



Telling Disability Histories:

Language and terminology

Co-creation

‘Retain and Explain’

Centering disability

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Advocacy for Telling Disability Histories

The updated ARA Glasgow Manifesto:

“ARA is committed to:

1. Being an agent for change and **reflecting the variety and diversity of the communities we serve** in the records we manage, preserve and keep, [and]

1.1 **Reaching out to marginalised groups... to improve their awareness of, and access to, records that may concern them”**

<https://conference.archives.org.uk/araglasgowmanifesto/>

ARA Code of Ethics

“Members should have regard to the extent to which their holdings and associated information are **representative of the communities documented or affected by the archives and records in their care, taking particular account of under-represented and/or underdocumented groups.**”

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60773266d31a1f2f300e02ef/t/6082c97ac1fa88333ca028b1/1619183995112/Code Of Ethics February 2020 final.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60773266d31a1f2f300e02ef/t/6082c97ac1fa88333ca028b1/1619183995112/Code+Of+Ethics+February+2020+final.pdf)

Think about the Language You Use 1

'Language and the meanings we attach to words very much impact, influence, develop, and change the attitudes that we have toward the subjects of discussion. That is why people are easily insulted or upset by word choices. Changing a phrase — even if it holds the same literal meaning — alters the subtle connotations and nuances of the speech, and communicates a different meaning and context than the original phrasing.'

The Autistic Advocacy, <https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/identity-first-language/>

Think about the Language You Use 2

- Terms that belittle and harm – e.g. ‘freak’, ‘cripple’, ‘retard’, ‘vegetable’
- Terms that normalise and pedestalise – e.g. ‘special needs’, ‘handicapable’; ‘fighter’, ‘survivor’
- Terms that describe the norm – e.g. ‘normal’; ‘able-bodied’ (‘able-minded?’); ‘temporarily non-disabled’; ‘neurotypical’
- Terms that destabilise the normal/abnormal divide – e.g. ‘(dis)ability’; ‘dis/ability’
- Terms that reorient away from normalcy – e.g. ‘Crip’; ‘Mad’ [both community-reclaimed words]
- Terms that de-medicalise and politicise – e.g. ‘Deaf-gain’ not ‘hearing loss’; ‘neuro-divergent’

D. Peers, L. Eales, and N. Spencer-cavaliere, ‘Narrating Ourselves and Our Movements: Terminology and Political Possibility’, pp. 25-40, in Silvia Carraro (ed.), in *Alter-Habilitas: Perception of Disability among People* (Verona 2018), e-book.

https://eng.alteritas.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ALTER_HABILITAS_Percezione_della_disabil.pdf

Person First or Identity First?

- *Person* with a disability vs. disabled *person* (e.g. see <https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/identity-first-language/>)
- Significance of capitalisation, signifying condition vs. community, e.g. deaf vs. Deaf or d/Deaf incorporating both (e.g. see <https://hearmeoutcc.com/capital-d-small-d-deaf/>)
- Single set of disability terminology vs. community-led usage with varying terminology
- Identification (out-group speaking of 'them') vs. Self-identification (in-group speaking of 'us')

When in doubt, ask the person how they like to be described.

Decontextualised Ableism: Unpacking Casual Language

'That's imbecilic.'

'Is she blind?'

'That cretinous man...'

'Was this your crazy idea?'

'Don't be idiotic.'

'You seem to have a blind spot about this.'

'That's dumb.'

'Our recruitment practices are colour-blind.'

'Are you deaf?'

Inclusive Cataloguing 1

Mentioning disability as an interesting/relevant aspect of someone's life (not avoiding it as an embarrassment or slur)

Creator's language first [cataloguer's language second]?

Use content warning?

Researchers should note that this archive catalogue facilitates access not just to the records of the Shakespeare Globe Trust, but to the staging of works from the Early Modern corpus. These can describe (for example) race, gender, class, sexual orientation or disability, in ways which reflect the period in which they were created, and thus be inappropriate or offensive. We encourage researchers to alert staff with specific concerns, to help us care for future users as well as archives.

Inclusive Cataloguing 2: Problematic Language

Contextualise

Guild of the Brave Poor Things

“Today the name seems patronizing, but this view is anachronistic. The only fair way to judge the name and, indeed, the aims of the guild, is in the context of the time – and neither would have struck people at the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th centuries as anything but good.”

<https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Disability/TheGuildOfBravePoorThings.aspx>

Reframe?

Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital Training College, Stanmore (1937) [formerly “Crippled Boys Training College”]

<https://www.mountfordpigott.com/about/archive/royal-national-orthopaedic-hospital-training-college-stanmore-1937/>

How can we be clear with users (and future cataloguers) what we are doing and why?

Inclusive Cataloguing 3

In this satirical 1814 print, an actor is presented in the role of Shakespeare's *Richard III* (complete with stage hunchback)

Is it a representation of disability? Or only 'cripping up'? How does the viewer know if the actor had lived experience of impairment?



Inclusive Cataloguing 4

Risks of ongoing erasure/absence due to

- precautionary closure of historically catalogued collections (with legacy language), or
- closure due to sensitive personal data.

What's left?

- Third-party perspectives (e.g. scientists, medics, charity staff)

“Most of the archives that depict mental health lived experience are filtered by mental health professionals, but that is like lions representing bird song in roars. Why should the hunters give the hunted’s history? Why should the people who’ve never visited a land be that country’s prime historians? How can we tell our true stories when our words are seen as sickness?”

Dolly Sen, <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10071338/1/SextonSen.pdf>

Co-creation: Nothing About Us Without Us

Including input from disabled people

- Staff?
- Advisory board? (volunteers?)

Will they say a catalogue is a finding hindrance rather than a finding aid? What could you do instead?

Are the records themselves inaccessible?

Remove or “Retain and Explain”?

Options:

1) Take it off display

- No upset or offence caused
- Removal may be seen as ‘woke’
- Disability is hidden from view

or

2) Add more context

- Labelling may be seen as ‘woke’
- Viewers may not read caption so perceptions of disabled people may be reinforced
- Inclusion of disability is usualised



Disability and Exhibitions

Is the exhibition informed by the social model of disability (rather than the medical)?

Content warning?

Caring for past records subjects - redaction

Whose perspective?

- More of the non-disabled than the disabled?
- Disabled people as passive recipients of charity or active people with agency to meet their needs?

Addressing gaps and silences

What do you see if you avoid reading the captions?



Introductory Guidelines to Historical Sources

- 1) Assume that concepts and terms are not stable over time: the same thing and the equivalent group of people are not necessarily being referenced
- 2) Assume that the impairment or category of person being described will not neatly map across different periods and contexts
- 3) As soon as you are dealing with another language in a source text, be even more alert to 1 and 2
- 4) Bear in mind that disability history is also the history of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and moral status (so social/cultural history). History of Science, medicine and psychology may not be appropriate and should not be your first point of call.
- 5) Revealing disabled people from the historical record does not absolve you of the responsibility to see disabled people in the present and ensure they are more visible in the future.

The true reporte of the forme and

shape of a monstrous childe borne at Muche Horkesleye, a village thre myles from Colchester, in the Countye of Essex, the .xxi. daye of Apryll in this yere. 1562.

O, praye for God and
believe his name



His myghty hande hath
wrought the forme,

Example 1: *True Reporte*, 1562

monstrous

The true reporte of the forme and shape of a monstrous childe, borne at Muche Horkesleye a village three myles from Colchester, in the countye of Essex, the .xxi. daye of Apryll in this yere. 1562...

monsters

This monstrous world that bredes as rife

As men tofore it bred by natue kinde

corrupted

By birthes that shewe natures strife

sinnes

Declares what beset the secrete minde.

deformed

I meane not this as though shape

Were alwayes linkd with fraughted minde with vice

But that in nature god such draughtes doth shape

Resembling sinnes that so bin had in price...

maymed

[T]here was borne a man childe of this forme at Muche Horkesley in Essex, a village about three myles from Colchester, betwene a naturall father and a naturall mother hauing neyther hande, foote, legge, nor arme, but on the left syde it hath a Stumpe growynge out of the shoulder, and the ende thereof is rounde, and not so long as it should go to the elbowe, and on the ryghte syde no mencion of any thing where any arme should be, but a litle stumpe of one ynche in length...

Finallye it hath by estimation no tounge, by reason whereof it sucketh not, but is succoured wyth liquide substaunce put into the mouth by droppes, and nowe begynneth to feede wyth pappe beyng very well fauoured, and of good and cheareful face.

¶ This being the .xxi. daye of Aprill, in this yere of our Raigne shod a monstrous childe borne at Muche Horkesley in Essex, a village about three myles from Colchester betwene a naturall father and a naturall mother hauing neyther hande, foote, legge, nor arme, but on the left syde it hath a Stumpe growynge out of the shoulder, and the ende thereof is rounde, and not so long as it should go to the elbowe, and on the ryghte syde no mencion of any thing where any arme should be, but a litle stumpe of one ynche in length, as ife on the left betwene there was a blanke cuttinge out of the length of the thyrgh adioynt to the hande, and rounde at the ende, and groweth somewhat northward towards the place where the right legge should be, and towar the ryghte legge should be, there is no mencion of any legge or thyrgh. This childe is called and borne but no yeaer, but a litle hole in the heate to drawe out the humors, and by estimation no tounge, by reason whereof it sucketh not, but is succoured wyth pappe beyng very well fauoured, and of good and cheareful face.

¶ The naturall father of this childe was a husbandman and his wyfe, were both christen and well to do, and had bene married many yeaer, but this childe shod the .xxi. daye of Aprill, and his wyfe had become then threthreth yeaer of age. This childe was borne at Muche Horkesley, a village about three myles from Colchester, betwene a naturall father and a naturall mother hauing neyther hande, foote, legge, nor arme, but on the left syde it hath a Stumpe growynge out of the shoulder, and the ende thereof is rounde, and not so long as it should go to the elbowe, and on the ryghte syde no mencion of any thing where any arme should be, but a litle stumpe of one ynche in length...

¶ Printed at London in the printing house of Iohn Wolfe, by Thomas Draxe, 1562.

Example 2: *Foole upon foole*, 1600

THis **innocent** Ideot, that neuer harmed any... Some certayne yeres since (but not a few yeres) there dwelt a poore blind woman in Bow lane in London, called by the name of blind Alice, who had this foole of a child to lead her... **the City more desirous to pity, then to be cruell**, placed him as a fostered fatherlesse chylde; and they did well in it too, seeing **hee was one of Gods creatures**, though some difference in persons...

GAffer Homes being Sexton of Christs Church, **would often set lohn a worke**, to towle the bell to prayers or burials, wherin he delighted much...

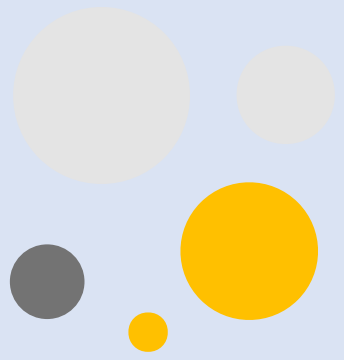
In the Sermon time he was mist, sought and not found, inquired after, but he was a more foole that sought the foole; the cryer **cryed a man child of the age of two & thirty yeres**; for at least he was so olde, yet one saies he had not wit enough to looke to himselfe.

Example 3: *The Scouter*, 01/1933, 06/1935

“I have tried" **Disabled**" and" **Handicapped**" and" **Extension**," but they all raise a storm of dissent. What we want is a word which will imply that our boys are just as much part of the main body as any other Scouts; **which will give no offence**; which will cover our five sections (**blind, deaf, crippled, mentally deficient, and epileptic**), and which will yet show that there is a difference in the kind of tests that they are at liberty to use.”

“He is well known in the Scouting world both in England and abroad, and is **Section Secretary for Cripples** - his Group at the R.N.O. Hospital, Brockley Hill, has become a by-word in **Scouting for Cripples**... On May 5th the Deaf Scouts and Guides of London held a most impressive church parade at West Ham... **Heatherwood Hospital represented the Cripple Section of the Department at St. George's Day parade at Windsor Castle.**”

Collecting Disability



Have you undertaken a gap analysis?

Does the threshold test for significance consider disabled people as donors or users?

What you collect may depend on the sort of archive:

- local authority archive may collect local records (from a charity, club or individual);
- membership organisation can collect oral history testimony (from disabled members);
- theatre can collect records of access performances, etc.

Participation in Disability History Month

(16/11/2023-16/12/2023)

Think about perspective – disabled or non-disabled?
– challenging or reinforcing prejudice?

Plan your involvement ahead.

Consider celebrating other dates for specific disabilities, especially if you have relevant records, e.g. World Down Syndrome Day 21st March, World Deaf Day 26th September

What does it say if you have public engagement for Black History Month, or LGBT+ History month, but not Disability History Month?

What's stopping you...

- considering the possibility that a records creator or records subject was disabled?
- using a disability lens to show a different aspect of history?
- looking for and talking about the disabled people in your records?
- mentioning that someone had an impairment, and how they were disabled as a result?