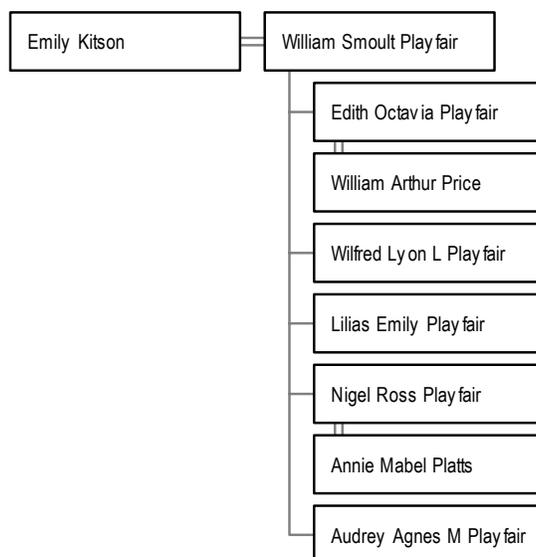


## Emily Kitson



Emily Kitson was born about 1842 in Leeds, the third and second surviving daughter of James and Ann Kitson. She 'missed' the 1841 census but was with her family for the 1851 and 1861 censuses as a 9 year old girl and a 19 year old young woman respectively. By the time of the 1871 census Emily was a married woman.

Ann Kitson lived to see both her daughters well married off. Emily, five years younger than Mary Ann, married on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1864 at the Mill Hill Chapel. Her husband was William Smoult Playfair, born in 1835 in India. He was the son of George Playfair, deceased, Surgeon General, Bengal Army. At the time of the marriage he was living at 8 Princes Street, Hanover Square, London. Emily's address was given as Little Woodhouse, Leeds. There were a number of witnesses to the event. Emily's family was represented by her brothers James and J. Hawthorn Kitson and sister Mary Ann Kitson. The Playfair witnesses were R.H. Playfair and Lyon Playfair. Also present were Richard James (?) Walker and Susan Sanderson.<sup>#</sup>

The Playfair family originated in the Carse of Gowrie, Perthshire around Errol, St Madoes and Kinfauns. They were apparently tenant farmers or tradesmen until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century when they diversified into the church and other professions as well as acquiring land in the Perthshire area.<sup>#</sup> By the time William was born the Playfairs had well established themselves. William was one of a family of which several members had achieved distinction in the last two generations. He was a grandson of Dr. James Playfair who, from 1800 to 1819, was Principal of the University of St. Andrews, and nephew of Sir Hugh Lyon Playfair, who was Provost of St Andrews and to whom, it is said, the city is indebted not only for all its modern improvements, but also for the revival and firms establishment of the Royal and Ancient golf club, to which it is indebted for so much of its present popularity. As recorded in the marriage certificate, William was the third son of George Playfair, younger brother of Sir Hugh, and who had been Chief Inspector-General of Hospitals in Bengal. William had been born in India in 1836 and he qualified as a doctor at Edinburgh University in 1856. He then returned to India to join the Bengal Medical Service. He served in Oudh during the Mutiny and was afterward professor of surgery in the Calcutta Medical College. But, for health reasons, he left India and returned to Scotland where, for the, 1861 census, he was staying with a sister, Jean A Playfair, at 14 Abercromby Place. The census record shows that by this time William, aged 25, had the post nominals MD &.FRIS Edin, SM Indies A.<sup>iv</sup>

Seven years after their wedding the Playfairs have a young family and are resident at 5 Curzon Street, Westminster.<sup>v</sup>

William S Playfair	35	Physician, MD FRCP	India
Emily Playfair	29		Leeds
Edith O Playfair	6		Middlesex, London
Wilfred J Playfair	3		Middlesex, London
Liliias E Playfair	3 mths		Middlesex, London
Anna lough(?)	29	Lady's Maid	Prussia
Cludia(?) Jones	29	Cook	Glamorganshire
Fanny Laker	21	Parlour Maid	Steyning, Sussex
Rose Singenest	22	Wet Nurse	France
Emily C Brickwood	21	Housemaid	Thames Ditton, Surrey

The 1881 census returns shows that the family has moved house but is still in Westminster at 31 and 32A Chambers Street. Two more children have been born. Edith is not at home as she was staying with a family at Reigate. Another person missing is Wilfred who had died in 1873 at the age of five.<sup>vi</sup>

William S Playfair	44	Physician, MD Edin FRCP	East India British Subject
Emily Playfair	38	Physician's Wife	Leeds
Lilias E Playfair	10	Scholar	St George, Hanover Square, London
Nigel R Playfair	6	Scholar	St George, Hanover Square, London
Audrey AM Playfair	5	Scholar	St George, Hanover Square, London
Maria Flisch	29	Governess	Prussia (NBS)
Peter Brerton	26	Butler	Naas, Kildare
William J Cowling	19	Footman	Brompton, Middlesex
Caroline Thompson	32	Cook	St Pancras, Middlesex
Hannah Maskrey	36	Nurse	Shirley, Derbyshire

Attached to the household at 32A, but apparently not there on the census night, were

Emily Jocelyn	31	Housemaid	Cressing, Essex
Marie C Morel	22	Ladysmaid	France (BS)
Mary H Gregory	16	Kitchenmaid	Axford, Wiltshire

William and Emily have not been located in the 1891 census. The only member of the family found is Audrey who was staying with her uncle and aunt, John and Jessie Kitson. 1901 finds the family at 38 Grosvenor Street.<sup>vii</sup>

William S Playfair	64	Physician Surgeon	British India
Emily Playfair	59	Physician's Wife	Leeds
Lilias Playfair	30		Hanover Square, London
Nigel Playfair	26	Barrister at Law Solicitor	Hanover Square, London
Audrey Playfair	25		Hanover Square, London
Eliza Everett	33	Parlourmaid	Norfolk
Celia Cunningham	22	Parlourmaid	Horforshire(?) NB
Rachel Jander	26	Ladysmaid	Switzerland
Barbara Leslie	22	Kitchenmaid	Haddingtonshire? NB
Florence Hall	19	Housemaid	Chelsea, London
Ernest Goebelle	24	Cook	Switzerland
Francis L Betts	17	Footman	Hadley, Suffolk

William Smoult Playfair was one of the most eminent physicians of his day. He enjoyed a reputation as a well known society physician, especially for women's complaints, having introduced to England Weir Mitchell's "rest cure". His treatise *The Science and Practice of Midwifery*, first published in 1889, and due to the fact that

Since 1889 much progress has been made in certain departments of obstetrics which has necessitated change, amounting to the almost complete rewriting of some of the chapters...

revised and added to by him in 1893 with assistance of his cousin Dr. Hugh Playfair, was a standard text. The 'testimonial' on the front cover of this publication lists William's various appointments as follows:<sup>viii</sup>

Physician-Accoucheur to H.I. and R.H. The Duchess of Edinburgh  
 Professor of Obstetric Medicine in King's College  
 Physician for the diseases of Women and Children to King's College Hospital  
 Consulting Physician to the General Lying-In Hospital and to the Evelina Hospital for Children  
 Late President of the Obstetrical Society of London  
 Examiner in Midwifery to the Universities of Cambridge and London and to the Royal College of Physicians

In addition he was physician-accoucheur to the Queen of Rumania and, presumably for his services, was appointed as a Grand Officer of the Order of the Crown of Rumania.

One of his roles as accoucheur was to make the formal announcement of the state of health of his patients. The following are two examples taken from the Times archives.

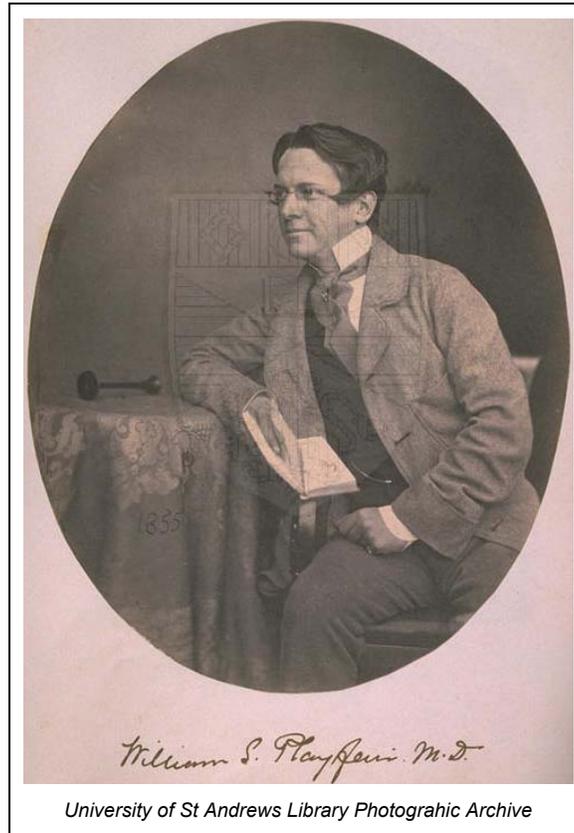
From the Court Circular  
 Buckingham Palace, March 18, 9.30am  
 Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Connaught and Strathearne has passed an excellent night and is well to-day.  
 The infant Princess is also quite well.  
 W.S. Playfair, M.D.  
 F.H. Laming, M.D.

The Birth of a Roumanian Prince

Bucharest Oct 16 [1893]

Her Royal Highness the Princess of Roumania has passed an excellent night, and her condition is perfectly satisfactory. The infant Prince is also quite well.

W.S. Playfair, M.D.



A debate raging at the time William Playfair was practising (and one that still engages the medical profession) was the matter of patient confidentiality. Spurred initially by the state's growing agenda in public health, which stressed the doctor's duty to collective interests, and led to the notification legislation on infectious diseases (1889) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The debate evolved to include the sensitive and volatile area of abortion. And it was in this conscience-testing situation that William Playfair found himself professionally and personally embroiled.

In the *Kitson v Playfair* trial of 1896, Justice Hawkins ruled that no general rules could be laid down on medical disclosure. The subject of the legal action arose from William Playfair having attended a sister-in-law of his wife for what he believed to be the effects of miscarriage or abortion. After repeated attempts to allow her to prove that she had not been unfaithful to her husband – who had been out of the country for the previous 13 months, Playfair disclosed his opinion to both the other doctor present at the time and to his wife. Despite having the weight of medical opinion on his side he was found guilty of slander and fined the hefty sum of £12,000, subsequently reduced on appeal to £9,200.<sup>ix</sup>

At the time of the trial Playfair, royal acoucheur and respected patron of the arts, was at the peak of his career. He had recently turned down a knighthood in the happy expectation of ultimately receiving a baronetcy. However, the scandalous nature of the case cost him much of his practice and hopes of any further honours from the Queen. He may have found some consolation in a letter he received from Gladstone who wrote to express his indignation at the jury's verdict and to assure Playfair that he had done nothing more nor less than his duty.<sup>x</sup> In reviewing who might be the subject of this case I was proved entirely wrong. The full details are revealed under the section on Arthur Octavius Kitson for whom, up to obtaining a copy of an article on the case, I had given up on finding anything further than the 1861 census.

William Playfair died on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1903, and his passing was noted in an obituary in the *Times* under the heading 'The Late Dr. W. S. Playfair, The Eminent Physician' We know that William was not the most robust of people and it is likely that, apart from the effect on his professional status, the stress of the trial affected his somewhat fragile health. The obituary notes that in his later years Dr. Playfair's health had been manifestly failing, and he had for some time withdrawn from practice and ceased to reside in London. I am not sure how

long Emily lived after her husband's death.

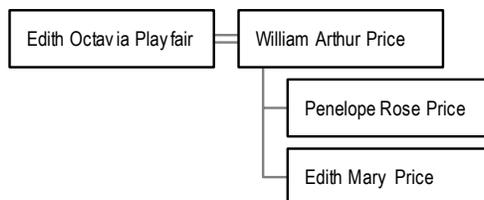


### Edith Octavia Playfair

The first child of Emily and William Playfair was Edith Octavia Playfair, born about 1865. She was not at home for the 1881 census as she was a visitor at the household of Robert and Hope Knowles of Gatton Road, Reigate, and who at some time lived in India.<sup>xi</sup>

Herbert Knowles	54	Merchant	Gomersal, Yorkshire
Hope Knowles	37		Somersetshire
Mabel L Knowles	14	Scholar	Calcutta
Hope Knowles	8	Scholar	London
Edith Playfair (Visitor)	16	Scholar	London
Sarah Nash	25	Lady's Maid	St. Austell, Cornwall
John Hancock	30	Butler	Kent
Anna Kemp	29	Cook	St. Albans
Emma Westbrook	26	Housemaid	Isleworth, Surrey
Ellen Day	21	Housemaid	Shedfield, Hampshire
Agnes Faithful	20	Kitchenmaid	London
Henry F Mine	18	Footman	London

Missing from the 1891 census, the next official record we have for Edith is the registration of the marriage Edith Octavia Playfair and William Arthur Price William, the son of Bartholomew and Amy Eliza Price who had been born about 1860 at St. Giles, Oxford, which was registered in Westminster for the Jul-Sep quarter of 1892.<sup>xii</sup> More specifically, they were married at the Church of St Thomas in the parish of St James on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1892 when William was 32 and Edith 27. Immediately prior to the wedding William was staying at Almond's Hotel, Clifford Street and Edith was at home at 31 George Street, Hanover Square. William's rank was given as Gentleman and that of his father was Clerk in Holy Orders. Edith's father William Playfair was modestly described at Doctor of Medicine. There were numerous witnesses to the ceremony – Bartholomew and Amy E Price and Arthur E Price (parents and a brother? of the groom), Emily Playfair, Lyon Playfair, R Lambert Playfair and Lilius E Playfair (respectively mother, uncles and sister of the bride).<sup>xiii</sup>



By the time of the 1901 census Edith and William had two children (and at this stage we do not know if they had any other children). The family was living at 19 Church Row, Hampstead.<sup>xiv</sup>

William A Price	41	Electrical Engineer (worker)	Oxford
Edith O Price	36		London
Penelope R Price	5		London
Edith M Price	3		London
Gertrude A White	27	Nurse Domestic	Wolverhampton, Staffordshire
Annie Bowden	30	Cook Domestic	Dunham, Norfolk
Alice H Howard	21	Housemaid Domestic	Hampstead, London

William, son of Bartholomew and Amy Eliza Price, was born about 1860 at St Giles, Oxford. For the 1861 census his parents were abroad, and he was at home with his sister and the family servants, at 11 St Giles Street, Oxford.<sup>xv</sup>

Amy M Price	2	Scholar	St Giles, Oxford
William A Price	1		St. Giles, Oxford
William J Hodgkins	25	Butler	Oxford
Sarah M Matthews	23	Housemaid	Paris, France (BS)
Ann Asyel	30	Domestic Cook	Oxford
Mary Tucker	30	Nurse	Bath

The Price family was scattered for the 1871 census. I have not found a record for William, but his father Bartholomew (transcribed as Bertha Law!) was visiting the Andrews family, resident at Hill House, Stowting Kent. It is possible that Ann Andrews was his sister.<sup>xvi</sup>

John B Andrews	55	Farmer of 440 Acres Employing 8 Labourers and 1 boy	Stowting, Kent
Ann Andrews	55		Colne St, Gloucestershire
Bartholomew Price (Vis)	52	Clergyman	Colne St, Gloucestershire
Eliza Begent	26	Domestic Servant	Hythe, Kent
Emily Cheeseman	16	Domestic Servant	Hartlip, Kent

Meanwhile, William's mother was at home at 11 St Giles Street, Oxford, with a brood of children.<sup>xvii</sup>

Amy E Price	35	Wife of Professor	Exeter
Amy M Price	12	Scholar	Oxford
Mary E M Price	9	Scholar	Oxford
Alice M Price	7	Scholar	Oxford
Rose E Price	5	Scholar	Oxford
Eleanor R Price	2	Scholar	Oxford
Bartholomew G Price	11 mos		Oxford
William Cole Cole (Vis)	70	Justice of the Peace	Moreton Hampstead, Devonshire
Amy Stogdon (Vis)	62	Solicitor's Widow	North Bovey, Devonshire
Elizabeth Johnson	54	Nurse Domestic Servant	Oxford
Elizabeth Penny	36	Nurse Domestic Servant	London
Temperance Butler	31	Cook	Fritwell, Oxfordshire
Elizabeth Ford	18	Housemaid	Oxford
George Tubb	19	Footman	Great Haseley, Oxfordshire
Ellen Walker	14	Nursemaid	Beverstone, Gloucestershire

It is likely, judging by these two census returns, that Bartholomew Price married late in life as there is an age discrepancy between him and his wife of about seventeen years. He certainly made up for lost time!

While the Price parents are back together for the 1881 census, in which Bartholomew is described as a Clergyman of the Church of England, MA, FRS, and Professor of Natural Philosophy, William reappears as a boarder at the Kings Head Hotel, Market Place, Barnard Castle, as a 21 year old student. Also staying at the Hotel are Hereford B George and Edward H Hayes, respectively Fellow and Tutor and Lecturer of New College Oxford, and William H Lewis, undergraduate of Oxford. So this group may have been on holiday, or on a study tour of some kind.<sup>xviii</sup>

Just over a year before he married Edith, William, now qualified, was living at 9 North Building, Broad Street, in the city of London.

William A Price	31	Electrical Engineer	Oxford
Emma Smith	29	Domestic Servant	Ricton, Warwickshire

The births of the two known daughters of Edith and William – Penelope Rose and Edith Mary – were registered at Greenwich in the 1896 and 1898 Jan-March quarters respectively. I have not followed up on Penelope, but a brief mention of Edith in the Times archives caught my eye.



### *Edith Mary Price*

Edith, who preferred to be known as Mary Price was born in 1898 and never married. The Times carried her obituary in the 21<sup>st</sup> May 1980 edition, and provides a potted biography of what was a full and interesting life.

Miss Mary Price, CBE, BEM, a distinguished Civil Servant, barrister and devoted wartime nurse, died peacefully at her home in Blewbury on May 15 in her eighty-third year. Edith Mary Price was the second daughter of William Arthur Price and Edith Octavia Playfair. She was educated in Newcastle and at Girton where she read history. After post-graduate studies at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, she became, most unusually for her time, a policewoman in Detroit. Returning home she was called to the bar and became only the third woman member of the Inner Temple. She practised briefly at the Chancery Bar before entering the Civil Service and the Land Registry. Here she spent the greater part of her working life, retiring as Deputy Land Registrar in 1958, when she was made CBE. During the war years however she volunteered immediately as a VAD and spent five years nursing at the Cambridge Military Hospital in Aldershot. Her work here earned her the greatest admiration and affection and she was awarded the British Empire Medal for her devoted service. Throughout her life she had concerned herself with a wide variety of interest : swimming and mountaineering in her youth, campaigning for the equality of women in her working years and the Red Cross and the British Legion in later life. She was widely loved and respected by all who knew her and most particularly by her own family who will always remember with happiness her vivid, colourful and entertaining personality.



### Lilias Emily Playfair

The second daughter born to Emily and William Playfair, and whose birth was registered in the district of St George Hanover Square in the Jan-Mar quarter of 1871, Lilias never married. The Times Archives makes mention of her attending various society events, the latest of which was a Court Circular snippet of March 1936 at which she presided at the Ladies Imperial Association's meeting.

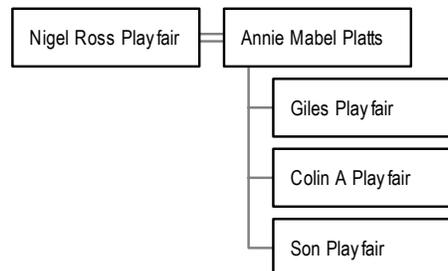


### Nigel Ross Playford

Nigel, the only surviving son of William and Emily, was born on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1874, and this event was registered at St George Hanover Square in the Jul-Sep quarter of that year.<sup>xv</sup> He was at home with his family for the 1881 census, as a 6 year old scholar and again in 1901, having studied first at Harrow and then, having matriculated in October 1892, at University College, Oxford, and now a qualified and practising barrister at law.<sup>xv</sup> However Nigel made his name in a field far removed from the academic and medical milieu of his father and uncles. Eschewing the legal career which presumably was planned for him, it was in the theatre that his future lay and he was the actor-manager of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London, in the 1920s. The following account is sourced from Wikipedia.

He starred in the Mermaid Society's well-received 1904 London production of *The Way of the World* by William Congreve and went on to produce a very effective modern run twenty years later at The Lyric with Edith Evans as Millamant (1924). By then, Playfair was well known. He had produced Shakespeare's *As You Like It* for the opening night of the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford-upon-Avon in April 1919, and brought it back to the Lyric in April 1920. Critics derided an unconventional set and costumes by Claud Fraser, but in what Shakespearean scholar Sylvan Barnet calls the play's "first modern production", their spare, evocative design was later acknowledged as a groundbreaking departure from the unimaginatively literal Shakespearean production typical of the time. As early as 1914, Fraser had also begun to think up designs based on John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. His innovative set and costume designs premiered at the Lyric Theatre on June 5, 1920, in what is now considered to have been another of Playfair's masterpieces. Playfair is credited with a major influence on the BBC's 1923 wireless Shakespeares, the first produced by that organisation. He continued to work as a BBC producer for some years, and is credited with having commissioned Richard Hughes to write the world's first radio play, *Danger*, which was broadcast on January 15, 1924. Playfair also appeared in a few motion picture films during the last years of his life. He was knighted in 1928. The National Portrait Gallery holds a pen and ink caricature portrait of Sir Nigel Playfair by Harry Furniss. Fortnum & Mason still markets Sir Nigel's Vintage Marmalade, and there is a Nigel Playfair Avenue in Hammersmith, near Ravenscourt Park tube station.

At the time he was establishing himself in the theatrical world but seemingly still in the legal profession, Nigel married Annie Mabel Platts who, as we will see, was herself an actress. The full details of the event are recorded in the marriage certificate which shows that on 25 July 1905, at St John's Church, Tunbridge Wells, Nigel Ross Playfair, a 31 year old bachelor, with the profession of Artist, resident at Grays Inn, London, married Annie Mable Platts, a 28 year old spinster of Woodbury Park Road (presumably Tunbridge Wells), and the daughter of Francis Thomas Platts, OS Police, Bengal. There were no members of Nigel's family as witnesses, but Annie's sister Ruth J. Platts, an Arthur Hutchinson and a Roslynn Bruce filled this role. The marriage was by banns, and the ceremony was conducted according to the rites and ceremonies of the Established Church.<sup>xvi</sup>



It is on record that Nigel and Annie had three sons, one of whom was Giles, who was born on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1910, and who was also an actor and campaigner for penal reform, and, like his father was educated at Harrow and Oxford. Another son was Colin, whose birth registration for the Jul-Sep quarter of 1912, has been found. But whether there were any daughters, or indeed any more sons, born to Nigel and Annie has not been established.<sup>xvii</sup>

Annie's father did not give her away as he had died some time before the wedding. She has in fact been difficult to trace through the census returns, and spent some years living in India. However Annie has been located in the 1901 census, living at with her widowed mother and sister Ruth and a brother Henry, at 12

Langley Mansions, Lambeth.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Annie Platts (W)	53	Independent Means	Liverpool
Annie M Platts	25	Actress	New Brighton, Cheshire
Ruth J Platts	23	Dispenser of Medicines	Bengal, East Indies
Henry F Platts	19	Housemaid	Bengal, East Indies

The sudden death of Nigel Playfair, on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1834 was covered by the Times in a short notice the following day.

Obituary

Sir Nigel Playfair

We announce with much regret that Sir Nigel Playfair, actor, manager, and producer, died yesterday afternoon in Kings' Hospital, at the age of 60. He was taken ill on the last day of July while playing in *As You Like It* at the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park. Last Tuesday he was removed to hospital and underwent a serious operation on the following day. Lady Playfair and their three sons were with him at the last.



Caricature Sketch - Sir Nigel Ross  
National Portrait Gallery

In fact there were a number of obituaries in honour of Nigel Playfair, the most informative appearing on an inside page of the 19<sup>th</sup> August edition.

## Obituary

### SIR NIGEL PLAYFAIR

#### ADVENTURES IN THE THEATRE

Sir Nigel Playfair, whose death yesterday at the age of 60 we announce with much regret this morning, occupied in the English theatre and in the affection of English audiences a place of his own. Though every one recognized his professional ability as manager, producer, and actor, and though, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, he was responsible for one of the most remarkable theatrical enterprises of recent times, he was always thought of, in distinction from other men of the theatre equivalent in experience with himself, as one who remained to the end of his days an amateur—an amateur, that is to say, not in ability, but in spirit, a man whose best work was never the outcome of a gravely ambitious professional routine but sprang rather from his pleasures, from his desire to amuse himself with experiment, and from his special "amateur" genius for fantasticality and caricature.

This endearing repute it amused him to contradict and, in contradicting, to confirm. He would, on occasion, in pleading for a National Theatre or defending himself against a charge of amateurishness at Hammersmith, assume a mask of solemnity which became willy-nilly an addition to his natural humour; but he



never wore it long. His two volumes of reminiscence, "The Story of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith" (1925) and "Hammersmith Hoy" (1930), were among the most entertaining and modest of their kind. He liked to describe himself, with a twinkle that permitted free interpretation to his listener, as a "mezzo-brow"; and when, in 1928, he replied to the congratulations of the Lyceum Club on his knighthood, he said that far from being shy of his distinction, he "went about the streets using it frequently to himself."

Born in London on July 1, 1874, he was the son of William Playfair, a physician in fashionable practice. His mother, Emily Kitson, was a cousin of Arthur Playfair, himself an actor. He appears to have been a shy and withdrawn child. W. S. Gilbert brutally introduced him at a party to Julia Neilson as "a boy that none of the girls seems to want to dance with"; at Winchester his health permitted him to survive but a few days, and, though he enjoyed the company of his house-master, "Frankie" Marshall, he seems to have found Harrow extremely tedious. He went to University College, Oxford, in 1892, and his life as an undergraduate at once found its centre in the O.U.D.S. A brief experience at the Bar followed, enlivened for him by acting with the Old Stagers during Canterbury Cricket Week and with their counterpart, the Windsor Strollers. He first appeared professionally at the Garrick Theatre in 1902, when he was given a modest part in *A Pair of Knickerbockers*.

After working with Bouchier for a time and serving a Shakespearian apprenticeship with Benson's company in the West Indies, he found his way to His Majesty's Theatre in 1907, where his unusual voice and appearance marked him for farcical parts—for Stephano in *The Tempest*, for the Clown in *The Winter's Tale*, and for the First Gravedigger in *Hamlet*; and, if his talent had not been exceptional, a clown he might have been permitted to remain all his life. But he won his way from fooling to comedy. Already after the Benson tour he had appeared at the Court Theatre in *John Bull's Other Island*, and as Bohun in *You Never Can Tell*. In the autumn of 1907 he was Mr. Shaw's Finch McComas; four years later he supported Mr. Granville-Barker in the *Anatol* dialogues, and was one of the critics—admittedly the broadest of the Shavian targets—in *Fanny's First Play*; and before the War he had appeared as Backbite in *The School for Scandal*, as Bottom, and in what was considered by many playgoers of discernment to be his best part—that of Cutler Walpole in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. While the War continued he played with increasing distinction in the many light pieces fashionable at that time.

## THE LYRIC, HAMMERSMITH

It was not until December, 1918, that, assuming management of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, he entered upon that phase of his career by which he will be chiefly remembered.

The history of that experiment, with which Playfair's connexion was actively maintained for 14 years, is still fresh in playgoers' memories. The theatre was remote, the available finance was not extravagant, and nothing but unfailing courage, coupled with that discernment which in the theatre is too often called good luck, could have persuaded the public of Charing Cross to journey so far into the wilds. But Mr. John Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* ran for a year, making Hammersmith known, and *The Beggar's Opera*, hazardously produced in 1920, set all London singing its airs, endured for nearly 1,500 performances, and founded the theatre's distinguishing tradition of gay and picturesque revival. In the same year Playfair appeared as Touchstone, and as Ralph (his favourite part) in *Ralph Roister Doister*, which he produced at the Kingsway. The Lyric continued with success, *The Way of the World*, *The Duenna*, *The Rivals*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, and *The Critic* proving that there was still a public for the classics interpreted as Playfair interpreted them, and such pieces as *Riverside Nights*, *Tantivy Towers*, and, finally, *Derby Day*, showing

that his special method—a mingling of intimacy, brightness, and burlesque—was not applicable to the classics alone. Meanwhile he was author or part-author of the English versions of Capek's *R.U.R.* and *The Insect Play*, and appeared in, and produced, many pieces outside his own theatre. The new season this spring of the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park owed much to his help, and he was an admirable Jaques in the production of *As You Like It*.

As an actor, judged by any academic rule, he erred, even in comedy, on the side of caricature. His style was broad and loose, personal rather than interpretative, but he had the glorious quality, with which nature had endowed him and which his talent taught him to employ, of being able to make people laugh and of communicating to them that their amusement was indeed his own. As a producer his strength was that he did consistently what pleased himself, never whining that the public was too stupid to appreciate this or that, but inviting them, with a watchful eye on their answer but an unswerving, light-hearted independence, to take a share in his game. He had pronounced mannerisms of theatrical style, of which a childlike joy in the lighting and extinguishing of candles may be quoted as an instance, and a tendency to treat such a play as *The Way of the World* not merely as an old play seen through the glass of modern fashion, but as if the fact of producing it at all were a joke. Charade was never very far from his comedy, nor the spirit of an after-dinner rag from his farce. But his extravagances, like his merits, were his own and spontaneous. In an age when style of any kind was the thing most wanted in the theatre, they were accents on his style, playful and unique. They made him loved and they made him famous; they were the sugar, applied intuitively and not cynically, to his pill; and they enabled him to do what no one else could do outside a private society—give back the classics to the twentieth-century stage. He was a gentlemanly adventurer in the theatre whose adventure bore fruit.

A further notice in the Times of 17<sup>th</sup> December 1934 advised that, in accordance with Sir Nigel Playfair's wishes, his widow had presented his collection of printed plays and books relating to the art and history of the stage to the British Drama League. The collection included a fine example of the 1765 edition of *The Beggar's Opera* and over 50 editions of 18<sup>th</sup> century plays.

Nigel's widow outlived him by some fourteen years. A letter to the Times, published on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1948 under the heading "Lady Playfair", provides an insight into the character of this woman called May by her friends.

The bare news of the sudden death of May Playfair cannot indicate the loss to her multitudinous friends and to her relations. Those of us who have been lucky enough to see her on her too rare visits to London since she went permanently to live at Sandwich tow years ago will have one very real pleasure the less to look forward to. Possessing than unusual combination of sweet charm and great intelligence, and having perfect taste, May like to live in lovely (but modest) houses, which she kept open to every one. Indeed, her Saturday afternoon teas in Wellington Square all through the 1939-45 war were a boon to many whose work kept them in London and who could then relax, and to others of us who were able to spend leaves in London; there was splendid company and, miraculously, a splendid tea served by her devoted friend and housekeeper. But, quietly and without publicity, May was always working to provide something for someone – a chance for new playwrights or stage beginners, entertainment for those in need of it, amateur theatricals for the forces, countless objects for countless people, never just an easy charity, but a cause needing thought and toil, willingly, quietly given. To her three sons will go many expressions of the regard in which was held a delightful, a wonderful friend.

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## Audrey Agnes M Playfair

The last child of Emily and William Playfair was Audrey, born in 1876. She was at home with her parents and siblings for the 1881 census at Chambers Street, Westminster. She is the only member of this family who I have located in the 1891 census, when she was staying with her uncle John Hawthorn Kitson, his daughter and another niece at Elmete Hall, Leeds.<sup>xiv</sup>

John H Kitson	47	Engine Manufacturer	Roundhay
Jessie B Kitson	14		Roundhay
Gladys J Parry	20	Governess	Rowsley, Derbyshire
Audrey A M Playfair (Niece)	15		Middlesex, London
Dora L Ellershaw (Niece)	14		Hull, Yorkshire
Catherine Joyce	48	Cook	Kingweston, Somersetshire
Annie F Campy	23	Housemaid	Newland, Yorkshire
Sarah Sectney	23	Kitchenmaid	Lincoln
Annie Cullinworth	19	Housemaid	Harewood, Yorkshire
Fannie Barnett	17	Scullerymaid	Leeds
William Mason	20	Footman	Hadley, Staffordshire

She was back with the family in London for the 1901 census when she was an unmarried woman of 25 and, like her elder sister Liliás, remained unmarried. Together with Liliás and their mother, Audrey's attendance at various events was recorded in the Times, with the last ones I have found being in 1933, when they were among those present at the memorial service for a Robert Fleming Crooks at St Mark's, Audley Street, and in February 1934, when Audrey Playfair attended a luncheon of the Old Queen's Society at the Washington Hotel, Curzon Street.



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<sup>i</sup> HO107/2321/p14; RG9/3393/p15.

<sup>ii</sup> Certified copy of Marriage Certificate.

<sup>iii</sup> Hub Aarchives.

<sup>iv</sup> Obituary, Parish: Edinburgh St Mary; ED :33; Line: 20; Year: 1861.

<sup>v</sup> RG10/102/p1.

<sup>vi</sup> RG11/93/p12; FreeBMD Death Index.

<sup>vii</sup> RG13/82/p54.

<sup>viii</sup> Copy of Title Page and Preface on file.

<sup>ix</sup> Case cited in A. McLaren, *Privileged Communications : medical confidentiality in late Victorian Britain*, Medical History, 1993, 37, 129-147.

<sup>x</sup> Lancet, 1903, ii:574.

<sup>xi</sup> RG11/797/p23.

<sup>xii</sup> FreeBMD Marriage Index.

<sup>xiii</sup> Certified copy of Marriage Certificate MXD396037.

<sup>xiv</sup> RG13/120/p41.

<sup>xv</sup> RG9/892/pp21-22.

<sup>xvi</sup> RG10/1018/p84.

<sup>xvii</sup> RG10/1436/pp2-3.

<sup>xviii</sup> RG11/1449/p2; RG11/4933/p11.

<sup>xix</sup> FreeBMD Birth Index.

<sup>xx</sup> RG11/93/p12; Oxford Men, 1880-1892: RG13/82/p54.

<sup>xxi</sup> Certified copy of Marriage Certificate MXD347866.

<sup>xxii</sup> www.links.org; FreeBMD Birth Index.

<sup>xxiii</sup> RG13/414/p49.

<sup>xxiv</sup> RG11/93/p12; RG12/3714/pp30-31.