

In Our Own Words:

Creative Approaches to Inclusion through an Arts
and Humanities Intellectual Disability Project

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Foreword, Mike Tull, Chair of Trustees, Pennine Heritage Trust

As Chair of the board of Trustees for the Pennine Heritage Trust, I feel proud and privileged that we have been able to facilitate what has become affectionately known as LD Club. Two of the Trust's charitable objectives are to: 'Harness the time, energy and spirit of the residents in the area to realise its potential and kindle their imagination' and to 'promote, advance and maintain ... an appreciation of the social history, physical and cultural heritage of the Pennine area'. This book explains how our Knowledge Transfer Project (KTP), funded by Innovate UK, gave us an opportunity to build on these objectives, and the work we were already doing, to reach what might have been an otherwise underserved and overlooked group.

Indeed, the KTP has enabled us to see the 'art of the possible' and

to help us see new ways of making the work we do, and the opportunities we offer to our communities, even more accessible and even more inclusive. This project is a good example of our core aims in action, and our aspirations to work with a wide range of partners. In the chapters that follow, you will see contributions from Pennine Heritage's staff and volunteers, service users and social care staff, as well as university academics and undergraduates. I am pleased to see so many different people engaging with our archives and being part of our community at the Birchcliffe Centre in Hebden Bridge. All of this means that there is much in this short book that will inspire intellectual and compassionate curiosity in how to further the valuable work demonstrated and explored within its pages.

Mike Tull, 2025

Rob Ellis, Introduction

This book offers reflections on an innovative learning disability or LD project, initially developed by an academic historian and a practitioner in the care sector. It would go on to include service users and support staff based at St Anne's Community Services, a multi-speciality care provider based in the north of England, as well as academic staff working in the humanities, and representatives of Pennine Heritage, a community charity based in Hebden Bridge. The chapters that follow include contributions from everyone who actively participated in the pilot programme, including service users, students, volunteers, and staff from all three organisations.

The immediate inspiration for this volume had been the publication of Rory Du Plessis's *I See You: A Photo Album of People with Intellectual Disability*.¹ That volume had taken the 1890-1920 casebook of the Institute for Imbecile Children at the Grahamstown Lunatic Asylum in South Africa and, in a bid to counter its 'dehumanising language', Rory had used the records to create poetry that 'honoured and memorialised' the people within its pages. He had been kind enough to share a copy with me and when I showed it to the group and suggested we could all write something together based on our experiences of our project, the response was overwhelmingly positive. There was, however, a longer-term story of its development and this introductory chapter offers a brief overview of that and its rationale, along with some of the research that framed it, and the practicalities that were considered along the way. Given the nature of this short book, academic references have been deliberately kept to a minimum.

A quick word on terminology

As Rory's book shows, the language of learning disability can be harsh on 21st century eyes and ears. It also shows that terminology and labels change over time. Indeed, at the start we talked about Learning Disability or LD but as the project progressed it was clear some people's preferred descriptor was intellectual disability. In some of the content below and in some of the chapters that follow the terms have been used interchangeably, depending on the preferences of each author.

¹ Du Plessis, Rory. 2024 *I See You: A Photo Album of People with Intellectual Disability*, Pretoria: ESI.

Some Background to the Partnership

Just as the publication of Rory's book was serendipitous, so too was the development of this project. I had been working on an Innovate UK- funded Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with Pennine Heritage. The aim of the KTP had been to use my experience, knowledge, and research expertise to add value to what Pennine Heritage had been successfully doing for decades, and to work together so that more people would use this important community asset. There will be more on this in the coming years, but my experience of co-production and of partnership working demonstrated an important role for History and the Humanities in the development of community outreach and engagement, while at the same time recognising the need to work creatively with others.² As I had seen in many of the co-produced ventures I had been involved in, bringing together different research, and practical and experiential strengths meant that what we developed together was much more than the sum of its parts. Whether as lead on those teams or whether I was an invited participant, the activities and outputs we developed together enabled us all, and our audiences, to look at the past in new and different ways. Some academics can be sniffy about what this means for the study of history but I find the collaborative nature of this approach fun and, on a personal level, I always learn more from the other participants in the process.³

The pros and cons of this can be complicated but, as Lola Young has pointed out, there are legal, ethical, and intellectual reasons for engaging wider groups and there is little doubt that co-produced and creative outputs can extend the 'reach' of research, public engagement and knowledge exchange.⁴ Indeed, in our original co-produced KTP funding bid, we explained that Pennine Heritage's University partnership would enable it to engage a much more diverse audience than it was then currently doing. This was important to both Steve and Judith, two of the Trustees of the organisation, and to me as we worked on the KTP outline.

For those starting out, guidelines from the UK's National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) can be a useful reference point to think about what diversity means in practice.⁵ The NLHF encourages organisations to consider diversity in its widest terms via its funding schemes and this includes (intellectual) disability which sits neatly with my research expertise, both in terms of publications, and public history, impact and engagement.⁶ It was this that led to another serendipitous moment when I was approached by Gerard Wainwright from St Anne's Community Services.

²Ellis, Rob, and Catharine Coleborne. 2022. "Co-Producing Madness: International Perspectives on the Public Histories of Mental Illness." *History Australia* 19 (1): 133–50.

³For an overview of critiques see Moody, Jessica (2015) *Heritage and History in E. Waterton, and S. Watson (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 113-29.

⁴Lola Young, cited in Crooke, Elizabeth (2007) *Museums and Community, ideas issues and challenges*, Abingdon: Routledge: 86.

⁵National Lottery Heritage Fund. No Date. "Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion", available at <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/our-commitment-equality-diversity-and-inclusion> [Accessed 1 July 2024].

Gerard is the Day Centre Lead at St Anne's and in 2022 he was awarded the Royal College of Nursing's Learning Disability Nurse of the Year award.⁷ When we first met at the end of that year he was exploring his own public history of Stansfield View Hospital, a long stay facility for people with intellectual disabilities in Todmorden, West Yorkshire. Gerard's Remembering Stansfield View led to the creation of a video, that included insights from people who lived and worked in the hospital before its closure and demolition in the 1990s. With that project coming to an end, Gerard was keen to explore other opportunities that were inclusive and gave voice to the people he and his colleagues supported in community settings and in supported living accommodation. As we chatted about the past and the present of intellectual disability, we wondered if we might do something, via the KTP, with a group of present-day service users. I had done this several times in the past, including *Our Minds, Our Histories* with St Anne's which had been funded by the NLHF and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).⁸ The advantage we had this time around, however, was that through the KTP, we had access to Pennine Heritage and its resources, subject to agreement from the Trustees, which came readily and enthusiastically. This meant reflecting on those past opportunities

and thinking about how we might use Pennine Heritage's Birchcliffe Centre, a former Baptist chapel built at the end of the nineteenth century, its event spaces, its archives, and the adjacent woodland with small stream running through it. With all of this available to us, it became relatively easy to co-conceive a pilot plan that would work for all concerned.

Based on my research in the histories of intellectual disabilities and mental illness, and previous experience of and contributions to service-user centred projects, I was clear on how this would work from my point of view. I wanted a mixed group of people to ensure that this had some history focus, and that included inviting four students who had completed my third-year specialist undergraduate history module on mental illness and intellectual disability. Only one of them had an existing track record of volunteering in disability sport but all of them had shown an interest in the topic and gone the extra mile in trying to understand it more fully. Extending the invitation to them was an easy decision because I could be sure that they would treat their involvement seriously and empathetically, and their induction meeting with Gerard only served to confirm that this was the case.

Unlike some of the other public histories described above, however, this was not about intellectual disability or its history per se.⁹

⁶See, for example, Ellis R. 2015. 'Without decontextualisation': the Stanley Royd Museum and the progressive history of mental health care. *History of Psychiatry*, 26:3, 332-347. Ellis R. 2017. *Heritage and Stigma*. Co-producing and communicating the histories of mental health and learning disability *Medical Humanities*, 43, 92-98. Ellis R. 2020 *London and its Asylums: Politics and Madness*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁷Anon. 2022 'Gerard wins Learning Disability Nurse of the Year', St Anne's Community Services. Available at <https://www.st-annes.org.uk/gerard-wins-learning-disability-nurse-of-the-year/> [Accessed 1 July 2024].

⁸Anon. 2021. *Destigmatising Mental Ill Health through Creative Arts Practice*, available at https://issuu.com/universityofhuddersfield/docs/discover_2021/s/11151620 [Last accessed 1 July 2024].

⁹Ellis, Rob, and Catharine Coleborne. 2022. "Co-Producing Madness: International Perspectives on the Public Histories of Mental Illness." *History Australia* 19 (1): 133-50.

Instead, it was one that just happened to include some members who were described or who identified in that way. As Gerard explained, the people from St Anne's had all lived in the area in and around Hebden Bridge all their lives and here was an opportunity to explore these meaningful local histories as a group. In reality, at least two members of the group had spent significant parts of their lives in an institution and while Simon Jarrett's history shows stories of inclusion, as well as marginalisation, he reminds us that even in the 21st century, 'threats to independence remain high' and social inclusion elusive.¹⁰ This context helps to explain why we wanted to create a mixed group where we could, again, learn from each other. As a historian, I also wanted to emphasise the importance and potential of History to drive something that was and is inclusive, as well as being fun and creative. However, this project only worked because of Gerard's drive

and the willingness of the people involved to help us co-produce a programme that worked for everyone.

To be clear, there is already a wealth of literature on this subject with important suggestions on how to make heritage spaces welcoming for people with intellectual disabilities. Work by Jonathan Rix and the Access to Heritage group in Liverpool, for example, had clear aims to improve access, to learn from people with intellectual disabilities on the practicalities of that, and to create guidance on how it works in practice.¹¹ In our first step in that process, Gerard and I were fortunate that everyone we asked to be involved opted in and the concept of consent was important for us both, in terms of current service delivery and its past. We agreed that those attending the sessions at the Birchcliffe Centre could come to one session or all of them, and they could opt-out of any of the individual activities for any reason, without explanation. The

sessions would cover history and heritage but the definitions of these would be broad and related to peoples' interests. As with *Our Minds, Our Histories*, the aim was to create democratic and inclusive activities that encouraged people to be involved but this was not about employment or training. Instead, we wanted to try and destabilise 'what it means to be (or to be labelled) as learning disabled', and to demonstrate the positive place of the Arts and Humanities and community assets such as the Birchcliffe Centre in that process.¹²

With an outline plan for the first sessions that included an orientation of the building and getting to know each other, we envisaged a programme would develop over time. At the start Francesca and later Andrew, the Heritage Managers at Pennine Heritage, and Andy, a volunteer, played pivotal roles in drawing out links from the archives, building or landscape to the

¹⁰Jarrett, Simon. 2024. 'The Myth of Marginality', History Workshop, available at <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/disability-history/the-myth-of-marginality/> [Last accessed 2 Dec 2024].

¹¹Rix, J. With the Heritage Forum. 2009. "It's My Heritage Too. Developing participatory methods for promoting access to heritage sites. In Seale, J., & Nind, M. (Eds.). *Understanding and promoting access for people with learning difficulties: Seeing the opportunities and challenges of risk*. London: Taylor & Francis Group.

¹²Jarrett, S. and Tilley, E. (2022). 'The history of the history of learning disability', *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 50, 132-142.

activities on offer. Elsewhere, Francesca had identified 'zines' as a way of capturing historical content in a relatively straightforward but democratic way and this was something we had used with students to good effect. Here, it offered a way of scrapbooking memories as we progressed and, like everything else we did, participants could do as much or as little of this as they wanted to.

As the sessions developed, we hoped that others within the group would suggest or prompt activities for the rest of us. Some of this is captured in the chapters that follow but in the very first session, Harry spotted a 'banjo' (a pink acoustic guitar) in a collection of objects used by a home school who regularly use the Birchcliffe Centre for their own teaching. On the very first morning, of the very first session, he was handed the banjo and he led us all in his favourite songs and this became something we repeated in every subsequent session – something

we had not anticipated at the outset but something that was a real joy for all of us to be part of. In other sessions, as hoped, the History undergraduates grew in confidence to take the lead in creative and meaningful ways. This included some sporting activities (see below) and even decorating cupcakes, with one of their parents providing the materials to do so and even baking some for us all. Thank you. Inspired by her work on the poet Sylvia Plath, Iona brought some things for us to make friendship bracelets and her suggestion to draw around our hands was so popular that this became the image chosen in three of the chapters below.¹³ Similarly, Ian's love of pottery making and his experience as a gifted exhibitor of his own work, led us to our own, less accomplished attempts, and a group excursion to a nearby workshop to see some of his other creations. While all of these may look like random additions, we were able to link each to some aspect of what Pennine Heritage offers to the local community.

¹³Murphy, I. (2022). "Once I was locked up they could use that on me all the time": Ableist Psychiatric Structures in Sylvia Plath's 'Tongues of Stone.' *Plath Profiles*, 14(1). & Murphy, I. (2023). *The Changing Landscape of Teaching Twentieth-Century American Literature: Bringing Disability Studies into Undergraduate Seminars*. U.S. Studies Online, *Resilience/Renewal: Shifting Landscapes in American Studies*. <https://usso.uk/2023/03/06/bringing-disability-studies-into-undergraduate-seminars/>

Some Important Caveats and Reflections on the Contributions

At this point it is worth re-iterating that this was a pilot programme. There is every chance that museum and heritage professionals, as well as some academics may be reading this and asking themselves 'so what?' This short book, however, offers an opportunity to reflect on what worked for us and to showcase the kind of things we developed as a group. As a group, we wanted something to remind us of the experiences we had shared together and it was this that was the main driver for this publication. While it may not look like it, however,

this was research-based and without that research none of this would have happened. Equally, I know enough about the past histories of intellectual disabilities to avoid being too triumphal about the present, but there are some things that worked

and the chapters that follow give some insight into that. While we had originally planned four monthly sessions, as a way of piloting the partnership, we ran six. In reality, given the co-produced nature of what we developed we could have had much more, and it was only the students graduating, and in some cases, returning home, that brought the extended pilot to an end. The contributions below reflect the fact that there was a willingness to continue with a core group and, as a result, the group and new activities carried on into a new year. At the time of publication, the group still meets with a mix of original and newer members, some of whom are included in this volume. As we move forward, there are opportunities to explore how this might be rolled out with other disability, or other overlooked and underserved groups.

All of this is positive but we know there is more to do and more to reflect on. We are aware, for example, that all members of this relatively small group were invited participants who chose to join in and play full and active parts in its success. We need to consider how we can continue without very limited but core funding from the KTP. We need more consultation across the group to think about what might not have worked, as well as the examples here that showed what did. Following a suggestion from Catherine Coleborne, we called this volume 'In Our Own Words', but eagle-eyed readers will spot a couple of chapters that are written by others. There are plenty of examples in the distant and near history when the voices of vulnerable individuals have been co-opted by those with more power, a stronger voice, or the cultural capital or wherewithal to be able to do so.¹⁴ In this case, we had to wrestle with the fact that three of the people involved were non-verbal and their reflections, such as they are, are authored by someone else. Similarly, and following advice from St Anne's, their names have been altered so that they remain anonymous. The photos we have included reflect this anonymity and, sadly, do not capture their participation in the range of activities we engaged in. The alternatives to this level of anonymity would have been to erase their positive and significant contributions altogether but this was never an option. As some of the chapters and some of the images show, our imperfect solution reflects their active

and influential role on the programme and everyone involved in it.

For everyone else, my role as editor has been minimal. I provided a framework so that each chapter had a strong and coherent link back to the thread of the volume as a whole, but each contributor was encouraged to write about their own experiences and provide their own truths. As a result, we have not captured the details of every single session or every single activity. Instead, we wanted to get some sense of what this project meant to people and what they took from it, which means some inevitable overlaps.

¹⁴Ellis, R., Kendal, S., Taylor, S.J. (2021). Voices in the History of Madness: An Introduction to Personal and Professional Perspectives. In: Ellis, R., Kendal, S., Taylor, S.J. (eds) *Voices in the History of Madness. Mental Health in Historical Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. Faulkner, Alison (2021) *Knowing Our Own Minds: Transforming the Knowledge Base of Madness and Distress In Voices in the History of Madness: Personal and Professional Perspectives on Mental Health and Illness*, eds. Rob Ellis, Sarah Kendal and Steven J. Taylor. Palgrave Macmillan. Alikhanizadeh, Megan et al. (2021). Often, When I Am Using My Voice... It Does Not Go Well: Perspectives on the Service User Experience. In *Voices in the History of Madness: Personal and Professional Perspectives on Mental Health and Illness*, eds. Rob Ellis, Sarah Kendal and Steven J. Taylor. Palgrave Macmillan.

This aside, it is easy to spot some key themes that linked back to people's personal or professional interests and, in some case, their aspirations. The chapters by Millie, Milly and Noah reflect on how we used the wider histories of Hebden Bridge and the surrounding area to make the sessions more fun, more hands on, and more interactive. The references here are to walking tours of both the town and the canal that runs through it. The changing nature of both calls back to the town's (industrial) past but are indicative of both the wealth of opportunities we had to explore this, and provide an insight into our methodologies. Andrew and Andy's chapters explain that process in a little more detail, and they consider how they took the germ of an idea from the students to decorate cupcakes so that it was relevant and interesting historically. This process can also be seen in Francesca's overview of how we used the local landscape to shape one session and in Lochlann's description of the links he drew from his own sporting interests to create a fun and inclusive activity that introduced a level of friendly competition and team building amongst the group. What I like about these examples is that fact that we could make the link back to the history of Pennine Heritage, the Birchcliffe Centre, and Hebden Bridge, rather than those things necessarily driving the content in the first place. This brings its own challenges of course and may not be replicable in all cases but they are good examples of something that might otherwise have been missed if it had only been the heritage and history professionals that had been driving the direction of travel.

The importance of this is demonstrated by Ian and Renait's chapters, in particular, which focus very much on the things that they enjoyed across the programme. The best bits. Their favourite bits. At first glance, it is easy to see the good things in these recollections but there are also hints at content that was less enjoyable that we need to reflect on as a group and to consider as we move on to the next stage. In John and Harry's chapters, both of which were authored by Gerard, and in Taylor's chapter, authored by Iona, we get some sense of the positive impact on them as individuals, but also, importantly and significantly, of their positive impact on the project and its participants. In several chapters including Iona's, Jess's, Leonie's, and Louie's we get more of a sense of this with barriers overcome, and friendships and memories made. The clarity of impact in these examples is clear to see and Harry's 'banjo' playing is a theme of several chapters. By contrast, the transformative impact on John is explored by Natasha. The role of the programme in enabling them both to get to know each other and to form a deeper connection was a welcome surprise and something we had not anticipated at the outset. What we had tried to engender, of course, was a place of shared experiences and of mutual support and friendship. These are themes returned to, perhaps unsurprisingly by Gerard and Rob, who consider how those initial serendipitous circumstances led to something that proved to be both joyous and uplifting, so much so that we hope that this is only the beginning for what became affectionately known as LD club.

Andrew, It started with a cupcake

I'd not long been at Pennine Heritage when I was tasked with coming up with the next session for our Learning Disability Group. Rob told me that one of the student volunteers, Lochlann, had enlisted his mum to bake us some cupcakes. How do you make an educational session about history and heritage starting with a cupcake?

It then struck me that I was working in a former church. Food has always been important to churches, a vital part of the Eucharist or Communion. Churches have also long been places where those in need could be fed. I then learned that food had a particular importance for Baptist churches. Like other nonconformist sects, Baptists made an event out of

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basement



Sundays: following the usual Sunday sermon, the church would put on a dinner for the congregation. This would then be followed by more prayers in the late afternoon and then games and dancing to finish the day. Those coming to the Birchcliffe Chapel came for the day, especially important given that it's at the top of a big hill!

Food was also a central part of the more recent history of the Birchcliffe Centre. After the building was saved in 1978, the basement area continued to be used as a restaurant until relatively recently, becoming well known for serving good-quality food. Food, then, has been an important part of Birchcliffe life for as long as the church has been here.

The history and heritage that formed the session was the space itself. We started by looking through photographs of another important food-related event – the Harvest Festival. We remembered our own experiences of Harvest Festivals while looking at how the Birchcliffe and other churches in the area had been used for those events. We then went into our archives to look at an episode from the First World

War. The Sunday School was in charge of giving out current buns over the Whitsun weekend, however the pressures on food supplies meant that buns were restricted. Looking at what happened during and then after the war when food was more readily available gave us an insight into the important role that places like the Birchcliffe Centre played for the local community.

Creativity is at the heart of everything that we do with LD Club, something of a gear shift from academic teaching. Approaching different topics from an entirely different angle gives them a new perspective, but also shows how traditional archival sources like minute books, which can be dry, can be used to bring the past to life. What started with the idea of cupcakes turned into a celebration of the role of the Birchcliffe in local customs. And the cupcakes were delicious.



Andy, In the archive. A tale of buns and war

I have spent a lot of time in the archives at Pennine Heritage, run in partnership with the Hebden Bridge Local History Society. To me they are a fascinating treasure trove of documents from which countless stories about the Calder Valley and its people can be told. But to others in our disparate group the word archive might conjure up an image of something dry, dusty and, well, dull. So how could I make a visit to come alive for such a varied bunch of people?

Well, when it was mentioned that cupcakes were to be on the menu at one of our sessions, it reminded me of something I had come across in the old minute books of the Sunday School which used to be run by the Chapel at Birchcliffe. Everyone, no matter what their life experiences likes a treat, and a story

with a happy ending. So, this is the story I told about the Whitsunday treat, currant buns and wartime hardships.

Every Whitsunday, in May the teachers at the Sunday School would lead a procession to a field where they would treat the children to a picnic, with coffee and currant buns provided along with games and other entertainment. In the years before the First World War the school was thriving, and the minutes recorded that in 1914 it was agreed that “the Co-operative Stores provide 700 buns (at $\frac{3}{4}$ d each) and 100 of the $\frac{3}{4}$ size”. Clearly a big event for the school and the local kids. But with war breaking out only 2 months later, how would that affect future treats?

Well, at first it seemed not a lot. In 1915 an order for the same number was placed although with the proviso that they should be “the best that can be got at the price”. BUT by the following year the war had led to inflation and the price of the buns had doubled (does that sound familiar!). The number of buns ordered was reduced to 500 although it’s not clear whether that was a response to the price increase or because there were fewer children at the school.

By this stage of the war the German U-boats’ sinking of merchant shipping was leading to food shortages and in 1917 it was decided that “One Bun only be served to each person and that the distributors use their discretion as to whether Half a Bun will suffice for the

little children”. At least, though the tradition of the treat was still surviving.

However, 1918 brought no respite, and the minutes for that year record that a Joint Meeting of schools in the area decided that “owing to the state of national affairs and the difficulty in securing food supplies it would be better to abandon the usual treats this year”

So, was that the end of the Whitsunday treat? Happily, it wasn’t, and in 1919 after the war had ended, the minutes record that the scale of the treat had recovered (almost) to pre-war levels, it being “resolved that the Cooperative Stores be asked to provide 600 full sized buns and 100 $\frac{3}{4}$ size”.

We shared this story on the day we also shared the delicious cupcakes. The picture shows a small section of the archives, with a distinguished visitor. Of course, neither the cupcakes nor the buns are allowed in archives (nor indeed are animals) hence his hangdog (sorry!) expression.



Francesca, Creativity and collaboration

As a heritage professional, developing these workshops was an excellent opportunity to create a truly inclusive space for engaging with heritage. Research from Historic England has found that visiting heritage sites has a significant impact on wellbeing, improving people's overall happiness and satisfaction with life. Yet for many members of our community, there are not many opportunities to visit heritage sites or engage meaningfully with history. Traditional museum exhibitions and events can be inaccessible in many ways. For example, they may involve busy and over-stimulating environments, restrictive expectations around visitor behaviour, or an over-reliance on text for communication. With these workshops, we wanted to break down some of these barriers for people in our community.

Our workshop model focussed on person-to-person communication, and on creating shared experiences through outings and activities. For me, a particular highlight was our pottery workshop. The idea for this pottery workshop came from one of the participants who is a pottery artist, working at a local studio to create and exhibit his work. He had the excellent idea of sharing



his skills and passion for pottery with the group, and the idea for a workshop was born! We began by taking a walk in the incredible woodland next

to the Birchcliffe Centre, gathering natural materials, and talking about how nature and heritage are so closely connected in this part of the world. We then returned to the centre, and used the natural materials we had collected to make art by pressing imprints into air-dry clay. Everyone in the group was enthusiastic about working with the clay, producing patterns that reflected our earlier outing to the woods. This creative activity became a way to record and reflect on the natural heritage of our region, in a hands-on and collaborative way. This workshop was the first co-developed session, where a participant brought their

passion and shared it with the group. It led the way for more similar workshops, developed together based on the shared interests of the group.

Gerard, Celebrating the contribution of people with learning disabilities to the culture and history of Calderdale

I'm not sure what I expected when we first started this project. I was excited at the prospect of supporting a group of people with learning disabilities to be involved and at the opportunity to work with the rest of the group.

I'd already been involved in making a documentary to commemorate thirty years since the closure of Stansfield View Hospital, the long stay institution for people with learning disabilities where John and Harry (not their real names) lived until 1993. Renait and Ian are currently working on a research and health promotion initiative with me, and other people with lived experience. This project seemed like a logical step from that and an opportunity to support a group of people with learning disabilities to engage with their heritage through the history and culture of their local community.

I feel I have a sense of responsibility to acknowledge the role of people with learning disabilities in my own career and life. I consider John, Harry, Renait and Ian, friends. People I value, whose company I enjoy. Their learning disability is not really my primary consideration. But I'm conscious that for others on first meeting them it may be. John and Harry only partially communicate through speech, for many people that can be a barrier and create a challenge to forming a relationship.



But the way the sessions were planned allowed time for us to get to know one another through a range of activities including exploring Birchcliffe Chapel; finding out more about its architecture and rich history, and its importance as a centre for the community of Hebden Bridge and through Pennine Heritage it's wider significance. Francesca, Andrew, and Andy showed us items from the archive and explained their place in the culture and history of the area. We explored the surrounding woodland and had guided tours of the town and canal with reference to the ancestry of buildings, the region's industrial past and its emergence as a centre of culture and tourism. We used pictures, drawings, and found items related to the project to make zines which reflected our personal response to the project and how it impacted on our own history. We also crafted items from clay which we decorated and glazed. We ate

together, sang together, and talked and laughed. In the end we came to know one another and the fact that John and Harry communicated in different ways no longer seemed to matter.

Throughout it was clear to me that this was more about the process than the outcome. We have created objects which reflect the differences of the group, people's artistry, skill, interests, and personality. But the meaning for me is embedded in the making, not in the finished artwork; although, they act as artefacts of the project and our individual contribution to it. On a personal level I was reunited with my art school past, and the importance of making things to me, I loved losing myself in creating a zine which captured elements of what I've taken from this time. I also learnt a lot from watching others, listening to what they had to say and seeing their unique interpretation of the time we spent together.



Harry, Music, joy and laughter

Harry lived in a long-stay institution in Calderdale for over fifty years of his life before moving into a shared house in 1993 under the Community Care Act. Though in his mid-eighties he's full of life and has been instrumental in bringing the group together.

Harry has a severe learning disability and limited verbal communication, despite this he has a gift for making friends and creating opportunities for joy, laughter, and melody; instantly dissolving any social awkwardness, and delighting everyone with his impromptu singalongs and ability to find the fun in any activity.

It's difficult to underestimate the impact he has had on the project and the impression he's made. I first met Harry in the early 1990s; he's someone I'm all the better for knowing.

Harry exemplifies the principle of living in the moment. Whatever we do he seems to relish it and inevitably carries the rest of the group with him.

On our field trips into town and on the canal, he effortlessly engages passersby in his observations and enthusiasm.

I challenge anyone not to join in when Harry picks up a 'banjo' and starts to sing, only momentarily pausing for applause or to start to laugh which spreads throughout the group. Like sunshine radiating happiness.

We've come to use the term joy almost synonymously to describe what he creates; too often in short supply, but in our times spent together we've felt what it is to have a sense of community and shared identity, to connect and feel alive. In a large part thanks to Harry.



Ian, Learning about history



My name is Ian. I like pottery, doing jogging, things like walking, day centres, crafts, visiting places like art galleries and museums and shopping for clothes. I have a learning disability and live in my own house with support from Bridgewood Trust, I've been there a long time.

I go to the Pennine Heritage centre on a Tuesday. But not every week. Gerard collects me and Renait and takes us in his car. It's up a really steep hill. We've walked up it before, I don't mind, I like to be active.

We've been doing rubbings on tiles and floors. We talk about history like canals and look at the old buildings in Hebden Bridge. I made a clay sculpture and painted it with bright colours. I liked doing this. I'm showing people round Northlight where I do my pottery. I'm a good artist. People buy my pottery. For my zine we took pictures on a walk. I also used pictures of the tiles and stained glass when I made rubbings. I like doing crafts.

I liked talking to people, meeting new people and talking to the university students. The man with the guitar who likes singing, he's in his eighties. Harry, that's it

I liked the food, the sandwiches and sometimes we had cake. I'm not so keen on those vegan sausage rolls - I won't have them again.

The best thing was being together and joining in. I would do it again if I get chance.



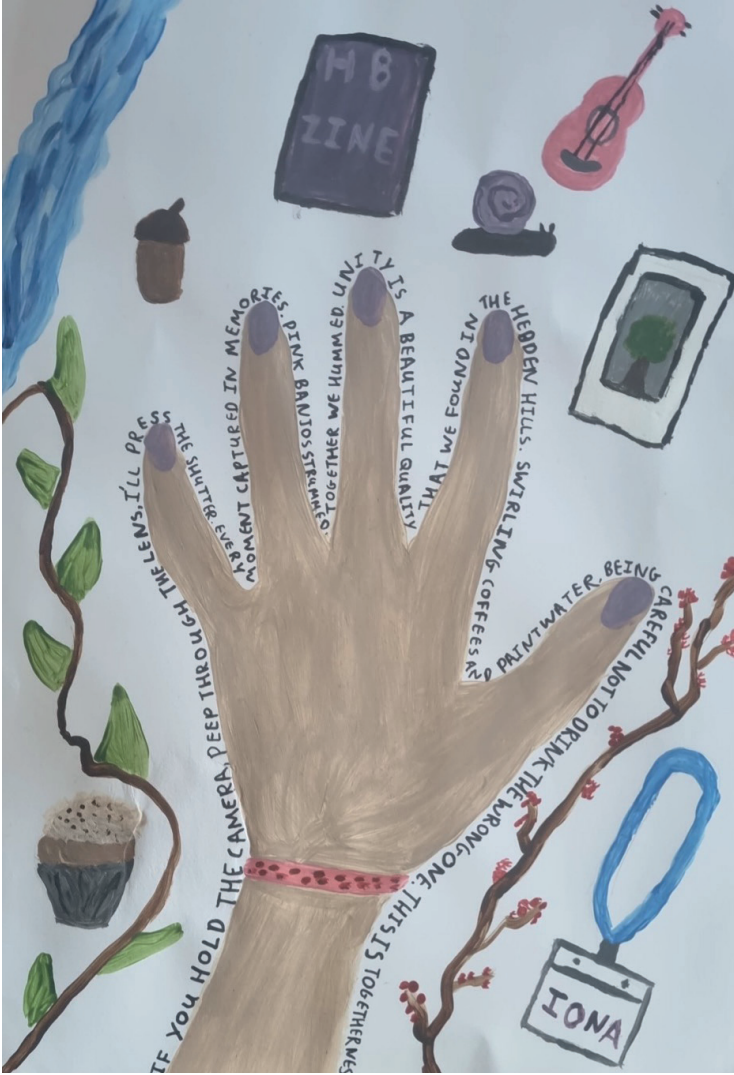
Iona, Togetherness

For me, our Pennine Heritage group is all about togetherness. What it means to form connections. Real ways of giving and accepting care. The project is completely different to the work I'm used to. When you spend so much time researching, it's easy to become disconnected from the little things you used to appreciate. The project reshaped my world outlook and gave a real glimpse of hope into the future of service-user-led projects.

In one of the sessions, we drew around each other's hands and filled the hand with drawings and words which make us who we are. I'd say this

was one of my favourite moments at the group. I decided to take this and create a painted hand full of Pennine Heritage memories, as the group will always be a very special part of me and who I am as a person. Each drawing relates to a special memory that taught me something I'll carry with me for the rest of my life. The sheer joy from a singular balloon by the canal taught me to always find happiness in the little things life provides. The teamwork between me, Renait, and Ian whilst taking polaroid pictures in the woods showed me it was always worth

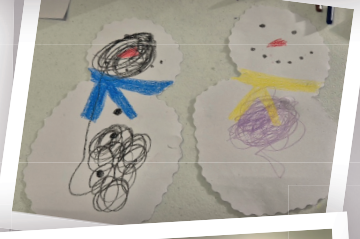
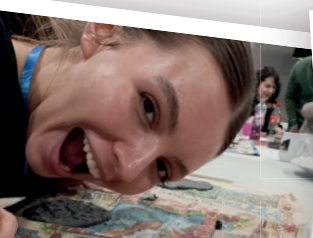
capturing every moment that feels special. Our banjo sing-along sessions starring Harry and John reminded me to always use my voice; no matter how out of tune it may be, the memories are always worth it. Decorating cupcakes brought back that youthful euphoria of eating cake without second thoughts. Making friendship bracelets and chatting showed me the joys of small moments of connection. We spent these wonderful days laughing so authentically I'd forget to cover my mouth to hide my smile. The clay art we produced together gave a real connection with both

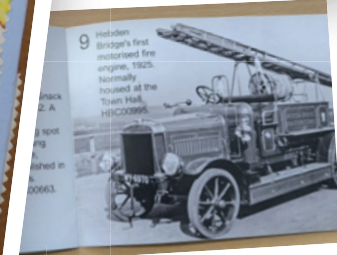
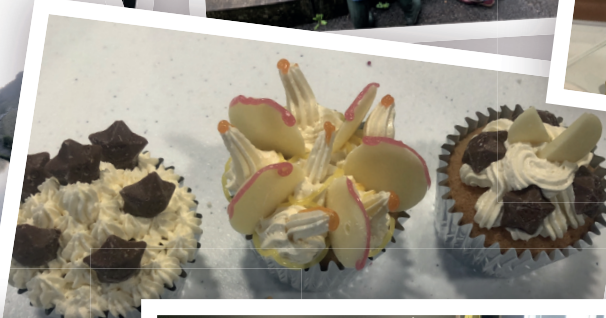


nature and art. Seeing the talent of those around me made me appreciate how wonderful it is to be truly passionate about something. When the honks of the geese by

the canal scared me (and Andrew) it was okay because everyone had each other's backs. What shocked me most is that by the end of our time together, Harry no longer

wanted me to take my nose ring out! Every single person who came along taught me that being your authentic self creates the most beautiful feeling of togetherness.





Jess, A history project for all

My name is Jess, during the Pennine Heritage History Project I was in the role of deputy manager and support worker in the service where Harry and John live. I have worked there for four and a half years. I found the whole project really interesting; it was a great opportunity for Harry and John, but also for me personally. I really enjoyed it.

I learnt a lot about the history of Hebden Bridge which I didn't know previously. One of my favourite things was going into the archive room and getting to see

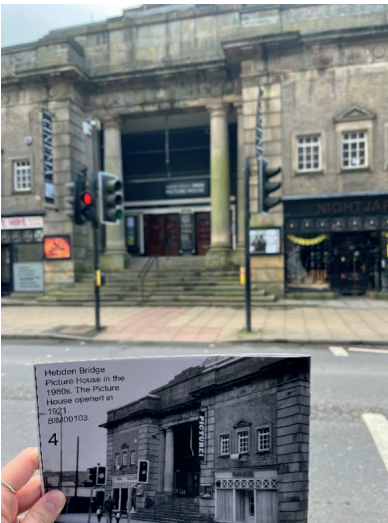
all the historic documents and pictures, one that particularly stood out for me was written by Sunday School students early in the last century - it really brought the past to life for me.

I also enjoyed our walks round Hebden Bridge town centre and along the canal, comparing the buildings in the town to photos from the archive and learning about how their purpose has changed over time.

I think Harry got a lot out of it socially, he made friends with the university students, and I felt they cared about him. He got a lot out of the different sessions, including walking round Hebden Bridge and decorating buns, which he seemed to enjoy. Harry would play the banjo at the end of each session, which became a tradition and a moment we could all share and join in.

It was just a really nice project which ran really well. It was interesting to do something different each time.

As much as John doesn't always show things or open up you could see him really come out of his shell and enjoy it more as he got to know people. I really looked forward to going.



John, Creativity and confidence

John (not his real name) has spent his whole life in the Calder Valley. Born in Mytholmroyd the neighbouring town to Hebden Bridge. In his youth he moved to Stansfield View - a long stay hospital for people with learning disabilities situated on an isolated hillside above Todmorden.

Introspective and hesitant around people, John is often described as a loner. A man of few words. He takes time to build trust. Values stillness and quiet. Habitually looking forward to his next cigarette and coffee - the currency for many who have experienced life in an institution. His sense of self is deeply rooted in the landscape and culture of this part of the world. It's industrial heritage; his mum worked in the local textile mills. Stansfield View where he spent his adolescence and early adulthood, though closed in the 1990s its legacy lives on. The widespread segregation of people with learning disabilities is an uncomfortable yet irrefutable aspect of recent history and of John's story.

He also has many attributes which could be seen as synonymous with a certain aspect of Yorkshire character. Stoic, uncomplaining, uncompromising, sardonic, fastidious by nature and often enigmatic.

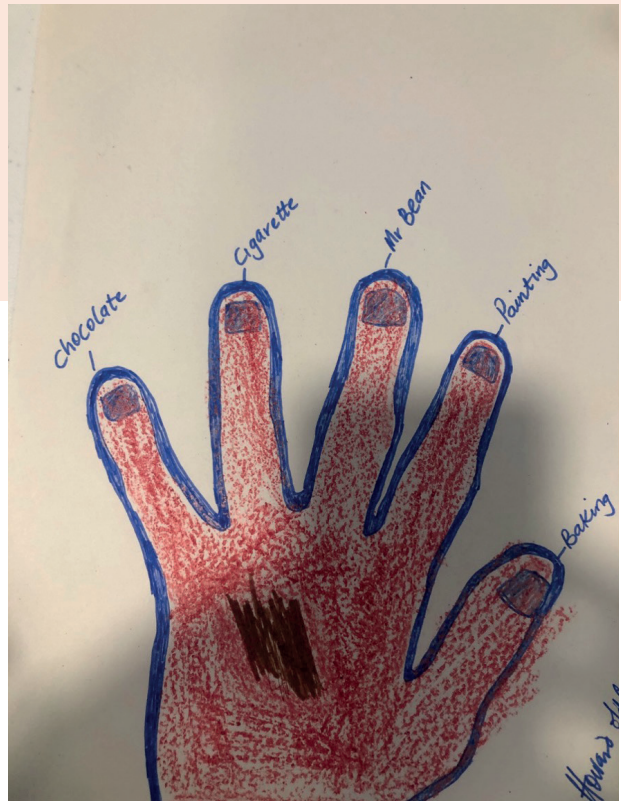
I was uncertain how John would adapt to being part of this project. Though comfortable working with his hands and applying himself to tasks – perhaps part of the DNA of his working-class heritage. Adept at craftwork. Equally at home with a pen, pencil, or paintbrush – yet averse to getting his hands dirty. Focused, industrious and determined. He's invariably ill at ease in social settings.

In this project we have an unspoken rule that one Tuesday each month we are equals, all with a contribution to make that is valued by everyone taking part. Our difference is what defines us. Students, historians, people with learning disabilities, an archivist, lecturers, a poet. A dialogue, which

in John's case is often wordless; conveyed through deed, creativity, his personal means of expression nurtured in an unhurried and safe space. In this atmosphere John has found his place. A sense of purpose. Over the months he's gained confidence and appears to have lowered his guard.

I've known John for most of my adult life, this is the most comfortable I've seen him in a group. Invariably he'll avoid people, often positioning

himself as far away from others as space allows. He has a preference of standing with his back to the wall, whether this stems from a sense of self-preservation after years spent in an institution or general unease around others is unclear. After a couple of sessions, he voluntarily sat with the rest of the group, actively engaging in activities. That may seem small but it's a testament to the transformative impact of this project.



Leonie, Life is what you make it

For me, this photo embodies the experience I have had. Laughter, enjoyment, and friendship. From the very beginning, I enjoyed every moment. I have been able to learn and explore some of the rich history of Hebden Bridge, from the history of the building where our sessions took place, to the history of nature and food in the local community, and much more. It has been incredible to visualise the evolution of Hebden Bridge with photo booklets, and the creative, hands-on activities to explore these histories have been fantastic. From taking rubbings of architecture from around the building, to collecting plants, leaves, and pinecones on a woodland walk to imprint into clay, and to creating our own zines. Almost every session we could join a sing-along to a pink banjo if we wanted to. Singing, clapping, and laughter filled the room. Music has been a huge part of my life from an early age, from learning the clarinet and piano, being involved in my school's choir and musical productions, and going on to study music at A level. While I could go into detail about the history of music, the scales, and the keys, and I could talk about film composers and their music (a personal hobby of mine). But the music we all created in each session has taught me just how beautiful it can be. Music is what you make it. Life is what you make it.

The photo I have chosen was taken from the session where we had looked at the history of food followed by a cupcake decorating session. The other students and I led the creative activity, and it was such a joy to see everyone enjoy the decorating, as well eating of the delicious cupcakes! However, my favourite part of this whole experience has by far been spending time with the

people involved. Each session I have learnt something new about someone, I have had the pleasure of listening to everyone's interests and hobbies, and they have in return kindly listened to my interests. Each time I stepped foot into a session, I was never thinking about how I was perceived by others, if I were too loud or too chatty, if I had said the wrong thing or not been understood; I could just be me, without any concern. This photo for me, proves to myself that I can just be me, amongst people who can just be themselves. It has been a privilege to meet and know every single person involved in this project. I have created many happy memories which I will always hold dear to me. Thank you everyone.



Lochlann, Bringing inclusivity into sport

On the final session of the project, we held a session which was focused around sport and aimed at getting everyone to play and compete with each other. I have been involved in accessible disability sport for some time and know the benefits and opportunities it can bring to everyone. We started with a warm up game called Head, Shoulders, Knees and Cones, which was based on the song 'Head, Shoulders Knees and Toes' and included a 'Simon Says' element. As the leader in this activity, I called a part of the body or an action and the players had to either touch that part of their own body or

complete the action. When 'Cones' was called, players raced to pick the cone up as quick as they could. Once everyone was warmed up, there was a relay race in which individuals were split into teams. Walking as fast as they could, players followed a short course of cones and stripes on the ground, with their team members cheering them on.

As a student group, we decided on these activities because they are physically accessible to the group we had and we did not require much equipment. It was cheap and easy to replicate. Both of



these activities lead to some competitive rivalry with a lot of cheering, laughing and joking and it was the same when we then played chair football. In this game the participants were sat in teams in the hall on chairs. A soft ball was used for players to kick and push with their feet into the goal behind the opposing team. This went really well and saw everyone playing alongside each other and changing positions to try and beat the opposing team.

The picture I have chosen shows me with Noah and Leonie in a pose that replicates a football team picture. I really enjoyed this session and meant that I could use the skills that I have gained from coaching people with Intellectual Disabilities in a different scenario. Moreover, the sporting focus tied in with the archival sessions that looked at the histories of Hebden Bridge Cricket Club and the Tennis that took place at the Birchcliffe Centre in the twentieth century. However, whilst the participants were seen to enjoy the sporting experience it was ultimately led and run by neurotypical staff and students, rather than the people with disabilities. This is important because one of the participants chose to opt out of this element and was supported in his preference to focus on an arts and crafts activity. In the spirit of the project, the choice of activity meant that everyone was involved in 'something' but including them in planning discussions in future may allow more of them to take an active part. Despite this, the session was a success and the opportunity to unwind with some fun and relaxed games was a nice way to wrap the project up.



Most of my university life has been spent studying the ancient world. An unfortunate side effect of this has been the narrowing of my horizons when it comes to finding ways to engage with historical materials. Before joining the project at Hebden Bridge, I would almost exclusively access history through written work, be that ancient evidence, modern scholarship, or using both to write my assignments. Now, as a full member of LD club, I see just how creative and expressive history can be.

I have been able to metaphorically, and often literally, get my hands dirty. This is thanks to the focus the project places on hands on history as a means of engaging with local heritage. These activities are linked to the session's overall theme and allow us all to get involved and have fun. I have also been challenged to come up with some of these ideas myself. This has pushed me to think creatively, finding tasks and activities that are both inclusive and enjoyable for everyone, that also use easily available materials.

No photograph sums up all these experiences better than this one. In this session, the theme was 'Industry'. The day was planned to start with a walking tour of Hebden Bridge's surviving cotton-weaving mills. The other student volunteers and I were asked to plan and lead the coinciding craft activity. Using recycled cardboard boxes as a base, alongside the ever-expanding box of art supplies the group has, the plan was to make factories based on the buildings viewed on the tour. Of course, things don't always go to plan, and road works and heavy traffic in the morning meant the majority of the group was unable to make it on time. As such, the tour had to be cut, meaning we had to rely on a

small booklet of black-and-white photographs that had been created for this part of the project for inspiration. Nevertheless, I think the results pictured above were incredible and I felt proud seeing everyone getting stuck in and working together on a task I had helped put together.

Moreover, this photo represents everything wonderful about the

project. Watching everyone working together to complete their projects, I felt as if I could see the barriers between service users, support staff, academics and students being broken in front of my eyes. At the end, when we had all finished our small group projects, we put them all together, and I realised we had created a small town of our own. This epitomises what being a part of this project

is about for me. We may all come from diverse backgrounds and social groups, have different interests and skills, but thanks to engaging with history, we were able to come together and assemble something greater than we could manage alone. I will be grateful for the fact that I could be a part of, and be able to contribute, to this community for the rest of my life.



Millie, Creating connections through history: My enriching experience with LD Club

The learning disability group (LD club) is an enriching experience that I am so grateful to be a part of. Over the months, I have taken part in carrying out a variety of different presentations paired with activities. My favourite was the session where we planted flower bulbs which coincided with the local floral arranging society that kindly donated to the archive. I greatly wanted to take part in LD club because I think it is important to make history accessible to everyone. Exhibitions and museums may be the most traditional way of sharing history but it is events like LD club that make the effort for true inclusivity in a way that is engaging and catered to people's needs. With wanting to build a career in public history, it was crucial for me to gain as much experience in the diverse ways history can be shared with different demographics that I can later apply to future projects.

During this experience, I learnt a great deal, particularly about patience and adapting to a calmer-paced environment



Christ Church, Todmorden, PHDA, TAS03285

compared to the fast pace of university environment that I am used to. I developed skills in differentiating presentations to different demographics and linking archival findings to engaging but educational activities. Presentation delivery was a significant focus for me; I tend to speak quickly, and this activity provided valuable practice in slowing down, being present, and consciously considering my delivery. I also gained insight into the floral arranging society, a fascinating and large-scale community effort that is less commonly seen today. It was delightful to see the thought and community spirit behind the arrangements and the joy they brought to people. Gardening, too, was a new experience for me. It was refreshing to work outdoors on something interactive and long-lasting—creating our own piece of history if you will, to revisit when the plants bloom. What I found most rewarding was the painting activity that followed. This involved using potatoes to make stamps in the shapes of flowers and leaves; it was so much fun getting creative in making the different shapes for the participants to make

their own bouquets using paints and the stamps. I equally enjoyed seeing how the participants used the different prints and how much delight the activity brought everyone involved.

My time with LD Club has been an incredibly rewarding and enriching experience. It has enhanced my understanding of how history can be made accessible and engaging for diverse

audiences while helping me develop invaluable skills for a future in public history. From planting flower bulbs to creating potato print art, each activity has offered unique opportunities for growth, creativity, and connection. This experience has truly affirmed the importance of inclusivity in sharing history and the joy it can bring to everyone involved.

Milly, Walking tours and shared goals

During this tour of Hebden Bridge, we used photographs taken from the archive at Pennine Heritage to identify how the landscapes and buildings had changed over time. On this tour we saw the Hebden Bridge Picture House which was built in 1919 as an independent cinema and remains one of the last civic-owned cinemas in Britain. This engagement with a local landmark helped us to further understand the cultural identity of the town and the value of preserving heritage. Another one of the photographs was of a donkey and an old resident on Albert Street taken around 1900. The similarities of what we saw when we visited this street were strikingly similar. This session helped the group to develop a common understanding and appreciation of the changes and continuities that have shaped the town. I think this tour was useful to have at the start of the project as we were able to take this

appreciation of the town's history through to other sessions. In doing so, this helped to unify individuals within the group by creating a common goal of shedding light on the history of Hebden Bridge.





Natasha, Getting to know John better through the history project

My name is Natasha, I'm a support worker for St Anne's Community Services. I was asked to take part in this project to get to know John better as I'm his key worker. The idea was that working closely with him and supporting him would help me understand him better and hopefully help us get closer. John can be quite closed off, doing things with him that he enjoys is a good way of getting to know him better.

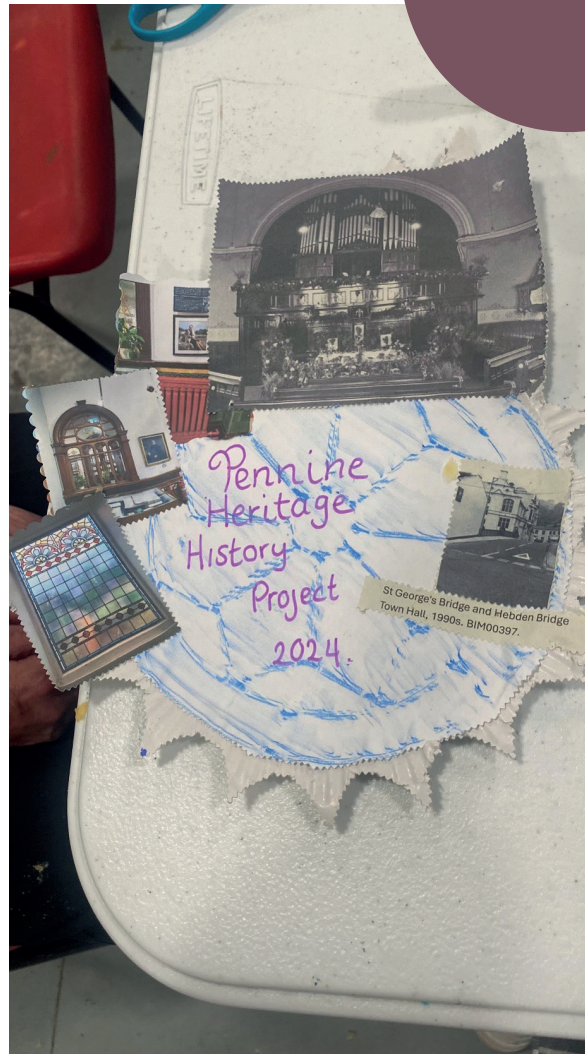
During the project we learnt about the chapel where we met one Tuesday each month from January to June. We learnt that there was a Sunday School there and that it was important to the local

community as a place for people to meet. We learnt about how people struggled in the olden days. They held fundraising events and baked buns, as treats were scarce when there was rationing after the war. It's interesting to see that the church is still used by the local community in Hebden Bridge but in different ways now.

We also learnt that although the chapel and Hebden Bridge have changed over the years, some things stay the same. We found out more by looking at the buildings in the town and comparing them to old photographs. John enjoyed going out walking in the town, on the canal and in the woods – he likes being outside.

He is very good at arts and crafts and liked those activities which we did each time we met – I think it was good for John that there was a routine. I enjoyed helping him create his zine, he used things he'd cut out and collected from the chapel. He also made some rubbings from different parts of the building. The chapel is very old.

It's been good for me to see how capable John is in this setting and that he has a lot to contribute. I also think it's good that other people in the group can appreciate his abilities. Although he doesn't always say much it was nice that he was able to make people laugh as he can be shy around people sometimes.





Noah, History as an experience

I did not know what to expect from this project before I started participating in it. I quite quickly discovered this was all about experiencing history in new ways and attempting to unlock archives to make history more accessible. We attempted to do this through exploring the history of the local area and linking our activities to the past. Everything we did was given purpose in this way. There was no one session that stood out for me; it was the group and the personalities in it which shone through. Most of what we did was engaging with so many different levels people could engage on. And while a couple of the tasks were not the most inspiring, people in the group made them enjoyable. The tasks were inspired by the past in every way. There is no right way to unlock history in our broken society. The past seems to always be the starting point but this project looked to go beyond just reproducing the ways of the past which makes it stand out for me.

On paper this was all about history. But like the history so often written on it, paper is rubbish. This project was about establishing friendships and engaging socially in an environment constructed around history and heritage. It is hard to make friends, I find it really difficult, but this project helped me talk to people and made me smile. Using history as a topic to allow people to talk and share their personal interests is a great idea and for me here it has worked really well.

It has made me realise history is nothing until it is experienced. You need to experience history; life needs to be pumped into the past or it remains too stagnant to mean anything. Here, we experienced history in different ways. We were surrounded by it. We were inspired by the past to create things in the present. The sessions in Hebden Bridge showed history is so much more than academic words boringly narrated on an inaccessible page. History needs

to be unlocked for everyone and especially the future generation. We must not be the gatekeepers to the past but the enablers of it. We must save Trotsky's dustbin of history from being thrown out. Creating our own communities through common values and interests like history is something that feels so worthwhile.

This picture is of the Rochdale canal in Hebden Bridge. We did a session on the canals and explored a section of it in the town. The canal is a monument to Britain's industrial, empirical past, however it was heavily renovated to be in the state it is currently in towards the end of the 20th Century. This renovation has changed its purpose to a community space. This mix of old and new and repurposing the past to serve the needs of the present is what history and the methods employed in this project are all about. It is almost a metaphor for the project, old means repurposed in a new way.



Renait, Going to the chapel

My name is Renait. I work at Oxfam, The British Heart Foundation and for the Public Partnership Group at The University of Huddersfield. I have a learning disability and dyspraxia. I like to be busy doing things. I like to travel and go on holidays to different places when I can, I went to the Isle of Wight this year and am going to Ireland on the ferry.

I have found this project very interesting. The people are nice. I go there in the car with Gerard and Ian on Tuesdays, I've known them a long time. We've been doing the project every month from January to June.

Through this I got to meet John, Iona, Rob and the students. John is talking more now, when I did a course with him before he didn't talk much. I like talking to people there. It's a good thing to do.

One week we walked around Hebden Bridge and looked at the buildings. Another time we looked round the chapel and got to see the font where people were baptized in the old days.

We made something with clay and did a leaf imprint. We collected the leaves

from the woods at the back of the chapel to do this. We've been making zines; I couldn't use the scissors, but people helped me. I stuck in pictures of Hebden Bridge and other things I'd made.

They have very nice food at the chapel. Harry did his singing. He's a very nice guy. I'm going to miss him.





Rob, New ways of seeing the past, new ways of seeing the present

From almost my very first day as an academic, I have been approached by organisations and individuals wanting to know more about the histories of learning disability and mental health and illness. Wherever possible, I have jumped at the opportunity to be involved in collaborative projects, developing my public history practice along the way. I have been fortunate enough to work with museum professionals, artists, and theatre practitioners, as well as current health care professionals in the statutory and charitable sectors. Even with the constraints on UK Higher Education, this opportunity was too good to turn down.

The very best projects I have been involved in are the ones that have included people with lived experience, often known as service users or clients, and, importantly, History students. On a very basic level this has been my way of linking my research interests with my teaching practice, but working in partnership is always a learning process and I see myself as better historian because of it. Offering that opportunity to undergraduates has always been such an obvious thing to do, partly because it allows them to develop new ways of seeing the past and new ways of understanding the present, but also because of their potential

to contribute in fun and creative ways.

I am passionate about the contributions that History can and does make to the world, and I am frustrated by the attempts to restrict access to it, and the Arts and Humanities more generally, because they are somehow seen to have less 'value' than other subjects. This collaboration has showcased, amongst many other things, just what history and history students can do and some sense of that is captured in this picture.



whether that was Harry leading the singing or, as Natasha recalls in her chapter, John's ability to make people laugh. The time he smiled knowingly with a sideways glance to the group when Jess and Natasha recounted a story of how he tricked them into cigarette breaks on a long car journey, made us all laugh out loud.

Some of the people in this picture will be moving on to pastures new but, as we reflected on what we had done, it became clear that there was a will to keep the group and its activities going. A good sign! I am immensely grateful for everyone's contributions and proud to have got to know them during what was a joyous, positive, and inclusive project.

It was taken in a local café bar at the end of the last session. We had been to see some of Ian's pottery at a local workshop and, as a way of saying goodbye, we wanted to toast the end of the whole thing with soft drinks before going our separate ways. Each of us found choosing one

picture almost impossible but I like this one because it captures the spirit of what we tried to do. Not everyone one was present but, as some of the other chapters demonstrate, we had created a sense of togetherness and camaraderie in a relatively short space of time. So much of it was fun too,

Taylor, The power of music

I first met Taylor in September 2024 at an open day event in the centre we hold LD club in. Taylor is non-verbal so creative communication is essential. Each session, I made an effort to get to know Taylor, to see what he liked and what engaged his interests. Taylor has been going through a real transition period in his life, so being in another new environment was understandably anxiety inducing. I soon discovered Taylor liked the 'hands on' activities like planting flowers and making fireworks on the tablets. Music has always been a big part of the group – the sessions aren't complete without a good sing song. It was during one of these musical interludes that we had a moment which really highlighted the importance of this project, a moment I'll never forget.

It was Taylor's fourth session and we got out a mix of musical instruments. Taylor and I got the bongos and at first he was hesitant. Knowing how much he enjoyed the 'hands on' activities I encouraged him to play by banging the bongos twice. He then banged

them twice in response. This then produced a back and forth, a conversation of sorts, in a common language: music and rhythm. I played different beats and he responded with different beats in return. It was a relaxed communication and I felt I knew Taylor far better afterwards. Call and response through music is a technique often used with people that have learning disabilities, something which I was not aware of in the moment. For me, the moment started off as some fun with drums together and then became a conversation through sound. Music is such a powerful tool for connecting people beyond language, and this moment is one I will treasure for a lifetime.





Catharine Coleborne, Afterword

Long ago now, historians were mostly concerned with matters of the State and rulers, with power and politics. Most of 'us', in those pasts, were invisible. The historians of the 1960s and 1970s challenged the notion that History was an account of how things happened – the slow or cataclysmic events of change – and offered instead multiple accounts of how history is made and who makes it. Social histories, or 'histories from below', included new voices, diverse perspectives, and methods ranging from oral histories to the location of surprising archives and collections where historical data could be both sourced and made. These voices and perspectives included those of people living with disability or with experience of health institutions, including mental hospitals, places where many people with intellectual disability were housed for decades.

As we reflect on our present global circumstances, it is useful to remind ourselves that this newer version of historical thinking is still relatively recent. Growth in the field over the past few decades means that histories of disability are now more plentiful, and also rich in their uncovering of stories and accounts of and by people with diverse understandings of what it means to live with disability.

Yet critically, different ways of seeing and revealing the past are not always welcome by those in positions of power. The kinds of histories we now make, then,

should not be taken for granted. Histories of and by 'us' - most of us ordinary, different, shy, inexperienced, learning about things around us - are important. These histories reflect both the world as it is and also as we experience it. Even more importantly, these histories should be accessible and make sense to people who might not have had the opportunity to learn at universities or in formal settings. History can be made explicable and relatable, as well as offering a rethinking of the ways we can know about the past.

In this volume, Rob Ellis has brought together a wonderful array of writers and practitioners to express their understanding of what history means. This is an

interesting outcome of the ongoing project to produce histories with and in communities; what Ellis refers to as 'co-production', especially in mental health care and disability settings, so that a place and role can be made for history and its accessibility to different audiences. These histories are supported by the United Kingdom's national framework of Knowledge Transfer Partnership to help to translate knowledge and learning from the academy into social and cultural organisations in ways that bring out the value of humanities scholarship and research.

Reading *In Our Own Words*, I am struck by the sheer joy of the authors engaging in what one author (Noah) calls 'history as experience'. These pieces are written to provide first-person accounts of making and doing history. They are powerful because they show that history making can give everyone a sense of belonging, place, purpose and community. In my research and writing I have found it important to foreground the value of storytelling in the context of historical accounts of mental breakdown, and to talk about mental illness from outside the medical institution. This has not been an easy task, with first-person accounts sometimes obscured by institutional language. Increasingly, the co-production of histories of mental illness means challenging the boundaries of research, authorship, and publishing.¹

This volume brings back memories of my own first forays into working with community and mental health organisations, and with organisations devoted to the care and support of people living in the community. They seemed to me to be small interventions at the time but were important ways to connect historical thinking and writing with the work of community organisations.² These experiences set me on a path of striving to understand how historians might forge relationships and create potential for living historical practice.

The themes of this volume include learning about history itself, as well as about how to undertake historical research. There is a focus on place and community, food and sharing time together, and the way food evokes memories. The archive itself also

features here, alongside creative practice. Harry reflects through scribes on the music and objects that allow the expression of his thoughts and emotions. This group of people has been guided in their historical work by passionate and enthusiastic educators seeking to find history in the everyday. Their words form both narratives of history and also become sources for future historians to consult. Their experiences of working together on this project and this volume can tell future historians much about engagement and community work shared by the university and heritage organisations.

¹See for example *The Re;Minding Histories Research Group, 'Co-producing Histories of Australian Community Mental Health, 1970-1990'*, in Natalie Hendry and Effie Karageorgos (eds), *Critical Mental Health in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand*, Palgrave 2025.

²These included projects with organisations based in Aotearoa New Zealand such as the *Schizophrenia Fellowship* and a project with an Auckland disability provider. A collaborative book emerged from one larger project with the *Waikato Mental Health Services, the University of Waikato and Te Awamutu Museum: Catharine Coleborne and the Waikato Mental Health Research Group (eds), Changing Times, Changing Places: From Tokanui to Mental Health Services in the Waikato, 1910-2012* (Hamilton: HalfCourt Press, 2012).

Rory du Plessis, Afterword

The title of my book, *I See You*, is derived from the English translation of the Zulu greeting, *Sawubona*. To greet someone with *Sawubona* / *I See You*, is not merely a form of politeness but carries with it the recognition that the addresser recognises the worth and dignity of the addressee. In this sense, the greeting is an act of “resistance to the diminishing of life, an opposition to the devaluing of life”¹ and a covenant that affirms the value of an individual’s existence.

Throughout the volume, *In Our Own Words*, we see how the participants of LD club share a profound testimony of their encounters, exchanges, and experiences of one another. For John, the participants were all treated as “equals” and respected as valued contributors to LD club. Gerard emphasised how everybody “ate together, sang together, and talked and laughed” and in that way, everyone was able to learn from

one another. Moreover, much of the contributions to this volume are a witnessing of how they “came to know one another” (Gerard), and how knowing one another was valued as a “privilege” (Leonie). Thus, in sharing how they came to “see the humanity of another”;² we can say that they came to see with *Sawubona* eyes.

While Harry, John and Taylor were not able to author their own chapters, I praise Gerard for writing ‘in his own words’, the testimony of their importance in his life and Iona for the connections and treasured memories made. For example, Gerard declares that “I’m all the better for knowing” Harry, and he further salutes Harry’s ability to relish every experience, and in his expression of delight, Harry carried “the rest of the group with him”. For Natasha, who is John’s care worker, LD club offered an opportunity for her to get to know him better. In her

contribution to the volume, she testifies to how John has “a lot to contribute” and how “people in the group can appreciate his abilities”. Overall, the contributors share how they came to recognise and appreciate one another’s humanity, and thus *In Our Own Words*, is a collection of personal narratives of how they uphold one another in personhood.

In the introduction to the volume, Rob outlines how the people with learning / intellectual disabilities benefitted from the project, but also how they made a “positive impact on the project and its participants”. Here I am reminded of Eva Feder Kittay who would describe the work of LD club as presenting an opportunity for “learning to become a humbler philosopher” and being taught about “what matters in life”.³ It is in the encounters of LD club that the participants started to see the world with a new outlook (Iona) where the focus is on joy, laughter, happiness, creativity, camaraderie and friendship, togetherness and connection, and the mentors of these principles are Ian, John, Renait and in particular, Harry who “exemplifies the principle of living in the moment” (Gerard). For Leonie she learnt how she “could just be [herself], without any concern”, Noah demonstrated how the project helped him to talk to people, while Iona attested to how every group member taught her that “being your authentic self creates the most beautiful feeling of togetherness”.

In Our Own Words can also be thought of demonstrating how we can be ‘humbler historians’ where our focus is not on producing the next *magnus opus*, but on unlocking history for everyone (Noah)

and thus making an effort to foster inclusivity and accessibility (Millie and Taylor/Iona). To this end, a hallmark of LD club is how inclusivity was embraced as a shared ethos and how “being fun and creative” (Rob) is at the heart of reinvigorating the teaching of history, to bringing the “past to life” (Andrew), as well as to making history a meaningful topic to the lives of all community members.

Some of the volume’s contributors have moved “on to pastures new” (Rob) and although they have left LD club, their contributions to the volume show that they will remain advocates for the rights and welfare of people with learning / intellectual disabilities.

¹C. Kaunda. 2023. “SAWUBONA. A theo-ethic for everyday decolonial gestures.” *Acta Theologica* 43 (1): 41–59, p. 52.

²*Ibid.*, p. 50 (emphasis in original).

³Eva Feder Kittay. 2019. *Learning from my daughter: The value and care of disabled minds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In Our Own Words: Creative Approaches to Inclusion through an Arts and Humanities Intellectual Disability Project

This collection of words and images was created by a group that became affectionately known as LD Club. The individual chapters are authored by service users, care staff, heritage professionals and volunteers, and university staff and students.

