

Oxford DNB: January 2022

Welcome to the eighty-second update of the *Oxford DNB*, which adds ten new articles and eleven new lives. The release has a special focus on music and art, particularly illustrators and cartoonists.

From January 2022, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*Oxford DNB*) offers biographies of 64,184 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 61,852 articles. 11,860 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 2022: summary of newly-added content

A reference group article on **Contributors to the *Tatler*, *Spectator*, and *Guardian* periodicals (act. 1709–1714)**

links thirty *Oxford DNB* articles, whose subjects created the eighteenth century's most popular and influential periodical essays. This group of London wits, minor writers, and members of the letter-writing public at large was brought together by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, and their essays were first distributed as newspaper-like broadsheets and later anthologized in multi-volume book format. The significance of the three periodicals to which they contributed is seen to lie in constructing a model of English character, defending new urbane forms of sociability, advancing an agenda for the reformation of manners and language, and pioneering theatrical and literary criticism. Furthermore, they were credited with bringing knowledge previously confined to books, to a wider reading public in clubs, coffee houses, and other places of polite sociability.

The earliest of the lives in music is the cloth merchant **William Priestley (1779–1860)** from Sowerby, Halifax, Yorkshire. He developed an enthusiasm for music while living with an uncle and unmarried aunts who, like his

mother, had been taught music by the first organist to be appointed at Halifax parish church. A cultured man, interested in antiquities and place-name etymology, and an early member of the Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society, he is generally regarded as the founder in 1818 of what was later named the Halifax Choral Society, which became the longest surviving amateur choral society in Britain with an unbroken record of performance. The opera singer **Alfred Piccaver (1884–1958)**, born in Long Sutton, Lincolnshire, was the son of a brewer's labourer. He moved to the USA with his parents in very early childhood, and was a boy soprano in Albany, New York. He made his reputation in Prague before appearing at the Vienna Court Theatre, in 1912, where he was immensely popular and gave fifty performances a season over twenty-seven years. He returned to Britain in 1937 and lived there until 1955, but moved back to Vienna where he died and was given a state funeral. Although he spent less than twenty years in Britain, Piccaver ranks as one of the great English singers. The conductor, broadcaster, and music critic, **Trevor Barry Harvey (1911–1989)** became assistant chorus master at the BBC from 1935 to 1942. He guided Benjamin Britten's professional and personal life from their first meeting in the early 1930s to 1955, his own domestic arrangement bringing together Britten and the BBC Chorus singer Peter Pears. As a freelance conductor from 1946, he championed British music, presenting premières of works by Richard Arnell, Phyllis

Tate, Kenneth Leighton, Geoffrey Bush, Peter Racine Fricker, Alun Hoddinott, and Bruce Montgomery (the crime writer Edmund Crispin), as well as Britten. He later became notable for conducting concerts for children.

The lives of two founder members of the psychedelic or progressive rock band, Traffic, which formed in 1967 and reaching its creative peak with the album *John Barleycorn Must Die* (1970), are included in this update. Born in Edgbaston, the musician and songwriter, **Christopher Gordon Blandford [Chris] Wood** (1944–1983), attended Stourbridge College of Art, and claimed that his musical education in blues, jazz, and modern jazz came through Birmingham's record shops. He was a sought-after session musician, but following Traffic's break-up in 1974 he declined into addictions to drugs and alcohol. The musician, singer, and songwriter **Nicola James [Jim] Capaldi (1944–2005)**, born at Evesham, Worcestershire, bought his first drum kit from his earnings as an apprentice factory engineer. He found his niche with Traffic, the group he was associated with for his entire career, and became its lyricist.

This release includes the lives of four prolific contributors to *Punch*. Born in Sheffield, the cartoonist, painter, and etcher, **James Henry Dowd (1883–1956)** started work as an illustrator for Yorkshire newspapers. His cartoons appeared in *Punch* from 1906 to 1948. After moving to London he also produced political cartoons for the *Evening Standard*. His

brother, the cartoonist, illustrator, and poster designer, **Leonard Philip [Leo] Dowd (1891–1947)** attended Sheffield School of Art and worked for the local press before following his brother London. His cartoons appeared in *Punch* between 1916 and 1938. The cartoonist, illustrator, and writer **Norman Arthur Mansbridge (1911–1993)** studied at Heatherley's Art School in London, and spent several years in advertising before becoming a freelance cartoonist. He contributed more than 700 drawings to *Punch* from 1937. The cartoonist **Alexander Steel [Alex] Graham (1917–1991)**, born near the River Clyde in Partick, Glasgow, studied at Glasgow School of Art. After war service, he became a full-time cartoonist in 1945 and moved to London, contributing the first of more than 800 cartoons for *Punch* in 1946. He began contributing to the *New Yorker* in 1953, notably 'The Eavesdropper' series (the first series in the magazine by a British artist). His most famous creation was 'Fred Basset—the Hound That's Almost Human', which began in the *Daily Mail* on 9 July 1963, and continued to run long after his death. The strip was syndicated worldwide to nearly 200 papers.

Finally, the gallery owner, art collector, and artist (**Edward**) **Eardley Knollys (1902–1991)** and the artist and gallery manager, **Frank Mundy Coombs (1906–1941)** became personal and professional partners after Knollys bought the Storrans Gallery in London, in 1936, which Coombs had

joined in the previous year. The gallery's more than sixty varied exhibitions displayed the men's wide-ranging social reach as much as their increasingly refined artistic judgement and skill in seeking out and assembling works.

After Coombs's death in an air raid, Knollys was employed by the National Trust, for which between 1946 and 1957 he was regional representative for south-west England and Wales, when his friend Lees-Milne was secretary of the trust. Knollys secured a range of different properties for the trust, among them Avebury Circle in Wiltshire (1942), Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire (1944), Montacute in Somerset (1946), Charlecote Park in Warwickshire (1946), Stourhead in Wiltshire (1946), Cotehele in Cornwall (1947), Arlington Court in Devon (1947), Lytes Cary in Somerset (1948), and Dunsland House in Devon (1954).