

Oxford DNB: October 2021

Welcome to the seventy-ninth update of the *Oxford DNB*, which adds nine new articles, comprising nine new lives, accompanied by two portrait likenesses. The new articles have a special focus on people of Black/African descent who have had an impact in and on the UK.

From October 2021, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*Oxford DNB*) offers biographies of 64,159 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 61,828 articles. 11,812 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

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October 2021: summary of newly-added content

A gravestone placed at Sunderland Point, near Lancaster, in 1796, marks the burial sixty years earlier of a young man, or youth, of African descent, **Samboo [Sambo]** (d. 1736?), a servant on board a ship, who died within days of arriving in Britain. Although little is known of Samboo himself, his grave has become representative of those whose lives were destroyed by the transatlantic slave trade.

Samuel Barber (1783–1828), the son of [Francis Barber](#), the black, formerly enslaved servant of Dr Samuel Johnson, settled in the Staffordshire Potteries, where he was employed as a potter's printer. After a conversion experience, Barber quickly joined the Primitive Methodist Connexion, whose first chapel opened at Tunstall, in the Potteries, in 1811. As a preacher on the Tunstall circuit, he was known for his biting sermons. Contemporaries noted his part-African ancestry, and he seems to have internalized concerns linking race and sinfulness. **Louisa [Luisa] Calderon**, (1785x8–1825), a young woman born in Trinidad of part-African ancestry, came to Britain in 1806 to give evidence in the trial of the repressive governor of Trinidad, Sir Thomas Picton, who in 1801 had ordered her torture to extract a confession. Her appearances at the Central Criminal Court in Picton's trials (he was retried in 1808) caused a sensation. She spent some years in Britain, having been taken up by the family of the Ayrshire landowner, William Fullarton, who investigated the charges against Picton. After William Fullarton's death she returned to Trinidad where she died in obscurity. The African-American fugitive slave, lay preacher, and autobiographer, **James Alfred Johnson** (1847–1914) arrived in Liverpool in 1862, having escaped enslavement in North

Carolina during the American Civil War. He made a living as a busker and sailor, before settling in Oldham as an ironworker. Undergoing an evangelical conversion, he became a preacher and wrote a spiritual autobiography, which was posthumously published.

Born in Sierra Leone, the son of a headmistress and grandson of a formerly enslaved African, the author and barrister, **Augustus Boyle Chamberlayne Merriman-Labor** (1877–1919) used the pseudonym, 'An Africanised Englishman', when he published an account of the 1898 hut tax war in which he had served as a volunteer. He arrived in London in 1904, to study law, and went on to publish accounts of life in the imperial capital, including a satire on British life, *Britons through Negro Spectacles*. He died in Lambeth in 1919. The bus and taxi driver, **Joseph Alan [Joe] Clough** (1885–1976), born in Kingston, Jamaica, arrived in London early in 1906 and in 1908 was taken on as a driver by the London General Omnibus Company. He was almost certainly the first black bus driver in London, half a century before the more familiar and extensive recruitment of black conductors and drivers by London Transport in the 1950s. He volunteered for the army in the First World War and served as a motor ambulance driver on the western front, after which he settled in Bedford first as a bus driver and later as a self-employed taxi driver. His experiences over sixty years provided material for a sociological study of race relations in modern Britain. The nurse leader **Kofoworola Abeni Pratt** (1914/15–1992), born in Lagos, Nigeria, followed her husband to

London in 1946, where she trained as a nurse at St Thomas's Hospital. Qualifying as a state registered nurse in 1949, she received a Nightingale Fund grant to take the Royal College of Nursing ward sister course before becoming a staff nurse at Guy's Hospital. The training that she underwent prepared her for her nurse leader role on her return to Nigeria in 1954, where she became known as the 'African Nightingale'. The air force officer and barrister, **John Henry Clavell [Johnny] Smythe** (1915–1996), was born into a distinguished Creole family in Sierra Leone, where he was a civil servant before volunteering for the RAF in 1941 when he was among six Sierra Leonean volunteer reserves for the RAF. Selected as flight navigator with 623 squadron, he completed twenty-six missions before his aircraft was shot down near Mannheim in November 1943. Liberated from a prisoner of war camp in 1945, he was attached to the Colonial Office as liaison and welfare officer for colonial servicemen. In his role as a welfare officer, he organized Caribbean passengers aboard the *Empire Windrush* in 1948, which signalled the migration of Caribbean people to Britain. He became a barrister, married a nurse from Grenada, who had trained in London, and returned to Sierra Leone, where he practiced law, but in retirement moved back to Britain, where he lived at Thame, Oxfordshire. Born in Kingston, Jamaica, the playwright **Barrington John [Barry] Reckord** (1926–2011) was awarded Jamaica's prestigious Issa scholarship which enabled him to travel to Britain in 1950 to read English, then theology, at Cambridge. He was a teacher in London secondary schools when he began writing plays, the first of which, *Della* was

presented in 1954. Renamed *Flesh to a Tiger*, the play was produced at the Royal Court theatre in 1958, making Reckford the first post-war black dramatist to have a play produced in London's West End. He went on to write another four plays for the Royal Court between then and 1974, as well as plays for tv, but his ambitions to earn a living as a playwright were largely unfulfilled. A Barry Reckford bursary to encourage new playwrights, open to black, Asian, and minority artists, was founded in 2012.