Disability History Association Podcast
Interview with Iain Hutchison
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Caroline Lieffers: Hello and welcome to another episode of the Disability History Association podcast. Today it's my pleasure to be interviewing my colleague Dr. Iain Hutchison. Iain works as a research affiliate at the University of Glasgow, where his work focuses on the history of medicine and disability. Iain, thank you so much for joining me today. I want to start by asking, how did you get involved in disability history?

Iain Hutchison: Hi, Caroline. Thanks firstly for the invitation to join you on this podcast. And my first answer's a bit of a long-winded one. I was a late starter in academia; I had a previous life before that. And when I was doing my undergraduate degree we were leading up to the time when we needed to think about a dissertation topic. Despite four years of advance warning to think about this, I didn't really know what I was going to do. Ultimately I started investigating the possibilities of lead mining in Scotland. In the course of doing that, looking at an archive, finding material that was all over the place, there was no easily identifiable theme, I was just starting to get my head round the way it might be approached when I had some overseas visitors. So I was doing the tourist bit round Glasgow with them and showing them the sights, and one of the places we went to on a Sunday morning was to Glasgow Cathedral. When we arrived at the cathedral there was a service taking place, and while we could have wandered round--it's a big building--we decided to kill time until the service was over and come back later.

Now, behind the cathedral is a garden cemetery--it's called the Necropolis--a garden cemetery that started in the 1830s-1840s. And it was on the site of an old quarry, a worked-out quarry, which had left a big hole in the ground. No one knew what to do with it, and it eventually became the site of a cemetery. Now, because it's a quarry, it was up a hillside and it was constructed kind of where interments, graves were all layered in like a hierarchy. So, up at the very top you had very ornate tombstones. And then as you go farther down they become much more plain slabs, and indeed at the back there's even a pauper area which is just plain grass. So I was taking my friends round this cemetery and in the course of that on the lower levels I noticed this stone which, plain stone, and it seemed to have, oh, I don’t know, twenty odd names on it, maybe more. I thought, my goodness they've got an awful lot of bodies into that small area. I went over to have a closer look. I put my hand on the top of the stone and my fingers sort of going over the top of the stone, found more inscriptions on the other side. So I went round to the back, and there were over forty interments in this grave. And of course then the question is, how did they get all these bodies in this small area? Well, the answer was that this grave belonged to an institution called East Park Home.

Now, East Park Home opened in 1874. It was a response to the 1872 Education Scotland Act, which brought in compulsory education. And with compulsory education came school attendance officers, who went round looking for children who weren't turning up for school. And in the course of the school attendance officers' work, they had names of children, but they found that these were children mainly with very serious physical disabilities who were hidden away in poor homes. They were out of sight and out of

mind. An organization was set up to try and attend to these children in various ways. It was meant to be an outdoor type of organization, but some of the children were so, so severely disabled and indeed many of them that they were finding at that time were actually in a terminal situation; they were dying. They set up a residential home and that opened in 1874. So this tombstone had been set up by the home and the explanation for the large number of interments was that many of them were very very small children. That's how they had got so many children into this small plot of land.

The children interred I think dated from about 1880. I don't what happened before that; they maybe went to pauper graves. And, you know, I thought to myself, these children came from the poorest of homes. They would have ended up in pauper graves had they died at home. So on the one hand I was thinking, well that's nice that these children are commemorated when otherwise they wouldn't have been. But the cynical side to me thought this, this is a gravestone but it's actually a big billboard. It's a big poster carved out of stone, because this was, as I say, a garden cemetery. It was the type of cemetery where the city elites, the well-off people in the city, would come and promenade on a Sunday and they would look at the inscriptions to the good and the great of the city who were buried there. What this stone was actually saying, "here's a worthwhile charity. Look at these little children. Give us some money."

So that piqued my interest in learning a bit more of what was behind this grave if you like. I went to the city archives to see what information they had. And it looked as if the whole idea of maybe pursuing a follow-up was going to fall flat because they just had a couple of very small items there, and I thought, you know, there's nothing here that really I can work on. But the archivist said, oh, while you're here, hang on. There's some volumes of annual reports have not been catalogued, do you want to have a look at those as well. [**Caroline:** Wow] You know, having gone through the catalogue and only found two small items. So these annual reports were produced, and I then found another good body of material in that, and I then approached the home, which has evolved and still exists in a new format, that they also had annual reports, and kind of filled in the gaps with those of the archive. So suddenly I had material to work with.

Now, as I started working on this material, the thing that struck me about the reports was that the children that this home catered for were really very much marginalized. It sometimes quoted children, but I think that those quotes were often fabrications because the quotes that were given were not the way children living in the wynds and the cellars of the poorest part of the city would speak. So that got me into it. But it also got me farther into it, if you like, by saying, seeing that the people who should be at the center of the story were actually almost dismissed from it, you know. And this is a theme that has been found in many other sources over the years, too. I think we all experience it where you get a lot of information about philanthropists, about educators, about clinicians, and the people who should be at the centre of the story barely get a word in. It's a long-winded introduction to it, but that's how I got into disability history.

Caroline: No, there's a really important point you're making there about how disability history has often been hidden or erased or distorted in and from archives. And it's important that you bring that up, so I appreciate that.

So, the research that you're discussing, now that became the foundation for your PhD, is that right?

Iain: I used that, I used the home for my undergraduate dissertation, and then I went on to do a PhD, and I, if you like, I expanded that theme so that it was not just children but adults. It wasn't just physical impairment, which this home primarily focused on, although not solely in its early days, and also expanding the time period, because the undergraduate project ran from the 1870s up until 1913-14. So the time period when I went on to do the PhD was to cover the long nineteenth century, you know, from the late eighteenth century through to the early twentieth century. And incorporating too, it was a very broad sweep I took, because I looked at physical impairment, mental impairment, sensory impairment, and how these different impairments kind of interwove with each other and how they were responded to in different ways. And also, I hope, recognizing that no single impairment for many people actually was there in isolation. There were often multiple impairments, one affecting the other, one resulting from the other.

Caroline: So the result of that project was your book, *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*, is that right?

Iain: Yes. That came out of the PhD. I should mention a person who we both know well and many other historians of disability will know well. I should mention Penny Richards, because when I began on the PhD project I was very much looking for things that told the experience of disability, because this was gnawing away at me. You don't get it often in the official sources. And it was just sort of, if you like, through a casual conversation, Penny contacted me because I was here in Scotland and because she had got correspondence, letters from an ancestor in Scotland and a conversation developed. And the letters which Penny had, and which she very generously let me make a lot of use of, really gave me a lovely case study of different types of disability in one particular individual, the lady called Marion Brown. And indeed she experienced circumstances of physical impairment, of sensory impairment. But they were conditions that, you know, they came and went and were actually very difficult to explain, so it also raised questions of, of, you know, how do you define disability?

It also highlighted, as I found in other sources as well, it was almost a kind of hierarchy in disability. Now Marion Brown wrote in one of the letters, you know, that, I've lost my sight for several weeks, I've not been able to move about, but things could be worse because at least my mind's sound, you know. And you get this in a lot of sources, too: people who have sight loss are quite often found saying, well, at least it's not as bad as losing my hearing. And people with hearing loss are saying, well, at least it's, you know, you get this debate between sight loss and hearing loss as to which is the worst affliction. And also how attention has focused on different impairments has been a gradual progression over time. Interest in sensory impairment from the late eighteenth century, increasing interest in mental impairment, you know, from the sort of, first third, if you like, of the nineteenth century. Physical impairment doesn't really get a lot of attention until quite late in the nineteenth century, with maybe the exception of certain very specific conditions that people focused on like leprosy or something like that, you know, very, very specific things.

Caroline: Hmm, really interesting. Those are some important thematic points in, in disability history, looking at the hierarchies of, sort of, stigma in disability, asking the question, what constitutes disability, and also as you mentioned, sort of, where experts choose to place their attention. So thanks for drawing our attention to that. To, sort of,

push this even a little bit further, what is unique, if anything, about the history of disability in Scotland? Because that was obviously the focus of your project.

Iain: I think some of the things that come out maybe suggest a uniqueness which is, is related to the sort of cultural condition that Scotland is in at that time, the time I work on. And perhaps that's particularly the case in terms of Scotland's religious outlook in the nineteenth century. Religion goes very much hand in glove with the different philanthropic schemes that were set up by well-intentioned people. I tend to call them interventionist, but well-intentioned people. They were driven, I think very much by religious beliefs, and it was a period in time where there might have been different strands to religious affiliation, but everyone had a religion. It was expected they had a religion. Everyone had to have a religious label of some sort. And quite a lot of the people that were heavily involved, the interventionists who dedicated big chunks of their lives to different impairments, they often had a religious agenda. For example those involved with, with blind people, they were motivated because they were horrified that blind people could not read the Bible, you know, they couldn't read the Word of God. This was terrible. And even a similar thing with deaf people, they, you know, they can't hear the, the ministers, the clergymen preaching. So they're being denied and their life is being, their lives are being doubly devalued--both by sensory loss and by being debarred from, you know, religious teachings. And that's maybe, it's a theme that's certainly current, I think, certainly across the western world if not beyond, but it has a strand to it in Scotland.

But also on the other hand I find it quite interesting that in the nineteenth century, you know, before the age of air travel and so forth, when journeys to other countries were arduous affairs and took a long time, there was nonetheless a lot of interchange. You know, asylum superintendents would go off on a three-month study tour to see what their counterparts were doing in Europe and the USA and Canada and so forth. So there was quite an international flavor to the intervention in disability by the people who, if you like, held the power, such as the big philanthropists, the, the asylum superintendents, the big educators, people involved in the deaf communities, and surrounding the different debates about what was the most effective form of communication that should be developed for deaf people and so on.

Caroline: It's very interesting, very interesting to know that Scotland was so embedded in the kind of larger intellectual and medical culture around disability in this period. I'm going to skip ahead a little bit actually to our, to the questions that I drafted up about that the Royal National Institute for the Blind, since you brought up this issue of religion and missions making sure that blind people have access to religious texts, for example. You were involved with this project with the Royal National Institute for the Blind, Scotland - so can you tell us about what this was? How did it get started?

Iain: Yes surely. Okay. In Scotland if you like, and again, I suspect this was repeated elsewhere, but in Scotland in the Victorian period blind people were either catered for by blind asylums and workshops. Now, some of the blind asylums also had, you know, they were places of work for some people but not places of residence. So they had out-workers, came to work in the workshops for blind people as well as people living there. Now, the very fact they had workshops--these were people who were regarded, if you like, as able-bodied blind. They could earn a living, although it was ultimately in the sort of stereotyped crafts of cane weaving and basket weaving, carpet weaving, that kind of

thing. There were also people who were blind, who had sight loss who were seen, if you like, as non-productive. They might be the disabled blind, if you like, disabled from working. And separate organisations sprung up to cater for what they identified as the outdoor blind people. And that was people who were not affiliated to, to an institution. And again the first one was in Edinburgh, our capital city, and served both the city and some of the neighboring counties. And that was an instance where it was driven by a missionary who set up and this, it was very much about going out and visiting blind people in their homes, teaching them to read raised type, and for the first four or five decades that was focused on the Moon System. That gave way to Braille roundabout the turn of the twentieth century. And, yes, they were, and in teaching them to read, it was teaching them to read the Bible, it was teaching them to read religious stories, if you like, parables or whatever. And it was only through time that they were persuaded to widen the reading curriculum a little bit, that people just didn't want to read that kind of stuff. So you would get some of the great novels being put into raised type and so forth. But, but yes, their agenda was, you know, it was a mixture of, I suppose on the one hand I'll give them credit, they wanted to do good, you wanted to help people who were living isolated lives. But they had this religious agenda.

Now, and similar organizations were spread out across Scotland from about the 1860s to the late nineteenth century so that the whole country was eventually covered. As it became a bigger organization it was then kind of identified that the different organizations covering different geographical areas were not recording their activities properly, if at all. No rigorously kept statistical information. So an attempt was made to rectify that. I can't regard it as being a particularly successful one. But anyway in Edinburgh, the RNIB Scotland had some old records. Most of them were in printed form--annual reports and this kind of thing. But they also had a register, which had been compiled very haphazardly, but compiled between 1903 and 1910. Some entries were very detailed, some of them very scant. It was completed by the missionaries; I think there about three of them by that time. And it seemed that the missionaries maybe knew some of the individuals recorded very well so there was a lot of details, and maybe others it was just hearsay. But they would put it in because, you know, it built up the figures, made them look as if they had a lot more responsibilities, that they could say, well, I've got four hundred in my parts when they actually only knew forty, you know.

So we got this, we found this register. It was very incomplete but it seemed to offer possibilities and we subsequently decided to build a project around it. RNIB Scotland advertised for volunteers to be involved in some of the research, and we got a very good little team together there. Some of them have sight loss or other impairing circumstances to work around and that was very much the intention to try and involve people, particularly with sight loss so that was inclusive. It was getting away from this outsiders looking in. And a lot of research, the volunteers in particular did a lot of research in the National Archives Scotland, which would be looking, trying to trace these individuals through deaths, births, and marriages, through decennial census returns. And a lot of, there were a lot of dead ends or very scant information, but we did get people who we could do quite a lot of exploration on. And one of my rules was to take these farther and go to other archival sources and so forth to try and get more information on them. So we built up several life stories.

The scope of the project, see, the register covered 1903 to 1910, but of course that's only a seven-year period. The people on that register, many of them lived until their 70s

and 80s. So they had much longer lives than were just encapsulated in the period they were on the register. We also found that the family network was very important. So we often had to look at them growing up in their families, therefore looking at their siblings, their parents, sometimes even their grandparents, and some of them lived to a grand old age, some of them lived into the 1960s or thereabouts, had their own families, had their own networks. So although the register was from 1903 to 1910, the chronological scope of the project to get people's stories covered from, on the one hand, I think the earliest extremity was the late eighteenth century and at the other end it took us up to about the 1960s, whereas, you know, where some people who had been recorded in the register, maybe people in their 20s, actually, you know were still alive and active until they were in their 80s. So that was the, that was the kind of core to it if you like.

We ended up with about ten case studies which were showcased individually, which I hope, you know, was, was giving voice to people who had maybe never had voice in their lives, was telling their story. And one of the outcomes of that which I found very revealing, was that we ended up with ten people, we ended up with ten very different stories. Now, we didn’t go looking for different stories and different experiences. We found ten people with quality information. That information told us ten different stories. So there was no such thing as a typical blind person. No such thing whatever. And I think that was one of the revelations of it, if you like, you know.

Caroline: Absolutely. That's a really important point--that it's almost impossible to generalize when it comes to the experiences of people with disabilities.

Iain: Absolutely.

Caroline: Yeah, yeah. And I understand also that one of the outputs of this project, which was called "Seeing Our History," was also a series of podcasts for the RNIB radio. Is that right?

Iain: Yeah, the project was set up under the name "Seeing Our History," as you say. The initial output was a book which was produced in a variety of formats, as well as normal format, if you like, large print, Braille, and so forth. We didn't do any of the early forms of type but it was commented at one stage, if somebody wants the Moon System we’ll have to do it in that, because there's apparently still a few people about who use Moon as the preferred method of tactile print. So that book kind of told the story, and we called it, "Feeling Our History." It was a kind of double meaning. On the one hand it kind of inferred to, you know, feeling tactile print as a, you know, as a means of communication, the importance of that. But also the, feeling the emotions and so forth that go along with that. And then as you say we went on and did podcasts, and we called that "Hearing Our History." And the format of the podcasts was designed so that the various researchers who had worked diligently through the whole project would be involved in telling about the people that they had discovered, their stories, you know. So that was very good. And we did, one of the early, earlier radio outputs of it was, one of our colleagues made a radio broadcast and someone heard it and they tracked her down and said, oh my grandfather was blind. I wonder if he's in the register. And we checked it out and sure enough he was, this man was listed. And so we were able to give her, give her a little bit of information. And she, in turn, this man had lost his sight quite well on in his life, but he'd still been a working man. And she was able to produce a couple of very old photographs. And the man had been a horseman. You know, he'd, he'd handled

horses in an agricultural environment. And then she produced this photograph of her grandfather with this horse, which had been all regaled and its tail plaited, obviously for exhibition and something, you know. So that was a good two-way journey and that lady also took part in the podcast talking about her grandfather.

Caroline: It's really interesting to hear about this because I think many of us are trying to do projects that are more engaged with the community, and certainly the way that your project was structured with the volunteers from the community, and also these sort of built-in outreach formats like podcasts seems like a particularly good model that others can follow.

Iain: Yes. I think that, you know, the podcasts in particular were broadcast on what was at that time called Insight Radio, which is the RNIB's own radio station. I think it’s now rebranded as Connect Radio. So, if you like, it was taking, the research in particular, to people who maybe don't know a lot about their own history, if that's not taking it a step too far. Yeah, it was intended, I mean so much of what we as academics do, you know, we all read each other's work, but it's got a fairly limited audience at the end of the day. What do academics do, locked away in their ivory towers? And I think they're increasingly conscious of this, that, you know, there have to be different types of output, so that people in the wider world if you like should know what we're doing and be drawn into it a little bit, you know. Yeah.

Caroline: Yeah, absolutely. What's the point of any of it if no one knows that we're doing it, and no one knows what our findings are, right? And I just, in the spirit of, sort of, broader education for everyone, I do want to mention that if anyone is curious about the Moon System, which was developed in about the 1840s by an Englishman, it is this system, like you mentioned, Iain, of raised type and it, it's based sort of on the Roman alphabet that we normally use in English, but it's more kind of abstracted and simplified, so it would be a little bit easier for the fingers to detect. And there's actually a pretty decent Wikipedia article - I hate to mention Wikipedia as a good academic but I'll do it anyway [both laugh] - there's a pretty good Wikipedia article about it that I encourage people to go visit. And in terms of those podcasts, you can still see or find the podcasts online at http://www.insightradio.co.uk/seeingourhistory, so if anybody wants to follow up on that…

Iain: I'm impressed. [Both laugh]

Caroline: It's certainly worth, you know, worth people's time to look into those.

Iain: And when we first discussed it with Insight Radio they said, well, you know how are we going to format it, how are we going to structure it? And they said, you really need some kind of, you know, musical introduction to it. We didn't really know what, you know. And one of the people, as a consequence of that, we got involved was a singer called Sarah Caltieri, a very independent lady who has sight loss--hates to be introduced as being a blind singer. I'm a singer, she says, and quite rightly so. And I'd heard Sarah sing at another event some months earlier and I'd gone over and spoken to her and we went our separate ways. I didn't know her name, and then when this question came up I thought, well, I wonder if this is something that she could, could help with. And I contacted her, I said, look we spoke, I heard you singing, you don't by any chance also write songs, do you? "Oh yes. Yes. Oh yes, I'm a singer songwriter," you know. So she

undertook to write an intro for the podcasts. We gave her a free hand to do that. And I think the only guidance we gave for her was that this had to be upbeat. We didn't want anything that spoke about poor blind people. That's not what this was about. We wanted it to be upbeat. And because the podcast was set on people who had been recorded in the Edwardian period, we thought, you know, kind of a music hall, that type of thing.

And I gave Sarah copies of some of the transcripts and stuff of the people that we'd been looking at. And she used those transcripts and those stories to, to write her song. And I think the first time it was listened to we though, gosh, where does this come from, you know, and then we listened to a second time and the third time, I thought, hey, you can see what she's doing here. This is clever. So Sarah wrote the song, she wrote the music. We had a formal launch of the podcast and she and the two other musicians dressed up as, you know, music hall entertainers. And that was an additional thing that came out of it, if you like, you know. And Sarah's since gone on and kind of developed her musical and indeed writing career a bit further, and I hope she makes the big time sometime in the foreseeable future.

Caroline: That's wonderful that the podcast was really able to kind of bring the community together like that and continue on even well after the podcast officially ended, right? That's great.

Iain: Yeah, and we got a lot of support. A lot of the records were held in the National Archives in Scotland. And they, they occupy, it's a Georgian building and it's a fantastic building, big dome inside it, and they were very supportive. And when the project was sort of coming together and we had a formal launch, that's where we had it. And Sarah and the other two girls put on that performance there and everything. So I think there may well be pictures of that linked to the Insight Radio podcast, I'm not sure. If not, I've got pictures.

Caroline: [Laughs] All right, I'll see if I can include a link to them in your bio with this podcast. That'll be wonderful. I also understand that you worked on a project about Glasgow's Royal Hospital for Sick Children. Is that correct?

Iain: Yes. Well, this was taking me away a little bit from what you might perceive as disability history, but this post came up and I ended up researching this. Now, disability again obviously came into it when you started looking at children's experiences, so in some ways that project, some of the stuff coming out of it, I subverted it a little bit, you know [Caroline laughs]. And I did that in the Centre for the History of Medicine at the University of Glasgow where I've sort of hung on as a research affiliate, a bit of a cuckoo in a nest in more ways than one, because apart from me getting a desk and refusing to budge from it, I do, I do find myself explaining to people from time to time that, yes, I work in an arena which is looking at medical history, but I'm not a medical historian, you know, I'm a historian of disability. And I'm heavily, heavily influenced by the social model and other models as well, you know, rather than my colleagues who look on disability as a problem to be fixed, which of course many of us as historians of disability and certainly many people who identify as disabled do not take kindly to.

Caroline: It's good that you're being a bit of a thorn in the medical establishment's side. Good for you.

Iain: Square peg in a round hole, yeah.

Caroline: Absolutely. Is there much public interest in preserving disability history in Scotland? You know preserving sites of historic importance for disability? I mean, what is the disability history scene in Scotland like these days?

Iain: Well, I mean, when you're talking about sites that might be perceived as disability history, well, I mean we have people in Scotland who are historical geographers who are very much interested in, you know, institutional sites if you like, that were set up in a certain way to a cater for certain types of impairments and so forth. And that's particularly true of mental institutions, of which there were some really large places incarcerating people.

I mean, for example, well, one of the decennial censuses that I looked at, I can't remember which year it was, but late Victorian period, there were something like ten times as many people in Scotland incarcerated in mental institutions, mental asylums than were held in prisons, jails, and police cells. That tells you something. Nowadays, you know, many of these institutions remained active for a long time. They did tend to be gradually, you know, changed their personas from asylums and institutions to hospitals, particularly in the late 1940s when a National Health Service was set up. But the roles were maybe slower in changing and a lot of these old Victorian buildings remained in use. Some of them still do, but many of them certainly remained in use until ten, twenty years ago. And when they subsequently closed down I think it has as much been because of the costs of maintaining them and so forth.

Now, what's happened to these since then? Some have become rather noble and haunting ruins that have, you know, just fallen apart and so forth. Some others are being rehabilitated as upmarket apartments and places like that. And indeed I went round an old district asylum a couple of years ago and it's been made into executive apartments and it's, you know, quite a big site, you know, quite a lot of old Victorian sandstone buildings. And I did wonder, you know, as I wandered around I thought, you know, people living here, they probably know that it was a hospital in the twentieth century, late twentieth century. I wonder how many of them actually know before that it was a Victorian asylum. Their apartment was perhaps an asylum ward housing twenty people where maybe restraint was being exercised and so forth. Yeah, it's just a question I asked in my mind. And I suspect most of them don't appreciate that, they don't know that. It's not something that would appear in the, in the estate agent's brochure when they were selling these apartments, you know.

Caroline: Yeah, probably not. But at the same time it is a very important piece of our history and we don't want to forget it lest we repeat it, right, so ...

Iain: Yeah, and the way they were used, as I say, the historical geographers that look at these things, yeah, it wasn't just that these buildings were built to impress, but they weren't just built to impress. You know there was a, there was a kind of logic in terms of the management of them as to, as to how they were constructed. I mean, one that we had in Glasgow which, it hasn't survived, the original Glasgow asylum which was opened in 1814 was, you know, was built in the style of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. And yeah that was, architecturally it must have been an incredible building, but it was all about surveillance and control and separating and categorizing different types of inmates.

Caroline: Absolutely it's like a lesson in, in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* right there, yeah, interesting. So we've kind of been hinting at this all along, but one of the questions I'm always curious about with people who do disability history is, what keeps you going? You know, why do you feel compelled to continue working on this subject?

Iain: I think because I'm always learning. You know, it's opened up a lot of doors in terms of a getting to know a wider range of people, including many people who identify as disabled. And understanding particularly from them the things that are important and how we look at things. And that's something I don't think I'll ever stop learning from because I'm, you know, I'm an outsider looking in. People quite often will ask historians working in disability, why do you do this? And, you know, there's also always sort of unsaid questions about, that kind of hint, have you've got a disability but I can't see it, or is there's someone in your family? And many people doing disability history are prompted and motivated by experiences such as that, either directly themselves or family members and so forth. Others are outsiders like me. And--although I do now wear hearing aids, so I feel, I feel a bit, you know, a bit more authentic now--but you know, so it's what we can, what we can learn from human interaction. And certainly people I've met that I would never have met otherwise, you know, who have become good friends. And again, you know, they all have different perspectives.

And one of the things, you know, disability history in some ways is seen, you know, it's a very kind of specialized sub-discipline, you know, "oh yeah, that's a little quirky thing, you know, that you do." But disability is everywhere. Disability will affect all of us at some point in our lives--unless we go out with a big bang, you know, we step off the street in front of a giant articulated lorry--the vast majority of us, we will experience disability in some form before we will depart this mortal coil. So we should be more aware of it. You know the only thing that makes it appear to be a minority thing is that most people's experience of disability will come in their later lives and then [sarcastic] they're not disabled of course, they're just old, you know, it's acceptable to be old and have a disability, when it's kind of shocking when it's a child or a young person who should be, you know, whole and active. But it's everywhere, it's out there. We should not look on this as some kind of minority activity or condition. That's one thing that I feel I've learned.

Caroline: So my final question for you is, what are you working on now? What's coming up next?

Iain: Oh, a few things I'm kind of trying to put to bed at the moment, one of which you know well about, and that's this edited volume, "Disability and the Victorians," which has been on the go forever, and Caroline is one of our contributors. So we hope that will appear soon, that we're at last on the, on the home straight with that having encountered one or two hurdles along the way that made it a slow process. Right at the moment I'm also working with a colleague in Aberdeen. I'm looking at, in my case, the Scottish National Institution. In her case she's looking at an English asylum facility for children. And it's an attempt to be a comparative kind of thing, but in fact the institutions are so different there's not a lot to compare and that creates its own challenges. The institution I'm looking at--I did some work on this some years ago and it was material I knew existed. And it was held in a hospital facility, and I applied to get access to it, and I was stalled and stalled and stalled for about four years. They demanded different things,

and I satisfied those and then, the final thing they asked for was an insurance indemnity--indemnity against what I don't know--an insurance indemnity for half a million pounds. And I thought, come on, you're being silly now, you know. And at that time I was teaching at the University of Stirling, and I went to their research office and showed them the letter and I said, look at this, you know. And they said, no problem we'll take care of that for you. So whatever it is they had to do, I don't know what was done, and I finally got access to this material. After, while I was working on it, but after about another four years we finally managed to get the material released and to be conserved and put into the University of Stirling archives so that researchers would have access to it in the future.

So that was a long story, but amongst that material there were bundles of applications for children to be admitted to the Scottish National Institution, which was a mental institution for, for children. And what made the applications interesting, if you like, is that these are, these were applications of not just children who were admitted to the institution, but were also the applications of children who were rejected. So we're getting paperwork for the ones who were turned away and of course then the question is, well, what happened, you know? An interesting thing too is, and I found this with other institutions for, certainly for sensory impairment, was that parents in Victorian times were actually desperate to get their children into institutions. You would think they would be rather traumatized by the very thought of it, but there were actually less places than there was demand for places. And I think many of them did feel that the children would get an opportunity in an institutional setting that they couldn't give them at home. They weren't all like that; there were obviously cases where a child might be disruptive at home, the other children were suffering because of that, and they were quite happy for them to be palmed off to someone else. But you know it's interesting, interesting to see the views of parents, and that they actually saw this as a positive thing, which I rather suspect parents would not see it that way in most cases today. So yes and I, the Scottish National Institution is something that I've been working on recently and hopefully that will also soon be put to bed, I hope.

Caroline: It sounds like you have a really fascinating and deep archive to work with, so I think we'll all wait eagerly in anticipation of this project.

Iain: You're too kind.

Caroline: So really, very interesting and also really important to recognize the complex decisions that people made or had made for them when they entered or were rejected from an institution like this.

Iain: And the definite influences that, you know, that they were under, different ethos at different times in history.

Caroline: Yeah, and what opportunities were available, or what discrimination existed, or what restrictions existed in the world outside of the asylum that made it extremely difficult for people with disabilities to live with their families, right. So all of these factors are at play and you're doing very good work to draw attention to them, yeah.

Iain: Thank you very much, you're so kind.

Caroline: Oh you're so welcome. Iain, that's our last question. Was there anything else that you wanted to talk about?

Iain: The only thing I think I would mention in the passing, you know, I've kind of argued that disability is mainstream and disability history should perhaps be seen as mainstream, just as much as gender history or, you know, Marxist history, history of work, economics, or whatever. I think we have seen the discipline grow incredibly over the last twenty years. And so many people are now doing it, so many different perspectives coming in. It is growing and I'm really gratified that there's that much interest.

Caroline: Absolutely, yeah, I think this is a field that's growing rapidly and new work coming out all the time that is ever complicating and adding depth and understanding to our, our awareness of disability. So, yeah, I am similarly grateful for this, this growing field. Wonderful. Well thank you so much, Iain. Such a pleasure to talk to you, as usual, and I'm sure we'll get a chance to catch up again soon.

Iain: Lovely, no, thank you, Caroline.

Caroline: Thanks to everyone out there for listening or reading the transcript. Please join us again next time! Bye bye!

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