hostess, and philanthropist, **Maud Evelyn Petty-Fitzmaurice**,

marchioness of Lansdowne (1850–1932), who had served as vicereine during her husband's viceregal postings in Canada (1883-8) and India (1888-94). She was subsequently a leading political hostess in pre-1914 London. Her admission to the order was in recognition of her role in organizing, since 1899, the Officers' Families Fund, which supported officers' wives, widows, and children. In 1920 she was appointed GBE, making her Britain's most-decorated non-royal woman. Two of those appointed to the order in 1918 were leading figures in the patriotic wing of the labour movement. The trade unionist and politician, **James Andrew Seddon** (1868–1939), born in Prescot, Lancashire, began his working life as a grocer's assistant and became president of the shop assistants' union. He was among the first Labour MPs elected in 1906. During the war he was among those labour movement figures willing to support conscription and state planning, in exchange for state guarantees of wage levels, and successfully stood for the short-lived National Democratic and Labour Party against Labour and Liberal candidates in the general election of 1918. The Labour politician **James Parker** (1863–1948), born in Lincolnshire the son of an agricultural labourer, was brought up in the west riding of Yorkshire where in 1895 he became the full-time paid secretary of the Independent Labour Party in Halifax, and was elected an MP for Halifax in 1906 as a result of the Lib-Lab electoral pact. He represented the seat until 1918, holding junior office in Lloyd George's coalition

government, being notable for promoting war savings certificates. Also admitted to the order in 1918 was the retired civil servant **Sir Samuel Butler Provis** (1845–1926), who had already been knighted as permanent secretary of the Local Government Board, where his role was to curb local expenditure. His appointment to the order was in recognition of his contribution to wartime schemes to provide pensions for disabled servicemen, and his membership of a Ministry of Reconstruction committee which recommended the transfer of poor-law functions to the counties and county boroughs. This foreshadowed the ‘break-up of the poor law’ in 1929. The college head and headmaster, **Herbert Armitage James** (1844–1931), appointed to the order in 1926 when Stanley Baldwin was prime minister, was among the clergymen decorated, and was particularly associated with his defence of the established Church in Wales, where his father had been an incumbent. He represented the shift to Conservatism in the leadership of late Victorian public schools (he held the headships of Rossall, Cheltenham, and Rugby), which recommended him to the fellows of St John’s College, Oxford, when they elected him president in 1909, to keep out the progressive Sidney Ball. The obstetric and gynaecological surgeon **Florence Elizabeth Barrett, Lady Barrett** (1867–1945), was also appointed to the order during Baldwin’s premiership in 1929 (Baldwin’s wife, Lucy Baldwin, was a campaigner for improved maternity care). She had studied at

the London School of Medicine for Women, where she went on to hold consultant posts, and was latterly dean. She was among the first women appointed to the Order of the British Empire in 1917. As well as her application of modern surgical techniques to the improvement of obstetrics and gynaecology, Barrett had a long-standing interest in infant welfare, stressing the importance of improving the mother's condition as a way of reducing infant mortality. The Baptist minister and journalist **John Charles Carlile** (1861–1941), appointed CH in 1929, was the illegitimate son of a London hatter and followed his father's profession before being drawn to the Baptist ministry (though never formally ordained). He had also been appointed CBE after the First World War for his ministry among troops at Folkestone. As president of the Baptist Union during the 1920s, and editor of the Baptist Times from 1925, he broke from his predecessors' Liberal affiliation, and adopted a more independent political line. The Welsh-born civil servant and educationist, **William Napier Bruce** (1858–1936), was already in poor health when he was appointed to the order, in 1935, and was unable to attend the investiture. His reputation had been made by his work as an assistant commissioner of the Charity Commission in drawing up schemes under the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889, resulting in the creation of a system of secondary schools in Wales considerably more extensive than existed in England. He was moved to the Board of Education where he was involved in creating

regulations for the new local authority secondary schools created in England after 1902, though the literary emphasis of the curriculum laid down was subsequently controversial. From 1927 to 1934 he was pro-chancellor of the University of Wales, where his principal achievement was to preside over the charter for the Welsh National School of Medicine. With these eight additions, 278 members of the order are now included in the Oxford DNB (see the Reference List of **Members of the Order of Companions of Honour**).