

# THRESHOLD



**DISABILITY AND THE HOME  
DIGITAL DISABILITY IN COLLABORATION  
WITH MUSEUM OF THE HOME**

**EDITOR CLAIRE DARKE**





Threshold  
Disability and the Home  
Digital Disability In Collaboration With Museum Of The Home

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Front Cover: Claire Darke  
Rear Cover: Paul Darke  
Outside Centre - Registered Charity 1117578  
[www.digital-disability.com](http://www.digital-disability.com)

**‘What you really collect  
is always yourself’**

Jean Baudrillard

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# Digital Disability

MUSEUM OF  
THE HOME





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Thanks to all those who participated, as well as those who have worked to bring it to fruition: Paul Darke; Dr Miro Griffiths; Claire Darke and Walker Darke.

## PREFACE

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The beginning of Digital Disability's creative relationship with Museum of the Home stems from an Unlimited commission, to produce a publication of global postage stamps issued for the United Nation's International Year of Disabled People (1981).

This subsequently led to the creation of the 'Disability and The Home' collaboration between Digital Disability and the Museum of the Home.

This Project explores the idea of 'Home' from the lived experience of Disabled people and it stimulated two exhibitions:

Disability and the Home: Toys and Games Exhibition, which showed the historical range of Toys that included disability, especially the wheelchair;

and,

The Front Door Photography Exhibition, using photography to demonstrate how having one's own home is essential in the idea of independence. The Museum of the Home and Digital Disability continue to work together exploring Home and Disability.



An image of 'The Barbie Family' from 2023

'Family' and 'Home' are often seen as the ideal.

However, 'Ideals' can hide oppression and hate, where sexism, ableism, racism and misogyny, and other form of marginalisation, remain hidden and flourish, tolerated, out of sight.



## INTRODUCTION

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Unlimited, the Arts Council of England funded Disability and Arts organisation based in Wakefield, was instrumental in facilitating the co-operation between the Museum of the Home and Digital Disability after the latter's failed bid for a funded project (around Joseph 'Elephant Man' Merrick). We approached the Museum of the Home with the aim of exploring their collection and creating 'content' out of that research. It turned out that the Museum in fact contained very little Disability-specific material, so we had to be creative in compiling an exploration of Home and Disability that included other relevant sources.

The Museum of the Home was most supportive when we came up with the notion of two exhibitions, Disability and the Home: Toys and Games Exhibition and The Front Door Photography Exhibition for their new Lower Branson Coates space.

Disability and the Home: Toys and Games, as the name suggests, looked into the opportunities for play at home and in the homes of Disabled people, particularly at the limited range of toys featuring disability within which both Disabled children and adults could imagine themselves.

Followed by the exhibition of photographs of Disabled people, all significant to Digital Disability, each at her/his respective 'Front Door', was placed in its historical context: it combines images from the 1970s and 1980s of the front doors of a 'special home' where some of the project's participants attended, as children as long-term boarders, residential school. This entailed further research into and the use of archive materials to accompany the commissioning of new images (included in this publication).

Paul Darke of Digital Disability has collected Disability artefacts – stamps, toys, images, memorabilia of all kinds – for decades, for their relevance to Disability arts and political awareness. This collection, combined with ‘inclusive’ toy production in recent years (especially by Mattel), seemed to offer the ideal timing to focus on what has been available from the 1960s but has been overlooked, forgotten, marginalised, and omitted from more mainstream collections and curation in museums and galleries.

Paul Darke has argued that Disability is all around us in cultural products and productions, while others argued that we, as Disabled people, were ‘invisible’, thus simply not present. Thankfully, the museum and gallery section has caught up over the last decade, yet often needed non-Disabled people, academics, to make them aware – then act. The situation has, fortunately, changed, although it must be said there is still a tendency for the non-Disabled to be placed in control of such revelations, research, interpretations, and explorations of pre-existing Disability history in such institutions. The Museum of the Home must receive considerable credit for giving Digital Disability a significant degree of freedom in this project and how they interpreted their exhibitions, alongside their astute and insightful support and advice.

Disabled people are on the threshold of being allowed to use, access, and curate for their own interpretation of museum collections. The work of Digital Disability and Unlimited, for example, have been key to our approaching this phase. We, Disabled people, are almost where we can cross the divide, can control our own history, and can interpret it in our own unique way with a freedom that has already been awarded to others. The reality is that we should, by this point, have our own museum.

As part of the close collaboration between the Museum of the Home and Digital Disability, the project held several events with presentations, discussions, and training papers from: academics Professor Beverly Clough (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Professor Simon McKeown (University of Teesside); researchers India Whiteley and Callum Perrin; artists Nicola Lane and Anahita Harding. Chief Research Investigator on the project, and Digital Disability mentor, is Dr Miro Griffiths (from the Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Leeds), along with Paul Darke. The research activity involved multiple visits to the London Metropolitan Archives, the National Archives at Kew, and others. Several video interviews, for the future development of the project, were carried out in Brighton, Hastings, Slough, and Wolverhampton; these will form the basis of a documentary film about Home and Disability at the special school, the Shaftesbury Society's Coney Hill School (formerly in Kent, now in London).

The video commissioned as part of the 'Disability and Toy' and 'Front Door' exhibitions. Dr Miro Griffiths and Professor Simon McKeown explores the home as the site in which one collects one's own history. The home is often per se a museum where our own version of Disabled lives is curated. As Disabled people themselves, Griffiths and McKeown collect Disability history: PopHead, Invacars, images, toys, and much more. The quote at the beginning from Jean Baudrillard is indeed correct in asserting that 'What you really collect is always yourself'. For Disabled people, whose history and selves are often ignored, this is especially true. The Museum of the Home has brought the museum as home into the museum of the home for Disabled people.

The Hob Car a Hand-Propelled 'pedal' car for Disabled Children. was a major find for us: we knew they had existed, but did not

know that one was still around from the 1960s. In fact, Coney Hill School had a Hob Car in the 1970s that Paul Darke used regularly. The Hob Car in the exhibition was on loan from Tettenhall Transport Heritage Centre in Wolverhampton. The Hob Car was developed and made in Wolverhampton. It was on display alongside both the 'Disability and Toys' and the 'Front Door' exhibitions as it provided curatorial continuity between the two: it was a toy, it was used by those in the photography exhibition in the 1970s, plus it is a found artefact that needs to be preserved in order for the history of Disabled people to be preserved as completely as possible.

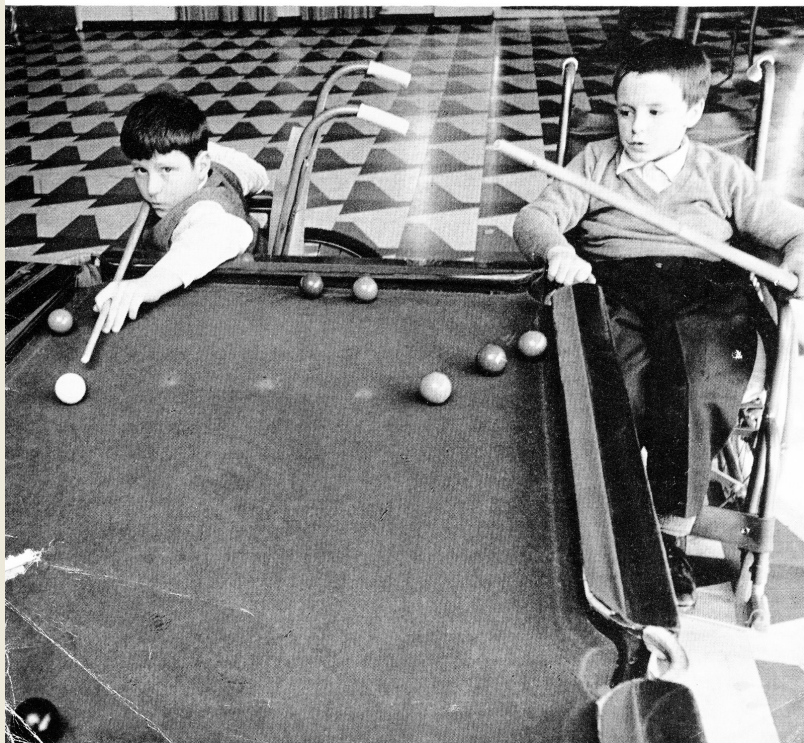
Digital Disability and the Museum of the Home will be continuing their collaboration, with the support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, over the coming years so that the history of Disability and the home can further be revealed from the perspective of Disabled people themselves: watch this space.

# LINK

The Journal of **The Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Limited (A.S.B.A.H.)**

**Christmas 1967**

**One Shilling**



Billiards Table in Main Hall at Coney Hill School  
An archive visit find  
**Link Magazine Christmas 1967**



Darke Family photograph (Paul on the right).  
Camberley, Surrey, *circa* 1970.

## DISABILITY AND HOME FRONT DOOR PHOTOGRAPHS

DR PAUL DARKE

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The aim of The Front Door Photography Exhibition was to explore what 'home' means to Disabled people; it is an idea(I) that can be interpreted in many ways. Having grown up in an institution, the idea of home was, for me, not where my family were, but where my friends were: in a 'home'. My familial home was fairly dysfunctional and not very happy, inclusive or exciting, mainly due to poverty and historical class oppression. C'est la vie. Others, including some involved in this project, did not view our institution similarly – quite understandably. The idea(I) of home is tied in with one's perspective on 'family' (another highly contested social construction) and how one fits, or does not fit, into that unit.

Interestingly, for me, the front door itself was a significant component in seeing the institution as home: the familial home was not easily accessible. Both front and back doors had steps, which meant that I had to walk on crutches all the time (and oh, how I hated walking). The institution, the special school, was always completely accessible. It had level entrances, lifts to each floor, and no carpets; there was polished parquet flooring as far as the eye could see down its purely institutional corridors and their magnolia-painted walls.

The existence of institutions, special schools in particular, is that I am (as are most Disabled people) against them. They constitute a form of apartheid that benefits no one and further marginalises those in them, mainly Disabled people though now increasingly people with learning disabilities. However, I do fully understand



the desire and perceived need for such segregation. I am glad I went to a special school. It was fully accessible; it allowed me to meet, mix with others classified as Disabled – which we could probably not otherwise have done, and become proud of my Disability identity and community. There is a major ‘but’: it did not accomplish this for my fellow pupils, and in no way offered any significant level of education, which I consider its most egregious crime by far. Equally, I am aware that, had I gone to the local comprehensive school, with my siblings, I may well have benefited from a broader education, but I would have been marginalised, stigmatised as an ‘abnormal’ interloper who was unable to participate in the normalised environment. For example, the local comprehensive school had a football team focused on winning, whereas my special school had a football team that was about no more than being able to participate. We played other schools: special and normal. I loved sport!

I was fully aware that institutions, special homes, were not ‘good’ places for Disabled people. Even as a child, what I wanted was a home of my own. My own front door. Institutions, or death, were where you ended up when unable to achieve one’s goals, or when any last hope of independence had been abandoned. True, this is a gross simplification, yet one that has driven many a Disabled child, young adult, to strive for their own independence: In their own home.

The front door is a key part of our identity. This can be seen when driving around my then home area, a council estate called Old Dean in Camberley, Surrey. When I was growing up, nearly every front door was identical, the only sign of individualism its colour. Once the ‘right to buy’ happened, the first thing to change was the front door, which indicated that the resident was no longer a council tenant but part of the ‘new middle class’. Class, as





Coney Hill School  
The School Photograph *circa* 1972 - unknown



School 'Front Door' *circa* 1971 Lord Snowden/Sunday Times  
(cropped Image used for 'The Empty Hours' cover)

always, plays a big part in any interpretation of a front door; class is thus relevant to the photography of a front door and its regular use. Class, to me as an artist, is an equally important factor that, it is hoped, captures this in some way; in working with galleries and museums, it is more significant than impairment (or than one's other identities of gender, sexuality, colour, *et al.*).

'Front Door' is solely about wheelchair users, intentionally. Such a choice was not to minimise the significance for any other impairment of a threshold of any premises, often the strongest barrier to physical access. It is highly relevant to me, a wheelchair user and artist. My hope is that other artists will appropriate the iconography of 'Front Door' to illustrate other forms of impairment, through individual or multiple projects. These certainly offer more than enough scope, such as that exploring fashion and pain.

It is important that Disabled people gain and maintain the power and position to determine and control our own representation in images, wherever they occur. My work as a photographer and filmmaker has always focused on the story of Disability from our own perspective, particularly that of a wheelchair user within a vanishing impairment group. My impairment, Spina Bifida, is gradually being erased from society through screening and the medical processes that surround that practice. Today is tomorrow's archive content; my work is about ensuring that it is not merely an archive of lost or forgotten people, as we have so often been.



Disability and Home:  
The Front Door Photography Exhibition  
Lower Branson Coates space.



Coney Hill School 'Front Door' *circa* 1972 - Unknown  
Nigel Thomas - Sue Francis - Paul Darke  
(all around the age of 10 years old)

## THE FRONT DOOR

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The 'Front Door' Photography Exhibition is part of the wider Disability and Home project exploring the idea(l) of the home in relation to the lived experiences of Disabled people entirely from the perspective of Disabled people themselves.

In addition to this exhibition, there is a film that reveals in depth the experiences of Disabled people who attended the Special School detailed in the 1971 publication **The Empty Hours** by Maureen Oswin (1971, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London). Digital Disability are based in Wolverhampton in the West Midlands.

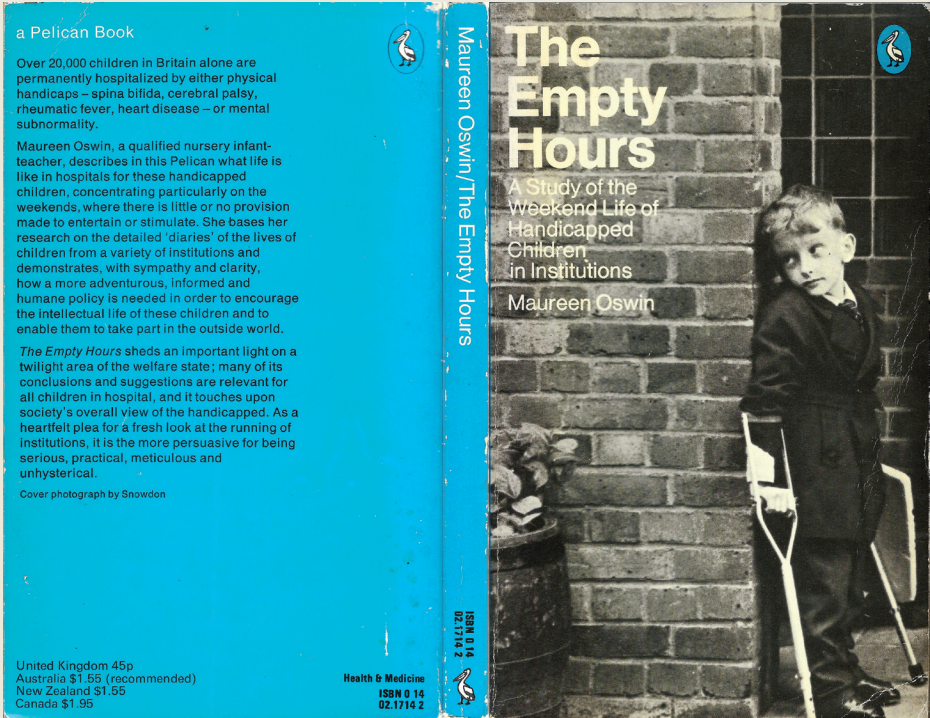
### **Acknowledgments:**

Thanks to the subjects of the photography: Anahita Harding, Antoinette Morris, Harriet Wade, Lee Perkins, Liz Carr, Dr Miro Griffiths, and Penny Pepper. Further thanks to the Tettenhall Transport Centre and to Unlimited. Appreciation to Stephen Neville.

Digital Disability wish to thank the Museum of the Home for their partnership and encouragement, as well as the National Lottery Heritage Fund for their financial support, in the development of this project.

Digital Disability also wish to thank Claire Darke, Professor Simon McKeown, Dr Alison Wilde, Nicola Lane, Professor Beverley Clough, Callum Perrin and Walker Darke for their contributions to this project.





Cover for Paperback of **The Empty Hours**  
Photography by Lord Snowden for the Sunday Times

## THE EMPTY HOURS

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**The Empty Hours** by Maureen Oswin, published in 1971 by Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, a seminal textbook for Special Needs Institution professionals working in care and education. This book is the inspiration for 'Disability and Home', a project created in partnership with the Museum of the Home, developed and delivered by Dr Paul A. Darke of Digital Disability.

Our project seeks to explore the ambiguity of 'Home' from the unconventional point of view of a home rather than the home.

**The Empty Hours** has a chapter about how a home should be run - a model of good practice - the home cited was the Special School attended by Darke from 1970 until 1978, aged 7 to 15.

The idea of Special Schools, segregated schools, are still a contested practice for many disabled people. A major portion of the history of such homes has been lost, forgotten until now.





## BLACK AND WHITE OR COLOUR

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In showing disabled people at their Front Door, this project explores the importance of having one's own home and to be a valued part of society. The project reveals how the image itself is open to interpretation. Charities use Black and White imagery to define their subjects as 'lesser'.

Marginalisation is achieved by linking ideas of class, wealth, location and 'otherness'.

The images here are of the same person: Dr Paul A. Darke. The black and white image was taken in Surrey in 1978; the colour image in 2023 in Wolverhampton.

'Jason Woz Eare' photograph by Stephen Neville.  
Front Door photograph by Claire Darke.

## Anahita Harding

As a disabled person, home for me is a place where I can rest and recharge. I like to take my time cooking (usually lentil soup), or to have a coffee while watching a film. Sometimes it is a place where I spend time with family in the evenings.

“Home” can change depending on where I am living, I could be with a flatmate, family member or alone, but what makes a place “homely” is when I feel settled and at ease, and able to be fully myself.

Anahita Harding is an artist, often working conceptually, exploring disability, identity, gender, and culture.

Most recently, Anahita scaled the interior of the Fire of London Monument as if mountaineering (given it is inaccessible): climbing the stairs in mountaineering-style and recording the process on film for an upcoming triptych video installation.



## Antoinette Morris

Home is where I live: home is where my life mainly takes place. Friends come, family come, and support, however limited, come to enable me to continue to live fully independently.

The idea of home, having a front door that is mine to choose to open or not, I know is not an option for many disabled people through no choice of their own. Institutions, the loss of control and choice, are ever present in the way our society works. The, my, 'Front Door' is my life writ large.

Antoinette Morris attended Coney Hill School, at the same time as Lee Perkins and Paul Darke, in the 1970s. She left before Lee and Paul, for a mainstream school near her home in Kent.

Antoinette worked for BBC World Service, SHAPE, London Disability Art Forum and as well as a disability children's organisation in Hackney. Antoinette is now retired.





## Harriet Wade

Home for me is a safe and peaceful refuge and a place to rest and sometimes to recover from trying to keep up with everyone else out there in the world.

An accessible home is hard to find, to manage, and to afford. I live in a nice house because of the benevolence of a family member. I wonder if I will ever be brave enough to move.

Harriet Wade is a Trustee of one of Surrey's leading venues after having had a career in Social Work. Harriet's father, Peter Wade, was a key player in the development of the Disability Movement in its early inception and development.

Harriet is currently training to be a Cruse Bereavement Counsellor.





## Lee Perkins

My 'Front Door' is to the home I share with my Mother: as I have aged and become more disabled it is, has become, is becoming more difficult to enter. I will need to move eventually to stay still: ageing is something rarely considered if you are disabled.

Being 'Disabled' is often seen as a static or rapidly deteriorating state of life: it is rarely so. It is ever-changing, sometimes slowly sometimes quickly, for many of us - especially as we get older. Thus, the home, the practicalities of the home, are often ignored when it comes to disabled people.

Lee Perkins attended Coney Hill School – Hayes, Bromley, Kent - along with Antoinette Morris and Paul Darke in the 1970s.

Lee worked for ICI most of his working life in Slough. He has a passion for Arsenal Football Club and cricket which have enabled him to travel the world. Lee is now retired.





Liz Carr

As an anti-assisted suicide advocate, I would argue that providing support and accommodations, a decent 'Home', will enable disabled people to live valued lives in their own homes. Assisted suicide (AS) devalues the lives of disabled people and promotes the idea that life with an impairment is not worth living. AS imposes pressure on disabled people to choose death over living: no home and no life!

The 'Home', my home, should be provided with support and resources, for all disabled people, to ensure we can live with choice and full control over their own lives. A home of our own is essential for us, as disabled people, to be full members of society in a way that is equal and based on justice.

Liz Carr is an internationally recognised actor and activist who has been active in the Disability Movement for decades. Her current primary activism is based around Assisted Suicide which she discussed on her recent appearance on BBC Radio 4's Desert Island Discs - which can still be heard on BBC Sounds.

[www.lizcarr.co.uk](http://www.lizcarr.co.uk)

## HOME DIGITAL DISABILITY



## Miro Griffiths

The home is a contested space. Often, disabled people do not occupy homes. They exist – survive in inaccessible buildings, with restricted participation due to a lack of support, and under control from authorities who determine how lives should be lived.

There is a legacy of denying disabled people a place to call home. Alternatively, the home should be a space of comfort security and most importantly creativity. A place to be creative, imaginative, and experimental. The home is a place to think, and practice, how to live your life, who to live with (if anybody), and who you are becoming.

Dr Miro Griffiths is one of the UK's leading Disability Studies academics working in the subject at the Centre for Disability Studies, University of Leeds. Currently, Miro is a Leverhulme Research Fellow exploring Disability Youth Activism and is a Lead Investigator on this 'Disability and Home' project along with Dr Paul Darke.

<https://disabilityactivism.leeds.ac.uk/miro/>





## Paul Darke

I never considered my home – the family home growing up - to be my 'Home', as I went to a residential special school, from the age of seven. I thought of that as my home as I spent 40 out of 52 weeks a year there.

Consequently, I have ambiguous feelings about the idea of a home: people are what matter, not buildings. 'Front Doors' often hide familial trauma. They can be a shield to protect or to hide truths. Open doors, front or back, are always better.

Paul Darke is the creative force behind Digital Disability, which has developed this exhibition and on-going collaboration with the Museum of the Home. Paul attended Coney Hill School, a Special residential school, with Antoinette Morris and Lee Perkins.

Paul is an artist, mentor, and media specialist on Disability and Cinema.

[www.digital-disability.com](http://www.digital-disability.com)



## Penny Pepper

Our precious if depleted social housing system has given me this beautiful space with its Victorian front door. Once owned by Lady Blah it is now the entrance to my precious creative domain. It is especially loved by someone coming from a working-class family with destructive tendencies, and an awareness that disabled people's spaces do not often promise permanence.

We remain threatened with residential care and housing poverty. This means the process of making my home, my environment, welcoming, colourful and provocative is a pleasure I never take for granted.

Penny Pepper is a writer, artist, and poet, who is a regular writer for ByLine Times. Penny's most recent novel was *First in the World Somewhere*.

Penny has toured the nation with her work and performed in places as diverse as Wolverhampton and Hastings.

[www.pennypepper.co.uk](http://www.pennypepper.co.uk)







Play figure with wheelchair and ramp  
Little Tikes 1990's

## TOYS AND GAMES

CLAIRE DARKE

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Digital Disability's collection of disabled toys began when we were first buying toys for our son, as his father is a wheelchair user: it seemed logical to have toys that reflected this reality. There were not many Disabled toys to choose from at the time. Our first toy wheelchair was a Little Tikes product: a boy, a wheelchair and a ramp. It was colourful and fun as the adjustable play figure could ride down the ramp in the wheelchair with all moving wheels. Over time we have assembled a large collection of toys that represent the diversity of Disabled people. The focus of this exhibition is on those toys that represent characters who use wheelchairs or similar. This is not a comprehensive collection; indeed, there many more available.

Our Disabled doll collection is dominated by Mattel products, which includes many wheelchair-using Barbies, her little sister Barbie Chelsea, as well as the male version Barbie Ken. It seems that Mattel have always been pushing for change, and diversity in their dolls. Mattel launched Barbie in 1959, at the time when dolls were baby dolls, designed to promote nurturing and motherhood to little girls. Barbie took a new approach, Barbie was different, she was a fashion doll with accessories that promoted ambition, careers, and financial self-sufficiency. Mattel's new approach included advertising direct to children via television. This quickly helped establish Barbie as the market leader. Mattel has maintained this high status over the years by creating new Barbies and products within the constantly expanding market driven by capitalism and the opportunities offered by 'diversity'.

Significantly, after criticism for a lack of diversity and unrealistic

body image, Mattel responded by introducing new dolls. Initially this was with Hispanic dolls in 1980; more globally relevant models followed. However, it was not until 1997 that Mattel produced Share a Smile Becky in a wheelchair: alas, she was soon discontinued when it became clear that her wheelchair could not access the Barbie Dream House. The follow-up was Paralympian Champion Becky for the Paralympic Games in Sydney, Australia, in 2000 part of the official merchandise. This was followed by the more recent Mattel winter sports stars, with a paralympic skiing doll, of the 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics.

In the 1990s Lakeshore Learning produced a solid play figure of a young man in an electric wheelchair, but more mainstream toys have flexible adjustable parts and accessories. Many Disabled play figures have tended to be part of hospital play sets: play figures with a broken arm, leg or bandaged head, a temporary ailment that explains their wheelchair. Significantly, our first Little Tike toy is not a part of a hospital set and was simply child in a wheelchair. More recently Disabled play figures produced by Lego and Playmobile for example have been paralympic wheelchair users with a gold medal around their neck. There are not many toys that deviate from these standard forms.

Another popular genre is novelty toys, designed to be comical. The Stunt Granny, with her helmet and mirror visor along with a blanket over her knees, fits this form very well. There are also the competitive Racing Granny and Grandad toys: oxygen canisters strapped to their backs as they race against one another on their mobility scooters. Some may find it a fine line between humour and Disabled people as figures of fun.

The most common sphere in which Disabled people as toys are made is in popular culture, in film and television. Many Disabled characters have featured in science fiction on television and film. They revel in their stereotypical impaired characters. This includes the likes of the scary, menacing, baddies such as Davros, Sil and Moxx of Balhoon, in the BBC TV series Doctor Who. However, this is not always the case, as is demonstrated in the TV Series Stingray (UK 1964 the first Supermarionation), where the Commander Sam Shore character is doing good in his hover-chair and saving the world. Commander Shore is calm and strong, a positive role model.

The controversial depictions of disability include characters in Little Britain, South Park and Family Guy. This 'adult humour' has been unpopular and heavily criticised especially by parents of Disabled children. Still, Disabled people often warm to these characters as they reveal the discriminatory attitude generally held by mainstream culture and society towards Disabled people. For example, Joe Swanson is a macho paraplegic police officer who features in Family Guy, an animated sitcom with adult and often dark humour. Joe faces constant obstacles and humiliations as part of his daily life from not just society, but also from his close family and friends.

On the other hand is the depiction in The Simpsons (the 20th Century Fox Television animation comedy) of Stephen Hawking which is much more light-hearted and humorous. Stephen Hawking (1942-2018) is, significantly, not a fictional character. Hawking made four appearances in the show, where he is depicted in a turbo-charged flying wheelchair. Such toys are produced for the adult market and have become collector's items that are worth considerably more when they remain in their original box.



In popular culture, lead characters, can be rather bland or a stereotypical figures of ultra-normality and the action figure produced reflects this. Capitalism and market saturation, exploitation, and the rise of the 'Collector' of such figures – memorabilia – means that an increasing range of 'toys' that feature disabled people are currently made, compared to the past, in relation to blockbuster movies or prime-time TV. Some, blockbuster movies even if a flop can make some disabled figures hard and expensive to acquire because of limited production.

A positive or a negative depiction of Disabled characters has a complex narrative even within Toys and/or Games. The positive is often a broad-brush stroke showing the 'normality' of disabled people, yet disabled people themselves often experience the more 'negative' aspects, those highlighting differences that reveal otherness. These characters are troubled, misfits, forced to inhabit the mainstream world. Characters such as Dr Finklestein from *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Dr Loveless from *Wild Wild West*, and X-Men figures are prime examples. Each has their place in their respective contexts, but these negative archetypes reveal more about reality than they would like to us all to know or see in them.

Another positive role model is *Ironside*, played by Raymond Burr, another policeman wheelchair user. This was originally a US NBC TV series from 1967 to 1975. Corgi Toys produced a police truck linked to the series with sliding doors and lift which proved very popular. The *Ironside* series was unusual for the time to have a Disabled character take the lead in a mainstream TV show. *Ironside* reflected discrimination against Disabled people.

In relation to the Presier figures we felt that often the curatorial setting can define meaning, thus we exhibit them in as neutral a

setting as is possible in order to ensure they are interpreted by the spectator how they wanted to interpret them. Alternatively, the wounded soldier, metal figures in wheelchairs in the collection, inevitably force a certain interpretation due to their military identity, such as the cliché of the noble warrior, but that does not mean such a portrayal will always be perceived as a positive.

With disability (abnormality), as with ordinariness (normality), you cannot control meaning. Such control of meaning, as indicated by the idea of the intentional fallacy, along with cognitive dissonance, ensures that intent is often irrelevant. What is certain is that disability, the wheelchair, is often much more fascinating than the dullness of the ordinary, i.e., the 'normal'.



Raymond Burr on Ironside Van Model Kit Box 1969



## DOLLS

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Baby doll in wheelchair  
Lakeshore Learning 1990's



Becky Paralympic Champion  
Paralympic Games Sydney Australia 2000  
Mattel 1999



Becky in wheelchair Share A Smile Becky. Mattel 1997



Barbie Paralympic Alpine Skier  
You Can Be Anything Range  
Mattel 2022



Barbie and Barbie Ken in Wheelchairs:  
Barbie Fashionistas Range 2019 and Barbie Chelsea



Barbie Chelsea in Wheelchair  
Mattel 2022

## PLAY FIGURES

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Girl in Wheelchair Accompanied by Male Adult  
Playmobile 2020



Wheelchair Racer with Gold Medal  
Lego mini-figures 2022





Boy with Bandaged Head in Wheelchair with Nurse.  
Happyland Hospital Set Early Learning Centre 2021



Happyland Sunflower School girl in Wheelchair  
Early Learning Centre 2009



Children in School Bus  
Little Tikes 1980's



Girl in Wheelchair from School Bus Set  
Little Tikes 1980's



Solid Play Figure: Boy in Electric Wheelchair  
Lakeshore Learning 1990's



Play Figures in Wheelchairs  
Playmobile Various





Sylvanian Families  
Nurse Rabbit with Wheelchair. Flair 2010



Play Figures Older Man in Wheelchair with Nurse  
Playmobil 4226 - 2005

## NOVELTY TOYS

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Stunt Granny with Controller  
Maplin Electronics 2008



Grandad pull-back-and-go  
Mobility Scooter  
Jam WH Smiths 2007



Grannies Racing Circuit with Controllers and Track.  
Maplin Electronics 2010

## TELEVISION: SCIENCE FICTION

### STINGRAY

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Stingray Commander Sam Shore in Hover-Chair  
TV Series Stingray (UK 1964)  
The First Supermarionation. Matchbox 1964



**Stingray: Under Fire** by Graham Marks  
Boxtree Ltd. Publishing 1992

## DOCTOR WHO

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Davros Action Figure with Tardis Controller.  
'Vengeance on Varos'  
BBC TV. Product Enterprise 1985





Moxx Balloon and Robot Spiders  
Pull-back-and-go  
BBC TV. Character Options 1985



Peri Action Figure with Sil  
BBC TV Underground Toys 1985

## TELEVISION: LIVE ACTION

### IRONSIDE

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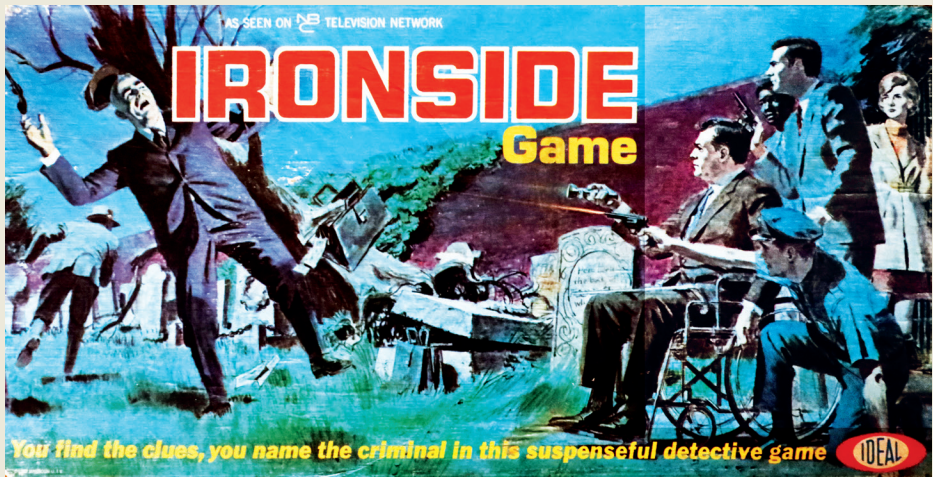


Ironsides Van Model Kit - USA NBC TV Series  
1967–1975 Starring Raymond Burr  
Mpc Of The Fun Group At General Mills 1969

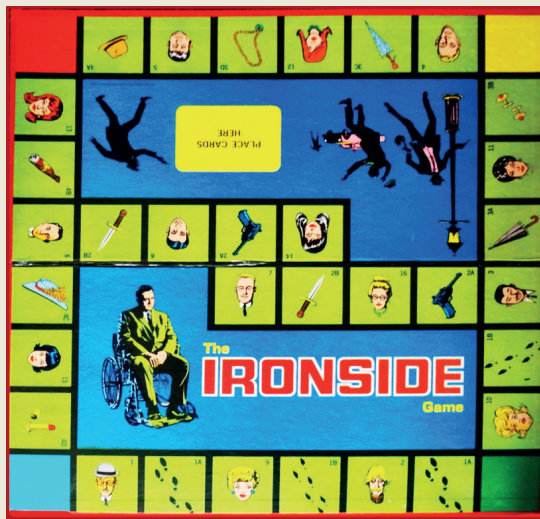


Ironsides's Truck and Play Figures  
Corgi Toys 1971





Ironside Board Game.  
Ironside USA NBC TV Series 1967–1975  
Ideal 1969



The Board from the Ironside Game by Ideal 1969

## TELEVISION: ANIMATION

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Stephen Hawking in Turbo Charged Flying Wheelchair  
The Simpsons Animation Comedy. 20th Century Fox Television.  
Playmate Toys 2003



Timothy "Timmy" Burch in Wheelchair  
South Park Original network Comedy Central 1997 - 2002



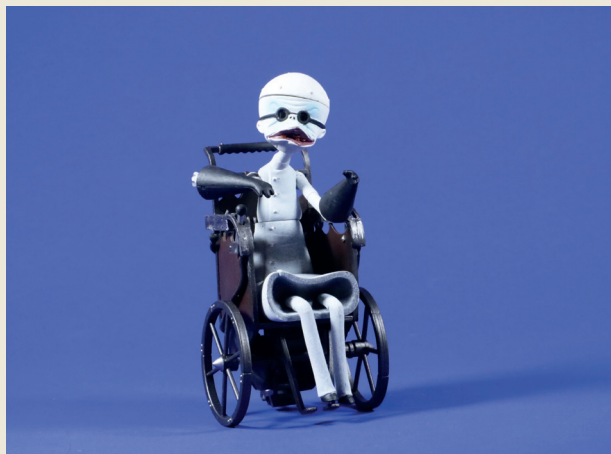
Joe Swanson in Wheelchair. Family Guy  
Fox TV Animation Series 1999



Lou and Andy - Wheelchair and Carer  
Little Britain BBC TV Sketch Comedy Show 2003

## FILM / MOVIES

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Dr Finkelstein Action Figure series 1  
The Nightmare Before Christmas Disney Film 1993. Reels Toys



Dr. Loveless with Spider Blaster Action Figure  
Wild Wild West Film 1999 WB X-Toys 1999





Rocky Balboa with Wheelchair  
Rocky II film 1979 Jakks Pacific 2007



Jake Scully Action Figure with Wheelchair  
Avatar film 2009



## COLLECTABLES & MODELS

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Hospital Wheelchair Group of the First World War.  
9908: Charles Biggs Model Company 2001



Elderly Man in Wheelchair with Nurse  
Collection Models 2004



Figures in Wheelchairs (Various)  
Scaled figures for use with model train sets.  
Presier Models 2000



King Bran the Broken  
The Game of Thrones TV series  
Pop! Funko 2018

Doctor Finkelstein  
The Nightmare Before Christmas Film  
Pop! Funko 2017

Head Professor X  
Marvel Comic Series The X-Men Film  
Pop! Funko 2018

## COLLECTING POPHEADS

DR MIRO GRIFFITHS

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The reason I collect is because I'm fascinated by the narratives, commentaries, and genres that explore disability in popular mainstream culture. The PopHeads are a way of glimpsing how disabled people, and the concept of disability, have been portrayed through narratives, often exploiting disabled people and often using disability either to ridicule difference or to shock or to horrify audiences.

The PopHeads become a personal pursuit and an endeavour to try to determine how many exist, but also to act and serve as an archive of disability, disabled characters, and disability narratives. There's something quite deeply personal about the pursuit of collecting something, and I am reminded of people like Bourdieu who spoke about the way in which collecting is an opportunity to develop purpose and meaning within your life. Also, when you try to collect something, you're attaching significance to it based on your interpretation of the subject and matter that surround the actual artifact.

It gives me a way to think about how I understand and interpret disability; further, being a disabled person myself, to reflect on how disablement is manifested within all aspects of my daily living, and the way(s) in which different communities and people respond to me as a disabled person. When I am exploring and trying to find different PopHeads, I am persistently thinking about my experience as a disabled person.

I am, also, interested in the way in which we archive

knowledge. Part of that is archiving the artefacts that hold significance for oneself. It is not determining what is significant but determining why, in some communities and contexts, some find significance in particular items and artefacts. I want to capture and remember the different characters, the different stories and narratives that surround and coalesce around the different figures that I find. This helps to create a legacy of knowledge on a particular subject. I want to think about how disability is portrayed and represented now; at the same time I also want audiences and communities in the future to have access to my PopHeads, have access to the stories that surround the PopHeads, and the reasons why I've collected them.

Having audiences think about what disability means to them, whether they're coming from a background of either being a disabled person, or having familiarity with disablement, or not having any connection to it at all, is important. Investigations and interrogations are required to make sense of disability and to reflect on how disabled people are treated in society. A way to do that is, I think, by trying to capture and build this collection of characters and figures, some of which are real and some are rooted in fiction, who are experiencing disability and are representing disability from different backgrounds and aspects of disablement. This is important for critiquing the narratives from which they emerge, while they also have importance for how we want to think about the future organisation of our societies.

I think it's important that disability be represented within our cultures. Disability is prominent within society. The danger is that we create very specific narratives of disability. Often,



they are rooted in tragedy. They're rooted in demonstrating disabled people and disability in a toxic way, which is not capturing the political and social contexts of how we organise society. Certain stereotypes and tropes, which for politicised disabled people is deeply unsettling and problematic, reflects the way in which those who have influence over our cultural narratives determine what is made and what isn't, and what we think about communities.

When I see disabled characters in PopHeads, often they are found within horror. They're found within comedy. By that I mean disabled people are positioned in forms of ridicule, or they are depicted in certain narratives where the disabled person takes on the status of villain. I find it just fascinating in how we position our thinking of disability in these deeply negative and toxic circumstances. We devoid ourselves of the important political and social commentaries that surround the marginalisation of a very prominent community.

Very rarely have I seen PopHeads, or even media narratives, that capture the perseverance of disabled people to fight for self-determination and for political status. The figures often reinforce stories of tragedy and stories of danger and villainy. This is important because it reflects aspects of our society: it's reflecting how we think about ourselves, why we are troubled by certain communities - such as disabled people.

That's why I want to continue collecting PopHeads. It is significant both that I collect the PopHeads and I store them in my home. When you're a disabled person the home can be, possibly, the only place where you have salvation and you have a level of accessibility in which you can accommodate and be yourself - but that's not always the

case. The home is a place where I can live the life that I want. I can build my environment to be as accessible as possible, given the material circumstances I find myself in.

The PopHeads become a part of an accessible home. I can build, I can establish, I can order them in a way over which I can exercise control and self-determination. I can create the stories and the narratives around them. By that, I mean I can curate how they should be understood, I can reveal the stories they are trying to tell us, and - on a broader level - I can facilitate knowledge.

When people come into my home and they see the PopHeads, they ask me questions. I have the possibility to inform others about the knowledge that surrounds and coalesces around the PopHeads. It is a way to inform their understanding of disability. The reason I keep them in the home is a deliberate choice.

The transference of knowledge is integral to the premise of collecting. When I decide to loan out the PopHeads to museums or to others who are interested in them, it means relinquishing control. I acknowledge other people's interpretations and views for why they want access to my collection. Again, collecting is a deeply personal endeavour: you are pursuing something very specific and intrinsic to your own aspirations, your own values, and your own interests, yet you're sharing that with others. You are sharing it with individuals, and communities, that hold alternative views to the ones you have on the subjects that bring together the collection. That can disrupt your own understanding of these subjects and bring in new forms of learning and understanding.

## HOME DIGITAL DISABILITY

That particularly happens when I ask people, “what do [they] think about my collection?”. I ask them to explore the significance it holds for them as an audience to what I have curated. This can be harmful. I am aware that some people have no interest in the collection. They think there is no point to collecting. They ridicule me. They joke about an individual, with plenty of responsibilities and duties, wanting to collect these things and spend time pursuing them.

Collecting within the home can be a way of enhancing and developing your knowledge, and having the opportunity to remake knowledge of a particular subject. The PopHeads can disrupt understandings of disability and interrogate why certain depictions and representations emerge, why they can be potentially liberatory for our cause of choice and control, or why they may be detrimental to our causes.



Professor X Marvel Comic Series The X-Men Film  
Pop! Funko Special Edition 2020

## DISABILITY AND THE HOME: TOYS AND GAMES EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

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### Dolls

Wheelchair and baby doll  
Lakeshore Learning 1990s

Barbie Chelsea  
Mattel - You Can Be Anything Range 2022

Barbie Chelsea in Wheelchair - Mattel 2022

Barbie in Wheelchair  
Mattel - Barbie Fashionistas Range 2019

Barbie Ken in Wheelchair  
Mattel - Barbie Fashionistas Range 2019

Barbie Ken  
Mattel - Barbie Fashionistas Range 2019

Becky in Wheelchair  
Mattel - Share A Smile Becky 1997

Becky Paralympian Games Sydney 2000  
Mattel 1999

Book: **Barbie We Love Sports Camp** by Dianne Muldrow  
Mattel 1998

Barbie Paralympic Alpine Skier

Mattel - You Can Be Anything Range 2022

Barbie Mermaid

'Glynis the Mermaid' by MCDarke 2023.

Inspired by the film Miranda 1948.

## **Play Figures**

School bus with 5 play figures 1 wheelchair

Little Tikes 1980s

Child in wheelchair with adult female.

Playmobil 4407 - 2005

Child in wheelchair, with male adult.

Playmobil 6663 - 2014

Older man in a wheelchair with female adult.

Playmobil 4226 - 2005

Wheelie Chair - Hot Wheels 2019

Wheelchair racer with gold medal

Lego mini-figures 2022

Nurse Rabbit with wheelchair and accessories

Sylvanian Families by Flair 2010

Boy In Wheelchair

Lakeshore Learning 1994

Boy in wheelchair with ramp

Little Tikes 1990s



Happyland play figures  
Sunflower school children includes girl in wheelchair  
Early Learning Centre 2009

Happyland Hospital Set  
young patient and nurse with wheelchair  
Early Learning Centre 2021

Wheelchair - Build a Bear Workshop 2022:

Book: **Wheels** by Jan Pienkowski  
Published by William Heinemann Limited 1991

**Early Learning Centre Catalogue 2009**

### **Novelty Toys**

Grandads  
2 pull back and go action figures driving mobility scooters,  
Jam WH Smiths retail Limited 2007

Stunt Granny with controller and accessories  
Maplin Electronics 2008

Grannies Racing Circuit  
2 racers, with controllers and track.  
Maplin Electronics 2010

## Television: Science Fiction

Commander Sam Shore Action Figure in Hover Chair  
TV Series Stingray (UK 1964) the first Supermarionation.  
Matchbox 1964

Book: **Stingray Terror of the Giants** by Alan Fennell  
Boxtree Limited. 1993

Book: **Stingray The Ghost Ship**\_by Graham Marks  
Boxtree Limited. 1992

Book: **Stingray Under Fire**\_by Graham Marks  
Boxtree Limited. 1992

Peri action figure with Sil  
Doctor Who TV BBC series 6th Doctor Who 1984-1986  
'Vengeance on Varos'  
Underground Toys 1985

Davros action figure with Tardis controller.  
Doctor Who TV BBC series 6th Doctor Who 1984-1986  
'Vengeance on Varos'  
Product Enterprise 1985

Davros - Pull-back-and-go action figure  
Doctor Who TV BBC series 1985

Moxx Balloon - Pull-back-and-go action figure with Robot  
Spiders (Doctor Who TV BBC Series) The Moxx Of Balloon  
Series 1: The End Of The World  
Character Options 1985

## **Television Live Action Ironside**

Ironside Van Model Kit

Ironside USA NBC TV Series 1967–1975

Mpc Of The Fun Group At General Mills 1969

Ironside: A board game

Ironside USA NBC TV Series Ironside 1967–1975

Starring Raymond Burr. Ideal 1969

Ironside's Truck and Figures

USA NBC TV Series Ironside 1967–1975

Corgi Toys 1971

Lou and Andy - Little Britain BBC TV sketch comedy show 2003

## **Television Animation**

Stephen Hawking in Turbo Charged Flying Wheelchair

The Simpsons Animation Comedy. 20th Century Fox TV

(Note: Stephen Hawking (1942-2018) A Theoretical Physicist made four appearances on the Show as himself.)

Playmate Toys 2003

Joe Swanson action figure in wheelchair.

Family Guy Fox TV Animation Series 1999.

Jimmy Valmer action figure on crutches

South Park Original network Comedy Central 1997  
2002

Timothy "Timmy" Burch action figure in wheelchair

South Park Original Network Comedy Central 1997  
2002

## Film / Movies

Dr. Finkelstein Action Figure Series 1  
The Nightmare Before Christmas Disney Film 1993  
Reels Toys 1993

Dr. Finkelstein Action Figure Series 2  
The Nightmare Before Christmas Disney Film 1993  
Reels Toys 1993

Dr. Finkelstein Collector's Action Figure  
The Nightmare Before Christmas Disney Film 1993  
Reels Toys 1993

Dr. Loveless with Spider Blaster Action Figure  
Wild Wild West Film 1999  
WB X-Toys 1999

Rocky Balboa action figure with wheelchair  
Rocky II Film 1979  
Jakks Pacific 2007

Jake Scully Action Figure with wheelchair  
Avatar Film 2009

## Collectables: PopHeads

PopHead Dr. Finkelstein  
The Nightmare Before Christmas Film 1993  
Pop! Funko 2017

PopHead King Bran the Broken  
The Game of Thrones TV series  
Pop! Funko 2018

PopHead Professor X  
Marvel Comic Series The X-Men Film 2000  
Pop! Funko 2018

PopHead Professor X  
Marvel Comic Series The X-Men Film 2000  
Pop! Funko Special Edition 2020

### **Metal Figures and Model Figures**

Hospital wheelchair group of the First World War (9908)  
Charles Biggs Model Company 2001

Elderly man in wheelchair with nurse  
Collection Models 2004

Figures in wheelchairs (Various)  
Preiser Models 2000

### **Exhibition Video 'Disability Collections' and Hobcar**

Dr Miro Griffiths talking about his PopHead collection,  
contextualising problematic images of disability.

Professor Simon McKeown talking about his Invalid Carriage  
collection.

Hobcar object and curation.





The Hob Car on display Museum of the Home  
Hand-Propelled 'pedal' car for Disabled Children 1969  
WH Hobson Ltd. Precision Engineers Apprentices Association  
on loan from  
Tettenhall Transport Heritage Centre Wolverhampton UK.



## EVALUATION

Disability and the Home is a collaborative project between the Museum of the Home and Digital Disability to explore and reveal ideas, images, objects, and concepts around the idea of 'the home' to Disabled people. The project was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and culminated with two exhibitions hosted by Museum of the Home in London.

### **Exhibition 1 Disability and the Home: Toys and Games**

Museum of the Home 17th January - 26th March 2023.

Disability and the Home: Toys and Games exhibition focuses on toys and games that use the wheelchair: this eclectic collection is a key part of recording and archiving the experience of Disabled people in society.

Audience Figures: 10,300

Comments from the public:

- *'Seeing all the toys I realise there is much more to consider, I see things differently now.'*
- *'The display has made me so emotional; it made me cry because her sister lives with a disability.'*
- *'The disability toys exhibition was one of the best exhibitions I have ever seen in London. It evoked many childhood memories for me. I will visit again! Thank you.'*
- *'I did not know about the disability toys, so definitely learned something new today!'*
- *'Thank you Digital Disability for bringing disability to the Museum of the Home. I have a visual disability since 2019 which I have now accepted.'*

## **Exhibition 2 - The Front Door Photography Exhibition**

Museum of the Home - 28th March – 25th June 2023.

The Front Door Photography Exhibition is part of the Disability and the Home project exploring the idea of the home in relation to the lived experience of disabled people.

Audience Figures: 11,600

Comments from the public:

- *'My friend and I really enjoyed our visit today.'*
- *'The Front Door Disability exhibition is really good and makes you realise that there are many other hidden parts of our community.'*
- *'Saw this exhibit two days ago and thought it was great!'*
- *'Brilliant.'*

Staff remarks:

- *'I've noticed that it made a lot of visitors reminiscent.'*
- *'It has been great to see it highlighting what little good representation living with disabilities has had. It resonates with people.'*
- *'It's been nice to see the representation of disability in toys.'*
- *'Visitors have really enjoyed seeing the toys, especially the kids.'*

**Danielle Patten**  
**Director of Creative Programmes and Collections**

*'Digital Disability's work with the Museum of the Home has transformed the way we are able to represent and discuss disability with our audiences. The Front Door Photography and Disability Toys exhibitions have helped the Museum to be more representative of our increasingly diverse audiences and ensure we put the voices of those with lived experience of disability at the centre of this work. Digital Disability's events and workshops have created a community of artists, academics, and activists at the Museum which has enabled us to embed this important work within our displays and programmes.'*

**Sean Curran**  
**Head of Inclusion for Historic England**

*'The Front Door exhibition is Powerful and Beautiful.'*

For further information on this project visit:  
[www.digital-disability.com](http://www.digital-disability.com)  
[#DisabilityandtheHome](https://twitter.com/DisabilityandtheHome)









***Collecting is a way of validating oneself in a society that does not value you or your kind. Collecting gives value to the seemingly valueless. Collecting gives meaning to the meaningless.***

***Dr Paul Darke***

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