

Disability History

Fascinating Facts

Written by
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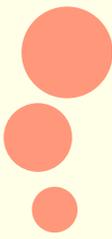

UNISON
Aberdeenshire



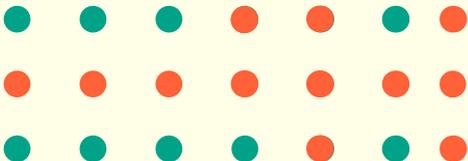
1944 Disabled
Employment
Act



2010
Equality
Act



1995
Discrimination
Act





INTRODUCTION

This is primarily a brief journey through the social history of disability, it is by no means a full account. Reading through disability history, it is extremely difficult not to come away with a different viewpoint other than a history of discrimination and missed opportunities.

This precis takes into account some international events such as the banning of Sign Language education which was just shocking, even for the time, and how long it took to be reversed.

This account of disability history is largely based in the North East of Scotland as it written for UNISON branches who are supported by the Grampian Resource Centre, but it may be appreciated by others with an interest in social history.

We have been as accurate as possible, but all research was done through the internet and from more recent oral history obtained from local people. Hence their comments may not have been recorded elsewhere but the information has been factually certified by the people concerned.

This precis only utilises a few case studies, however, it is anticipated that there will be many people with disabilities and/or who work in disabilities who have achieved many things. This disability history was written during 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic placed many restrictions on people's freedoms.

It is hoped by reading through this brief account of disability history it will give an insight into how issues have impacted on many parts of society and in particularly the North East of Scotland over the last two hundred years, from 1809 to the present.

Kathleen Kennedy, Equalities Officer, Aberdeenshire UNISON

CONTENTS

page

Louis Braille	8
Harriet Tubman	9
Bilbohall Hospital	10
Edinburgh Royal Blind School	10
William Cuffay	11
Glencraft Aberdeen	11
Lunacy Act and Ladysbridge Hospital	12
Albert Einstein	12
Sign Language Banned	13
John Keir	13
Helen Keller	14
Rosa May Billinghurst	15
The Mental Deficiency Act	15
Handicapped	16
Justice Not Charity	16
The Segregation of Handicapped Children Act	17
Wellwood Unit, Cults	17
Second World War	18
Camphill	19



Disabled Persons' Employment Act	19
Wellwood Nursing Home	20
NHS Scotland	20
Birth of Paralympics	21
The Mental Health Act	21
Mental Hospitals to Close In 15 Years	22
Stigma	22
Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act	23
1972 / 73 – Raeden Nursery Opened	23
Education Mentally Handicapped Children (Scotland) Act	24
Winter Paralympics	24
The Disabled Person Act	24
Children with Disabilities Act	25
Mental Health Act 1983	25
Taxicard	25
Community Care and Mental Health roll out	26
Brian Irvine Scottish / Aberdeen Former Footballer	26
Disability Discrimination Act / Guarantee Interview Scheme	27
Scottish Council for the Care of Spastics	28
Dame Ann Begg	28



The Scottish Parliament	29
European Year of the Disabled Person	29
Woodlands Hospital Closes	30
Reverend Professor John Swinton	30
Evelyn Glennie	31
Gordon Brown	32
The Equality Act	32
Disabled Author in Aberdeen Kathleen Kennedy	33
Paul Maynard Conservative MP	34
ATOS wins PIP Contracts	34
Unison Signs up to Dying to Work Campaign	35
Joseph Long	36
Into the Future	38



1809 – LOUIS BRAILLE

Born 4th Jan 1809 but not until an accident at aged 3 did he lose his sight. By the age of 16 Braille was attending the National Institute for Blind Youth in Paris where he spent every waking moment poking holes in paper to come up with a more tactile and efficient way of having holes represent the letters and numbers which his fellow students could recognise letters by tracing their fingers over the holes, and thus being able to have access to written material.

Braille’s inspiration came from Charles Barbier who had tried to develop a system with embossed dots for the army. It was designed to allow enemy location messages to be passed

secretly through the ranks.

Despite the fact that even if the enemy found a note they would be unable to decode the messages, this method failed to impress the Army.

The Braille Alphabet

⠁	⠃	⠉	⠇	⠑	⠆	⠎	⠈	⠊	⠋
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
⠅	⠄	⠍	⠹	⠞	⠡	⠟	⠗	⠠	⠢
k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t
⠩	⠥	⠦	⠨	⠧	⠤				
u	v	w	x	y	z				

However, Louis Braille saw how this method could be developed to assist blind people to read and be more independently. The system is still in worldwide use today and bears Louis Braille’s name.

1822 – HARRIET TUBMAN

Harriet Tubman was a civic activist with epilepsy, a nurse and a women suffragette. Her legacy is one of most recognised in American history and has inspired many people from different races and backgrounds.



Tubman was born a slave on a plantation in Dorchester County, Maryland around 1820. She suffered a traumatic brain injury from the actions of a slave owner which resulted in her having epileptic seizures and hypersomnia. Unfortunately, even after receiving this blow she continued to experience violence towards her. Tubman was a Black American who had a powerful impact. She made it her aim to free as many men, women and children from slavery through an underground railroad. It is estimated that she helped around 3,000 slaves to freedom. As Tubman was just 5 foot tall and was considered disabled by her slave owners it did not occur to them that she was the unlikely reason their slaves kept escaping.

Her insight into nursing and the local flora in Maryland also allowed her to help relieve many afflicted with chickenpox, cholera and yellow fever.

1835 – BILBOHALL HOSPITAL

Bilbohall hospital in Elgin opened in 1835. Its original name was Elgin Pauper Lunatic Asylum. This was later changed to Morayshire Mental Hospital which closed in 1995. By 1850 it was overflowing and an additional floor was added to the building. It was the first in Scotland and only asylum built before the Scottish Lunacy Act 1857.

1835 – EDINBURGH ROYAL BLIND SCHOOL

In 1835 Mr James Gall established a school for blind children. In 1875 it merged with the Royal Blind Asylum's educational unit in the 1900s and introduced a higher education section where students gained recognised diplomas. The school remained in the same building until 2014. From 1990 it operated two campuses. Although it specialised in the education of blind children, it also catered for children with other disabilities. The school continues today.



PHYSICAL EXERCISES, WEST CEAROMHAR.

1842 – WILLIAM CUFFAY

When William Cuffay was born his spine and knees were 'deformed' which meant his height as a grown man was 4'11". Cuffay was a journeyman tailor who lost his job when the new tailors' union went on strike in 1834. Cuffay was outraged by his treatment and he became convinced that workers needed to be represented in parliament. In 1842 he became the president of the National Chartists Convention and was considered to be a militant leader. In 1848 he was arrested on information suggesting that he was conspiring against Queen Victoria which he may have known about but did not support. Cuffay was transported to Tasmania, Australia for 21 years but 3 years later, when all political prisoners were pardoned, Cuffay returned to being a tailor. However he never left Tasmania and again he became involved with Trade Union duties and radical politics. Cuffay was involved in amending the Master and Servant Law in Tasmania giving workers rights, before he died in 1870.

1843 – GLENCRAFT ABERDEEN

Glencraft opened in 1843 as a social enterprise to assist in improving the lives for both the staff and wider society with part of their building being leased as a hospital for orphans in Aberdeen. Glencraft continues to employ 70% of the workforce made up of people with disabilities.

As it still remains a social enterprise, Glencraft's specific social objectives were met by giving their long serving employees dignity through highly skilled employment. The high-quality products were recognised by many including the royal family



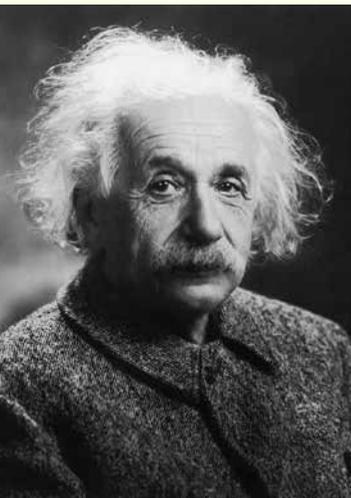
whom they have supplied for the last four generations. Glencraft hold's a Royal Warrant for its products.

Glencraft closed in November 2009 with debts of £3 million and the loss of 52 jobs, leaving the staff fearing the worst and concerned about their future employment, particularly when so many were disabled. Yet six months later Glencraft re-opened with backing from an oil company and the Scottish Government.

1857 – LUNACY ACT & LADYSBRIDGE HOSPITAL

The 1857 Lunacy Act Scotland was created by the General Board of Commissioners who were basically the Scottish Sheriffs. This gave them the right to inspect the 'madhouses', which may not have been the best of reasons.

Ladysbridge Hospital in Banff in Aberdeenshire was created following the passing of the Lunacy Act 1857. It was built to house and take care of 'lunatic paupers' and opened in 1865. In the 1950s Ladysbridge Hospital developed and became the regional centre for mentally handicapped (now learning disabled) adults. It finally closed in 2003.



1879 – ALBERT EINSTEIN

Einstein had a learning disability as he had found writing and maths at school very difficult but he then went on to become one of the best-known scientists of all time winning the Nobel prize for Physics in 1921. It is believed that he had Asperger's syndrome as he found it difficult to communicate clearly and was socially awkward.

1880 – SIGN LANGUAGE BANNED

At the 1880 Milan multinational country conference (International Congress on the Education of the Deaf – ICED), deaf educators declared that oral education was better than sign language which was banned. The result was catastrophic for deaf students and deaf teachers who lost their jobs. This was a devastating blow to the deaf community. Among the delegates attending 87 were Italians and 56 were from France – despite both countries having a long tradition of supporting schools for the deaf.

A 100 years later the 1980 ICED conference voted to modify the findings of the Congress of Milan, declaring that all deaf children have the right to flexible communication in the mode or combination of modes which are most suitable to meet their needs.

The 2010 Vancouver ICED Conference formally voted to reject ALL the Milan resolutions and a formal apology was made after 130 years. This left the deaf community free to be educated in any way they choose.

1895/98 – JOHN KEIR

John Keir was known as one of the most outstanding personalities in Aberdeen in his day. Keir took the ideas from the Aberdeen branch of the Blind Association to the ATUC (Aberdeen Trades Union Council). The Council agreed to John Keir's request that he and his colleague Mr Johnstone became delegates.

Mr Keir later became the first disabled President of the STUC. As President he guided the deliberations of delegates and impressed



them with his memory for facts and figures relating to civic and educational affairs. Mr Keir was a person of great intelligence and an understanding of the culture of that time.

1904 – HELEN KELLER

In 1882 when Keller was just 19 months old she lost her sight and hearing through illness. When Keller was six, she was examined by Alexander Graham Bell a Scottish born, American scientist (known for inventing the telephone), and teacher of the deaf. After his examination she was sent a 20 year old teacher from the Perkins Institution who remained with Keller until she died. Within months she learned to recognise objects by feeling them, associating them with finger spelling and arranging them into sentences. Keller never learnt to develop skills in the way her contemporary disabled people did, so wasn't held back. She wrote several books and began lecturing (with help of an interpreter) on behalf of the American Foundation for the Blind. Keller was the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Keller is one of the most famous disabled people in the world. She became an activist and travelled the world, she also brought hope to millions of disabled people.

1911 – ROSA MAY BILLINGHURST

Rosa May Billinghamurst was known as the ‘cripple suffragette’. Rosa was born in 1875 and after a bout of Polio was left disabled. In those days, she was simply regarded as a ‘cripple’. She endured many violent demonstrations as a disabled campaigner and did not let her disability hold her back. At suffrage demonstrations she used a hand-tricycle to propel herself.

Billinghamurst’s first arrest in 1912 was for campaigning and obstructing the police in Parliament Square, London although this incident is recorded as a suffragettes arrest. The Women’s Social

In court, Billinghamurst wasn’t referred to by name but as ‘the cripple’.

and Political Union (also known as the Suffragettes) organised a campaign to smash windows. This led to 220 arrests.

1913 – THE MENTAL DEFICIENCY ACT

This Act defined provision for instituted people who are ‘feeble-minded’ and ‘moral-defectives’ (REALLY SHOCKING). There were 4 categories: imbeciles, idiots who nowadays would be considered as having a learning disability, a more nebulous group of feeble-minded ‘their intelligence had fallen by the way side and they were socially inefficient, and moral defectives’. These were very wide-ranging groups that the Act covered.

People were automatically placed in institutions and separated from their families and community. The act also made provision for the establishment of a Board of Control.



At the height of the Act in the 1960s in Britain there were as many as 65,000 individuals in institutions. When people start exploring their family history, they may well find that some of their ancestors among these numbers, as it is still only their grandparents' era. Caution may be needed as it can be upsetting.

1915 – HANDICAPPED

The word handicapped originated in 1504 when King Henry VII of England recognised that there were a great number of disabled veterans who were considered no longer able to work or contribute to society. He proclaimed they were legalised, hence the name 'Hand-in-cap', authorise to beg.

Only in 1915 did the word begin to be applied to children with disabilities as new fields such as sociology and social work began to develop. By the 1950s the word handicapped covered adults and the mentally disabled. In the 1970s handicapped was the word of choice by social services and legislation. It is still often used today although is no longer acceptable.

1920 – JUSTICE NOT CHARITY

The 'Blind March' was for 'Social justice, not charity' and many of the marchers carried placards saying: 'Justice not Charity'. Among the marchers were 74 blind workers from Scotland. They marched to London to demand that the then Prime Minister, David Lloyd George give fairer rights to people with sight loss. The event was the first disability movement of its kind and was instrumental in Parliament creating the resulting Blind Persons Act of 1920.



1921 – THE SEGREGATION OF HANDICAPPED CHILDREN ACT

The segregation of ‘handicapped’ children began with this Education Act that stated they were to be educated ONLY in special classes or schools. At the time it was believed that mental defects could be detected in those with physical disabilities. Little changed until 1944 when the ‘Eleven Plus’ examination came in which bluntly assigned children according to their perceived academic ability.

It is often heard, even today, that disabled children should be educated separately. They are often found in Special Needs bases today so in some ways they are separate. Traces of this Act and its ideas are still in circulation today in 2020, though current education legislation in Scotland emphasises ‘inclusion’.

1931 – WELLWOOD UNIT, CULTS

Wellwood Unit in Cults opened on 30th October 1931 for ‘The Desirability of Instituting a Home for the treatment of Early Cases of Nervous and Mental Disease’ based on a similar establishment in Edinburgh. It had been recommended that the place had several acres in its grounds but was still within 10 miles of Aberdeen.

In 1946 they considered buying a neighbouring property to run as a nursing home like Wellwood or as a home for ‘senile patients’ but their bids were unsuccessful. It was bought by Aberdeen Town Council as a home for deficient children. (The Wellwood Unit’s story continues – see 1947)

1933/42 – SECOND WORLD WAR

The Nazi government in Germany introduced a Law of Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary diseases. This was the start of the Nazi aim of creating a 'Master Race'.

In 1933 this law forced the disabled to be sterilised so their genes would not be passed on. When you stop to think about this, you realise how there is absolutely no bearing on reality, even then, never mind in the 21st Century – but it happened. Disabilities included were wide ranging from severe physical deformity to chronic alcoholism.

Furthermore in World War II people with severe learning disabilities and others with physical disabilities were a Nazi target for elimination by euthanasia. The killing of disabled adults began in 1939 with a panel of 'medical experts' set up to approve the 'mercy-killing' of each person. Parents were led to believe their children were being sent away to receive specialised improved care. In time they were told the child had died with pneumonia and their bodies disposed of quickly to stop the disease spreading.

When prisoners arrived at concentration camps, they were judged on their value as slaves, therefore the sick, the disabled and the elderly were the first to be exterminated as they were thought to have no economic worth.

The UK wasn't exempt from disability discrimination, as at the beginning of Second World War the British government called up all men between 18 and 41.



Murdo Macdonald from Carloway in the Isle of Lewis was one of them. He travelled to Aberdeen Gordon Barracks as instructed, quite a distance. He wasn't able to go to war as he had a glass eye but was a very able crofter and even a Harris Tweed weaver which requires extremely good eyesight. He was also this writer's Grandfather.

1940 – CAMPHILL

Camphill first opened in Aberdeen to educate mentally handicapped children, as at that time they had no access to any educational provision. Dr Karl Kong was inspired by the Rudolf Steiner philosophy of making a real improvement for those who had been excluded from society because of their intellectual needs. He believed people with learning disabilities have as much to give society as anyone. This was a radical new concept in Scotland.

Camphill continues to thrive and in 1955, after parents' requests, they opened an adult provision, to allow residents to make Camphill their permanent home and often place of work.

1944 – DISABLED PERSONS' EMPLOYMENT ACT

People were now required to be registered as disabled thus creating a record of people who needed to work for a living but were 'handicapped' from getting employment on their own merits. The Act required an employer that had 20 or more employees to have a percentage of disabled persons and at that point it was 3%. Any employer had to seek permission from the Minister to be exempt, when a disabled person applied for an advertised



vacancy and didn't get the job. The Act became law to coincide with veterans returning with disabilities from the Second World War, to support and help in finding them work. Public employers were not bound by the Act. There was some speculation that the 3% was never met.

1947 – WELLWOOD NURSING HOME

Wellwood Nursing Home became part of the Aberdeen Mental Hospital Group when NHS (Scotland) was established. By the 60s the North Eastern Region Hospital Board decided on the possible uses of the Wellwood Unit and turned it into a centre of care for children with learning disabilities (mental handicap). Any of its patients who were left were transferred to Daviot in 1963. It was a larger psychiatric hospital set in rural Aberdeenshire which closed in 1995. From 1964 Wellwood Unit reopened as part of Woodlands Hospital and over the years new wards were added and the children moved to the extension wing.

1948 – NHS SCOTLAND

NHS Scotland was founded in 1948 along with the English and Welsh NHS www.ournhsscotland.com/history/timeline we are always pioneering. In its first financial year NHS Scotland cost around £42 million – equivalent to 13p a week per head of population in Scotland. The NHS brought health, medical ethics and society together, as until 1948 there had only been private or local authority institutions caring for people with learning disabilities. These were taken over by the NHS and this gave everyone free access to a GP, prescription drugs, glasses, dental treatment and dentures but it was shortly scaled back.



1948 – BIRTH OF PARALYMPICS

Ludwig Guttman (1899–1980) was a German Jewish neurosurgeon who realised that sport can play a significant part in rehabilitation. Sport became a central element in the rehabilitation system for people who were paralysed in World War II.

The first Paralympics took place in London in 1948 and only involved 16 injured service men and women. It was originally called the Stoke Mandeville Games. Stoke Mandeville Games became the Paralympics and officially began in Rome in 1960. It featured 400 athletes from 23 countries and has taken place every four years since then. Furthermore since Seoul in Korea 1988 the Paralympics have taken place in the same cities and venues as the Olympics.

1959 – THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT

The Mental Health Act repealed the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act and for the first time there was a clear distinction between mental illnesses and learning disabilities. This was a great breakthrough in challenging the stigma around learning disabilities and mental health. Treatment was to be normally voluntary and informal either in hospital or in the community unless it was compulsory, when proper provision had to be made in the interests of patient or society.

The Act saw it to be desirable to move from institutional care to care within the community but in practice this took much longer.



1961 – MENTAL HOSPITALS TO CLOSE IN 15 YEARS

Enoch Powell the then Minister of Health stated mental hospitals were to be closed within 15 years when addressing the Association for Mental Health, declaring within 15 years there would be greater care in the community for mental health patients. He stated that there would be 75,000 less psychiatric beds needed, and any buildings 'not fit for purpose' would be closed and were not to be used for other functions. All these closures did not take place within the proposed time scale! A number remained opened until the 1990s.

1966 – STIGMA

Paul Hunt and Peter Wade in 1966 published a book called 'Stigma' Facing Oppression. It described many of the ways in which society oppresses disabled people. It showed the inadequacies in the Welfare State by having disabled people contribute their own stories. These stories showed the struggles disabled people faced and how society treated them.



1970 – CHRONICALLY SICK AND DISABLED PERSONS ACT

This Act required local authorities to provide welfare services that meet the needs of disabled people. The Act obliges local councils to have access for disabled people to public buildings. The Act also covers legislation for the disabled orange badge (now blue badge) that helps people with disabilities to park nearer their destination. This really gave greater independence and access to more activities for disabled people.

1972/73 – RAEDEN NURSERY OPENED

Raeden was an assessment and treatment centre based in Aberdeen which included all specialisms. The main aim was to have assessments and ongoing treatment for children away from the hospital. They also encouraged parents to help their children reach their full potential. It was based on the Peto Institute in Budapest which teaches children with Cerebral Palsy to reach their full potential and makes no assumption that they have learning difficulties. Goals were set accordingly to each child but examples are eating, dressing and self-care.

Raeden Centre closed in 2011. The functions which were based there were moved to the Hospital for Sick Children. There was much criticism from parents and children who attended. Some were now adults. The building was beyond repair and budgets were being slashed in a age of austerity.



1974 – EDUCATION (MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) ACT

This Act was to bring Scotland into line with the English practice of having all children educated regardless of disability. This affected about 2,000 children in Scotland and 100 staff in the day-care centres. This Act was simply to stop handicapped children being classed as hopeless cases therefore being opted out of any education systems and placed in day centres and mental hospitals for purely care. This was a major step forward in educating children with disabilities, one that would transform many lives.

1976 – WINTER PARALYMPICS

The first Winter Paralympics was held in Sweden in 1976 and every four years since France in 1992 and they have taken place in the same cities and venues as the winter Olympics. At the first 198 athletes from 16 countries took part in the event.

1981 – THE DISABLED PERSON ACT

This Act was about the adaptation of buildings to cater for workers with mobility impairments. It added to the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 to ensure building standards had statutory obligations to provide for certain types of buildings to be accessible and meet the British Standards Institution 1979 Code of Practice in the matter of access.



1981 – CHILDREN WITH DIABILITIES ACT

This Act places the education of children with disabilities under education authorities, replacing health authorities. The Act laid down that ALL children should be educated in mainstream schools and classes wherever possible. The child or young person should not be denied access to mainstream schools on certain criteria e.g. mainstream is unsuitable or their disabilities are too complex for the school environment.

This was a major breakthrough, although even before the Act was passed, many disabled children were attending mainstream schools.

1983 – MENTAL HEALTH ACT 1983

Applies in full in England and Wales but only in parts in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The main aims of this legislation was to ensure that people with serious mental disorders can be treated even without consent to prevent them harming themselves or another person.

1990 –TAXICARD

Taxicard was a scheme set up to assist disabled people and elderly who weren't able to use public transport. It provided for discounted taxis and the scheme was piloted in Aberdeen City but it soon was rolled out to cover the whole region. It was radical as it gave people freedom and independence they had never had before or had lost. Participants paid only 25% of the taxi fare.



When it was first introduced no one could have both a Concession Card and a Taxicard but this changed in 2005 when the Concessionary Card began to be operated and funded by the Scottish Government. Until then each region had its own Concessionary Travel Scheme but now it is Scotland wide and those with a card can travel freely around Scotland.

1993 – COMMUNITY CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH ROLL OUT

One of the biggest changes this brought about was the closure of many institutions.

This was when institutions stopped being the answer to everything. This Act was about supporting people with mental health or learning disabilities within the community rather than taking them out of society and into institutions.

1995 – BRIAN IRVINE SCOTTISH/ABERDEEN FORMER FOOTBALLER

Brian Irvine was a Scottish International footballer who played for Aberdeen Football Club. Irvine was originally from Falkirk and played for Airdrie and Ross County and was capped 9 times playing for Scotland. He shocked Scottish professional football by announcing that he had been





diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Someone who had been very fit suddenly had a life-long disability which should have finished his career. After his diagnosis Irvine went on to play for another ten years.

The way in which Irvine handled this diagnosis encouraged those in football and outwith sport.

Irvine subsequently returned to professional football for another 20 years – playing until he was 40 and then coaching and managing. Even today Irvine is often quoted in Aberdeen newspapers to encourage football fans and players alike.

1995 – DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT/ GUARANTEE INTERVIEW SCHEME

This Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone with disabilities in relation to employment, education, purchasing goods and services or transport. Before this Act was passed there had been feeble attempts to curb discrimination on disability grounds.

Disability Discrimination Act/guarantee interview scheme. This Act was informally known and is still referred to as the DDA.

Discrimination was described as when a disabled person has been treated less favourably because they are disabled and the treatment can't be justified.



1996 – SCOTTISH COUNCIL FOR THE CARE OF SPASTICS

Scottish Council for the Care of Spastics has changed its name to Capability Scotland. I hate the word spastic. ‘Spastic’ is a medical term meaning a person with Cerebral Palsy, and referred to how their muscles go into a spasm.

It has become a derogatory word and over the years children and adults have come to use this as a term of abuse. Some people see disabled people as a category to be labelled. However this is a medical term that is not being used correctly.

Over the years the word ‘spastic’ has been misused and the Council needed to change it – hence Capability Scotland.

1997 – DAME ANN BEGG

Dame Anne Begg was elected in the 1997 General Election and served as an MP until 2005 for Aberdeen South.

Before becoming an MP, Begg had been a secondary school principal English teacher in Arbroath Academy. Begg has degenerative Gaucher’s disease and this results in her being a wheelchair user. Begg was the first permanent wheelchair user in the House of Commons. The very first wheelchair user, Arthur MacMorrough Kavanagh, who served from 1868 to 1880, was not wheelchair bound.





The House of Commons isn't wheelchair accessible therefore when Begg was elected as a MP, someone remarked that she would be sticking out in the aisles if they didn't cut a piece out of the 'green benches'. But as ever Begg's sense of humour came out when she answered that she had been invisible far too long and now people will noticed she is there. Begg also believes it is good that disabled people are noticed and don't just blend in.

In the New Year Honours list of 2011 Begg was appointed as a Dame Commander of the British Empire (DBE) for her services to disabled people and equal opportunities.

1999 – THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

The Scottish Parliament opened in 1999 and is designed to be disability friendly and fully accessible to wheelchairs and scooters but not until the new building opened.

2003 – EUROPEAN YEAR OF THE DISABLED PERSON

The main aim was to raise awareness and understanding of its millions of disabled citizens. Unfortunately, in the UK, very few people had heard about it.

In Europe, 51% of people in a poll said it had an informing impact on them, giving them an insight to the barriers disabled people face. Although the EYPD did assist the general public with understanding physical disabilities the same can't be said about learning disabilities.



When a poll during 2003 was taken the question was asked about whether disabled people have a right to a job – 51% of UK responses said they didn't know, which was quite shocking.

2004 – WOODLANDS HOSPITAL CLOSES

Between 1948 –1964 it was known as Woodlands Home for Handicapped children, .and then Woodlands Hospital, Aberdeen which closed in 2004 and placed most of the residents in the community. Ladysbridge Hospital in Banff was similar to Woodlands but for adults, and it closed a year earlier in 2003.

2004 – REVEREND PROFESSOR JOHN SWINTON

Swinton who moved to the North East of Scotland in 1972 when he was about 15 years old and has never left the area. Swinton is a major figure in the world in terms of disability theology. Swinton began his working life as a Mental Health Nurse at Royal Cornhill Hospital in Aberdeen. He also trained as a learning disability

nurse, where he was a charge nurse at Woodlands and Wellwood units.



Swinton went on to study Theology, but never left the field of disability apart from when studying. In 2004 he established the Centre for Spiritual, Health and Disability. This centre aims to bring academics, researchers, practitioners, and educators together to work

on innovative new projects. Although Swinton is now in the academic world, he remains in a disability pastoral role within the Church of Scotland and within his home church.

2007 – EVELYN GLENNIE

Glennie was born in Aberdeen in 1965 and grew up at her families' farm just outside Methlick in Aberdeenshire. Glennie has two brothers and her native dialogue is Doric – the local language of the North East of Scotland. At the age of 8 Glennie began losing her hearing although she manages to perceive sound through her body.

Glennie attended Ellon Academy in Aberdeenshire and her first percussion teacher was Ron Forbes who helped her to understand that sound could be heard throughout the body rather than only the ears. In September 1982 Glennie attended the Royal Academy of Music in London and met another highly thought of teacher, the revered percussionist – James Blades.

In January 1985 Glennie graduated with an Honours music degree and had one of her early major television documentary appearances on the BBC. After many further TV appearances and a blossoming career as the world's first ever full-time solo percussionist Glennie received her first of three GRAMMY awards. Glennie received an OBE in 1993 and in 2007 a Damehood, followed by the Companion of Honour in 2016.





In the opening ceremony to the London 2012 Olympic Games, Glennie introduced a new instrument called the Glennie Aluphone which was featured in the track Caliban's Dream. Glennie was also the featured drummer in 'And I Will Kiss' as scenes of bygone pastoralism gave way to the industrial revolution.

2007 – GORDON BROWN

Brown was born in Giffnock, Renfrewshire in 1951. He was the UK Prime Minister between 2007 and 2010 AND he was disabled! Brown lost an eye when he was playing rugby at school. From my research so far, he is the first PM with a known disability.

As result of this accident not only had he lost his right eye he is only partially sighted in the left. Brown went through several treatments and operations but didn't get his sight back. Brown read history at the University of Edinburgh and was later elected as rector of his old University in 1972.

2010 – THE EQUALITY ACT

The primary purpose was to bring a number of Acts and regulations together, such as the Equal Pay Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Race Relations Act, Disability Discrimination and other areas such as religion, belief, sexual orientation and age.

A disabled person is defined as someone who has either a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect to the person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities. This definition is key as it gives guidance to the legal definition of disability. A review of this Act is scheduled to commence in 2020 but this may be on hold due to coronavirus.



2010 – DISABLED AUTHOR IN ABERDEEN

KATHLEEN KENNEDY

Kennedy is a local disabled woman who published her memoirs in September 2010. The publisher was her former Educational Psychologist, Gordon Booth.

Kathleen Kennedy was born in Aberdeen and grew up in Findon, Aberdeenshire. She has severe Cerebral Palsy and her memoirs give an insight into life with Cerebral Palsy through the last 35 years.

Her memoirs recall her experiences through Special Nursery to fighting to get to mainstream schooling to finding work. Her book launch saw a gathering of former and present-day disabled practitioners including the Reverend Prof John Swinton (See 2004A). Kennedy and Swinton did not meet through disability circles but through church and knowing a lot of the same people. Someone once exclaimed, “Who let them meet?”

Brian Irvine (See 1995) wrote the foreword for Kennedy’s first book as it was, he who made the suggestion that she write a book. Kennedy’s second book was on how she adapted life to enable her to participate fully and the foreword this time was written by Reverend Professor John Swinton.

Kennedy is not only known through her disability work. She is also known to be a Trade Unionist in the area and beyond. Kennedy went on to be the second Aberdeen Trade Union Council’s Disabled President and the second women president, in the ATUC’s 150th year.



Kennedy is the most Northern member of the UNISON National Disabled Members Committee 2017, 2019 and 2020. She represents disabled members in Scotland.

2011 – PAUL MAYNARD CONSERVATIVE MP

In 2011 a Conservative MP Paul Maynard with Cerebral Palsy was mocked by some MP's for the way he spoke when he delivered his first 'speech' in the House of Commons. Some MP's thought he was drunk.

The Speaker had to issue written warnings to these MPs due to their behaviour towards Maynard. This is shameful behaviour in Parliament but it isn't an uncommon experience for people with Cerebral Palsy which affects their speech.

2012 – ATOS WINS PIP CONTRACTS

ATOS won the contract to 'assess' disabled people to 'assist' them to move from benefits into work.

PIP is Personal Independence Payment. It replaced the 'Disability Living Allowance' (DLA) but was actually about Government reducing expenditure on benefits for disabled people, more than enabling them to be independent.

The government's aim was to cut the total budget for DLA by 20% during the following year. This looked like it was just a budget cutting exercise during the austerity government.



Disabled people were outraged when there were reports of disabled people being told they were fit for work when they were barely able to get to the assessment centres, never mind being able to do a days work.

2017 – UNISON SIGNS UP TO ‘DYING TO WORK’ CAMPAIGN

UNISON as an employer signed the TUC Dying to Work Charter. The Charter is about allowing terminally ill employees to continue to work. Although they may need time off, for many months of treatment or to recover – they should remain in employment. Scottish Qualification Authority and South Lanarkshire Council were two of the first employers in Scotland to sign the TUC Dying to Work Charter.

From the moment a person is diagnosed with cancer etc they are classified as disabled under the Equalities Act. Yet a McMillan Survey found that 37% of cancer patients had experienced discrimination on returning to work. Cancer Research are forecasting that 1 in 3 people will be diagnosed with some form of cancer and 10% of the cases will be people under the age of 50.



2019/20 – JOSEPH LONG

Joseph Long is one of Scotland's finest pianists and has performed widely in the UK and abroad. A former pupil of the North East of Scotland Music School in Aberdeen (where he studied piano with David Parkhouse and John Blakely) he is also a First Class honours graduate of the University of Cambridge. He now teaches advanced piano studies at NESMS and at the University of Aberdeen.

Long is a lifelong friend of Kennedy (mentioned in 2010), and their friendship goes all the way back to their preschool days at the Raeden Centre in the 1970s.

Long is registered as partially sighted and has been visually impaired his whole life. This is mainly a result of having had congenital cataracts removed late (at 1 year old). This meant there was a lack of stimulation of the visual areas of his brain during the critical early periods of development in infancy, while the cataracts were still in place.

Long still lives in Muchalls where he grew up, and despite his visual impairment, he lives independently.

Long doesn't hide his disability but has noticed that some people don't actually realise he is partially sighted. At times Long doesn't tell them about his disability and at other times he does. He often observes wryly that if everything seems to be going more or less OK without someone realising he has a sight problem, and they seem reasonably content not to know, what's the point of

mentioning it? He has, however, become more inclined to bring it up in conversation than when he was young and feels less prone than during his youth to be over-reliant on other people to somehow magically 'get it' without him doing a little educating.

When the Cowdray Hall in Aberdeen reopened in November

2019 after many years of closure due to renovations, Joseph Long, as a popular local pianist who has drawn large audiences, was asked to inaugurate a new series of concerts. He has since contributed to a series of 'virtual concerts' during the COVID lockdown. He is currently planning a series of concerts of all Mozart's piano sonatas, to take place over several years.





INTO THE FUTURE

It is obvious from reading this booklet that as history never stops in everyday life, nor will the development of disability history. Although this brief account only goes back as far the 1800s, there is plenty of history going back even further.

If disability history teaches us anything, it is the importance of not limiting someone's life because they have a disability but rather encouraging them as you would with anyone else, to reach their full potential.

As referenced in the introduction, this has been written during the pandemic of COVID 19. There will obviously be some changes coming which will affect people with disabilities. It could be said that between COVID and the impending review of the Equalities Act 2010 there will inevitably be more positive changes for people with disabilities. Hopefully disabled people, professionals, Trade Unions (particularly in relation to work) and the government will be resolved to make changes for the better.

We hope that, as individuals, this brief history of disability has challenged you to realise that people with disabilities do impact on everyday life and society and we should be actively encouraging them at all levels.

*For a future that
continues to
make changes
for the better.*

