

## Oxford DNB: December 2021

Welcome to the eighty-first update of the *Oxford DNB*, which adds twelve new articles. The release has a special focus on lives with a global dimension, connecting the British Isles with the West Indies, Africa, the Levant, India, Australia, and mainland Europe.

From December 2021, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*Oxford DNB*) offers biographies of 64,173 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 61,842 articles. 11,860 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

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

### **December 2021: summary of newly-added content**

A reference group article on **Officials and investors in the Royal African Company (1672–1750)** surveys some fifty lives among the most prominent of those who invested in the Royal African Company from the granting of its charter in 1672 until the company was formally dissolved in 1750. The Royal African Company, which boasted a charter granting it a monopoly over all English trade from modern day Morocco to the Cape of Good Hope, was the single largest contributor to the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans, shipping in the region of 150,000–160,000 captives between 1672 and 1731. The Scottish planter and slave owner **Ninian Home (1732–1795)** was one of the first British planters to settle in Grenada, where he acquired estates and enslaved people, and in 1792 became the colony's governor. He antagonized the Francophone community, and was killed during the uprising of the free mixed-race inhabitants led by Julien Fédon.

The Irish naval surgeon, **John White (1755/6–1832)**, was highly regarded and appointed as senior surgeon to the experimental convict settlement in New South Wales, sailing on what became known as the 'first fleet' in 1787. He kept

abreast of new surgical developments, demonstrated exceptional administrative skills, both at sea and at the colony, particularly in combating outbreaks of disease. His *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* was published in 1790. The army surgeon **Edward Laing (d. 1797)**, who accompanied the 'third fleet' to New South Wales in 1791, wrote a detailed account of medical conditions on board as well as the scurvy outbreak at Sydney Cove. On a subsequent posting to the West Indies, he described the outbreak of yellow fever in the British garrison, and himself died of fever in Grenada. Between 1851 and 1853 the army officer and diarist, **James Maurice Primrose (1819-1892)** took part in the campaign which drove the Xhosa from their lands in the Eastern Cape of South Africa to allow British settlement. Most of his military career was spent in administrative roles in India until in 1880, with no recent battleground experience, he was placed in command of the British force at Kandahar, Afghanistan. Not expecting a rebel attack, he was unprepared for the ensuing siege of the garrison, and attempts to break out were a failure. On its relief, he was removed from his command.

The Levant consul, **Thomas Backhouse Sandwith (1831-1900)** served in Syria and Palestine before in 1865 becoming British vice-consul in Cyprus, where as well as dealing with Ottoman officials, he collected antiquities and took the first meteorological readings. His despatches contain important

evidence for the state of the island. As consul in Crete from 1870 to 1885 he brokered a pact between the Cretan Christian leaders and the Ottoman authorities. His final postings were in the French protectorate of Tunis and in Odessa. While a student at Cambridge, **Northcote Whitridge Thomas (1868-1936)** was drawn to folklore studies and anthropology, but as anthropology was not yet established in British universities he studied in France. From 1901 he held a position at the Anthropological Institute in London from where he contributed to anthropological debates of the period and edited the book series, *The Native Races of the British Empire*. During a period when the value of anthropology was being urged by its proponents as of value for colonial governance, he became the first formally appointment government anthropologist when the Colonial Office employed him to conduct an anthropological survey of 'native customs and laws' in British West Africa. He undertook surveys between 1909 and 1915 in the face of scepticism among colonial officials as to the value of work conducted by professional anthropologists, though his methods based on the logics of local political and ritual institutions were regarded as vindicated by later events. The son of a colonial administrator in Mauritius and the Seychelles, **Sir Edward Arthur Henry Blunt (1877-1941)** gained first place in the Indian Civil Service competitive examination and was posted to the United Provinces. In 1920 he was appointed financial secretary and he was confronted

with a slump in agriculture which led him to investigate debt and the credit and banking systems. Through this and his work on the census he became regarded as the best-informed British administrator in the United Provinces, and he went on to publish a major study of the caste system in northern India.

Born in Goa, in Portuguese India, **Aleixo Caetano**

**Lactâncio de Sousa (1883–1958)** studied medicine in Bombay before, in 1919, opening a private clinic in Nairobi serving the Indian community with his wife **Mary Matilda de Sousa [née Pereira] (1890–1953)**, born in Bombay, where she had qualified in medicine. She was the first Asian female doctor in Nairobi—possibly even in east Africa. They both worked to improve medical services in British East Africa. Together they founded a maternity hospital and training school for midwives. She particularly took to the challenge of improving the rudimentary medical facilities for Asian women. He was politically active as a member of the East African Indian National Congress, an interest which Mary de Sousa shared, and of the Goan Overseas Association and encouraged the establishment and maintenance of Indian and Goan schools in British East Africa.

The German artist and illustrator, **John Heartfield [formerly Helmut Herzfeld] (1891–1968)** who trained as a typographer in Munich, adopted an anglicized form of his name in protest at anti-British campaigns in Germany during

the First World War. In 1916 he began the photomontage work for which he became famous during the Weimar era but, a communist, was threatened by the Nazis and fled to England in 1938. During a twelve-year exile he was an organizer of the Free German League of Culture and gained a position as a cartoonist and typographer for Penguin Books. He returned to Germany in 1950 and was eventually adopted by the GDR, which promoted him as a 'cultural ambassador'. He made a final journey to London in 1967 to plan a retrospective of his work at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. The museum curator and archaeologist, **Richard David Barnett** (1909–1986), himself the son of a distinguished orientalist, joined the department of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities at the British Museum, and deployed his remarkable linguistic talents at Bletchley Park during the Second World War. In 1955 he became keeper of the newly created department of western Asiatic antiquities at the British Museum that covered the whole of the Middle East plus Phoenician settlements in the western Mediterranean from Neolithic times until the beginning of the Islamic period in the seventh century AD. The museum's unique collection of Assyrian reliefs was entirely reorganized, and the revamped galleries were opened by Prince Charles in 1970 to great acclaim. Much of his own scholarly work centred on the Assyrian reliefs. He shared his father's interest in Anglo-Jewish history and published a catalogue of the collections of the Jewish Museum in London. The

linguistic scholar, teacher, and public servant, **John Leslie Melville Trim (1924-2013)**, taught phonetics at University College, London and at Cambridge where he became the first director of the department of linguistics in Cambridge and one of the 'founding fathers of applied linguistics'. In 1978 he became director of the national Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) in London. His legacy was his contribution to the language work of the Council of Europe, which changed the ways in which educators think about language teaching and learning, not least the use of language in direct person-to-person communication. He was co-author of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), a non-prescriptive reference tool to assist language educators, offering a shared terminology for the language profession, a rich descriptive scheme, and a six-level scale of illustrative descriptors of language proficiency.