



## Timeline History of the Disabled People's Movement



*NB This is 'national' timeline, however specific information.*

*denotes lancashire*

**1388** The Statute of Cambridge ("Poor Law"): distinguishes between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor claiming alms. Disabled and older people are considered to the 'deserving' and therefore eligible for charity.

**1530s** The dissolution of the monasteries creates large numbers of beggars, many of them disabled people who had previously been supported by the church. In response the Poor Law Act of 1535 decrees that 'the poor and impotent' should be supported by way of voluntary and charitable alms raised locally. This was the beginning of taxation to support the poor.

**1547** Priory of St Mary of Bethlehem (which later becomes the infamous Bedlam Hospital) is given to the City of London for the express purpose of

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housing 'mental patients'. This is the first formal 'institution' for disabled people in England.

**1601 Elizabethan Poor Law:** explicitly defines 'deserving poor' as disabled people and children, and included a requirement for each parish to support disabled people and the old – this sets the tone for the next 300 years of 'state administration' of disabled people's lives. Disability was characterised as an individual's problem and the state's role was to 'manage' them. Many amendments to the Poor Laws follow.



**Protests in the North:** There was opposition in Lancashire to interference from Londoners who wanted to prevent cheaper outdoor relief during a period of cyclical unemployment. This caused many anti-poor law associations to spring up. While there were protests in areas such as Oldham, in other areas the Poor Law Amendment Act was implemented relatively easily. The Poor Law Commissioners had disagreed on how the New Act should be implemented in the North of England with Edwin Chadwick arguing that it should have been implemented there first as there were new economic problems in 1834. When the Act was implemented in the North in 1837 there were severe economic problems making it appear that paupers were being punished for economic problems they had no control over.

In Bradford the Poor Law Guardians had to be protected by troops after riots against the Act; the Huddersfield Guardians defied the law for over a year. Opposition to the New Poor Law was great in the West Riding of Yorkshire and Lancashire where there were also movements supporting factory reform, parliamentary reform and the beginnings of trade union activity.



1607

Because Alderman W. Suddell was deaf, he was allowed to sit in any seat he deemed convenient at St John's Parish Church. He was not fined the usual violation charge of 12 pence for not sitting in his appropriate pew. The Mayor, Councillors and Aldermen all had designated seating.

**1744** Vagrancy Act: enabled detention of people experiencing mental distress ("lunatics") for the first time.

**1750** The Industrial Revolution in Britain brings urbanization and the breakdown of rural state and church welfare. Increase in factory based work meant an increase in segregation for disabled people unable to work in the new factories. The spread of poverty in cities leads to a growth in the number of institutions, asylums and workhouses to keep the 'economically unproductive' off the streets.



In the mills trivial mistakes due to lack of sleep resulted in serious injuries or mutilation.

One common punishment for being late or not working up to the work assigned would be to be "weighted." An overseer would tie a heavy weight to worker's neck, and have him walk up and down the factory aisles so the other children could see him. This punishment could last up to an hour. Weighting led to serious injuries in the back and the neck.

**1764** The first 'special school for deaf children opens.

**1784** 'Whites Act' – to segregate prisoners in Lancaster Castle Prison, the prison was remodeled which led to better facilities for the 'Lunatics' that were kept there (of which there were between 5 and 9). Although facilities were better there was still a policy of 'Incarceration and Restraint' for treatment.



**1816** The first County lunatic asylum was opened in Lancaster (Lancaster Moor), another 6 were opened in Lancashire over the next 100 years. By 1914 there were over 100 thousand people living in some 100 mental institutions around the country, these only started to close with the passing of the Chronically Sick & Disabled person's Act in 1970.

**1845** First pressure group to defend the liberty of people in asylums formed.

**Late 1800s** First DPOs are formed – in 1890 the British Deaf Association is founded, and in 1899 the National League of the Blind and Disabled is established as a trade union.



**1867** It is documented at Deepdale Workhouse that in the male ward, '1 blind and infirm and 1 case with bronchitis' are 'sleeping in the same bed'.

**11<sup>th</sup> March.** The North Lancashire Blind Welfare Society is founded in the Preston Corn Exchange, when a group of local dignitaries joined together to try and help blind people, many of whom wandered the streets without work.

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1868 The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) formed. This marks the beginning of modern charitable organisations, established by philanthropists or parents and carers, 'for' disabled people.



1872 (April) Whittingham Asylum opened and was fully operational by 1875.



1877 East Lancashire Deaf Society formed. In 1877 the Rev. G.A.W. Downing of Manchester, gathered Deaf people from Blackburn to provide a church sermon in their language. At that time only 10 to 12 people attended, and according to the census at that time, 58 Deaf people were registered as living in Blackburn and district.

In 1880, Mr Shaw (who by then had learnt sign language in 12 months) set up weekly bible classes for Deaf mutes in Blackburn. Mr Shaw was a very busy man and volunteered his services to Deaf people and this is how ELDS was formed. The East Lancashire Deaf and Dumb Society was formed at a meeting held in the Committee room of the Town Hall on June 5th 1888, the chair at that time was the Right Rev. Bishop Cramer-Roberts. Deaf people met up in a room in the Northgate area of Blackburn and were supported by Mr Muir who was a missionary. In 1902, Deaf people met at a building on 52a Victoria Street, Blackburn which became ELDS and a

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chapel. Victoria Street was a meeting point for Deaf people for many years, until ELDS eventually moved out.

**1886** Royal Commission on the Blind and Deaf: the first official recognition that national government should act on poverty amongst disabled people.



**1897**

Queen Victoria grants permission for a number of deaf schools, including Preston's, to use the prefix 'Royal' in its title and the Cross Deaf and Dumb School becomes known as the Royal Cross School for the Deaf.



**19<sup>th</sup> Century**

Surgeon's Court, Preston derives its name from its position at the rear of properties fronting Lune Street in the City Centre, occupied by surgeons during this century. It is said that local people were 'entertained' by the screams of unfortunate patients having their limbs amputated. For a few coppers you could have ring-side views!



**1912** It was suggested that blind workers could be taught to make mattresses and bedding and the members of the League for the

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Blind said 'Preston being a sea faring town, the making and renovating of mattresses for sailors bunks ought to be sought after'.

**1913** Mental Deficiency Act: require local authorities to maintain 'mental deficiency' institutions and set up supervised community care and control.

**1914** Elementary Education Act: requires local authorities to send 'feeble minded' children to special schools unless 'incapable of being taught'.

### Start of World War 1

**1917** The Government shocked by the number of blinded serviceman [during World War I] began to apply a more active part in the welfare of the blind. At a National Conference attended by delegates of the Blind Institute the then Chairman of St Dunstons Sir Arthur Person, made a top secret announcement that' the National Air Board required 1,000 intelligent blind men as 'detectors' on the approach of aircraft. They would be employed at listening posts connected with anti-aircraft defences. Their presence would lead to the release of men able to perform other military duties, but more than that they were peculiarly fitted for the work as in their case their sense of hearing was developed to a greater degree of 'sensitivity'. The delegates were asked to recommend suitable volunteers.

**1920s** Blind Persons Act: More unions of disabled war veterans are formed and blind workers march on London, against poor pay and conditions. Results in first legislation passed, introduced and supported by disabled people.

### 1939 World War 2 started.

**1939-41** Between 75,000 and 250,000 people with intellectual and physical impairments are systematically murdered by the Nazis through the Aktion T4 'racial hygiene' programme. As a precursor to this, 1933-39 saw the German authorities forcibly sterilize 360,000 disabled Germans.

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**1942** The Beveridge Report published. The economist Sir William Beveridge calls for a new social insurance system to conquer the 'five giants' of Want, Ignorance, Squalor, Idleness and Disease.

**1944** Disabled Persons Employment Act: introduced the 'green card' scheme and segregated state workshops and introduces the first legal definition of a disabled person.

**1948** The National Health Service Act and the National Assistance Act passed: The Labour Government constructs the 'welfare state' with the introduction of the National Health Service and the National Insurance Scheme. The welfare state marks the end of the 'deserving poor' charitable approach to disabled people, but the philosophy continues.

**1940s and 50s** Leonard Cheshire, RNIB and the Spastics Society establish residential homes for disabled people. Prior to this in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and before the only option for disabled children and adults was to be (forcibly) put into mental institutions. {Humphries and Gordon 1992}



**1950** One of Lancashire's oldest charities, Galloway's Society for the Blind, set up its headquarters in Penwortham and has been there ever since. The charity provides services to blind and visually impaired people across Lancashire and beyond.

**1951** Greater London Association of Disabled People (GLAD) set up.

**1952** Scope (originally 'The Spastics Society') was founded by 3 parents and a social worker who wanted disabled children to have equal rights to an education.



**1950-1951** The Preston and District Spastics Group (Scope) is formed.

**1965** The formation of Disablement Income Group (DIG).

**1966** Disability Rally in Trafalgar Square, London.

**1969** The independent living movement begins in Berkeley, California. Ed Roberts and his associates set up the Disabled Students' Program on the UC Berkeley campus and establish the first Centre for Independent Living (CIL) for the community at large.



**1969** The Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's Bill: Alf Morris, then Member of Parliament for Manchester (originally part of Lancashire), won the right to present a Private Member's Bill to Parliament. On 5<sup>th</sup> December that year, his Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's Bill was endorsed by the House of Commons.

**1970** Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Bill became an Act of Parliament: passed without input from disabled people.

**1971** Association of Disabled people (APG) established.

**1972** Paul Hunt writes a letter to The Guardian newspaper calling for equality for disabled people. His letter inspires the start of a united struggle against discrimination.



1977 Scope open's Beaumont College in Lancaster offering both residential and day programmes to learners aged between 18 and 25 with a broad range of physical and learning disabilities.

1974 Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) is formed and moves the focus away from welfare towards rights. UPIAS is the first to articulate the social model of disability, defining disability as: "the disadvantage or restriction of ability caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities.



1974 July. David Halpin becomes the first 'wheelchair-bound' social worker in the country. Announcement that a TV film featuring mentally handicapped children in the Preston area is to be made with the help of the Lancashire Social Services Department.



1975 4<sup>th</sup> September. It is announced that a special residential home for disabled men and women is to be built; the only one of its kind in Lancashire. It is projected to be a 26-room unit located near Sharoe Green Hospital, Fulwood.

1976/77 UPIAS publish 'Fundamental Principles of Disability' outlining the Social Model. Sisters against Disablement is founded by disabled feminists to promote disabled women's concerns and perspectives within the disabled people's movement. Several members were founders of UPIAS.



1978 January. New county special school in Moor Park opens

Early 1980s The first UK Centres for Independent Living (CILs) established in Hampshire, Derbyshire and Greenwich.

1981 International Year of Disabled People (IYDP).

1981 Disabled People's International is formed as a reaction to the refusal of The Rehabilitation International to share power with disabled people. British Council of Disabled People (BCODP) is established as an umbrella body that supports and encourages the development of hundreds of new organisations controlled by disabled people across the UK during the 1980s.

1982 The Commission of Restrictions Against Disabled People (CORAD) report advised that there should be legislation and a Commission to implement it. This was turned down by the Government, but CORAD began the campaign for civil rights legislation that culminated in the Disability Discrimination Act.



1985 Les Roberts gains Preston Council approval to build the North's first purpose-built riding centre for disabled youngsters. A

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charitable trust is to be set up and then run by Mr Roberts. It is projected that as many as 70 donkeys will be giving rides to the areas 'handicapped' children.

3 key schemes to help the 'mentally handicapped' in Lancashire are backed by the county council and health authorities – providing day centres in Preston, Lancaster and Wyre.



**1986** The Preston and South Ribble Access and Mobility Group forms.

**1988** 'People First' founded.

**1990** The first Black Disabled People's Network and several black mental health users groups are founded. Campaign for Accessible Transport (CAT) is one of the first disabled people's groups to use direct action.

**1991** Regard is founded to challenge homophobia in the disabled people's movement and the exclusion of disabled people from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community.

**1992** Disability Awareness In Action established to support disabled people's self-advocacy empowerment internationally and promote and protect disabled people's human rights.

**1993** CAT and 'Block Telethon' actions lead to the new Disabled people's Disability Action Network (DAN) carrying out over 100 protest actions in the next 5 years.

**1994** Sir Nicholas Scott, Minister for Disabled People, defeats the Civil Rights (Disabled Personal) Bill by procedural means at report stage. Public outrage at these tactics forced the Government to introduce it's own proposals-the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995.

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**1995** After years of campaigning by disability activists, the Conservative Government introduces legislation to outlaw discrimination against disabled people. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is limited in scope and the duty to treat people equally is subject to a reasonableness caveat. The definition of disability is based on the medical model.



**1996** PIP (Preston Information Project) formed, **1998** Becomes 'Preston Disc' (Disability Information Services Centre) and is registered as a charity. **2009** Extends its area of operation and becomes 'Disability Equality (nw) Ltd.

**1996** BCODP establishes the National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL) to promote independent living options for disabled people. Concerted lobbying by BCODP's Independent Living Committee since 1989 results in The Community Care (Direct Payments) Act which creates direct payments.

**1999** National Service Framework (NSF) for Mental health setting minimum standards and good practice.

**2000** Disability Rights Commission (DRC) established.

**2005** The DDA amendment act: extends anti-discrimination protection to land transport, small employers and private clubs, extends the definition of disability and introduces a public duty to promote disabled people's equality and 'involve' disabled people.

Disability Equality Duties for public sector bodies introduced through the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit publishes its report, Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People, setting out recommendations for achieving disabled people's equality by 2025. Recommendation 4.3 of the report says Revised and updated: Melanie Close, Chief Executive, November 2020

that by 2010 there should be a user-led organisation, modeled on a Centre for Independent Living, in every locality.

**2007** The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities opens for signature. UK Government agrees to roll-out individual budgets nationally.

**2010** The UK Government ratifies the United Nations Convention on the Rights of people with disabilities and passes the Single Equality Act: Much has yet to happen to make these Rights a daily reality for the 12 million disabled children and adults in the UK.

**2010** The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations.

**2011** Hardest Hits Campaign: Disabled people, those with long-term conditions and their families are being hit hard by cuts to the benefits and services they need to live their lives. The Hardest Hit campaign, organised jointly by the Disability Benefits Consortium (DBC) and the UK Disabled People's Council, brings together individuals and organisations to send a clear message to the Government: stop the cuts. There was a protest in May 2011, when an estimated 8,000 disabled people marched on Parliament, and further protests across the country on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2011.



**2011** 2 Disabled Women from Lancashire take Lancashire County Council to a High Court Judicial Review hearing following their cuts to Adult Social Care, reducing their budget by £179m over the next 3 years.

**2014** Care Act 2014. The Care Act is an Act of Parliament of the UK that received Royal Assent on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014, after being introduced on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2013. The main purpose of the act was to overhaul the existing 60-year-old legislation regarding social care in England.

The Care Act sets out in one place, local authorities duties in relation to assessing people's needs and their eligibility for publicly funded care and support.

**2020** Marked 25 years since the DDA was passed and 10 years of the Single Equality Act. No time for reflection or celebration though as 2020 also saw the world changed forever by the Covid19 Coronavirus Pandemic.

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