Article

Tracing Disabled Children's Lives in 19th-Century Scotland through Public and Institutional Records

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Abstract: Records of asylums, schools, and benevolent organisations that intervened in the lives of disabled children in Scotland during the long nineteenth century have survived to varying degrees in public and institutional archives. This might suggest the existence of detailed primary source material that stands in contrast to the sparse data about those disabled children who 'escaped' the attention of organisations that aimed to support and direct their lives. However, the records of these formal organisations are inconsistent in what they reveal about the lives of the children under their patronage. This article explores the challenges presented by the records of three organisations, namely, the Scottish National Institution for the Education of Imbecile Children in Larbert, Edinburgh's Gayfield Square blind school, and East Park Home for Aiding Infirm Children in the Maryhill district of Glasgow. Among the deficiencies of surviving institutional records are the frequent paucity of insights into the lives of their young residents. This article will consider how some of their life journeys can nonetheless be researched by marshalling data from the likes of mandatory registration records and decennial census enumerators' books. In addition to benefits afforded to genealogists, such records provide historians with materials from which disabled lives can be reconstructed and analysed.

Keywords: children; disability; institutions; poverty; Scotland

Citation: Hutchison, Iain. 2023. Tracing Disabled Children's Lives in 19th-Century Scotland through Public and Institutional Records. *Genealogy* 7: 50. https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy7030050

Received: 20 March 2023
Revised: 27 June 2023
Accepted: 15 July 2023
Published: 26 July 2023

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1. Introduction

The 19th century has been described by Michel Foucault as occurring in the era of 'the great confinement'.[1] The rapid growth of institutional provision in such spheres as education, healthcare, control of unremitting poverty, criminality, disability, and the breakdown of the traditional family unit, Foucault suggests, marked the zenith of the great confinement process. In Scotland, the long nineteenth century witnessed the erection of 'royal' asylums that received both poor and wealthy patients. These were joined by 'pauper' district asylums following passage of the 1857 Lunacy (Scotland) Act. Other forms of intervention occurred for the poor and the marginalised as the wealthy classes strove to impose order on society through goals of improvement. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the process of how, through a series of stages, the institution approach was employed towards children with mental, sensory, and physical impairments. Specifically, this article tries to hear the voices of some of these children through exploration of the archival records of three institutions.

Disability—whether it be mental, physical, or sensory impairment—is often found to go hand in hand with poverty. Historians working on English and Welsh Poor Law records build their investigations around the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, legislation that made widespread use of workhouses for incarcerating able-bodied paupers (King 2015; Wright 2000; Hulonce 2016). Overlooked are distinctive arrangements in the other nations forming the United Kingdom, namely, Ireland and Scotland. Ireland's 1838 Poor Law legislation faced particular challenges to operating a workhouse system similar to England and Wales, especially under the conditions presented by the 1845–1849 famine

(Gallaher 2019). Indeed, Cousins (1995) observes that '. . . a consequence of the famine was that, in 1847, the Poor Law was amended to allow outdoor relief to be paid [and] it remained a feature of poor relief in Ireland'.[2] This brought the Irish Poor Law closer to that of Scotland, where outdoor relief was a standard strategy under the Poor Law (Amendment) Act of 1845. This took provision for paupers away from church control, but only gave entitlement to relief to people classified as disabled from working. In Scotland, 'out relief' was used in order to keep the extremely poor in their own homes by supplying such basic necessities as blankets and fuel for warmth, modest food items such as oatmeal, or perhaps a small cash allowance (Hannaford 2018). Those paupers unable to survive at home through extreme impoverishment or disability were admitted to a poorhouse, not a workhouse (Levitt 1988a, 1988b).

This article places child disability within the context of the Scottish Poor Law. Under the administration of parochial boards, the Scottish Poor Law found parish 'inspectors of poor' having to work closely with charitable bodies inspired by philanthropic concern and endeavour. It discusses three organisations that individually addressed specific strands of impairment, and considers both the richness and the shortcomings of their archival records in revealing the lives of the children placed in their care. In doing so, statutory records held by the National Records of Scotland are used to help trace life stories and experiences. These records enable genealogists to consider child disability in a historical context and enable historians to evaluate impairment in children during the long nineteenth century from their experiences under institutional intervention.

2. Poverty and Disability

In her contribution to the edited collection by Derek Fraser and colleagues, *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, Audrey Paterson emphatically opens her chapter by affirming that 'the New Poor Law of 1834 did not apply to Scotland . . .', while Stephanie Blackden states that 'neither before nor after the 1845 reform was the Scottish poor law a carbon copy of that of England' and going on to detail some of the differences.[3] Historian Helen Macdonald (1994) explains that:

> . . . the existence of a distinctive Scottish welfare policy characterised by intervention in family life and the boarding out of children to foster parents . . . [were features of] the different legal background to the 1845 Poor Law Act . . . [which placed] traditional emphasis on outdoor relief, and the reliance on local decision-making, [that] gave rise to the implementation of a child care system which differed notably from that developed under the new Poor Law in England.

Peter Jones and Steven Jones and King (2016) also emphasise that 'at no point in Scotland was provision made for relieving the able-bodied', adding that 'there is little doubt that, despite similarities, the architecture of the Poor Law in 19th-century Scotland was quite different from that in England and Wales'. That said, Bernard Harris (2019) has highlighted a tendency for historians of the Poor Law of Scotland and of England and Wales to work in isolation, arguing benefits that might arise from a more comparative approach.

As historian Anne Crowther (1990) has written, in Scotland, the able-bodied unemployed facing destitution did not qualify for Poor Law assistance 'unless [and until] disabled from work by illness', which was often an eventual consequence of long-term deprivation. The children in affected families could be severely adversely impacted upon, while orphans and children with disabilities were additionally vulnerable. Such children were often categorised as being among the 'deserving' poor, with their tender years being widely accepted as excluding them from personal responsibility for situations of deprivation. Orphans, foundlings, and disabled children therefore attracted the sympathy of charitable bodies, these being organisations that were motivated by humanitarian compassion, but often also by strongly held religious conviction and evangelistic agendas (Checkland 1990; Abrams 1998). Parochial boards, as part of their obligations to provide support under the terms of the 1845 legislation, availed themselves of the specialist provision developed by organisations that cared for disabled children. Indeed, Checkland (1990) highlights the

particular appeal of the 'blind, deaf and crippled children' (to which mentally impaired children might be added) who 'relied almost entirely on charitable initiative', not least because, 'in Scotland charity was especially important, for in contrast to England, official provision of poor law relief was restricted to the old, young and the disabled'.[4]

3. Disability, Diversity, and Delivery of Care

Selection of 'disability' charities for study presents challenges, highlighted in Gordon Phillips' 2004 volume on sight loss which drew heavily on the records of Edinburgh's Royal Blind Asylum because of a depth and richness that was often sparse in other blind institution archive collections. The three bodies chosen for this study represent a cross-section of impairing circumstances and therefore differing needs and delivery of care. These charities followed a pattern that was widespread in the Western world in that they attracted responses that were varied in their objectives and that followed very specific perceptions surrounding different forms of impairment. Surviving records left by some organisations include annual reports that were made widely available at the time of their publication, and minute books that were internal administrative records intended only for the eyes of the officials and directors of these charities. Such historical records are variously held by university archives and public archives, or are retained by the organisations themselves where they, or their successors, remain active in providing disability support. The children being aided by such bodies would, it might be hoped, feature heavily in the records of such charities. However, this is often not the case, which creates a challenge for historical researchers seeking to hear the voices and trace the lives of disabled children during the long nineteenth century.[5]

In the 19th century, impairment was only rarely referred to under the collective term 'disability', while the label 'disabled' was commonly used as a Poor Law definition and meaning 'disabled from working'.[6] Different impairing conditions were seen as being quite distinct and separate, there being little accommodation of multiple impairment.[7] This is seen in the case of Robert Edgar (1860–1877), a deaf–blind boy who was initially refused admission both by the deaf school and the blind school in Edinburgh because of his dual sensory impairment.[8] Due to the nature of impairments being seen in simplistic terms during this era, the three institutions featured give opportunity for comparison and contrast in responses to child disability. Their records are employed to gauge the lives of children with mental, sensory, and physical impairments falling under the institutional and philanthropic gaze. They demonstrate some rich detail about individual children's lives, but attention is also drawn to deficiencies within the records. Consequently, such sources present genealogists and historians with challenges as well as opportunities.

By investigating examples of individual children, this article engages with what Julia Laite terms 'small' history, made increasingly possible in the era of widescale digitisation of primary source material.[9] The significance of the institutions considered, the Scottish National Institution for the Education of Imbecile Children (SNI), the Gayfield Square blind school, and East Park Home for Infirm Children, is that these three institutions offer opportunities for wider investigation of the life journeys of selected cases experiencing different types of impairment.[10]

If family units were disrupted by adverse events such as the death of a parent, or parents, arrangements for their children might include admission to an institution, especially where there was a disabled child. Even in instances where there were stable family circumstances, applications for admission often stemmed from the desire to give a disabled child the best life chances available. It also provided relief for families struggling to cope both with a disabled child and with the wider economic and social pressures confronting domestic life. The records of the Scottish National Institution and of East Park Home reveal that applications for places far exceeded the number of children who could be received. While SNI records reveal the apparent abandonment of some children when, at a later date, their families could no longer be traced, there was also the instance of William and Elizabeth Limond who sorely missed their daughter, Susan, and, at age 12, when she had

been in the SNI at Larbert for four years, withdrew her, declaring that they would 'be able to get on nicely with her at home'—and they did.

Cases such as that of Susan Limond show how the wider genealogical tracking of children, and their families, benefits from decennial census returns conducted from 1841, and open to public access to 1921. Further tracking is possible via civil registration records of births, marriages, and deaths from their origin in 1855.[11] Before 1855, Old Parish Records, that were maintained by the Church of Scotland, can be an additionally helpful source where these survive. The value of such resources to historians and genealogists is demonstrated in case studies presented in this article.[12]

4. The Scottish National Institution

The Scottish National Institution for the Education of Imbecile Children (SNI) was established in the rural community of Larbert in central Scotland in 1862.[13] Along with the city of Dundee's Baldovan Institution, created by philanthropist John Ogilvie in 1855, it was a residential establishment created specifically for the accommodation, education, training, and 'treatment' of mentally impaired children. Extensive archival documents that record the functioning of the SNI were retrieved from the storage facilities of successor health authorities in 2012 and were lodged in the archival collection of the University of Stirling where they benefitted from conservation and cataloguing.

The SNI admitted children under three categories. Firstly, facilities were afforded to the children of wealthy families who paid annual fees and whose children were housed in superior accommodation. At the opposite end of the social scale, the SNI also received pauper children who were sent by parochial boards under the provisions of the Scottish Poor Law and who were provided with simple accommodation and a plain diet. The third category of admission to the SNI was a philanthropically-funded annual cohort of 'elected' admissions. This group consisted of children who came from poor families, but whose poverty had not reached the level of such desperation that they had felt the need to throw themselves on the mercy of the Poor Law authorities. They nonetheless came from families who were unable to pay the fees required by the institution for private admission. These poor, but not pauper, children provided the SNI's benefactors with the opportunity for feel-good charitable intervention through their funding of this third category as 'elected' inmates. Under this scheme, parents could nominate their child for consideration by the SNI's financial supporters by placing them in an annual ballot. So, typically, the ballot might offer electors 50 names from which to choose 12 children, with the votes of those making large monetary contributions being proportionately increased in number and influence.

In seeking admission to the SNI of their mentally impaired child, each parent had to complete an application form in which detailed information about the child and family circumstances was sought. This information was required to be endorsed by people of standing in the home community, such as a minister of religion, while a medical practitioner had to offer data about the nature and level of the child's mental impairment. In seeking philanthropic support, the applications by parents were subjected to probing scrutiny, particularly to gauge how each child might respond to 'the benefits of the institution'. Electors were urged to consider the prospects of each child if admitted. Could a child be expected to 'improve' while in the SNI so that, when they attained adulthood, to some degree they might be able to re-enter society and be self-supporting? The admission procedure therefore placed particular reliance on the endorsements of medical professionals in children's home communities. 'Unimprovable' cases were discouraged and avoided as far as possible, the application process being a key procedure in weeding out such cases.

This procedure has provided a unique resource for the historian in that a substantial collection of application papers for admission from the 19th and the early 20th century have survived. Not only do the applications provide details of children entering the SNI, but they also enable some light to be cast on how they had fared by the time they left the institution, perhaps six years later. The application forms also provide an exploratory gateway to children whose admission was refused. The application details for this latter group of

children present opportunities for exploring what happened to 'unimprovable' children denied admission. Diverse outcomes for rejected children include admission to the SNI at a later time upon reapplication, admission in due course of older children to a poorhouse, to a district asylum or, in the case of Gilbert (1863–1880), continued residence with his family on the Isle of Islay until his life was cut short by his contraction of diphtheria.[14]

In a previous study of some of the children who feature in these applications, it was possible for the stories of Agnes (1890–1970), Hannah (1871–1908), and Susan (1882–1944) to be traced and analysed in some detail, while some other children, including examples who were refused admission, were also highlighted.[15] For the purpose of this article, two additional cases have been selected at random and for which one of several surviving SNI superintendent's letter books has been used as the starting point.[16] These fragile volumes consist of correspondence copies that give one side of written dialogue between the superintendent and outside bodies, such as the parochial boards that sent mentally impaired children to the institution. The examples of Margaret Mirk and William Caldwell provide two snapshots from the port town of Greenock, and for which the outcome was sad and tragic in the first case, but had some positive aspects within parameters of limited life chances in respect of the second.

Margaret Mirk was born in Greenock around 1883. In early childhood, Margaret was sent to the SNI by the Greenock Parochial Board under the provisions of the Poor Law. In May 1892, the SNI updated John Deas, the Inspector of Poor in Greenock, about Margaret's condition, writing that:

> . . . her habits are still very degraded, [and] indeed she has baffled all our efforts to improve them. Her physical health is considerably reduced at present and for the last eight days she has been more or less confined to bed.[17]

Seven weeks later, a further letter from the SNI informed Deas matter-of-factly that 'Your little patient . . . died here last night after a protracted illness. Please inform friends if any and instruct me per return as to the interment of the body.'[18]

The SNI's notification to its secretary in Glasgow then injected a sliver of empathy by adding that 'Poor thing she suffered long and sore'.[19] However, on 9 August, the correspondence reverted to practical matters when the SNI secretary was informed that 'In squaring up, please charge for coffin, shroud and attendance—19 shillings 6 pence, coach—7 shillings 6 pence, [and] grave digger—10 shillings'.[20] These items of correspondence, despite their brevity, are revealing. Namely, no family member claimed Margaret's body and so she was interred in the pauper section of Larbert's church burial ground. In a large institution where there were many child deaths, nine-year-old Margaret was little more than a chore of office administration in a demise that was devoid of relatives. The SNI's death ledger reveals that Margaret had arrived there on 7 September 1889 when she was six years old and that her death arose through her contracting tuberculosis, a cause confirmed in the SNI's registration of her expiry.[21] From a genealogy perspective, the institutional records of the SNI provide a starting point for tracing family threads as an adjunct to examination of the life story of the individual. This was a very short journey in the case of Margaret Mirk, both because of the brief life that she experienced, and because she appears to have been cast adrift from her family in early childhood.

By contrast, while not having a long life, William Caldwell reached adulthood, and was discharged from the SNI in 1892 when he was 17 years old.[22] His mother had died in 1878 when William was only three years of age, and later his father also died.[23] Consequently, William had no parental or family support when discharged from the SNI and so was a pauper. Greenock Parochial Board choose to adopt the common practice of boarding out the youth, sending him to stay with strangers in a rural location and away from the perceived vices of urban dwelling. Any communication abilities that William may have attained would have been through English or Scots. However, he was sent to the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides where he was placed with an aging childless couple in Scarista, Norman and Effie MacAskill, both of whom are recorded as speaking only the

Gaelic language.[24] Abrams (1998) has written that mainland orphan children who were boarded out on the islands of Tiree and Barra had to absorb Gaelic in order to integrate with the local community, but this would have been impossible for William to achieve because of limitations on his mental faculties.[25] The probability of communication difficulties aside, this arrangement was of short duration because of Norman MacAskill's poor health, with his death from a gastric ulcer occurring on 17 October 1893.[26] Accordingly, William had been moved to board with another family in the crofting community of Srannda (in Gaelic), Strond in its anglicised derivation, and close to the village of Obbé (now Rodel). On 18 July 1893, William, not yet 18, was admitted to Inverness District Asylum on the Scottish mainland.[27] As required by law, his certification as an 'idiot', at that time a medical categorisation of mental impairment rather than the derogatory term that it later became, was provided by two medical practitioners, but whose evidence was primarily informed by the testimony of Mrs Mackenzie with whom William was then boarding.[28] Of the various Mackenzie families living in Srannda at this time, William's host may have been Mrs Mary Mackenzie of 23 Srannda as, two years earlier, she was recorded as caring for another mentally impaired boarder, 80-year-old 'imbecile' Catherine Morrison, but this is necessarily speculative.[29]

The Inverness District Asylum records give insight to William and his circumstances.[30] Upon admission, he was described as being afflicted with congenital idiocy and of having epilepsy from childhood.[31] His asylum case notes at admission highlight William's poor mental and physical condition:

> He has a dull, stupid and heavy look, his face being devoid of all expression; he does not speak when spoken to and appears to understand but little of what is said to him. He is epileptic.[32]

Furthermore, William was described as small, poorly nourished, with a dull, heavy, and detached countenance. 'He had dark brown hair, his pupils were dilated, and he walked with a limp, his left leg flexed at the knee. His chest was rachitic, and he had foul breath'.[33] Given a poor prognosis from the outset of his stay in the asylum, William remained there until his death at the age of 22.[34] His decline was described in some detail:

> For the last month this boy's condition has been becoming worse and worse. He has had a persistent cough, but no sputum (he swallowed it). Examination of the lungs shewed a tuberculous condition. Latterly has taken but little nourishment. Has never spoken, but has lain day after day in bed making a noise between a grunt and a groan. Died at 10.30 a.m.[35]

The asylum post-mortem revealed advanced tuberculosis of both lungs, tubercular ulceration of his intestines, and tubercular nodules in the mesentery.[36]

Decennial census returns make it possible to trace some aspects of William Caldwell's family background and movements through childhood and young adulthood, with additional tracking made possible through records of registration of births, marriages and deaths. Helpful as these records are, they often provide snapshots only. Therefore, the records of William's admission to Inverness District Asylum are valuable in that they provide additional insight to the challenges that he faced through poor physical health, as well as those encountered through mental impairment and the prevalence of epilepsy in his later years. The decision to board out William when he was too old for continued residence in the SNI highlights the provisions of the Scottish Poor Law, and its inadequacies, where boarding out was a widely employed strategy used in preference to the institutional option of the poorhouse.

5. Edinburgh's Gayfield Square Blind School

The Edinburgh Blind Asylum began modestly in 1793, providing workshop employment for blind people and a residential home for blind women, but its scope expanded considerably over subsequent decades. This institution absorbed Edinburgh's school for

the blind, located at 2 Gayfield Square, in 1875 (Phillips 2004). The city's blind school had been founded by James Gall (1808–1895) in 1835 and it functioned independently until its amalgamation with the asylum (Kerlaff 2018). This section explores life at the school in 1861 when it was still an independent entity. In that year, the school had 22 pupils, 11 boys and 11 girls, their ages ranging from 7 to 14 except for two girls aged 18 and 20. With some ambiguity, both of the older girls are recorded as 'pupils' but, unlike the other children, not as scholars, i.e., receiving education.[37] Children came from across the diversity of Scotland, for example, James Sutherland, age 10, was from Wick in Caithness in the far north of the country, but inevitably the majority were from Edinburgh and its neighbouring counties.[38]

The blind school in Gayfield Square was superintended by 27-year-old George Robb, with 29-year-old Catherine Burt as matron, and they were supported by two young 'general servants'. One of their charges was Kenneth Blue, age 10, recorded in the 1861 census as being a 'scholar' and with Edinburgh as his place of birth.[39] With civil registration of births having been introduced to Scotland in 1855, Kenneth's birth is not captured in these records; but prior to 1855, some births are to be found in church registers of baptism where these have survived, yet as with some other case studies in this article, such a record of Kenneth, born around 1851, no longer exists. However, the 1851 census reveals that Kenneth was then living with his parents and other household members in the working-class Canongate district of Edinburgh. He was recorded as being three months old and, as the census was conducted on the night of 30/31 March 1851, Kenneth's birth would have occurred early that year or during the closing days of 1850.[40] The 1851 census was the first occasion upon which provision was made for specifically annotating people who were blind or 'deaf and dumb'—Kenneth is not listed as blind, with sight loss perhaps not yet having been identified in the infant or possibly occurring at a later date. However, his sight loss was firmly established when he was listed in the 1861 census as a resident at the Gayfield Square blind school.

As he matured into adulthood, and subsequent to his schooling in Gayfield Square, it seems likely that Kenneth was one of the many able-bodied blind people who fell under the patronage of the Royal Blind Asylum as an outworker. In 1871, when age 20, he was living at home with his parents and his younger sister, Dorcas Blue, and he worked as a basket maker, one of the typically tactile employments directed towards blind people with the aim of them becoming able-bodied productive members of society.[41] Three years later, Kenneth married 21-year-old Margaret Graham from the nearby port town of Leith.[42] Margaret was not sensory impaired.[43] Fortune did not, however, smile on Kenneth, or Margaret, as they embarked on married life. Soon after their marriage, Margaret gave birth to a daughter, but the baby died three months later from catarrhal congestion of the lungs, Kenneth registering the infant's death with his 'x' mark.[44] Four years later, Kenneth was again registering a death with his 'x', this time for his 25-year-old wife, Margaret, who had succumbed to the all-too-common cause occurring in confined and often damp urban living environments—phthisis.[45]

Two years later, in 1881, widower Kenneth Blue was in lodgings in the vicinity of the Royal Blind Asylum workshops on Edinburgh's Nicolson Street. At 205 Plaisance, he was sharing a room with 29-year-old John Richardson.[46] Richardson (1852–1914) was a blind weaver, also affiliated to the blind asylum, and he had been a fellow pupil with Kenneth when they were boys in the Gayfield Square blind school.[47] Born in the rural parish of Oxnam, Roxburghshire, his birth is confirmed as 28 July 1852 because the Old Parochial Records for this parish *have* survived.[48] Long considered a model worker, Richardson fell into bad company in his later life, became embroiled in theft from his employer, and spent his final years addicted to alcohol (Hutchison 2015). Kenneth, a basket maker journeyman in command of his trade, followed a different path and, in 1880s, had moved to the coastal locality of Portobello where he died in 1888, age 37, again a victim of phthisis.[49] As an adult, Kenneth Blue was one of many blind people, John Richardson being a similar example, living in Edinburgh as a member of an able-bodied blind 'community'. Kenneth spent his

formative years as a pupil of the Gayfield Square blind school and he was perhaps fortunate to be one of those who embraced a craft that provided a living, and of marrying and having a child. However, the family soon experienced circumstances of ill-health with devastating consequences for his infant daughter, his young wife, and, ultimately, for himself.

One of Kenneth's younger fellow pupils in the blind school at Gayfield Square in 1861 was seven-year-old Robert Hossack.[50] Robert's family home was also in Edinburgh, and this is where he was found 10 years later so that, in 1871, he was living with his widowed grandmother along with three younger brothers and a younger sister. His sight loss was not recorded by the enumerator and he was not credited with an occupation.[51] This deficiency in the 1871 census record was, however, made good in 1881 when more detail was included. Robert was then 27 years of age, was listed as 'unemployed', and there is no indication that he had ever engaged in any of the various craft occupations typically directed at urban adult blind people. Overseeing the running of a substantive 10-room house in Bonnington, on the north side of Edinburgh, was Robert's mother, Elizabeth, 'wife of a sea captain', while data across the two census listings reveals a total of eight siblings. No less than three of the eight were annotated as being 'blind from birth', in 1881, these being Robert (27), Jessie (25) working as a teacher, and Mary (11) who was attending school.[52]

Showing that the tubercular diseases that pervaded 19th-century Edinburgh society were no respecters of social status, at the age of 44, Robert passed away at the home of his parents from the chronic phthisis that had dogged him for the preceding five years.[53] Robert's birth was recorded in the Old Parish Registers for Edinburgh's Parish of St Cuthbert and, in rather handsome hand-written script, the entry is quite revealing:

> Robert Hossack [Robert's father], mate of the Ship "Lincoln" of the Port of Liverpool, and Elizabeth Taylor his Spouse, had a Son born at No. 12 Atholl Place in this Parish, in the Maternal Grandfather's house on the thirtieth day of April last [1853], named Robert Forbes [Hossack], Baptized by the Revd William Reid, Minister of the United Presbyterian Congregation, Lothian Road.[54]

This short narrative entry tells us that the substantial dwelling occupied by the family had passed down through Robert's mother's side of the family, while in the early 1850s, his father was then second in command of an 800-ton vessel registered in Liverpool where it is shown to be the 'City of Lincoln' that plied voyages to Australia.[55]

The life journey of Robert, one of idle comfort and without marriage, was in contrast to that of Kenneth Blue who worked for a living in basket-making and had a short period of family life of his own. In turn, both lives were quite different from the trajectory of John Richardson who developed a skilled trade as mattress maker only for him to stray into crime against his employer and alcohol abuse in later life. These three pupils who attended the Gayfield Square blind school in 1861 therefore experienced contrasting circumstances in their adult lives, affirming that there was no stereotypical experience of blindness.

6. East Park Home for Infirm Children

East Park Home opened in 1874 and came about as a consequence of the introduction of compulsory school attendance for all children aged between five and thirteen years as laid down in the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act. For the legislation to be effective, it was required to be rigorously policed and so the act was followed by the appointment of school attendance officers. In Glasgow, these officers, in their pursuit of non-attending pupils, discovered numerous cases of physically disabled children who, because of the nature of their impairments, were languishing beyond the public eye, often in households experiencing extreme deprivation, in barely furnished single-room dwellings and cellars.

Further awareness of the widespread prevalence of childhood physical impairment increased with the exploration of Glasgow's most deprived areas by lady visitors from the newly formed 'Association for Visiting and Aiding the Permanently Infirm and Imbecile Children brought under notice by the School Board Educational Inquiry'.[56] However, it quickly became apparent that there were children for whom the home provision of medical

aid and a nutritious diet was going to be inadequate.[57] Indeed, there were instances arising of infirm children who were in such poor health that, upon their discovery, they were already terminally ill. As a consequence, East Park Cottage in the rural environment of Maryhill, beyond the Glasgow conurbation, was acquired by the Association to provide a healthy living environment with nursing care and medical intervention. Expected to be a temporary expedient, the home gradually had to be expanded in stages from its initial 30-bed capacity. By 1908, there were 131 children resident, with education being provided in school rooms or in wards as appropriate to individual children's health circumstances and physical capabilities.[58]

In the early annual reports of East Park Home, details of each child were clearly laid out. So, for example, in 1899, one of the children is detailed as David Rae, admitted at age eight in June 1898 with rickets, 'feeble in body and mind', and having no education when received. A year later, he was noted as 'health much improved' and 'beginning lessons'.[59] In 1910, the identity of individual children underwent substantial anonymisation so that residents were no longer listed in annual reports from that year. Children who had left the Home, while still being recorded, were only documented by forename and the initial of their surname. So, for example, Willie More and James McGuiness, two boys detailed as resident in 1909, were recorded on the 1910 discharge list as Willie M and James McG.[60] After the 1916 report, children were not listed at all, a move that was prompted by Great War paper shortages resulting in considerably abridged productions, but this practice was not resumed post-war when otherwise comprehensive annual reports were again published. Internal written registers of children have not survived, except for a ledger that was begun in 1912 and was specifically of those children who were attending East Park's school, which means that it omits those children who were too infirm to participate in education.[61]

While this school register devotes only a single line to each child listed, it records their name, date of birth, date of admission to East Park's school, parents' address, and, where applicable, the child's last public school attended. These columns of the register have been completed to a high degree of consistency, but certain items were not entered, such as the names and occupations of their parents. Another blank column is headed 'Exempted from Religious Instruction'—it would be rare in early 20th-century Scotland for parents to demand this, but at the Home, when responding to pressure from the Roman Catholic Church that children of their faith should be permitted visits from Catholic clergy, notably for the administration of last rites, Frederick Young, convener of East Park's management committee's response was that:

> . . . no provision had hitherto been made for the instruction of Roman Catholic children in their own faith and, when . . . application was made for the admission of such children, the parents were led to distinctly understand that, this being a Protestant Institution, no exception would be made in the religious teaching.[62]

It should be noted that the Constitution of the Home did *not* contain stipulations reflecting such sectarian sentiments, but they clearly existed.

The early annual reports of East Park Home included anecdotes about selected children, stories that were intended to showcase the positive role played by the Home in aiding its child inmates. The veracity of these 'stories' is open to challenge, while the register's information, though limited, often gives sufficient detail to enable children and their families to be traced through enumerators' street-by-street recording of Scotland's population in the decennial census, and through registrations of births, deaths and marriages. Registrations of the births of children are closed for 100 years while death registrations are closed for 50 years. This means that, while the registration of the birth of a child in 1930 is not currently open to researchers, if that child died in 1940, the death registration *is* available. These records provide information that enables children to be viewed within the wider social context of their families and their living circumstances and this has been helpful in tracing the lives of some of the children resident in East Park Home.

A random example from the East Park schoolroom register is Wilhelmina Anton from Strathaven in the county of Lanarkshire. Wilhelmina was born on 10 August 1908.[63] The 1911 census shows her having two older siblings, Catherine, age five, and Peter, age seven. However, the 1911 census asked mothers about children born alive and children living at the time of the enumeration and so reveals that there had been another sibling who had died.[64] Six years before Wilhelmina was born, her sister, Jean, succumbed to bronchitis, gastric catarrh and pneumonia when seven months old.[65] When, and why, Wilhelmina was admitted to East Park Home for Infirm Children is not revealed in the surviving records for the institution. Wilhelmina appears in the school register in 1920, and again in 1921, under the familiar forename of 'Ina' by which she was probably known at East Park, but the information is minimal except that it reveals that she had formerly attended her local school in Strathaven.[66] As primary education in Scotland commenced at the age of five, this would suggest that Wilhelmina was still at home in 1913.[67]

One reason for flagging up the example of Wilhelmina is to highlight the shortcomings that can be encountered in the likes of census returns. For accuracy, they are dependent on the information provided by heads of households and by the ability of the enumerator to record correctly the information being provided—in 1921, East Park Home reported Wilhelmina simply as 'Ina', while the East Park school register recorded her incorrectly as 'Williamina'.[68] The decennial census returns were not conducted close to key moments in Wilhelmina's childhood years and, coupled with the shortcomings of the records of East Park Home, leave unanswered questions, notably about when she arrived at East Park and when she was discharged. The 1931 census will not be released until 2031 and, because of the closure periods on records of the civil registrations of births, deaths and marriages, Wilhelmina's later years are not immediately accessible. However, a search of the National Records of Scotland's *ScotlandsPeople* website index reveals that Wilhelmina had a long life, dying in 1989 at the age of 81.[69]

Looking at earlier admissions to East Park gives scope for a wider range of public records being accessible, coupled with the Home's initial practice of annually publishing lists of the children resident, and of children who had left, had been discharged, or had died. An example is John Collie, born in Edinburgh in 1874.[70] Because East Park annual reports only survive from 1880, there is no record of John's admission to the Home, but his mother's death at the age of 29 in 1879, on the eve of the boy's fifth birthday, from 'incompetence of the aortic valves', i.e., heart disease, may have been a key factor.[71] Isabella Collie's death probably provided the prompt for John's widowed father to seek his admission to East Park Home since John was unable to walk because of rickets.[72] The Home's location in a then rural environment, with the availability of sunlight and a nutritious diet, would have aided John's relatively swift discharge in 1881 when it was recorded that 'health [is] restored . . . returned to father able to go to school'.[73] And so, John was a success story, went to school, and by the age of 16, he was an apprentice tinsmith. This was in 1891 and, with his father and another lodger, they were renting space in a two-room household of seven people, it being the home of a widow, her three children, and her three boarders in the Port Dundas area of Glasgow.[74] This was a canal-side locality of overcrowded and basic living conditions, one where exposure to poor health and disease was commonplace. The 1891 census was taken on 5 April of that year. A mere nine weeks later, on 9 June 1891, John died of enteritis after falling ill three days earlier; his father registered his death the following day, 10 June.[75] John had recovered from his childhood rickets, had been discharged from East Park Home in improved health, had completed his schooling, and had embarked on an apprenticeship for a trade, but in pre-antibiotic days, life in Scotland was often fragile.

Young people's experiences at East Park Home, and the physical impairments that brought children there in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were many and varied, although common causes included rickets and tuberculosis. Koch's discovery of the tubercle bacillus in 1882 made possible, in the words of A K Chalmers (1856–1942), Glasgow's Medical Officer of Health: 'the gathering together, under one comprehensive title of

tuberculosis, many diseases, apparently of different origin and affecting different structures of the body, skin, glands, bones, joints and internal organs, as well as diseases of the membranes of the brain and body cavities generally'.[76] In Glasgow, the awareness of such physically impairing conditions, although not always their medical understanding, was brought to public attention and to that of the civic authorities as a direct consequence of compulsory education from 1872 and the diligence of school attendance officers in seeking out absent children. This had prompted philanthropically-minded citizens to found East Park Home in 1874.

7. Conclusions

The three settings for disabled children discussed in this article embrace contrasting experiences of impairment while, of course, impairing conditions were often not singular experiences, additional impairing conditions not infrequently being present alongside a 'primary' disability. However, a specific impairment, as identified, guided decisions to remove a child from its domestic environment and place that child in an institutional setting. There were diverse reasons why families might acquiesce to such a move, these including their perceptions of what might be best for the life chances of the child, concern over the disabled child's impact on the quality of life for their brothers and sisters, inability to cope with home care whether it be economically or emotionally, disruption and fragmentation of the family unit, and also rejection of a child with an impairing condition by parents ill-equipped to handle what they might see as a tragedy, not only to the child, but one inflicted upon the family as a whole. Poverty and consequent reliance on relief under Poor Law provision could have a significant impact in such circumstances.

The scenarios explored in this article highlight how intervention in the lives of disabled children did not occur in an all-encompassing manner. Philanthropists aspired to make a difference to children's lives. Supporters hoped that disabled children would be assisted to gain aptitude in crafts and skills so that they might be able to integrate within mainstream society and support themselves in some way in adult life. This was not a totally altruistic desire on the part of philanthropical middle- and upper-class patrons. In achieving these outcomes, disabled children, in becoming able-bodied adults, would not, their benefactors hoped, become charges on the Poor Law provision that these people from the higher orders were obliged to financially support via local taxation regimes.

The chances of achieving such outcomes were initially focussed upon children (and adults) with sensory impairments through the early decades of the 19th century. For children, mental impairment was embraced during the middle of the century, and physical impairment from the 1870s. It is noteworthy that institutionalisation not only made residential provision but placed a heavy emphasis on providing children with education and industrial training. The benevolence of these institutions was extended to children who were deemed to have a possibility for improvement if received by the likes of the Scottish National Institution. The surviving SNI application papers, completed by parents and guardians, were evaluated by officials with a particular eye to children's capability of 'benefit'. That such evaluations often turned out to be misjudged is barely relevant, the key point being that a weeding-out process was attempted at the outset.

The cases cited in connection with the Gayfield Square blind school demonstrate how turning the disabled child into an able-bodied adult could achieve some success in people with sight loss. Two of the three cases discussed learned craft skills and went on to have gainful employment, although this required the patronage of Edinburgh's Royal Blind Asylum and acquiescence to its moralistic regulations—complied with by Kenneth Blue, but rejected by John Richardson in his later life. That Robert Hossack did not engage in gainful employment may have been a lifestyle choice on his part, one that could be accommodated by his family's comfortable circumstances. This is perhaps validated by the course taken by his blind sister, Jessie, who did choose to work by embarking on a teaching career.

Physically impaired children were the last 'group' to be included in the institutional option. It was the introduction of compulsory education that was the catalyst, and indeed a 'home' for physically impaired children had been an unintended response, the initial aim being to provide, with a certain parallel to the Poor Law, 'out relief' in the children's own homes. However, East Park Home was different from the SNI in that it set out to cater for children who were judged by the likes of Glasgow's Royal Hospital for Sick Children as having permanent impairments beyond the reach of meaningful medical and surgical intervention and for whom recovery was often doubtful. Of course, in reality, East Park Home, through the intervention of its visiting physician superintendent and, in the early years of the 20th century, additional specialists such as physiotherapists, did aspire to improve the physiological circumstances of some of its children, not least because the Home also had to face the reality of changing circumstances as its children approached adulthood and because of the high demand for places.

Each of the children featured in this article had a unique life journey. Some lives were brief while some children lived long lives with various degrees of participation in 'mainstream' society. This article has attempted to highlight the challenges and opportunities that arise when tracing the lives of children with impairments. It flags up the shortcomings, as well as the benefits, arising through the records of 19th-century institutions. Importantly, it demonstrates how additional opportunities to learn the stories of children with disabling circumstances are possible through records of the likes of birth, death and marriage registrations and via decennial census returns—while accepting that these sources also present challenges and frustrations. Life journeys of disabled children deserve to be traced and reconstructed where possible in order to return these children, often sidelined as historical actors, to centre stage in the story of institutional intervention during their formative years.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1. Michel Foucault (1926–1984) writes of 'the great confinement' beginning during the 17th century but culminating in the 19th century 'birth of the asylum' when incarceration of mentally impaired people was widely adopted (Foucault 2001).
2. For more on the Irish Poor Law, see, for example, Crossman (2006, 2009, 2014); Crossman and Gray (2011).
3. Paterson (1976); Blackden (1986). For the pre-1845 regime, see Mitchison (2019).
4. Checkland (1990), *Philanthropy in Victorian Scotland*, pp. 6–7.
5. Examples of research that trace aspects of the experience of disability, and responses to disability, in Scotland can be found in Hutchison (2007); Davis (2008); Campbell (2020). Gordon Phillips' *The Blind in British Society*, cited earlier, has substantial coverage of sight loss in Scotland. In Turner and Blackie (2018), Scotland is heavily featured, along with the north-east of England and south Wales, in its exploration of physical disability arising from coal extraction.
6. For discussion on the emergence of 'disability' as a modern, collective categorisation, see, for example, Oliver (1996); Stiker (1999); Bredberg (1999).
7. Collectivisation of diverse impairments under the catch-all term 'disability' is a relatively recent trend. See, for example, Mike Oliver, 'Defining Impairment and Disability' in Oliver (1996); and Devlieger et al. (2003).
8. MacCulloch (1881). Robert Edgar was ultimately accepted by the blind school when its superintendent became impressed by the boy's strong religious conviction.
9. Laite (2020). Laite expresses concern that while digitisation has opened scope for use of large data to trace broad trends, pursuit of individual experience through digitised records has been marginalised. Richard Rodger has, however, expressed concern in the Scottish context that digitisation does not address the costs that arise in pursuing large datasets—see Rodger (2020).
10. These contrast with the likes of Baldovan Institution's records held by the University of Dundee's archive collection and which are predominantly administrative in their content, and for the deaf and blind institution adjoined to Smyllum Orphanage at Lanark for which surviving records are extremely sparse.

[11] Guidance on the use of these resources can be found in National Records of National Records of Scotland (2020), a publication launched in 1990 and which has been updated through various revisions.

[12] Direct experience of a 19th-century disabled life comes from Atkinson (2001). Reconstruction of a disabled life in the early 19th century, and indeed from the 17th century, might benefit from Old Parish Records, compiled by the Church of Scotland at parish level, but their survival is variable. Historian Rab Houston and clinician Uta Frith demonstrate how court records might be used as a route to trace and interpret life stories, as in the instance of Hugh Blair (c.1708/9–c.1765)—Houston and Frith (2000). For narratives reflecting the lives of other marginalised people see, for example, Crowson (2020). A contrasting perspective, that of imposter tramps, can be found in Freeman and Nelson (2008).

[13] In its reference to primary source material, this article occasionally repeats terminology, such as 'imbecile', that was in vogue at the time, but would be unacceptable in a modern context.

[14] Iain Hutchison (2021), 'Accepted and Rejected'. In particular, see the cases of Agnes, Hannah, and Susan, pp. 38–42.

[15] Hutchison, 'Accepted and Rejected'.

[16] University of Stirling Archives (UoSA), Scottish National Institution (SNI), Superintendent's Letter Book 1890–96, RS/3/1.

[17] Ibid., SNI to John Deas, Inspector of Poor, Greenock, 20 May 1892, p. 303.

[18] Ibid., 5 Aug 1892, p. 354.

[19] Ibid., 5 Aug 1892, p. 355.

[20] Ibid., SNI to A. J. Fitch, secretary, 9 Aug 1892, p. 355.

[21] UoSA, SNI Register of Deaths 1879–1909, 4 August 1892; Registration of Deaths, Parish of Larbert, 4 August 1892.

[22] UoSA, SNI Register of Discharges and Removals, Patient No. 698.

[23] Data for households in Scaristavore, Isle of Harris can be found at https://hebrideanconnections.com/pepple/112810, accessed 7 February 2023.

[24] Registration of Death, Elizabeth Caldwell, 19 September 1878, Bridgeton, Glasgow.

[25] Abrams, *The Orphan Country*, pp. 64/5. In 1891, there were 546 Gaelic-only speakers and 796 bilingual speakers of Gaelic and English in South Harris—*Census of Scotland 1891, Tables of the Number of the Population . . .*, Part VIII (Edinburgh: HMSO 1891), p. 244. Those speaking Gaelic only would be expected to be predominantly the elderly and the very young not yet attending school.

[26] Registration of Death, Norman MacAskill, District of South Harris, 17 October 1893.

[27] Highland Archives (HA), Inverness District Asylum Register of Lunatics, HHB3/5/1/1/2, No. 2948.

[28] HA, Inverness District Asylum, Case Book No. 26, HHB/3/5/2/26, pp. 354–56.

[29] Decennial census, township of Strond, Isle of Harris, 1891. The dwelling had two rooms accommodating MacKenzie's family of six and who were bilingual, plus Catherine Morrison who spoke Gaelic only.

[30] For development of the Scottish Poor Law of 1845 and of district asylum provision under the Lunacy (Scotland) Act of 1857, see Farquharson (2017).

[31] HA, Inverness District Asylum Register of Lunatics, HHB/3/5/1/1/2. No. 2948.

[32] HA, Inverness District Asylum Case Book No. 26, HHB/3/5/2/26, p. 354.

[33] Ibid., pp. 354–55.

[34] HA, Inverness District Asylum Register of Deaths HHB 3/5/1/12/1; Registration of Death, William Caldwell, District of Inverness, 15 September 1898.

[35] Ibid.

[36] HA, Inverness District Asylum Case Book No. 26, HHB/3/5/2/26, p. 356.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Decennial census, Parish of St Cuthbert, Edinburgh, 1861.

[40] Decennial census, Parish of Canongate, Edinburgh, 1851.

[41] Decennial census, Parish of St John's, Edinburgh, 1871.

[42] Registration of Marriage, District of South Leith, County of Edinburgh, 3 April 1874.

[43] Decennial census, Leith, 1871.

[44] Registration of Death, District of Newington, Edinburgh, 8 February 1875.

[45] Registration of Death, District of Newington, Edinburgh, Margaret Blue, 20 January 1879.

[46] Decennial Census, Parish of St Cuthbert, Edinburgh, 1861.

[47] Decennial census, Parish of St Cuthbert, Edinburgh, 1881.

[48] National Records of Scotland (NRS), Old Parochial Records, Oxnam Parish, 28 July 1852.

[49] Registration of Death, Burgh of Portobello, County of Edinburgh, 31 July 1888.

50 Decennial census, Parish of St Cuthbert, Edinburgh, 1861.
51 Decennial census, Parish of St Cuthbert, Edinburgh, 1871.
52 Decennial census, Parish of St Cuthbert, Edinburgh, 1881.
53 Registration of Death, District of St Andrew, Burgh of Edinburgh, 23 October 1897.
54 NRS, Old Parochial Records, Parish of St Cuthbert, Register of Births and Baptisms for 1853.
55 A vessel of 800 tons, City of Lincoln, built in 1847, is listed as undertaking voyages to South Australia - http://home.clara.net/ronsmith/liverpool/ships/ships_c.htm, accessed on 23 February 2023.
56 The Association's interest in 'imbecile' children was quickly dropped in deference to the established roles of the SNI and Baldovan Institution.
57 East Park Archive (EPA), Minute Book 1874–1893, EP2/1/1, 7 April 1874, p. 20.
58 EPA, 1908 Annual Report, p. 3.
59 EPA, 1899 Annual Report, pp. 6–7.
60 EPA, 1909 Annual Report, pp. 10–11; 1910 Annual Report, pp. 10–11.
61 EPA, 'Combined Admission and Lefts Register' for 'East Park Home Special School', EP4/1.
62 EPA, Minute Book 1908–12, 22 January 1909, EP2/1/3, p. 20.
63 Registration of Births, Parish of Avondale, Wilhelmina Anton, 10 August 1908.
64 Decennial census, 1911, Avondale.
65 Registration of Deaths, Avondale, Jean Duff Anton, 7 October 1902.
66 EPA, 'Combined Admission and Lefts Register', EP4/1, entry numbers 382 and 416.
67 Historic school registers and logbooks can be enlightening resources, but those for Strathaven are no longer extant.
68 Decennial census, 1921, East Park Home.
69 www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, accessed on 20 July 2023.
70 Registration of Births, Canongate, Edinburgh, 26 August 1874.
71 Ibid.
72 Registration of Deaths, Blackfriars, Glasgow, 25 August 1879.
73 Association for Aiding Infirm Children and East Park Home, 7th Annual Report, 1881, p. 10.
74 Chalmers (1930), *The Health of Glasgow*, p. 136.
75 Decennial census, Parish of Barony, Glasgow, 1891.
76 Registration of Deaths, District of Milton, Glasgow, 9 June 1891.

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