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**Oxford Dictionary of National Biography**  
**Colin Matthew and Brian Harrison (editors)**  
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It is hard not to love the *ODNB*. With some 55,000 entries on individuals who have shaped British life from the fourth century BC to the year 2002 and written by some 10,000 contributors, it is one of the great research tools of British academia. The printed edition is beautifully typeset and bound, but sadly the price is beyond most private budgets and the shelf space needed (3.6 metres) beyond that available in most houses. However, it is also available online for an annual subscription of £195 (+VAT) or £50 (+VAT) for three months. And the good news is that many public libraries in England (and several elsewhere in the UK) subscribe to it and it can be accessed at home using a local library's own subscription (to find out how see: <http://www.oup.com/oxforddnb/info/freeodnb/libraries/>). The online edition is fully searchable by word, name, place and almost any other way you would wish to search. This heightens its value and allows all kinds of fascinating interconnections to emerge.

Because of its range it is also one of the most important recent works on British Brethren history. The table below gives the results of the present reviewer's trawl for those who were, at least at some point in their lives, a member of the Brethren:

Howard, Luke	1772-1864	manufacturing chemist & meteorologist
Hughes, Hugh	1790-1863	painter & engraver
Linnell, John	1792-1882	landscape & portrait painter
Groves, Anthony Norris	1795-1853	missionary & Brethren founder
Wilson [née Cooke], Mary Anne	c.1795- c.1861	missionary
Bulteel, Henry Bellenden	1800-1866	religious controversialist & Church of England seceder
Darby, John Nelson	1800-1882	Brethren member
Maw, John Hornby	1800-1885	entrepreneur & artist
Kitto, John	1804-1854	writer & missionary

Parnell, John Vesey, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Baron Congelton	1805-1883	evangelist
Epps, John	1805-1869	physician & phrenologist
Wigram, George Vicesimus,	1805-1879	writer & lexicographer
Newman, Francis William	1805-1897	classical scholar & moral philosopher
Müller, George Friedrich	1805-1898	preacher & philanthropist
Borlase, Henry	1806-1835	Plymouth Brother
Gosse [née Bowes], Emily	1806-1857	writer of religious tracts
Carr, Jonathan Dodgson	1806-1884	biscuit manufacturer
Howard, John Eliot	1807-1883	quinologist
Newton, Benjamin Wills	1807-1899	Brethren leader & religious writer
Gosse, Philip Henry	1810-1888	zoologist & religious writer
Caffin, Sir James Crawford	1812-1883	naval officer (possibly Brethren)
Peters [née Bowly], Mary	1813-1856	hymn writer
Tregelles, Samuel Prideaux,	1813-1875	biblical scholar
Pigott, Sir Gillery	1813-1875	judge
Kelly, William	1821-1906	Brethren member & biblical scholar
Midlane, Albert	1825-1909	hymn writer
Morgan, Richard Cope	1827-1908	journal editor & publisher
Bevan [née Shuttleworth], (Emma) Frances	1827-1909	translator & religious poet
Cusack, Margaret Anne [religious name Mary Francis Clare; the Nun of Kenmare]	1829-1899	founder of the Sisters of St Joseph of Peace & writer
Waldegrave, Granville Augustus William, third Baron Radstock	1833-1913	philanthropist & evangelist
Guinness, Henry Grattan	1835-1910	evangelist & trainer of missionaries
Anderson, Sir Robert,	1841-1918	spymaster, detective chief, & author
Soltau, Henrietta Eliza	1843-1934	evangelist & promoter of missionary work

Barnardo, Thomas John	1845-1905	philanthropist & founder of Dr Barnardo's
Mather, Ebenezer Joseph	1849-1927	founder of the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen
Gosse, Sir Edmund William	1849-1928	writer
Arnot, Frederick Stanley	1858-1914	missionary in Africa
Pickering, Henry	1858-1941	religious publisher & journalist
Petter, Sir Ernest Willoughby	1873-1954	engine & aircraft manufacturer
Dobbie, Sir William George Shedden	1879-1964	army officer & colonial governor
Laing, Sir John William	1879-1978	builder & civil engineering contractor
Doodson, Arthur Thomas	1890-1968	mathematician & oceanographer
Wingate, Orde Charles	1903-1944	army officer
Sargent, Sir (Sidney) Donald	1906-1984	civil servant
Bruce, Frederick Fyvie	1910-1990	biblical scholar

The above list excludes those such as Isaac Crewdson, a Quaker seceder who was close to the Brethren, John Bowes, a former Primitive Methodist who formed a number of churches which became Brethren, or Jessie Macfarlane, a female preacher who adopted Brethren views. But those Brethren leaders we would expect are there, and several of the entries are written by historians who will be familiar to readers of this *Review*—special mention must go to the work of Timothy Stunt whose many pieces are a model of reference articles. But there are entries on those who do not turn up in Brethren histories, such as Sir Gillery Piggott, politician and judge, who joined later in life (and whose son was fined £1 with costs for stopping the Anglican burial service being read over his father's coffin). Six women are represented in the list, showing how Christianity could create space for them in ways which were not then available in society generally. And there are other surprises. Readers are perhaps aware of the Brethren philanthropists and businessmen, but there also are four

scientists and three individuals active in the creative arts on the above table.

The work is not perfect. Philip Gosse's entry seems anxious to play down his Brethrenism, presumably to rescue his reputation, as does the one on Edmund. John Eliot Howard's revised entry perpetuates the omission in the old *DNB* by not mentioning his Brethrenism at all, and (perhaps mercifully given the viewpoint of the entry) nor does Sir Robert Anderson's. Some contributors whose area of expertise is not religious history depict the conventional stereotype of the Brethren: their 'restrictive creed', 'stern religion', 'somewhat stifling' home life etc. However, a different picture of the movement emerges in entries such as that of the Indian missionary Mary Anne Wilson or of the biscuit manufacturer J.D. Carr. It should not be assumed that because it is in the *ODNB* that it is correct. I would want some further proof of the assertion in the article on Orde Wingate that the 'Plymouth Brethren [were] a strict evangelical sect that had numbered General Charles George Gordon among its adherents' (something that the author of Gordon's entry seems to know nothing about). 'Scottish Baptists' in John Epps's entry should be 'Scotch Baptists'.

But the *ODNB* invites analysis. The reader can see that I have been tempted into one: listing the entries by birth date. Almost two-thirds of those listed were born in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, representing the generation which was attracted to the new movement, shaped by the culture of romanticism. They were the makers of the Victorian age. All subjects were deceased by 2002, which lessens the works value for the later twentieth century, but there was a definite falling away last century of Brethren who were members of the elites which are found in the *ODNB*, though the half-dozen or so from the first half of the twentieth century are distinguished enough.

Not only did the movement fail to attract in the later period, but many talented people left in all periods. Some of the earlier leavers can be picked out from the table above. Margaret Anne Cusack rather stands out because of her later religious name. Those who lapsed from the faith can also be seen (Newman and Edmund Gosse), and

those, like Cusack, who passed through the movement for a while on their Christian journey (among them Bulteel, Linnell, Newton, Tregelles, Morgan, Barnardo, Mather, Sargent). A special category of those who left is those individuals whose parents were Brethren. I found twenty-six such individuals, probably the most famous being Bishop Hensley Henson; the occultist Aleister Crowley; the aircraft designer Sir Frederick Handley Page; and the politicians Sir Keith Holyoake and Anthony Crosland.

It is tempting to search for something within the Brethren which produced rejection—that ‘restrictive creed’. But the later individuals belong to the generation which rejected the Victorians and all they stood for, and people also make their own choices in life: there is a diabolist, a forger and a murderer among them. It is a melancholy fact that the individuals connected to the Brethren who provide the most hits on the internet (apart from Darby) are the diabolist Aleister Crowley and one of Frances Bevan’s daughters, Nesta Webster, who saw Jewish-Masonic conspiracies under every bush and nowadays seems to inspire all the racists of the western world. Not only are the Brethren present in the *ODNB*, but all human life is here.

Neil Dickson