

Research Briefing

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Historical representation of minority ethnic groups in the House of Commons



Summary

- 1 Introduction
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Summary

This research briefing looks at the historical representation of minority ethnic groups in the House of Commons.

It is difficult to establish the number and proportion of MPs from minority ethnic groups, as MPs are not required to officially state their ethnicity. We therefore rely on external sources that collect this information, often based on MPs' public assertions.

Part 2 of this paper looks at MPs from minority ethnic groups before 1987. This year is often identified as the year in which the first MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds were elected in recent times.

Part 3 of this paper highlights notable Jewish MPs. 'Jewish' is not currently listed as an ethnic category in the UK Census but many people regard themselves as ethnically Jewish.

This briefing does not contain a definitive list of MPs with minority ethnic ancestry or heritage. Rather it focuses on MPs from minority ethnic groups highlighting notable 'firsts'.

We would be pleased to hear of any published research in this area that helps develop the picture we have of early representation of minoritised ethnic groups in the House of Commons.

The Library briefing [Ethnic diversity in politics and public life](#) provides aggregate statistics on MPs elected since 1987 as reported by external sources. Curated lists can be found on [Operation Black Vote](#) and [Wikipedia](#).

1 Introduction

There is no official list of the religious or ethnic background of Members of Parliament. MPs are not required to declare this information and we therefore rely on external sources and any records of self-identification by MPs.

Differing understandings of and attitudes towards ethnicity mean it is difficult to be certain about when the first MP from a minority ethnic background entered Parliament and how many MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds there have been since.

The Office of National Statistics first included a question on ethnicity in the 1991 UK census and classifications of ethnic groups have changed over time.¹

This briefing uses the term “minority ethnic” to refer to people and groups other than those in the “White” ethnicity categories of the 2011 census.

Our analysis of historical MPs is based on family origin. The individuals we include in the timeline in part 2 may not have thought of themselves as having a ‘minority ethnic’ background as this is a relatively new term. As the timeline moves into the 20th century, we have been cautious about adding MPs with ancestors from minority ethnic groups to avoid ascribing labels to individuals that they would not identify with.

As noted above, ‘Jewish’ is not currently listed as an ethnic category in the UK Census. After [consultation on the 2021 Census](#), the Office for National Statistics recommended that Sikh, Jewish, and Somali ethnic groups should not be added as a response to the question ‘What is your ethnic group?’, but Roma should be. This does not mean that people do not regard themselves as ethnically Jewish. Part 3 of this paper highlights selected Jewish MPs elected before 1987.

1.1 Property qualification to stand as a candidate

The 1711 Property Qualifications Act restricted membership of the Commons to those owning land of a certain value.

Some of the first MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds were the sons and grandsons of wealthy men known as “slave holders” and enslaved or formerly enslaved women.² While we record them among Britain’s first minority ethnic

¹ [List of ethnic groups - GOV.UK \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](#)

² The use of the term “slave holder” follows [guidance from the US National Park Service Underground Railroad project](#)

MPs, we recognise the profits their families gained from enslaving others may have helped them to stand for Parliament.

The requirement for MPs to own property of a certain value was abolished in 1857³ but this did little to increase the number of working-class MPs, most of whom could not afford to commit to unpaid work. Pay for MPs was introduced by the [1911 Parliament Act](#).⁴

1.2

Requirement to swear the ‘oath to Christianity’

The requirement to swear the ‘oath to Christianity’ excluded members of other religions and atheists unwilling to compromise their principles from sitting in the House of Commons. Opening the House of Commons to non-Protestant religious groups was a central focus in the 19th century, and this facilitated the entry of MPs from minority ethnic groups associated with non-Protestant religions.

In 1829, the Roman Catholic Relief Act removed the bar from those of the Catholic faith from holding office, by providing an alternative oath. The first Roman Catholics entered the House of Commons in 1832.⁵

The Oaths of Allegiance etc and Relief of the Jews Act 1858 removed the bar from those of the Jewish faith from taken a seat in Parliament.⁶

Lionel Rothschild, the first practising Jewish MP, finally took his seat in 1858, when Parliament accepted changes to the oath of allegiance, 11 years after his initial election.⁷

In 1847 Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, who was returned as MP for the City of London, was unable to take his seat due to his Jewish faith. Nevertheless, in 1850 he decided to present himself at the Table of the House, and asked permission to be sworn on the Old Testament, with his head covered. This was allowed, but because he would not use the words “on the true faith of a Christian”, it was resolved that he could not take his seat.⁸

The following year David Salomons was returned as MP for Greenwich. Salomons took all three oaths but omitted the offending phrase when doing so. Believing that he had been appropriately sworn, he then took his seat, spoke in a debate and took part in three divisions. He was prosecuted in the

³ Kathryn Rix, Christmas at Newgate: [Edward Glover MP and the abolition of the property qualification](#), The Victorian Commons, 13 December 2012

⁴ See Edward Hicks, [MPs pay: the never ending controversy](#), History of Parliament Trust, 9 December 2013, and University of Manchester, [Why do we pay MPs](#)

⁵ The Victorian Commons, [Catholics in the Commons: part 1, 5 November 2014](#)

⁶ Commons Library briefing, [The Parliamentary Oath](#), 29 February 2016

⁷ Jewish Virtual Library, [Lionel Nathan de Rothschild](#)

⁸ MacDonagh, Parliament, pp198-199

Court of Exchequer for the recovery of the penalties incurred for sitting and voting without having taken the oath.⁹

Further information is available in the Commons Library briefing [The Parliamentary Oath](#).

The History of Parliament Trust website has articles on [Parliament and Religion](#) and provides a research guide for [MPs and religious affiliation, 1832-68](#).

⁹ As above, pp199-200

2 Historical MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds

Research by the History of Parliament Trust and others has identified historical MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds that are included in this briefing.¹⁰

2.1 Timeline of MPs from minority ethnic groups before 1987

The table below shows a timeline of MPs before 1987 from what we might consider minority ethnic backgrounds today. This is based on their family origins as described by various sources.

Although 1987 is often cited as the year when the first MPs from minority ethnic groups entered Parliament after Shapurji Saklatvala lost his seat in 1929¹¹, two Conservative MPs, Jonathan Sayeed, whose father was Indian, and Richard Hickmet, whose father was Turkish, were elected in 1983. They are said not to have identified with a minority ethnic group themselves¹² and are not included in this list. They are included on the [Wikipedia list of ethnic minority Members of Parliament](#).

¹⁰ See [Ethnic minorities in Parliament: a new addition to the Victorian Commons | The Victorian Commons](#)) and Alison Campsie, [Memorial calls for Scotland's 'forgotten' first non-white MP](#), The Scotsman, 26 July 2020

¹¹ Black History Month, [The First Black Parliamentarians in our Times](#), 19 August 2015

¹² D Butler and D Kavanagh, 'The British General Election of 2001', Dennis Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p206. The Clarion Mag, [The rich history of BME MPs, 21 June 2020](#)

Historical MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds

| Name | Year elected | Party | Constituency | Family origin |
|------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|------------------|--|
| James Townshend | 1767 | Whig | West Looe | Father: English; Mother: English, African and Dutch. |
| Richard Beckford | 1780 | Whig | Bridport | Father: English; Mother: Jamaican |
| John Stewart | 1832 | Tory | Lymington | Believed to be from a mixed ethnic background |
| Alexander Raphael | 1835 | Liberal | County Carlow | Armenian |
| David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre | 1841 | Radical Liberal | Sudbury | Mixed European and Indian |
| Henry Redhead Yorke | 1841 | Liberal | York | Father: British and Bermudan; Mother: English |
| Peter McLagan | 1865 | Liberal | Linlithgowshire | Father: Scottish; Mother: Black |
| Dadabhai Naoroji | 1892 | Liberal | Finsbury Central | Parsi |
| Mancherjee Bhownagree | 1895 | Conservative | Bethnal Green | Parsi |
| Ernest Soares | 1900 | Liberal | Barnstaple | Father: Indian origin; Mother: English |
| Henry Finnis Blossie Lynch | 1906 | Liberal | Ripon | Father: Irish; Mother: Mixed British and Armenian |
| Shapurji Saklatvala | 1922 | Labour | Battersea North | Parsi |

Notes:

Richard Beckford was later MP for Arundel in 1784 and Leominster in 1791.

Alexander Raphael was later elected Whig MP for St Albans in 1847.

Shapurji Saklatvala was later Communist MP for Battersea North in 1924.

2.2 Profiles

Brief profiles are given below with links to further information. MPs can access links to the [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#) via the parliamentary Intranet.

James Townsend

It is possible the first MP from what might today be classified as a minority ethnic background was James Townshend. He was elected to Parliament in 1767 as Whig MP for West Looe and then for Calne in 1782. His British grandfather worked for the Royal Africa Company, a mercantile trading company that also traded enslaved people; his grandmother, of African and Dutch descent, was a prominent businesswoman who also owned enslaved

people. Their daughter, Bridget, moved to England and had ten children, one of whom was James Townshend.¹³

See [History of Parliament: James Townsend \(1737-87\)](#) for more information.

Richard Beckford

Townsend is possibly followed by Richard Beckford, elected Whig MP for Bridport in 1780, the son of a plantation owner, [Alderman William Beckford](#) and an enslaved Jamaican woman.¹⁴

Beckford was one of seven known illegitimate children of his father and the only one to enter public life. Following disputes over his father's will he was not able to depend on family patronage to help him enter Parliament, instead relying on other patrons. He sat as MP for Bridport 1780-1784; Arundel, 1784-1790; and Leominster, 1791-96.

See History of Parliament Trust [Richard Beckford 1790-1820](#) and [Richard Beckford 1754-1790](#) for further information.

John Stewart

John Stewart, who is thought to have had a mixed ethnic background,¹⁵ was elected Conservative MP for Lymington in 1832. Stewart was the illegitimate son of John Stewart who owned sugar plantations in the Berbice, Demerara, Grenada, Trinidad and 'elsewhere in the West Indies'.¹⁶

The Stewart Society notes that although sometimes characterised as a 'Radical' he was generally Conservative and comments "What is striking was his defence of slavery, of apprenticeship, and of the sugar duties."¹⁷

Alexander Raphael

Alexander Raphael was born in Chennai, India, in 1775 to Edward Raphael Gharamiants and Maria Stephana Manuel, of Armenian heritage. The family used the surname Raphael when they moved to England.¹⁸

Raphael was elected as the Whig MP for the Irish constituency of County Carlow at the June 1835 by-election. However, the election was challenged on

¹³ London Historians' Blog, [From Gold Coast to Gold Coach: James Townsend, a Black Lord Mayor of London in the Eighteenth Century](#)

¹⁴ Amanda Goodrich, [Henry Redhead Yorke, Colonial Radical](#), 2019, p58

¹⁵ Victorian Commons, [Ethnic minorities in Parliament: a new addition to the Victorian Commons](#), 8 April 2019

¹⁶ [Summary of Individual | Legacies of British Slavery \(ucl.ac.uk\)](#) [Accessed 10 September 2023]

¹⁷ [History of the Stewarts | Famous Stewarts | John Stewart \(stewartssociety.org\)](#) [Accessed 10 September 2023]

¹⁸ David A. Kennedy, [FROM MADRAS TO SURBITON. ALEXANDER RAPHAEL, UNBEATEN CHAMPION, 1775-1850](#), 30 January 2018

petition and he was unseated on 19 August 1835. Raphael was later elected for St Albans in 1847 which he represented until his death in 1850.

David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre

David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, of mixed European and Indian descent, was elected as a Radical-Liberal MP for Sudbury in 1841. In 1842, however, Parliament overturned the result citing “gross, systematic, and extensive bribery” during the campaign, and he and the other Member for the Sudbury division, Frederick Villiers, lost their seats.

Dyce Sombre died several years later after trying to restore his fortune, seized by his wife’s family, who had declared him insane (under false pretences, by his account).¹⁹

More information can be found in the entry for [Dyce Sombre in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography \(ODNB\)](#) (Intranet)

Henry Galgacus Redhead Yorke

Henry Galgacus Redhead Yorke was elected Liberal MP for York in 1841. His father, Henry Redhead Yorke, was the son of a British plantation owner and a formerly enslaved woman from Bermuda, and his mother was English. He represented York until his death in 1848, when he died by suicide in Regent’s Park by taking prussic acid.²⁰

A 2019 [blog for The Victorian Commons](#) highlights the research that uncovered Henry Redhead Yorke’s background. It notes that:

This raises the question of how many more MPs and political activists from the past may have been of black or mixed ethnicity? It is important we explore this question to ensure we represent British history accurately, incorporating all those who have played a part in our past with equal attention. We must restore forgotten BME individuals to their place in British history.²¹

A 2020 article on the [two Henry Redhead Yorkes](#) looks at the histories of the two Yorkes in early radical and Liberal politics.”²²

¹⁹ William Dalrymple, *The Inordinately Strange Life of Dyce Sombre* by Michael H Fisher, 1 August 2010

²⁰ Amanda Goodrich, [Henry Redhead Yorke, Colonial Radical Politics and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1772-1813](#), Routledge 2019

²¹ Victorian Commons, [Ethnic minorities in Parliament: a new addition to the Victorian Commons](#), 8 April 2019

²² Amanda Goodrich, [The two Henry Redhead Yorkes, radical to liberal](#), *Journal of Liberal History* 108, Autumn 2020

Peter McLagan

Scotland's first MP from an ethnic minority background is likely to be Peter McLagan, Liberal MP for Linlithgowshire from 1865 to 1893 and the son of a Scottish 'slave holder' and a Black woman of whom we know very little.²³

In Parliament, McLagan advocated the temperance cause, supported the Irish Home Rule Movement, and called for the establishment of a Scottish Office. He also supported educational reform and called for children to have access to the same level of education which should be non-denominational.²⁴ His parliamentary contributions can be read on Historic Hansard: [Mr Peter McLagan](#). McLagan was one of a group of men who supported women's suffrage that earned the nickname '[suffragettes in trousers](#)'.

McLagan invested in the production of shale oil but was declared bankrupt in 1893 which led to his resignation as an MP and withdrawal from public life.²⁵

More information can be found in [Peter Maclagan's entry in the ODNB Intranet](#)

Dadabhai Naoroji

[Dadabhai Naoroji](#), born in Mumbai to a Parsi family in 1825, was professor of Gujarati at University Co from 1856 to 1865 and was a founding member of the [Indian National Congress](#). He also was involved in founding the London Zoroastrian Association in 1861.²⁶

Naoroji stood for election to Parliament several times, facing considerable racism each time.²⁷ He was eventually elected Liberal MP for Finsbury Central in 1892 with a majority of five votes. He refused to take the [parliamentary oath](#) on the Bible, but was allowed to take the oath on his copy of the Khordeh Avesta, the Zoroastrian religious text.

Naoroji campaigned for women's suffrage, old age pensions, Irish Home Rule and the abolition of the House of Lords and, in particular, Indian Independence. A fierce critic of British rule in India,²⁸ prominent pro-British Indians decided to put up their own candidate, Mancherjee Bhownagree who was elected MP for Bethnal Green North-East, in London, in 1895.

See [Dadabhai Naoroji's entry in ODNB \(Intranet\)](#) for more information.

²³ David William Main, [The remarkable career of Peter McLagan MP](#), History Scotland, 10 April 2021

²⁴ Scotlands People, [Our Records: Peter McLagan \(1823-1900\)](#) [Accessed 29 September 2023]

²⁵ Museum of the Scottish Shale Industry, [Notable figures: Peter McLagan](#) [Accessed 29 September 2023]

²⁶ Open University, [Zoroastrian Association](#) [Accessed 10 September 2023]

²⁷ History Press, [Dadabhai Naoroji: The UK's first Indian MP](#) [Accessed 10 September 2023]

²⁸ BBC, [The Grand Old Man of India who became Britain's first Asian MP](#), 5 July 2020

Sir Mancherjee Bhownagree

[Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownagree](#), the son of a Parsi merchant of Persian origin, was born in Mumbai in 1851. Bhownagree was elected as Conservative MP for Bethnal Green in the 1895 general election.

Bhownagree was a supporter of British rule in India and opposed the campaign for home rule. Despite raising the treatment of Indians in South Africa in the House of Commons, Bhownagree supported the Boer War and was seen as a supporter of British Imperialism.²⁹ Bhownagree retained his seat in the next general election of 1900 but lost his seat in 1906.

In 1908 Bhownagree succeeded Dadabhai as chairman of the Charitable Funds of the Zoroastrians which he renamed the Parsee Association of Europe.³⁰

See [Mancherjee Bhownagree's entry in ODNB](#) for more information.

Ernest Soares

Ernest Joseph Soares was born in Liverpool in 1864. The son of Jose Luis Xavier Soares, a Liverpool merchant of Indian descent who could trace his roots to Goa, India and Hannah Hollingsworth of Liverpool. He was educated at St Johns, Cambridge taking a degree in law after which he joined a firm of solicitors in Manchester.³¹

He was elected Liberal MP for Barnstaple in 1900 and served in Asquith's Liberal government as a Junior Lord of the Treasury from 1910-1911. He resigned in 1911 because of ill health and was knighted later that year.

Shapurji Saklatvala

The last MP from an ethnic minority background to serve before the 1980s that we know of was [Shapurji Saklatvala](#), a Parsi from Mumbai who represented Battersea North, in London, from 1922 to 1923 and 1924 to 1929.

Saklatvala came to Britain in 1905 to work for his uncle in the Tata company office in Manchester. He joined the Independent Labour Party in 1909 and campaigned to improve working conditions in Britain and India.

Saklatvala was adopted as the Labour candidate for Battersea North in 1921 despite joining the Communist party the same year and was elected for Battersea North in 1922. He lost his seat the following year but was re-elected without Labour support in 1924.

²⁹ Little Atoms, [The hidden history of the Conservatives' first ethnic minority MP](#), 13 April 2017

³⁰ John McLeod, [BHOWNAGGREE, Mancherjee Merwanjee](#), Encyclopædia Iranica [Accessed 10 September 2023]

³¹ [North Devon in 100 Objects 82 – Barum Curator \(wordpress.com\)](#) [Accessed 10 September 2023]

In 1926 at the start of the General Strike in 1926 Saklatvala was arrested and sentenced to two months' imprisonment for sedition following a speech in Hyde Park.³² He lost his seat in 1929 but remained a leading figure in the Communist Party addressing large rallies nationwide during the Great Depression.

See [Parliamentary Archives, Inside the Act Room BOMBAY TO BATTERSEA: SHAPURJI SAKLATVALA](#) for further information

³² [Shapurji Saklatvala \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#) [Accessed 10 September 2023]

3

Jewish MPs

There is no official data for religion of UK MPs and there is no official record of Jewish Members of Parliament, whether secular or practising.

The Jewish Year Book lists Jewish MPs and there is a page of [British Jewish Politicians](#) on Wikipedia which largely cites media sources for its list of Jewish MPs.

Brief details of selected Jewish MPs elected before 1987 are provided below with links to biographical information. MPs can access links to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB) via the parliamentary Intranet.

As well being Jewish, individuals may also have ethnic Jewish backgrounds³³ which are not noted here. For example, it has been noted that members of the Sassoon and the Samuel family, below, are of Iraqi descent, but it seems that they identified as Jewish³⁴ and so are not included in the timeline in part 2 of this paper.

3.1

Jewish MPs elected before 1987

Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild

Lionel Rothschild was returned as Liberal MP for the City of London in 1847, but as a Jew he could not take the Christian oath required to take up his seat in the House of Commons.³⁵

Following several failed Jewish Relief Bills, the Oaths of Allegiance etc and Relief of the Jews Act 1858 was passed and Rothschild took his seat as the first Jewish member of parliament 11 years after his initial election.³⁶

Further information can be found in the [Britannica entry for Lionel Walter Rothschild, 2nd Baron Rothschild](#).

³³ See [Race, ethnicity, heritage and immigration among U.S. Jews | Pew Research](#) and [Is Jewishness an ethnicity? | Jewish Voice for Labour](#) [Accessed 29 September 2023]

³⁴ See [Bearsted, Marcus Samuel, First Viscount \(1853–1927\)](#) and [SASSOON - JewishEncyclopedia.com](#)

³⁵ Commons Library briefing, [The Parliamentary Oath](#), 29 February 2016, pages 23-24

³⁶ Jewish Virtual Library, [Lionel Nathan de Rothschild](#)

Benjamin Disraeli

Disraeli was the first Jewish Prime Minister of the UK. He was the son of a Jewish Italian writer, although he was baptised in the Anglican Church at the age of 12 after his father left his synagogue.

The first official use of the title ‘Prime Minister’ began under Disraeli’s premiership when the term appears in official documents.³⁷

Disraeli first stood for Parliament in 1832 as an independent candidate. He later joined the Conservative party and stood for three constituencies before being elected Conservative MP for Maidstone in 1837. He was then elected for Shrewsbury in 1841.

He served as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the Commons in minority Conservative governments in 1852, 1858 and 1867–68. In 1868 Disraeli became Prime Minister in a minority Conservative government, but his party was defeated at the 1868 general election. It was, however, elected with a large majority in 1874, with Disraeli serving as Prime Minister from 1874–80.

Disraeli was made Earl of Beaconsfield by Queen Victoria in 1876 and continued to govern from the House of Lords.

Further information about Disraeli can be found through the following links:

- [History of Benjamin Disraeli, the Earl of Beaconsfield - GOV.UK](#)
- [Benjamin Disraeli - British PM, Conservative Leader | Britannica](#)

Edward Sassoon

Born in Bombay, Sassoon’s father’s family had settled in India after leaving Baghdad. Sassoon served in the Duke of Cambridge’s Hussars, rising to the rank of major.

He succeeded to his father’s baronetcy in 1896 and was elected Liberal Unionist MP for Hythe in 1899. Sassoon was elected president of the Sephardi congregation of London in 1902. He also served as Vice-President in the Anglo-Jewish Association and for Jews’ College London. He was buried in the Sassoon mausoleum in Brighton.³⁸

His son, Philip Sassoon, was elected for the Hythe seat on his father’s death in 1912. A later prominent member of the family was the poet and writer Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967).

Further information can be found in the [entry for the Sassoon family \(1830–1961\) in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography \(ODNB\)](#)

³⁷ In 1878 Benjamin Disraeli used the term ‘Prime Minister’ when signing the Treaty of Berlin. Gov.uk [The Institution of Prime Minister](#) [Accessed 16 Apr 2021]

³⁸ In 1933 the remains of the Sassoon family were removed and reburied at the [Liberal Jewish Cemetery, Willesden](#) in London

Herbert Samuel

Herbert Louis Samuel was elected Liberal MP for Cleveland at the November 1902 by-election.

One of the first Jewish Cabinet members, Samuel was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster from 1909 to 1910. As postmaster general from 1910, he recognized the postal trade unions and nationalised the telephone services. Samuel was Home Secretary in Herbert Henry Asquith's war-time coalition in January 1916 but resigned in December when David Lloyd George formed a new coalition government. He lost his seat in the 1918 general election and was appointed as the first High Commissioner for Palestine in 1920.

Samuel became Liberal party chairman in 1927 and returned to the Commons as MP for the Lancashire seat of Darwen in 1929. He became deputy leader of the Liberal party in 1931 and acted as leader in the summer of 1931 when Lloyd George was ill. He joined Ramsay MacDonald's national coalition government as home secretary but, as a confirmed [free trader](#), he resigned in September 1932 in protest against import tariffs.

Samuel lost his seat in the 1935 general election and was created Viscount in 1937, leading the Liberals in the House of Lords from 1944 to 1955.

Further information can be found in the following links:

- [Herbert Louis Samuel, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography \(ODNB\)](#)
- [Herbert Samuel \(Viscount Samuel\), 1870-1963 – Journal of Liberal History](#)

Philip Sassoon

Sir Philip Sassoon was elected Conservative MP for Hythe in 1912 on the death of his father, Sir Edward Sassoon who had also represented Hythe. Sassoon was initially the youngest MP in the Commons when elected. Sassoon was knighted in 1923.

Born in Paris, Sassoon was technically a French citizen until the age of 19. Sassoon was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford. During the First World War Sassoon was an officer in France and served as Private Secretary (1915–18) to Sir Douglas Haig, Britain's Commander-in-Chief.

Sassoon also acted as Private Secretary to David Lloyd George when he was Prime Minister (1920–22). Sassoon was Undersecretary for Air (1924–29 and 1931–37) and First Commissioner of Works from 1937 until his death in 1939.

More information can be found through the following links:

- [Sir Philip Sassoon \(1888–1939\) - UK Parliament](#)
- [Sassoon, Sir Philip Albert Gustave David, ODNB](#)

Samuel Samuel

Sam Samuel was elected Conservative MP for Wandsworth at the June 1913 by-election, then for Putney from 1918 until his death in 1934.

Samuel was born in London, into an Iraqi Jewish family. Educated at private schools in London and Paris, he founded the trading company Samuel Samuel & Co with his brother, [Marcus Samuel](#).

Marcus Samuel established the Shell Transport and Trading company which took its shell logo from their father's, Marcus Samuel, business principally selling fancy shells and ornamental shell boxes in an East End curio shop.

More information is available on [Samuel Samuel's Wikipedia page](#).

Emanuel Shinwell

Elected Labour MP for Linlithgow in 1922, he lost his seat in 1924 but won a by-election in 1928. Emanuel "Manny" Shinwell was born in Spitalfields, east London, the son of a Polish tailor. His family moved to Glasgow and he worked in the clothing trade, becoming an active trade unionist.

Shinwell served in the 1929 Labour government but rejected Ramsay MacDonald's national government and lost in the 1931 election, before defeating MacDonald in 1935. He was Minister of Defence from 1950 to 1951 and remained active in the Commons and later the Lords as Baron Shinwell of Easington from 1970 until his death aged 101 in 1986.

More information can be found through the following links:

- [Shinwell, Emanuel, Baron Shinwell, ODNB](#)
- [Emanuel Shinwell, Baron Shinwell of Easington | Britannica](#)

Marcus Reginald Anthony Samuel

Marcus Samuel was Conservative MP for Putney from 1934 until his death in 1942). He was elected at the November 1934 by-election following the death of Samuel Samuel, a relative.

More information is available on [Marcus Samuel's Wikipedia page](#).

Maurice Edelman

Israel Moses (Maurice) Edelman was elected Labour MP for Coventry North West in 1945 and then Coventry North in 1950. Following further boundary changes in 1974, Edelman represented Coventry North West until his death in 1975.

Edelman was born on 2 March 1911 at Cardiff, the third of five children of Esther (née Solomon) and Joshua Edelman.

He was a vice-chairman of the British Council and a founder member of the Council of Europe in 1949.

He was a prolific author and many of his novels were set in the political world. These include *A Dream of Treason*, *The Fratricides* and *The Prime Minister's Daughter*. His last two novels, *Disraeli in Love* and *Disraeli Rising*, are considered his best work.

More information can be found from the following sources:

- [Papers of Maurice Edelman MP \(1911–1975\), Labour politician, journalist and author - Archives Hub \(jisc.ac.uk\)](#)
- [Maurice Edelman – Politician and Best-selling Author - Amersham Museum](#)

Ian Mikardo

Ian Mikardo was born in Portsmouth, the son of Moshe Mikardo, a tailor from Poland, and his wife Bluma, from Ukraine. Mikardo was educated at Portsmouth Grammar School and worked as a management consultant.

He was elected Labour MP for Reading in 1945 and served as an MP from 1945 to 1959 and 1964 to 1987. Canvassing for Reading, Mikardo introduced a scientific approach, dividing the electorate into 'fors', 'againsts', and 'don't knows', and concentrating activists' efforts on persuading the 'fors' to vote and converting the 'don't knows'. The 'Reading system' was subsequently adopted by all the major parties.

Mikardo never held ministerial office but was Chairman of the House of Commons Select Committee on Nationalised Industries and was also Chairman of the Labour Party from 1970 to 1971.

More information can be found through the following links:

- [Mikardo, Ian \[known as Mik\], ODNB](#)
- [Parliamentary career for Ian Mikardo - UK Parliament](#)

Keith Joseph

Sir Keith Joseph was born in London to businessman Samuel Joseph and wife Edna Cicely. His father had been Lord Mayor of London. He studied law and joined the Young Conservatives in 1948.

Joseph was elected MP for Leeds North-East at the February 1956 by-election. He held several government positions including Minister for Housing and Local Government and Secretary of State for Social Services. Joseph is best known as the intellectual force behind Thatcherism. In 1974 he established the Conservative Centre for Policy Studies.

He was created a life peer, Baron Joseph of Portsoken, in the 1987 dissolution honours.

More information is available at [Sir Keith Joseph's entry in the ODNB](#).

Leopold Abse

Leo Abse was the son of a Jewish solicitor and cinema owner in Cardiff. He was educated at the London School of Economics and became a solicitor in Cardiff, serving in the RAF during the Second World War.

Abse was elected to the House of Commons as a Labour MP for Pontypool at a by-election in 1958, then in 1983 for the renamed seat of Torfaen until 1987. As a backbench MP, Abse successfully sponsored much of the socially reforming legislation on the statute book as private Members' bills in the late 1960s.

More information can be found through the following links:

- [People & Parliament transforming society: Leo Abse MP and Parliamentary career for Leo Abse - UK Parliament](#)
- [Leopold Abse's entry in the ODNB](#)

Renee Short

Renée Short was born in Leamington Spa to an engineer of Romanian-Hungarian origin and Miriam Marks, the daughter of Jewish Russian emigres, in 1916. She went to Manchester University after which she worked as a freelance journalist and then as a theatrical costumier,

Short was elected Labour MP for Wolverhampton North-East in 1964 which she represented until 1987. She chaired the social services select committee from its establishment in 1979 until she retired. For most of her 23 years in Parliament, Short served on the National Executive of the Labour Party (1970-81 and 1983-87).

Short campaigned on a wide range of issues - including medical research, abortion, Aids, prison conditions, cancer control and nursery education - and raised the issue of 'family-friendly' hours in the House of Commons, warning that a political career would be impossible for most women until parliament recognised the need for change.

More information can be found through the following links:

- [FLAMING RENEE! HOW RENEE SHORT MP BLAZED A TRAIL | Parliamentary Archives: Inside the Act Room](#)
- [Parliamentary career for Mrs Renée Short - MPs and Lords - UK Parliament](#)

Gerald Kaufman

Sir Gerald Kaufman was elected Labour MP for Manchester Ardwick in 1970 and for Manchester Gorton in 1983.

He was born in Leeds. His parents, Louis and Jane, came from Poland before the First World War. He was educated at Leeds Grammar School before studying philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford.

Kaufman held junior ministerial posts in the 1970s and, in opposition, served as shadow home secretary, shadow environment secretary and shadow foreign secretary in the 1980s and early 1990s. He was knighted in 2004.

In 2009 he became embroiled in the expenses scandal, submitting claims that were turned down by the parliamentary authorities. In 2015, he became Father of the House of Commons. He was a member of the Jewish Labour Movement.

More information can be found through the following links:

- [Parliamentary career for Sir Gerald Kaufman - UK Parliament](#)
- [Kaufman, Sir Gerald Bernard, ODNB](#)

Nigel Lawson

Nigel Lawson was born in London to Ralph Lawson, a commodity trader, and Joan Davis. His grandfather, Gustav, had come to England from Latvia in the early twentieth century.

After studying at Oxford, Nigel Lawson pursued a career in journalism. Writing for the Financial Times before being appointed City Editor at the Sunday Telegraph and later, editor at The Spectator.

In 1974 he was elected Conservative MP for Blaby, Leicestershire. Margaret Thatcher appointed him Energy Secretary in 1981 and Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1983. Lawson was responsible for the privatisation of key industries, including British Telecom and British Gas.

During his tenure as Chancellor, unemployment decreased giving way to increased inflation, a period that became known as the Lawson Boom. He resigned in 1989 amid disagreements with Margaret Thatcher over policy.

He was created a life peer, Baron Lawson of Blaby, in 1992.

In 2015, Lawson became president of Conservatives for Britain, a group which campaigned to leave the European Union.

More information can be found through the following links:

- [Parliamentary career for Lord Lawson of Blaby - MPs and Lords - UK Parliament](#)
- [Nigel Lawson - Oxford Reference](#)

Malcolm Rifkind

Sir Malcolm Rifkind was elected Conservative MP for Edinburgh Pentlands in 1974, Kensington and Chelsea in 2005 and Kensington in 2010.

Malcolm Rifkind was born in Edinburgh. His parents were of Lithuanian descent and his father was a draper. He studied law and political science at Edinburgh University and was called to the Scottish Bar in 1970.

Malcolm Rifkind was Secretary of State for Scotland and Transport Secretary under Margaret Thatcher's administration. In 1992 he was appointed Defence Secretary, overseeing the deployment of British troops during the Bosnian War. He chaired the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament from 2010 to 2015; he stepped down as chair in February 2015 and announced he was not seeking re-election in the May 2015 General Election.

In 1997 he received a knighthood in John Major's resignation honours.

More information can be found through the following links:

- [Parliamentary career for Sir Malcolm Rifkind - UK Parliament](#)
- [Malcolm Rifkind | Biography & Facts | Britannica](#)

Leon Brittan

Leon Brittan was born in London to parents of Lithuanian origin. His father was a doctor who had arrived in England as a refugee in the late 1920s.

He studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was President of the Union, and was called to the bar in 1962. He was elected Conservative MP for Cleveland and Whitby in 1974, then for Richmond in 1979.

Under Margaret Thatcher, he was a minister in the Home Office and then entered the Cabinet in 1981 as Chief Secretary to the Treasury. In 1983 he became Home Secretary where he attempted to streamline the bureaucracy of the Home Office. He also introduced tougher prison sentences for offenders.

In 1986 he resigned over the Westland Crisis when it emerged he had authorised the leak of a letter that criticised the Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine.

He was created a life peer, Baron Brittan of Spennithorne, in 2000

More information can be found through the following links:

- [Parliamentary career for Lord Brittan of Spennithorne - UK Parliament](#)
- [Brittan, Leon, Baron Brittan of Spennithorne, ODNB](#)

Edwina Currie

Edwina Currie was born into an Orthodox family in Liverpool. Her grandfather had come from Poland and was a patriarchal figure who cut contact with Edwina when she married out of the faith.³⁹ She studied alongside Bill Clinton at Oxford before working for Birmingham City Council. In 1983 she was elected Tory MP for South Derbyshire, but she lost her seat in the 1997 General Election.

[More information on Edwina Currie's parliamentary career can be found on the UK Parliament website.](#)

³⁹ Juliet Rix, [Edwina Currie: My family values](#), The Guardian, 27 October 2012

Michael Howard

Michael Howard was elected Conservative MP for Folkestone and Hythe in 1983. He was born Michael Hecht in South Wales. His mother was British-born Hilda and his father Bernat Hecht, was a Jewish Romanian immigrant who settled in England in 1939 and changed his name to Bernard Howard.

After graduating from Peterhouse, Cambridge, Michael Howard became a barrister in 1964. He became leader of the Conservative party on 6 November 2003, becoming the first practising Jew to lead a major political party.⁴⁰ He was made a life peer, Baron Howard of Lympne, in the 2010 Dissolution Honours.

More information can be found through the following links:

- [Parliamentary career for Lord Howard of Lympne - UK Parliament](#)
- [Michael Howard, Baron Howard of Lympne | British Politician, Conservative Leader | Britannica](#)

⁴⁰ Jonathan Freedland, [The trailblazer](#), The Guardian, 31 October 2003

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