

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

What is the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography?

The Oxford DNB is an illustrated collection of more than 50,000 specially written biographies of the people who shaped all aspects of Britain's past.

Getting Started

[Access the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#) You will need to enter your Open University Computer Username ([OUCU](#)) and password to use this service.

You can use the biographies in three ways: by searching, browsing or using themes. Each of these options are available by clicking on the tabs on the sand-coloured bar that appears on every page.

Search is the most important mode.

You can use the **Quick Search** box, which appears at the top right of almost every page in the dictionary as well as in the main body of the search pages. Use the dropdown arrow to choose to search either for a *person* or a word or phrase in the *full text*.

Person

If you are searching for a *person*:

- Enter the name in natural order, e.g. **John Smith**
- Use surname, initial(s) and surname, or forename and surname e.g. **Webb, B Well, or Beatrice Webb**
- Searches aren't case-sensitive, and you don't need to type accents e.g. **john of gaunt, Du Pre**
- You will find people with aristocratic titles e.g. **earl of essex**
- You don't need to know what someone is called in the dictionary e.g. **William the conqueror** finds **William I**

Full text

If you are searching the *full text*:

- **Quick Search** gives an exact match, so if you enter more than one word, you will search for that exact phrase, for example new world
- Searches aren't case sensitive i.e. **new world** or **New World** or **new World**
- You find only the exact word that you searched for.

Wildcards

If you wish to widen the scope of your search, you can use the ? and * wildcards in most non-numeric search fields:

- ? represents any single character: **d?g** will find **dog**, **dig**, and **dug**
- * represents any number of characters: **d*g** will find **dog**, **dig**, and **dug**, as well as **darling**, **doing**, **during**, etc.

Wildcards will not work:

- in **Quick Search** when you are searching **text**
- in any text search field using the **exact** match setting. If you want to use wildcards, change the setting to **all**.

To access other search options, including people search and image search click on the **Search** tab at the top of the screen.

People

If you are searching for groups of people:

Click on **people search** for a range of different search criteria, e.g. **Life dates = alive between 1700 and 1800** and **Place = Edinburgh** and **Text search = any words of apothecary or apothecaries** will find all those professionals in the 18thC who trained as apothecaries, or were members of the Society of Apothecaries, who had a connection with Edinburgh.

There are also options to search for groups of people, references, contributors, and images.

Working with Search Results

Click on the name link to view the full record. Follow **in-text links** to link to other biographical entries within the database. Other **major linked biographies** are listed in the left of the screen. **Important themes** within a person's life may also be followed within the left hand frame. Entries include **illustrations** wherever possible, and there are links to other resources such as the National Register of Archives, National Portrait Gallery and the Royal Historical Society Bibliography.

Printing and E-mailing Search Results

- Print an article by clicking the **print** icon at the far left of the grey bar.
- A printer-friendly version of the article will appear. Use your browser's print function to print. Page numbers are added to the print-out by your browser. Check your browser's print settings if page numbers do not appear.
- Email an article by clicking on the **email** icon on the grey bar.

- When you click on the email icon, a form will appear, with fields for the recipient's name and address, your own name and address, and a text field for any message you would like to add.
- Use the **buttons** at the foot of the form to choose how to send the article.
- If you choose to include the biography text in your email, you will send the complete text of the article, along with its references section, with simplified formatting. If the article includes an illustration, it will not be included.
- If you choose to **send a link** to the article, you will send a special URL in your email. This link allows the recipient who clicks on it to see the article exactly as it appears in the dictionary. The recipient does not need to be a subscriber to the dictionary. The link will work for five days after you send it.

Further Help

The database provides **Help** via a link at the top of its pages.