

Oxford DNB: September 2022

Welcome to the ninetieth update of the Oxford DNB, which adds ten new articles, and seventeen new lives, accompanied by three portrait likenesses. The update has a special focus on the lives of women active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially in the field of welfare reform.

From September 2022, the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford DNB) offers biographies of 64,533 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 62,127 articles. 11,917 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](#).

September 2022: introduction to the update by

Caitríona Beaumont

A commitment to welfare reform, enhancing the lives of women and girls and engaging with civic society are the threads that draw together the 'ordinary' extraordinary women featured in this latest release of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Born in the mid-to late nineteenth century, when women continued to experience restrictions in public and private life based on their gender, access to education was a key factor in enabling these women to lead interesting and meaningful lives. This was particularly important for Ethel Carnie Holdsworth whose working-class upbringing in the Lancashire mills could have easily prevented her from becoming a poet, journalist, and best-selling author.

The new articles vividly illustrate how these women used education to expand personal horizons, carve out professional careers, and in many cases work for the benefit of wider society. For example, Mary Clifford and Sophia Lonsdale both served as poor-law guardians and Edith Davidson devoted her adult life to the welfare of vulnerable women and girls.

Religious conviction underpinned the welfare work of a number of the women. In addition to Clifford and Davidson,

Rosamond Fisher, who served as central president of the Church of England's Mothers' Union, was committed to supporting women in their roles as wives and mothers.

Membership of voluntary women's groups emerges as another key factor in facilitating the activism of several women whose lives are added in this update. The women's suffrage and feminist campaigner Elizabeth Abbott worked for a number of well-known women's organisations including the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, and the Open Door Council. The writer Theodora Bosanquet was appointed executive secretary to the International Federation of University Women and Mary Clifford was a member of the National Union of Women Workers. The painter Alice Woodward joined the Artist's Suffrage League, indicating her support for the right of women to vote in parliamentary elections.

A number of these women were financially independent and enjoyed interesting working lives. The aeronaut and astronomer Gertrude Bacon flew on airships and in hot air balloons. Evangeline Edwards, professor of Chinese and first head of the Far East department at the School of Oriental and African Studies, spent her early career working as a teacher in Manchuria.

It is surprising to learn from these biographies how many of the women were seasoned international travellers. The

extent of female mobility during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is often underestimated. However, it was essential for building dynamic international networks that facilitated the many global campaigns for women's rights and women's welfare during these years. A second striking feature to emerge from the profiles of these ten fascinating women is their willingness, and ability, to speak publicly to different audiences. This fact is indicative of their commitment, and passion, for the causes they supported. Their accomplishments are impressive, and their lives deserve to be celebrated here.

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September 2022: summary of newly added articles

The Bristol poor-law guardian and social reformer, **Mary Clifford (1842–1919)**, who is commemorated in Bristol Cathedral, was the daughter of an evangelical clergyman in the city. She was of the generation of Bristol women who attended the first lectures of the Clifton Association for the Higher Education of Women. Attendance at a religious conference at Broadlands was a turning point in her life, and led her to a commitment to those in need. The squalid

conditions in a local workhouse prompted her to seek election as a poor-law guardian, and she dedicated twenty-five years to this role, taking a special interest in the welfare of children and those with learning disabilities. She had less sympathy with male able-bodied paupers. Latterly, through her involvement in purity work, she became a founding member of the National Union of Women Workers, and a moderate women's suffragist. The social reformer, poor-law guardian, and anti-suffragist, **Sophia Lonsdale (1854–1936)**, whose clergyman father was a canon of Lichfield Cathedral, had a leisured early life. Aged thirty, the experience of helping to administer housing schemes for working people in London drew her into social work, and membership of the Charity Organisation Society. Like Clifford, she was elected a poor law guardian, in Lichfield in 1892, and had a special concern for protecting child paupers. Unlike Clifford, she was an anti-suffragist. The clergy wife and moral welfare organizer, **Edith Murdoch Davidson [née Tait], Lady Davidson of Lambeth (1858–1936)**, was both the daughter of an archbishop of Canterbury, and married to one of her father's successors. She was brought up to undertake charitable social work, which she continued as a clergy wife. Her particular concern was the moral welfare of women involved in sex work. During the First World War she set up a body to co-ordinate the 'rescue' work of Anglican diocesan organizations, and in the post war era especially promoted the idea of a single moral standard between the

genders, seeking to involve men in the moral welfare movement.

The illustrator and painter, **Alice Bolingbroke Woodward**, (1862–1951), was the daughter of the geologist and museum curator **Henry Woodward (1832–1921)**, keeper of the geological collections at the British Museum (later housed at South Kensington). From childhood she and her sisters showed artistic ability, but had to earn their own livings, so trained at art school. She became a commercial artist, contributing illustrations to children's books, most notably *The Peter Pan Picture Book* (1907), the first illustrated version of the story. She belonged to women's organizations including the Lyceum Club and the Artists' Suffrage League. The aeronaut, astronomer, and botanist, **Gertrude Bacon [married name Foggitt] (1874–1949)**, was also the daughter of a scientist. As well as being a founder member, alongside him, of the British Astronomical Association, she accompanied him on balloon ascents to observe astronomical phenomena, and took photographs for him on other scientific expeditions. Like Woodward, she needed to earn a living, and wrote popular books on mechanized flight, as well as giving public lectures. Latterly her interests turned to botany. The literary editor and writer, **Theodora Bosanquet, (1880–1961)**, was born into a clergy family with scientific interests, and graduated in geology from London University. She decided to pursue a professional career, as an

indexer and then literary secretary to Henry James, and was a civil servant in the First World War. From 1920 to 1935 she was executive secretary to the International Federation of University Women, after which she became literary editor and a director of the influential periodical, *Time and Tide*, having come to know its founder, Lady Rhondda. The women's movement organizer and suffrage campaigner,

Wilhelmena Hay [Elizabeth] Abbott [née Lamond]

(1884–1957), was born into a business family, and trained as an accountant and secretary in the early twentieth century, as well as briefly studying at University College, London. Before the First World War she was involved in suffrage activity in Scotland and London. In 1919 she became headquarters' secretary to the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, and subsequently became editor of its journal *Jus Suffragii*. In 1926 she founded with Lady Rhondda, the Open Door Council, an equal rights feminist pressure group which campaigned for employment to be open to women on the same terms as for men.

The novelist, feminist, and socialist activist, **Ethel**

Holdsworth [née Carnie], [also known as Ethel Carnie

Holdsworth] (1886–1962), was the daughter of Lancashire cotton workers, and after elementary education worked in cotton mills. Brought up in an autodidact culture, she joined the Independent Labour Party, took to writing poetry, and briefly became a socialist journalist in London and was

involved in the adult education movement for working people. From 1915 she wrote a series of well-received novels, exposing day-to-day hardships in industrial Lancashire. Her best-known novel, *This Slavery* (1925), was a Marxist-inspired critique of factory life. The missionary and Sinologist, **Evangeline Dora [Eve] Edwards (1888–1957)** was the daughter of a Methodist missionary in New Zealand. After teacher training in London, she went on to attend the United Free Church's Missionary Training College in Edinburgh as a preparation for missionary work in China, where she served from 1913 to 1920. After being awarded the first degree in Chinese by the School of Oriental Studies, London, she held academic appointments at the school. From 1939 to 1955 she was professor of Chinese there, and was the last former missionary to occupy a senior post in Chinese studies in a British university. The campaigner for mothers and their families, **Rosamond Chevallier Fisher [née Forman], Lady Fisher of Lambeth (1890–1986)**, the daughter of a clergyman and public school housemaster, also took teaching qualifications and planned to become a missionary. On her marriage to a headmaster and future archbishop of Canterbury, she instead undertook the leadership of the foremost women's organization in the Church of England, the Mothers' Union, of which she was president from 1944 to 1953. In 1961 she was created a life peer.

The update also adds the lives of three women 'co-subjects' of existing subjects in the Oxford DNB. As a result of her applications to the Royal Literary Fund for financial assistance, the children's writer, **Ann Elizabeth Oulton (b. 1789, d. ?1871)** is now identifiable as the eldest daughter of the playwright and theatre historian, Walley Chamberlain Oulton, to whose article she is now added. **Helen Mary Clegg [married name Cox] (1860-1930)**, wife of the economist and journalist, Harold Cox, provided accountancy services for women's organizations and businesses run by women. **Beatrice Rosamond Headlam [née Pennington] (1850-1935)**, the estranged wife of the Christian Socialist clergyman, Stewart Headlam, emerges as a leading member of a number of feminist organizations, and in particular a founder of the Pioneer Club for women.

Meanwhile the male connections of the goldmining industrialist and newspaper proprietor, Alice Cornwell, who made a fortune in the Australian goldfields and purchased the Sunday Times in 1887, can now be documented and added. Her son, the journalist and theatre critic, **Sydney Wentworth Carroll [real name George Frederick Francis Carl Whiteman; other name Frederick Carl] (1877-1958)** is now added as a co-subject in her article. After the breakdown of her marriage, she lived with the journalist and writer on natural history Philip Stewart Robinson, [other name: Frederick Stennard Robinson], for whom fuller life

details can now be established, and to whose article his two brothers are added as co-subjects: the journalist and naturalist, **Edward Kay Robinson (1855-1928)** and the journalist, **Sir Harry Perry Robinson (1859-1930)**.