



disability ———
history month

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BEYOND THE BARRIERS

A journey through disability history in the UK.

**greenwich
students'
union**

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A Journey Through Disability History in the UK.

The history of disability in the UK is a testament to resilience, innovation, and unwavering determination. Throughout the centuries, disabled pioneers have risen above societal barriers, igniting change and inspiring others to challenge the status quo. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that disabled history is also marked by medical experiments, disrespect, isolation, and genocide - this darker side of their history is explored here to illuminate on the struggles the disabled community had to, and have to, live with.

Despite the progress in law and policy, the discussions of disability has often lacks intersectionality. Disability intersects with various aspects of a person's identity, including race, gender, sexual orientation, and more. Recognising this intersectionality is essential to creating a more inclusive and equitable society. We examine the gaps in our understanding and highlight the importance of a more comprehensive, intersectional approach to disability advocacy. It's worth noting that many of the 'firsts' within the disabled community have historically been associated with white, middle-class men, overshadowing the achievements of black and indigenous women.

As you explore this exhibition, reflect on the past, celebrate the present, and envision a future where barriers are dismantled, and diversity is celebrated. Beyond Barriers provides an opportunity to learn, connect, and deepen our commitment to creating a world where all voices, regardless of ability, are heard and valued.

HISTORY TIMELINE

A look through some key moments of disability history here in the UK.

1322

The Prerogativa Regis law is introduced allowing the English monarch to seize the property of people with mental illness or disability.

1535

The Poor Law Act 1535 requires town and parish councils to look after 'every aged, poor and impotent person' who was born or lived in the locality for three years. Services are funded by donations encouraged by the Church.

1593

An Act for the Necessary Relief of Soldiers and Mariners states that: Every parish shall be charged with a sum weekly towards the relief of sick, hurt, maimed soldiers and mariners'. Amending Acts raising the amounts to be collected are passed in 1597 & 1601.

1601

The Poor Law makes economic provision for people dependent on charity, which includes disabled people.

1620

Petition of the Poor Distracted of Bedlam to the King of England about the appalling conditions they suffer.

1664

The Great Plague of London. The gap between disabled people and the rest of the community was reduced, as larger numbers of people experienced illness, impairment, exclusion and poverty.

1774

Act for the Regulation of Private Madhouses enshrines the role of a doctor in 'certifying' madness.

1843

The stereotype of disabled people as pathetic and pitiable is given prominence in the portrayal of the character of Tiny Tim in A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens.

1845

The Lunacy Act passed to create institutions for poor, criminally insane and mentally ill people to be placed in. This Act made sure there was an asylum in every County. The treatment of people in these asylums was inhumane.

1851

The Census is the first attempt to monitor prevalence of impairment, specifically whether an individual is 'blind, deaf or imbecile'.

1876

Henry Maudsley, a leading British psychiatrist of his day and co-editor of The Journal of Mental Science, promotes his belief that 'lunatics' are by-products of evolution, not fit for treatment.

1886

Idiocy Act was passed, which intended to give "Facilities for the care, education and training of idiots and imbeciles". The way disabled and mentally ill people were perceived at the time was not equipped with knowledge or compassion.

1890

The Bethesda Home for Crippled Children in Manchester opens to provide a permanent home for physically impaired children.

1893

The Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act transfers responsibility for the education of blind and Deaf children to local education authorities

1897

The Workmen's Compensation Act establishes the right to financial support for those injured in workplace accidents.

1907

The Eugenics Education Society is formed, which would later be renamed the British Eugenics Society and, later still, the Galton Institute.

1913

The Mental Deficiency Act categorises people with learning disabilities and mental health issues as 'idiots', 'imbeciles', 'feeble-minded' or 'moral defectives'.

1919

The Central Council for the Care of Cripples is set up in response to the tens of thousands of injured ex-servicemen returning from the First World War.

1920

Partly bowing to pressure from a march of blind workers, the government supports the Blind Persons Act, which requires local authorities to register blind people and make arrangements for their welfare.

1920

The National Society for Lunacy Law Reform is established. It largely consisted of angry former patients critical of their experiences and complaints being dismissed by the authorities.

1930

The Mental Treatment Act brings in the concept of voluntary patients and recommends out-patient clinics and observation wards.

1939

Hitler orders widespread 'mercy killing' of sick and disabled people. The Nazi euthanasia program, to eliminate 'life unworthy of life,' is code-named Aktion T4. An estimated 275,000 people are killed under the programme from 1939 to 1945.

1939

During World War Two, the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead develops as a specialist burns unit.

1944

The Disabled Persons (Employment) Act sets up a quota system requiring employers with 20 or more employees to ensure that at least 3% of their workforce are disabled people.

1948

The first Stoke Mandeville Games are held, later commonly regarded as the birth of the Paralympic movement.

1948

The NHS was launched by Aneurin Bevan the then Health Secretary for Labour. So for the first time, hospitals, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, opticians and dentists were brought together under one umbrella to provide services for free at the point of delivery.

1950

The first polio vaccine is developed. Between 1947 and 1958 around 50,000 people in Britain contract polio.

1962

The first full hip replacement is carried out by Professor John Charnley at Wrightington Hospital near Wigan.

1970

The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, introduced by North West MP Alf Morris, is the first in the world to recognise and give rights to disabled people.

1970

In response to campaigning by disabled people, the introduction of Attendance Allowance is an attempt to cover the extra costs of disability in the widest sense.

1972

Alf Morris becomes the first disability minister.

1974

The Disabled Women's Coalition is founded at UC Berkeley by Susan Sygall and Deborah Kaplan

1981

Disabled Peoples' International is formed.

1986

The Disabled Persons Act strengthens the provisions of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and requires local authorities to meet the various needs of disabled people.

1992

BBC soap opera Eldorado is the first to have a non-disabled character played by a disabled person. However, in the 1960s, the actor playing Sandy in the television soap Crossroads becomes a wheelchair user during the lifetime of the programme.

1995

Protests by disabled people lead to the landmark introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act. This makes it illegal to discriminate against disabled people in connection with employment, the provision of goods, facilities and services or the disposal or management of premises

2000

The Representation of the People Act allows patients in mental hospitals, other than those guilty of a criminal offence, to vote.

2005

The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit publishes its report, Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People, setting out recommendations for achieving equality for disabled people by 2025.

2010

The Equality Act is passed by Parliament. It outlaws direct or indirect discrimination and harassment in employment, vocational education and the provision of goods and services, for a total of nine protected characteristics including disability.

2011

Launch of the 'Hardest Hit' campaign, organised jointly by the Disability Benefits Consortium and the UK Disabled People's Council. It lobbies the government about the impact of welfare cuts. Around 8,000 disabled people march on Parliament in May.

2012

The Olympic Games and Paralympic Games are held in the United Kingdom. Extensive media coverage by Channel 4 portrays disabled people winning medals as elite athletes.

2012

Responsible Reform is published. The report analyses the UK coalition government's proposed welfare benefit changes and claims that the government's consultation of changes to Disability Living Allowance fails to meet its own codes of practice; and that its report presents a highly misleading view of the responses it received.

2017

Jonnie Peacock, paralympian, becomes the first amputee to participate in Strictly Come Dancing.

2022

Troy Kotsur becomes the first deaf man to win an Academy Award for acting; he won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his role in CODA.



PA Photos, 1992

CELEBRATING HEROES



Baroness Jane Campbell

A disability rights campaigner and member of the House of Lords, Jane Campbell has been a tireless advocate for the rights of disabled people. She played a pivotal role in opposing cuts to disability benefits and promoting inclusive education.



Adam Pearson

A British actor and presenter, Adam Pearson has used his public profile to raise awareness about facial disfigurement and challenge societal perceptions of disability.



Kevin Walker - Signkid

A London-based rapper and musician who became Deaf after contracting meningitis when he was young. His musical ability comes from feeling the vibrations of sound through the floor.



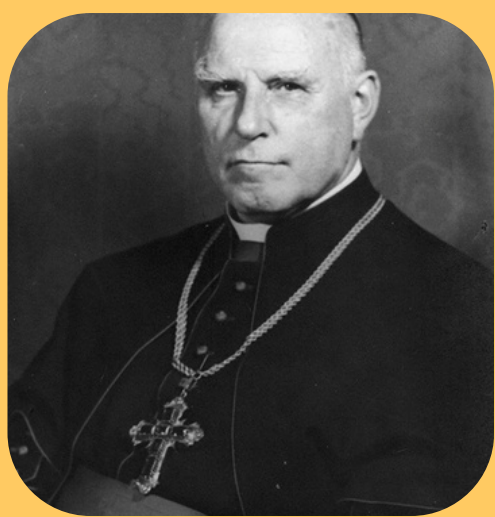
Marsha de Cordova

Marsha is a British politician who has been serving as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Battersea since 2017. She is a member of the Labour party. Marsha was born with nystagmus, a condition that causes blindness.



Bertie Massie

A prominent disability rights activist and former chair of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), Bert Massie worked tirelessly to promote the rights of disabled people in the UK and played a crucial role in the development of disability rights legislation.



Clemens August Graf Von Galen

A German Catholic Bishop who denounced the actions of the Nazi Government's Final Solution programme, including the murder of disabled peoples.



John Thomas Perceval

The son of a British prime minister who spent time in an asylum. He later writes two books about his time in asylums.



Dorothy Hopkins

Winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry. First known recipient of the Nobel Prize with a disability.