

Oxford DNB: July 2020

Welcome to the sixty-fourth update of the *Oxford DNB*, which comprises 13 new articles, containing 14 lives, accompanied by 1 portrait likeness.

The lives, which range from Scottish early sixteenth century merchant Alison Rough to nineteenth century traveller and translator of Russian folk songs Martha Wilmot, also include a cluster illustrating the ties between Scotland and Sweden in the seventeenth century. They have been curated and edited by Dr Anders Ingram of the ODNB.

From June 2020, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*Oxford DNB*) offers biographies of 63,765 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 61,457 articles. 11,799 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

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participating British public libraries, and how to gain access to the complete dictionary, are available [here](#).

July 2020: summary of newly-added content

The lives in this month's update focus on Early Modern Women.

Amongst the most eye-catching lives are those of **Anne Herbert**

[née Parr] (c. 1515–1552), the sister of Queen Katherine Parr and

her most trusted confidant and friend. Alongside her influence and centrality at court Anne was an important patron of and

participant in the English Renaissance, as well as a prominent early devotee of the reformed religion. However, after the death of Henry

VIII, Anne's role in expediting her sister's secret marriage to Sir

Thomas Seymour also caused a permanent rift between the

protector's party and the Parr siblings, with serious political

consequences. **Jane Hogarth [née Thornhill] (d. 1789)**, was the wife

of the engraver William Hogarth (1697–1764), and a publisher and

businesswoman in her own right. Following William's death Jane

was the key publisher of his prints. The Engravers' Act of 1735 had

been in large part consequence of William's attempts to prevent the

piracy of his works, and Jane successfully lobbied parliament to

secure her exclusive rights to these works, setting an important

precedent in the ongoing debates surround copyright terms and

duration.

The two earliest lives in this release are both vowesses – that is women vowed to chastity, usually after a husband’s death – but unlike nuns, remaining formally lay. **Susan Kyngeston [née Fettyplace] (c. 1490–1540)** was from an established land-owning family in Berkshire. Following her husband’s death she entered Syon Abbey, Isleworth, and a combination of Syon documents and a network of wills allow us to reconstruct the life of this formidable woman, the matriarch of a network of related families. A similar figure is **Katherine Langley (d. 1511)**, who also took a vow of chastity upon her husband’s death. She was part of the religious and intellectual circle of the Cambridge theologian William Chubbes (c.1444–1505/6). Katherine was also an avid collector of papal indulgences and letters of co-fraternity to religious houses, and remarkably no less than twelve of her collection survive, including one printed by William Caxton at Westminster which is the earliest known example of printing in England. Scottish merchant **Alison Rough (c. 1480–1535)** is unusual among contemporary woman of middling sort in the range of surviving documents in which she appears. Her husband Jasper had been killed at the battle of Flodden in 1513, following which Alison supported her family through trade and property investments. In the early 1530s conflicts in her family over inheritances and dowry monies lead to the killing of her son in law Alexander. Alison was condemned and executed, while her daughter Katherine escaped to England. The murder became the subject of an exhibit at the

Edinburgh tourist attraction The Real Mary King's Close, from 2003 to 2017.

Margaret Holsewyther (b. c. 1504, d. after 1560) is one of the few identifiable female painters who was active in the Tudor court. Daughter of jeweller and goldsmith Henry Holsewyther and married to Flemish artist Lucas Horenbout (d. 1544), Margaret and her daughter took over her husband's workshop, and its artistic production, on his death. Her miniature portraits seem to have been used as gifts to curry political influence and favour by Katherine Parr – a strategy Elizabeth I would later also use. The gentlewoman and court poet **Lady Mary Cheke [née Hill; other married name Mackwilliam] (c. 1532–1616)** was exceptionally well connected in the Tudor court. She spent a lifetime of service to Elizabeth and played an active role in the social life of the privy chamber. A widely circulated poetic exchange with Sir John Harrington from the 1590s survives, in which she responded to the latter's mild anti-feminist epigram 'Of a Certain Man', with her own spirited 'A Certain Woman Argues Men Are Blind'.

A cluster of this month's lives focuses on the wives, widows, and mothers of Scottish military officers in Swedish service in the seventeenth century. The daughter of a family of middling sort from Fife **Margaret Forrat (b. 1624, d. 1653)** married Sir James Spens of Wormiston (d. 1632), a Scottish soldier and diplomat in

the service of the Swedish crown. Following her husband's death she corresponded with Swedish chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, pressing the Swedish Riksråd for the settlement of debts stemming from her husband's final mission to the British Isles. Following her re-marriage she relayed information concerning diplomatic meetings at the Stuart court from to Oxenstierna. Upon her death she was accorded a full state funeral at Riddarholm Church, Stockholm, the resting place of most of the Swedish monarchs.

Isobel Spens [Spence] (d. 1653), was also born in Fife and married a Scottish soldier in the Swedish service who rose to the rank of major-general. Following her husband's death she also petitioned Oxenstierna for reimbursement for her late husband's long and loyal service. Lastly, born to a Scottish father and Swedish mother, and with several male relatives in the Swedish military service

Martha [Märta] Stuart [Stewart] (1606–1653) married a French lieutenant-colonel, Anton Ydron. Following her husband's death she also petitioned Oxenstierna, however, as she was his immediate neighbour on the island of Almö, situated in Lake Mälaren, her letters have the added dimension of requests to a local magnate rather than to the chancellor to Sweden.

The final group of lives relate to eighteenth century literature and travel. **Esther Sleepe [married name Burney] (1725–1762)** is best remembered today as the wife of the musician and writer Charles Burney (1726–1814), and mother of the novelist Frances Burney (1752–1840). She was a fan maker by trade and ran a shop at

Cheapside, at the time the most exclusive shopping street in the City (as did two of her sisters Esther and Mary). Young Frances Burney was ten years old when her mother died. She and her siblings were very close to their grandmother **Frances Sleepe (b. by 1685, d. 1776)**, also a successful fan maker. Frances also married a musician, Richard Sleepe. As fan makers were generally more prosperous than musicians it is likely both Esther and Frances were the primary financial earners for their families. Diarist and travel writer **Katherine Wilmot (1773–1824)**, was born in Drogheda, Ireland. In 1801 she embarked upon a Grand Tour of France and Ireland. She met political and artistic figures, including Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet, and Angelica Kauffman; in Rome she was presented to Pope Pius. Returning home to find her sister Martha in Russia visiting Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova (1743–1810), Katherine set forth once more. Her Russian diaries and letters are an entertaining and insightful record of life in early nineteenth-century Russia. Like her sister Martha, she describes folk traditions, and collected and translated Russian folk-songs, some of which were published as appendices to Dashkova's **Memoirs (1840)**. **Martha Wilmot [married name Bradford], (1775–1873)** initially travelled to Russia to visit Dashkova on the recommendation of her cousin, staying for two years as the aging princess's closest companion. She collected Russian folk-songs, placing her among the first to translate these into English, however, perhaps her most telling intervention lay in persuading Dashkova to write her memoir.