

From August 2018, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford DNB) offers biographies of 60,664 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 62,910 articles. 11,557 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

The August 2018 adds twenty-seven articles (including one reference group article), containing twenty-six biographies, accompanied by ten portrait likenesses. The particular focus is on women and Parliament in the period after 1918 when women's suffrage was (partially) gained, and when women could stand for parliament for the first time. Their biographies have been curated by Dr Mari Takayanagi, senior archivist at the Parliamentary Archives, whose introduction to them is below.

Introduction to the update by Dr Mari Takayanagi

It has been a very great pleasure to be Advisory Editor on this new release. Having done my own PhD on the subject of Parliament and women in the early twentieth century, I was well aware of how enormously helpful it was as a historian to find an entry in the Oxford DNB for a woman connected with Parliament, and how frustrating it was to find occasional omissions – I particularly remember my dismay on discovering that Beatrice Wright, the first woman to give birth while a sitting MP, was missing. This release goes a long way to rectifying such omissions. Following much investigation by volunteers for the Vote 100 project in Parliament to confirm which former women MPs and Peers were definitely deceased and for how long (not nearly as straightforward as it might seem!), I am delighted to say there is now an Oxford DNB entry not only for Beatrice Wright but also for every eligible woman MP elected before 1997 and woman life Peer appointed before 1997.

Furthermore, the Oxford DNB has taken a very commendably open attitude to including women other than MPs and Peers who have contributed in important ways to Parliament, politics, and public life. This release includes a wide variety of such women; Parliamentary candidates, Parliamentary staff, and previously overlooked suffrage campaigners. There are also women who, although best-known for being wives of Prime Ministers, turn out on closer inspection to be significant in their own right.

It has been particularly rewarding to examine the brave and pioneering seventeen women who stood in the 1918 general election. Of the five previously omitted, it was immediately clear to me that Winifred Carney, Norah Dacre Fox, and Millicent Mackenzie were prominent individuals who warranted Oxford DNB entries; but it only gradually became clear while writing the reference group article that Alice Lucas and Janet McEwan also had significant personal stories which merit more attention. Finally, as a women member of staff working in Parliament myself, I am very happy to bring May Court, House of Lords Accountant, and Jean Winder, first female Hansard reporter, to greater public prominence. Parliament could not function without such women, who are all too often overlooked by history; the Oxford DNB is much richer for their inclusion.

--Mari Takayanagi

The statute allowing women to be Members of Parliament passed on 21 November 1918, only shortly before the general election held on 14 December. The seventeen women candidates who stood are reviewed in a reference group article on **Women candidates at the 1918 General Election**. Twelve of them already have entries in the Dictionary, and entries are now added on the other five. The first Conservative woman to stand as a parliamentary candidate, **Alice Theresa Lucas [*née* Stern], (1853–1924)**, a member of the Stern banking dynasty, came forward for Kennington after her husband, who had been nominated to contest the seat, died shortly before the election. The Liberal suffragist **Janet Landells (Jenny) McEwan [*née* Selkirk] (1860–1920)**, the daughter of a leading Glasgow accountant, stood at Enfield, following the withdrawal of her husband through ill-health, and the death in the influenza epidemic of his successor as Liberal candidate. The Cardiff educationist and suffragist **(Hettie) Millicent Mackenzie [*née* Hughes] (1863–1942)**, who had been the first woman to achieve professorial status in Wales, contested the newly-created University of Wales seat as a Labour candidate. The former suffragette **Norah Dacre Fox [*née* Doherty; *later name* Elam], (1878–1961)**, who had been imprisoned three times for militant activity, stood as an Independent candidate for Richmond, Surrey, where she came second. Secretary to the Irish Textile Workers' Union and Irish republican, **(Maria) Winifred, [Winnie] (1887–1943) Carney [*married name* McBride]**, who had been imprisoned for her part in the Easter Rising, was selected by Sinn Féin to contest the staunchly Unionist constituency of Belfast Victoria.

None of these was elected, but eight lives of women who subsequently sat in the House of Commons are added in this update. Like the first woman to sit in the House of Commons (Nancy Astor in 1919), **Beatrice Frederika Wright [*née* Clough; *other married name* Rathbone], Lady Wright (1910–2003)**, was American. She was elected unopposed as a Conservative for Bodmin in 1941, succeeding her air force officer husband, who had been killed in action in the previous year. She married again and when her daughter was born, in April 1943, she became the first sitting MP to give birth. Another Conservative, **Joan Mary Quennell (1923–2006)**, a businesswoman and West Sussex county councillor with a particular interest in technical education, sat for Petersfield from 1960 to 1974. Long service as a Labour party member of Birmingham city council preceded the election, in 1970, of **Doris Mary Gertrude Fisher [*née* Satchwell], Baroness Fisher of Rednal (1919–2005)** to represent the Birmingham Ladywood constituency in 1970. Boundary changes caused her not to stand again in February 1974. She was made a life peer, and in 1975 she became a member of the European parliament. A Labour party member since 1941, and a councillor since 1945, the social worker **Millie Miller [*née* Haring] (1922–1977)** was elected for Redbridge-Ilford North in October 1974. Also a social worker, **Sheila Rosemary Rivers Wright (1925–2013)** joined the Labour party in 1946, and was a Birmingham councillor for over twenty years before winning the Birmingham Handsworth seat at the 1979 general election. Having spent most of her life in the Gorbals area of Glasgow, **Helen Margaret McElhone [*née* Brown] (1933–2013)** put herself forward for the Labour nomination for the seat in 1982, following the sudden death of her husband who had represented the constituency since 1969, and was elected at a by-election. Constituency boundary changes led to her displacement at the general election in the following year. A full-time union official for the National Union of Public Employees, **Rachel Anne Squire (1954–2006)** won the Labour party nomination for Dunfermline West against four male rivals for the seat, which she held from 1992 until her death. The economist, **(Sybil) Judith Chaplin [*née* Schofield; *other married name* Walpole], (1939–1993)**, an adviser to the chancellor of the exchequer since

1988, was made head of the prime minister's political office by John Major in 1990, and in 1992 was elected as a Conservative for Newbury. Her untimely death in the following year shocked Westminster.

This year is the sixtieth anniversary of the creation, in 1958, of life peerages which for the first time enabled women to sit in the House of Lords. Five lives of women peers are added in this update. Born in London's East End, **Beatrice [Beattie] Plummer [née Lapsker], Baroness Plummer (1903–1972)** was married to a Labour MP and successful newspaper executive, having both worked on the publications of the Independent Labour Party in the 1920s. They had business links with Eastern Europe, and belonged to Harold Wilson's inner circle, and Wilson had her created a life peer in 1965. The former MP **Baroness Fisher of Rednal**, made a life peer by Wilson in 1974, is mentioned above. Another life peer created after Wilson came to power in 1974 was **Margaret Rosalind Delacourt-Smith [née Hando; other married names Smith, Blackton], Baroness Delacourt-Smith (1916–2010)**, whose elevation to the House of Lords followed the tragic death of her husband, a life peer, former MP and trade union general secretary, while addressing the House in 1972. They had both been members of the Fabian society. A Labour member of Cambridge city council, and Cambridgeshire county council, **Nora Ratcliff David [née Blakesley], Baroness David (1913–2009)** was appointed in 1978 by James Callaghan to the House of Lords, where she was opposition spokesperson on education. A hands-on farmer, who ran her family's estate in Scotland, and for over forty years an officer in the Girl Guides Association, **Elizabeth Patricia Carnegie, Baroness Carnegie of Lour (1925–2010)** chaired the education committee of the Tayside regional council and the Scottish Manpower services commission. Wanting more education specialists in the House of Lords, Margaret Thatcher made her a life peer in 1982.

Three of the women included in this update were close to the centre of power through marriage to the prime minister. Marrying when her husband was still a young solicitor in north Wales, **Dame Margaret Lloyd George [née Owen] (1866–1941)** was resident in Downing Street for some fourteen years (1908–22), and was appointed a dame of the recently-created Order of the British Empire in 1920 for her wartime charity work. She was active in Liberal politics, supported women's suffrage (but not the suffragettes), had a particular interest in the women's temperance movement, and in 1919 became the first woman magistrate to serve in Wales. From a well-connected literary and military family, **Annie Vere [Anne] Chamberlain (1882–1967)** married into the Birmingham Chamberlain dynasty at a relatively late age, and only then became much involved in politics through the Conservative Women's Association. She became a centre of international attention during the Munich crisis in 1938. Brought up a Conservative, **Violet Helen Attlee [née Millar], Countess Attlee (1895–1965)**, ran the household during her Labour husband's early political career, to which she contributed by driving him to meetings (she was known as a feisty and accident-prone motorist) but assumed a higher profile during his premiership, promoting non-political causes mainly as a fund-raiser.

Four lives of contemporaries of the 1918 candidates represent the suffrage generation. The Armagh-born daughter of a Congregationalist minister **Mary Jane Ward [née Martin] (1851–1933)** taught moral sciences at Newnham College, Cambridge, became secretary of the Cambridge Women's Suffrage Association, and took part in the suffrage pilgrimage to London in 1913. Resident for most of her life in Tunbridge Wells, **Amelia Scott, (1860–1952)** took a leading part in welfare work there, and through her involvement in the National Union of

Women Workers became drawn into the suffrage movement and, like Ward, took part in the 1913 pilgrimage. In 1919 she was elected a councillor in Tunbridge Wells. A former schoolteacher, **Mary Ellen Cottrell [née Bryan] (1868–1969)**, settled in the Bournville area of Birmingham where she went on to hold a management position in the co-operative movement. In 1917 she became the first woman Labour party member of Birmingham city council. In 1922 she was the first woman elected a director of the Co-operative Wholesale Society. Another former schoolteacher, **(Marie) Cécile Matheson (1874–1950)** moved to Birmingham where she became warden of the Birmingham Women's Settlement in 1910, and became involved in social welfare work, with a particular interest in social work training. In 1910 she was among the social workers who signed an open letter to the Prime Minister in support of women's suffrage.

Finally, the update adds the lives of two women who made professional careers in the Palace of Westminster. In 1918 **Hannah Frances Mary [May] Court (1880–1945)**, was appointed as a 'lady clerical assistant' to the House of Lords, where her father was head of the accounting and copying department. Following his retirement in 1919 she subsequently became head of the department (1927) running an all-female staff and holding one of the high administrative posts in the House of Lords. **Florence May [Jean] Winder [née Hayward, other married name Hawke], (1909–2006)**, trained as a secretary and developed remarkably rapid shorthand reporting skills. Widowed in 1941 (like Beatrice Wright) when her husband was killed on active service, she was appointed a temporary reporter on House of Commons Hansard (1944), and in 1945 became the first permanent woman Hansard reporter in Parliament. After a long battle to secure equal pay with her male colleagues, she resigned in 1960, the next woman reporter not being appointed until 1968.

The Oxford DNB is updated regularly throughout the year, giving you access to the most up-to-date and accurate information available. Full access to all biographies is available by subscription.