

Oxford DNB: April 2021

Welcome to the seventy-third update of the *Oxford DNB*, which adds twelve new lives and three portrait likenesses. The newly-added biographies feature six lives key to the history of dyslexia, in laying the scientific grounds for the identification of dyslexia as a learning disorder, and in pioneering its treatment and lobbying for its recognition. The release also continues the series of nursing biographies.

From April 2021, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*Oxford DNB*) offers biographies of 64 097 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 61,771 articles. 11,801 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](#).

Introduction to the history of dyslexia lives by Margaret J. Snowling

The six lives of dyslexia pioneers included in this update highlight the multidisciplinary trajectories that brought the specific learning disorder known as dyslexia to political and societal attention. This path led to support for those with the condition, including the actor, Oliver Reed (1938-1999) who was diagnosed in the army in the late 1950s. Their work, beginning in the late Victorian period (in the case of James Hinshelwood), led to the emergence of a scientific basis for dyslexia, and to the earliest support for those with the condition. Hinshelwood and Alfred White Franklin, an ophthalmologist and a paediatrician respectively, join Macdonald Critchley (1900-1997) in the *Oxford DNB* as medical specialists who laid the groundwork for the neuroscientific understanding of dyslexia. This viewed dyslexia as a brain-based disorder with a genetic basis. In so doing, they promulgated a medical model of dyslexia that did not find favour with educationalists. However, few doubted, then or now, that the impact of dyslexia is more marked where there is educational disadvantage, and this focus on educational trajectories would characterise later research and advocacy.

Sandhya Naidoo and Tim Miles, writing before the science of reading emerged, were prominent figures in the psychology of dyslexia, which increasingly came to prominence from the 1960s. Together,

their work provided a comprehensive cognitive description of dyslexia as a language-learning or verbal difficulty that future researchers would build upon. Moreover, their clinical insights were critical to understanding how to design and deliver educational programmes to ameliorate dyslexia. Indeed, Miles and Bevé Hornsby, together with another educationalist in the *Oxford DNB*, Jean Augur (1934-1993), each developed their own version of a structured and systematic intervention programme for teaching children, and later adults, with dyslexia. They also established teacher-training programmes that would be vital to disseminating the knowledge accrued during the 1960s and 1970s. However, little of this fundamental research and practice would have reached a wide audience save for the efforts of Marion Welchman. Meantly cast as a ‘middle class mother from Bath’ upon her introduction to the dyslexia world, Welchman nevertheless established the influential British Dyslexia Association, initially as a parent support and later as a lobbying group. Her selfless and indefatigable efforts to bring awareness of dyslexia to publics and policymakers in Britain, Asia, and elsewhere, were successful steps in the campaign for its wider recognition.

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April 2021: summary of newly-added content

In 1895 **James Hinshelwood (1859-1919)**, surgeon to the Glasgow Eye Hospital, wrote a seminal paper on 'word blindness', later known as the developmental disorder, dyslexia. His interests lay particularly in the interpretation and treatment of word-blindness in children who were learning to read, and the possibility of the condition being congenital. He wrote the first landmark text on dyslexia, *Congenital Word-Blindness* (1917). In 1963, as chairman of a charity, the Invalid Children's Aid Association, the London paediatrician **Alfred White Franklin (1905-1984)** helped to establish the Word Blind Centre for Dyslexic Children where children who found learning to read especially difficult could be referred for assessment. His other concern was the recognition and prevention of child abuse, and he was a founder of the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. Through the Word Blind Centre, **(Elsie) Marion Welchman (1915-1997)** a state-registered nurse whose son had reading difficulties, found a method of remediation and a teacher, with remarkable results. She went on to establish the Bath Association for Dyslexia, to bring together parents and teachers. This led in 1972 to the creation of the British Dyslexia Association, which she ran as honorary secretary and which became a model for other associations around the world. After bringing up four children, **Bevé Hornsby (1915-2004)** began a new career in her early fifties as a speech therapist, and took up a position in the Word Blind Clinic at St Bartholomew's Hospital. At the Dyslexia Clinic, as it was renamed, she wrote the core text for therapists, and went on to do doctoral research, which demonstrated that intervention for dyslexia was

effective. The psychologist **Thomas Richard [Tim] Miles (1923-2008)**, who taught at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, observed and worked with children who exhibited problems in learning to read. He helped to found the British Dyslexia Association as a campaigning body and also the Bangor Dyslexia Unit, which employed tutors to work with children across Gwynedd. He developed diagnostic exercises and wrote a series of monographs to disseminate his research findings. During her early career as a schoolteacher, **Sandhya Naido (1922-2017)** developed an interest in children who failed to learn to read. After study for a research degree she became director of the Word Blind Centre and wrote a monograph, *Specific Dyslexia*, based on her observations of the disorder. She returned to education as headteacher of Dawn House School, which provided intensive therapy for children with severe language disorders, and where she studied the outcomes of those who had been pupils there.

Trained at the Westminster Lying-in Hospital, London, **Elizabeth Maurice (1775/6-1835)** was appointed chief midwife of the Birmingham General Dispensary in 1819. She ran the midwifery service for sixteen years, oversaw a rapid increase in the number of deliveries and was evidently highly regarded, receiving an obituary which referred to the confidence which both the medical staff and the dispensary governors had in her. The Belfast-born nurse, **Isabella Barbour [Ella] Pirrie (1857-1929)** trained at Liverpool and Berlin

before being appointed in 1884 superintendent of the Belfast Union Infirmary, a poor law institution. Encouraged by Florence Nightingale, she developed nursing training there and at the Church of Scotland Deaconess Hospital, Edinburgh, where she became matron in 1894. In 2007 a statue of her was unveiled at Belfast City Hospital on the site of the former Union Infirmary. The family of **Annie Catherine Brewster (1858-1902)** moved from the Caribbean, where she had been born in St Vincent, to London. She trained as a nurse at the London Hospital, where she spent fourteen years as nurse in charge of the ophthalmic wards, and gained the high opinion of the matron, Eva Lückes. Her career demonstrated that Black nurses were employed in British hospitals before the National Health Service, although barriers remained in some hospitals as late as the 1930s. Born in Maryhill, Glasgow, **Louisa Jordan (1878-1915)** began her working life as a gas mantle maker, but changed career in her twenties to become a nurse, gaining experience at a fever hospital in Lanarkshire, a poor law infirmary at Manchester, and the Deaconess Hospital, Edinburgh before qualifying as a Queen's Nurse. During the First World War she enlisted with the Scottish Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service, and died of typhus while nursing wounded troops in Serbia. During the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 an emergency critical care hospital in Glasgow was named after her. Trained as a state registered nurse at Bury General Hospital, **Robert [Bob] Tiffany (1942-1993)**, moved to the Royal Marsden Hospital, London to undertake one of the first courses in cancer nursing. In 1976 he became chief nursing officer at the Royal Marsden where he

developed cancer nursing as a recognized specialism and edited the first British textbooks on cancer nursing.

Finally, the release includes the life of the athletics coach, **Francis John [Frank] Horwill (1927-2012)**, who developed a love of running at school and in the boy scouts. The 1960 Rome Olympics inspired him to train other runners and in 1963, at a time when British middle-distance running was at a low ebb, he founded the British Milers Club (BMC). Such was the success of his methods – notably the ‘five pace training system’ – that in the 1980s BMC members held every world record between 800 metres and 5000 metres.