

# A Handsome Testimonial

*The life and times of*

**James Scott**

**(1829-1912)**

A Deaf man who lived and worked  
in *Horbury, Yorkshire*

Being one of many disabled people who contributed  
to the textile industry of this region

*by Gill Crawshaw, 2023*



# A Handsome Testimonial

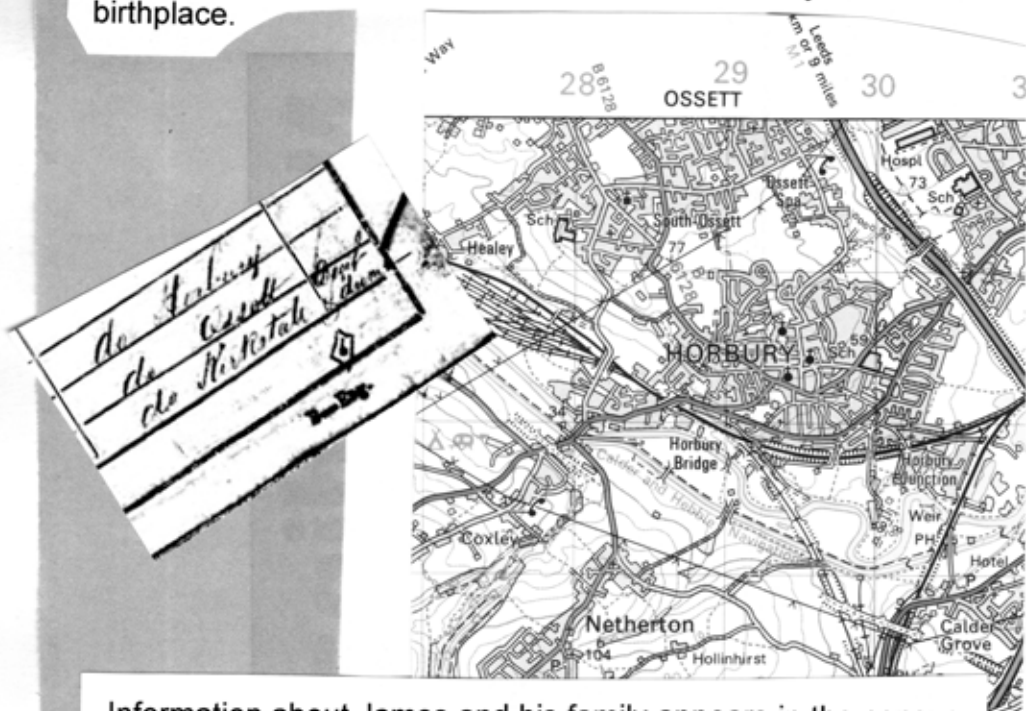
Disabled people are woven into the fabric of society. One area they played a major part in is the textile workforce of Yorkshire, which powered the defining industry of this region. Yet their contributions have often gone unrecognised. Once the industrial revolution began in the 18th century, continuing into the Victorian era, the narrative that disabled people were unable to work or have a useful role, instead having to depend on the workhouse or on charity, took hold. This idea of disabled people as being dependent and needy continues to this day. But it's definitely not the whole picture.

James Scott is a fine example of a disabled person who actively contributed to his family and his community, to the textile mill where he worked and therefore to the economy of Wakefield and the region. He is just one of many! But we rarely hear these stories of independent disabled people leading purposeful lives.

Discovering more about James's life, and the lives of other Deaf and disabled workers of the past, reveals a more rounded view of disabled people. It challenges some of the harmful and limiting stereotypes that cast a shadow over our lives.

## Who was James Scott?

James Scott was born on 8th March, 1829 in Kirkstall, Leeds. His parents were Thomas, a machine maker, and Mary. The following year they took James to be baptised at Dewsbury All Saints Church. The couple had married there and it was just a few miles from Ossett where the family lived. They would later move to neighbouring Horbury, near Wakefield, Mary's birthplace.



Information about James and his family appears in the census and other official documents such as baptism and burial registers. James had two older brothers, John and Joseph, and two younger sisters, Jane and Agnes.

10	Clubhouses	Henry Caswell
		App do
11	Yorkny hill	Abraham Hemmings
		Elizabeth do
	One house was inhabited	
12	Horbury hill	Mary Scott
		John do
		James do
Total		
15		U D B

The family soon discovered that James was Deaf (later census returns say he was Deaf since childhood, or from birth). They were certainly not well-off, so when James was offered a place at the Yorkshire Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Doncaster in 1838, his place might have been supported by the parish of Ossett. The cost of a place at the school for a year was £20, although £14 of this was raised through donations and subscriptions. The other £6 was to be paid by parents - or their local parish.

James spent five years at the Doncaster school, where he would have been a boarder. He was fourteen when he left in 1843, and probably started work straight away. By the following decade, James had been working for some time in a mill in Horbury, where he lived for the rest of his life.

<del>Wife</del>	<del>Married</del>	<del>1/2</del>	<del>11</del>	Dr W. J.
<del>Man</del>	<del>Wife</del>	<del>1/2</del>	<del>11</del>	
Son	11	1/2	11	Cloth Miller
Son	20	1/2	11	Warehouseman
Total of Persons...		3	11	

# Describing Deaf and disabled people

The words used to describe disabled people in James's day are now outdated and offensive. We might find them unacceptable, but they can tell us something about how disabled people were viewed and treated in the past. These views continue to influence ideas about disabled people today.

In the 19th century, the term "deaf and dumb" was common. It was used to describe people who were deaf and who didn't use spoken language to communicate.

Whether blind or Deaf and Dumb
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The 1851 Census of England and Wales was the first to ask specifically whether someone was "blind or deaf-and-dumb", and this question was repeated in the next census. From 1871, the authorities also asked whether an individual was "imbecile or idiot" or "lunatic".

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There was a column for the census collectors to record information about disabled people, and often they would add whether a person was "deaf and dumb" since birth or childhood.

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Since then, terminology around disability has changed, along with attitudes - although the legacy of the past prevails. The disabled people's movement of the 20th century, as part of the fight for justice and equality, developed the social model of disability. This way of thinking explains that people are disabled by physical and attitudinal barriers in society, rather than by their individual conditions or impairments. "Disabled people" has therefore become the term preferred by many, while others choose to describe themselves in different ways, for example, to reflect their identity as neurodivergent people, or people with chronic illnesses.

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However disabled people define themselves, they firmly reject the negative terms that have been used in the past. Unfortunately, some offensive and demeaning terms keep resurfacing, so disabled people will continue to challenge their use and the intentions behind them. Reclaiming a word and using it in a different way can convert its harmful power. Thus the shortened word "crip" denotes pride, strength and solidarity for many disabled activists.

You can watch a video about the social model of disability on the Unlimited website:  
<https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/social-model-disability-animation/> . If you want to read more, search 'social model' on the site.



Today, the Deaf community uses the capitalised word "Deaf" to denote their strong cultural identity, part of a community whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

In describing James, I decided to honour this current description and use the word Deaf. Certainly, through his schooling, James would have been part of a community of Deaf people.

# James's education

The Yorkshire Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was established in 1829 as a school to educate young Deaf people so they would be able to support themselves as adults.

## MANUAL ALPHABET.

The Parents and Friends of the Pupils are requested to learn the Manual Alphabet and to converse with their children by its means, or by writing on a slate. Parents who can read will soon learn this Alphabet by practising it with their children. They will thus also improve themselves both in spelling and in reading, and will in time acquire rapidity as well as correctness of spelling.

In cases where the Parents can spell or write, they should inform their children of their names, trades, places of residence, &c. they should also inform them of the names of their brothers, sisters, and other relatives, as their uncles, aunts, cousins, grandfathers, &c.



and residences. It is also very desirable that during the holidays the children should be made to observe the different industrial occupations which are carried forward in the town or district to which they belong; and that they should be taught the names of machinery, tools, implements, &c. used in such trades as may thus be made familiar to them.

If Parents will attend to these directions they will help forward the progress of their children, and thus the names of many productions of trade and agriculture, and of many operations will be taught them which cannot be shown to them in school, and which it would be difficult to describe.

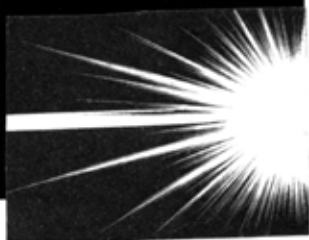
While James was at the Yorkshire Institution in the 1830s and 40s, the children were taught using the "silent" or "manual" method, where communication was based on signing and finger-spelling. There were a few Deaf teachers and assistants, some of whom had been pupils at the school. The institution's annual reports and other publications included illustrations showing the finger-spelled alphabet to encourage their supporters to use it to communicate. So James would have used sign language, at least at school.



From the 1870s, the school started experimenting with oralism, based on using the voice and lip-reading. In 1880, the infamous Milan Conference, the Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf, declared that sign language was inferior to oralism, and should be banned. This led to the widespread suppression of sign language in Deaf schools throughout the world, which stifled Deaf culture. In Britain, oralism became the law. The 1893 Elementary Education (Deaf and Blind Children) Act was based on the recommendations of the Milan Conference.



It took 100 years before this damage to Deaf people's education, development and culture was rectified. British Sign Language only officially became part of education provision for deaf pupils in the UK in the early 1990s.



## Victorian attitudes



James was alive during the Victorian era, a period of great social change and political reform. With this came an array of often contradictory attitudes about disability and disabled people.

There was a huge growth in institutions and charities for disabled people. The number of workhouses and asylums grew, and special schools, workshops and other schemes for disabled people were set up and supported by middle class philanthropists. James's school was one such organisation.

While many philanthropists were well-meaning, aiming to solve society's problems, they often imposed moral judgments. These influenced their view of disabled people.

On the one hand, disabled people were to be pitied for their suffering. If they bore their suffering without complaint, they were regarded as saints. On the other hand, disability was seen as a divine judgement or moral failing, to be feared and shunned.

Underlying these attitudes was a belief that disability was an individual, often medical, problem. This perspective endures to this day, as do Victorian attitudes of pity, fear and discomfort.

is accordingly  $\sqrt{12}$  and the base of the right-hand triangle is  $\sqrt{(2^2 - 1^2)}$ ; so the whole base area is  $(1 + \sqrt{3})/2$ . It is to distinguish a special case from a general one. A scalene triangle has 3 different sides and no line of symmetry (no rotational or point symmetry). **Point to ponder** Are the properties independent? Average number of points on a line segment is  $n = p(1) + (1-p)(n+1)$ . In a case where  $p = 1/4$ , so  $n = 4$ , the average number of points is  $4 \times (3/4) = 3$ . Chances it lasts at least 4 years are  $(3/4)^3 = 27/64 \approx 0.42$ .  $2^3 = 8$ .



No wonder we rarely come across stories of disabled lives well lived, of people getting on with their lives as part of their community, as James did. Instead, the prevailing narrative is of disabled people as dependent and needy, reliant on charity or on benefits, scroungers rather than contributing to society.



~~charity that can help~~

~~charity~~

## A hanker of worsteds

It was normal for children of working class families to go to work in the 19th century. The 1833 Factory Act had reduced the working hours of children, and raised the age at which they were allowed to work to nine years old. So at fourteen, James would have been a relatively late starter. His older brother John had been working in a mill for a few years as a cloth fuller (fulling was a process to clean and thicken cloth).

17	Ambling	John	14	21	21	Worsted packer
8	Stoddard	Mary	14	21	21	Worsted packer
	Stoddard	James	14	21	21	Worsted packer

In the 1851 census, James was a warehouseman. Over the years, his occupation was described in many ways: worsted packer, presser, or hanker. These were broadly similar - and strenuous - jobs, involving measuring and packaging lengths of fine worsted cloth into hanks of 560 yards' length.

17	Stoddard	Mary	14	21	21	Worsted packer
	Stoddard	John	14	21	21	Worsted packer
	Stoddard	James	14	21	21	Warehouseman
Total of Persons						7



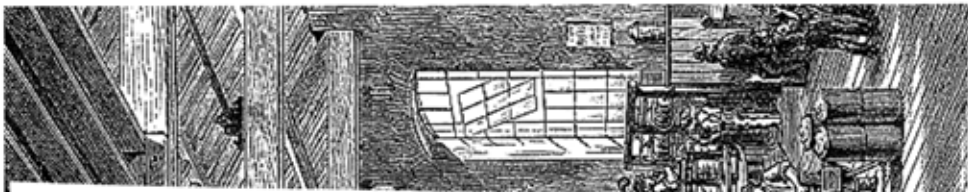
“I have much pleasure in replying to your inquiries respecting the conduct of James Scott, once an inmate of your Institution. He entered on my service on the 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1852, as a hanker of worsteds and general packer, at twelve shillings a week, and has been employed at the same wages ever since; prior to that time he had been employed by another firm in a similar manner, from whom he holds a handsome testimonial, and previous to that he had been in the employ of Messrs. Foster and Burrows upon the premises which I now occupy.

“I have inquired of his family this morning as to his general conduct at home, of which they speak very satisfactorily; a married sister, whom I saw, says that he carries his wages home very regularly to his mother with whom he lives, and that he is her main support. I believe also that his moral conduct is good. I cannot speak to his religious character, beyond that I see him occasionally at church, and there I see he understands the use of the prayer-book. He is very attentive to his work and very obliging.

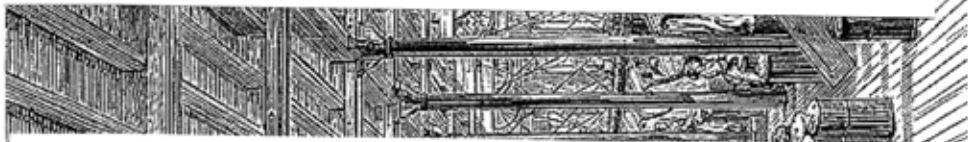
*Horbury, Wakefield, April 6, 1854.*

Richard Poppleton.”





A few years later, James's employer, Richard Poppleton, had cause to write a glowing report about James, "a hanker of worsteds and general packer" at Albert Mill. James's old school was gathering evidence to show that the education they provided was effective in turning out productive citizens. *The Results of an Inquiry Respecting the Former Pupils of the Yorkshire Institution for the Deaf and Dumb* was based on a survey sent out to employers and families of ex-pupils. First published in 1844, it was updated several times, including in 1854 when Richard Poppleton responded.



His statement, and the reports as a whole, are interesting because they give an insight into the lives of scores of Deaf workers across Yorkshire, who were employed and often thriving in a range of professions and industries. The responses, however, were not in the Deaf people's own words, so only give a partial and biased picture of their experiences. That the Institution didn't think to ask the Deaf workers for information, and the fact that one of the survey questions asked whether their conduct could be "approved of", reflects the paternalistic and patronising attitudes of the time.





The tone of Richard Poppleton's endorsement of James is consistent with these attitudes: benevolent yet condescending and a bit pompous. He doesn't approach James for information but instead asks his sister Jane's opinion. He comments on James's "moral conduct", even though he has no real basis for doing so.

JAMES SCOTT, Ossett, Wakefield.

"I have much pleasure in replying to your inquiries respecting the conduct of James Scott, once an inmate of your Institution. He entered on my service on the 28th June, 1852, as a hanker of worsteds and general packer, at twelve shillings a week, and he has been employed at the same wages ever since; prior to that time he had been employed by another firm in a similar manner, from whom he holds a handsome testimonial, and previous to that he had been in the employ of Messrs. Foster and Burrows upon the premises which I now occupy.

"I have inquired of his family this morning as to his general conduct at home, of which they speak very satisfactorily; a married sister, whom I saw, says that he carries his wages home very regularly to his mother with whom he lives, and that he is her main support. I believe also that his moral conduct is good. I cannot speak to his religious character, beyond that I see him occasionally at church, and there I see he understands the use of the prayer-book. He is very attentive to his work and very obliging.

*Horbury, Wakefield, April 6, 1854.*

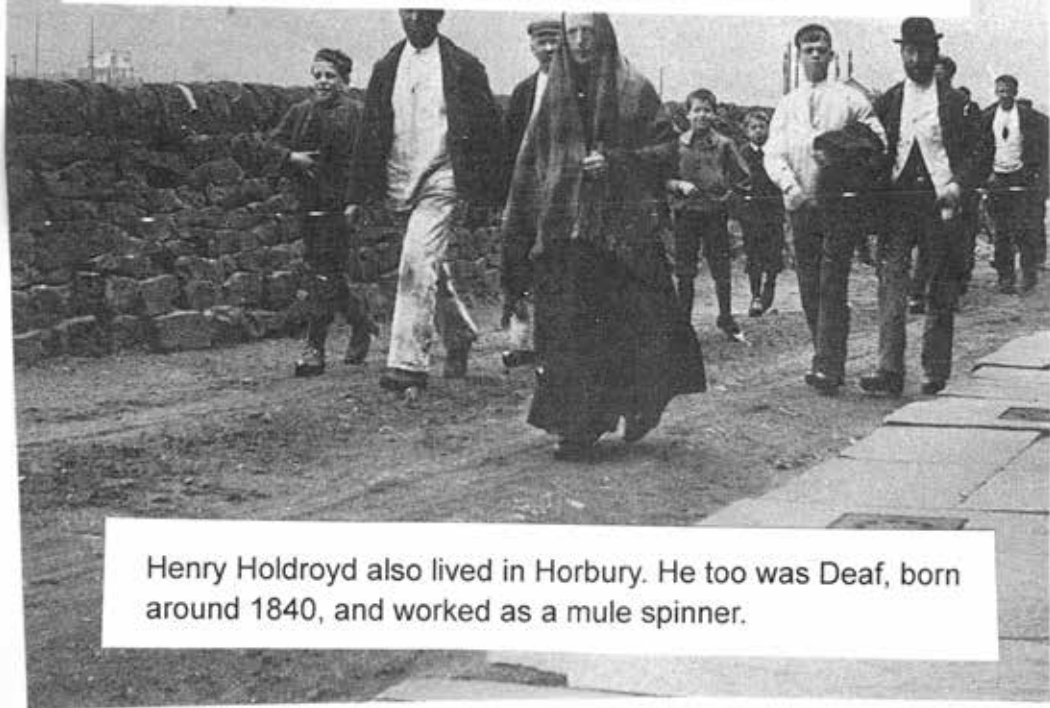
RICHARD POPPLETON."

However, we can learn something of James from this report. He was a reliable worker, "attentive" and "very obliging" who had also impressed his previous employer. He was far from being needy or dependent, in fact other people depended on him. He was the main wage earner in the household and supported both himself and his mother.

James was dedicated to his job. He continued to work in mill jobs for at least 30 years. It may be that he stayed working for the Poppleton family at Albert Mill in Horbury Bridge, in the worsted dyeing and spinning business.

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In the small town of Horbury, most of James's neighbours and many of his family were mill workers. In 1875 there were nine woollen manufacturers in Horbury, and at least six other businesses associated with the woollen industry. The population had grown from 2,609 in 1843 to almost 4,000 in 1875 to meet this industry's demands. James wouldn't have been the only disabled member of the textile workforce.



Henry Holdroyd also lived in Horbury. He too was Deaf, born around 1840, and worked as a mule spinner.

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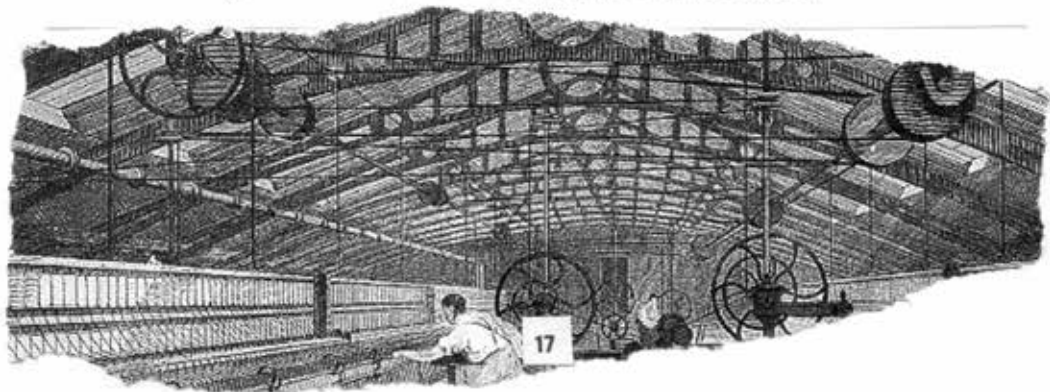
Another Horbury resident was Fanny Hemingway, a blind woollen feeder. She was 44 in 1851 with six children aged 12 to 24. All but the youngest worked in the woollen industry in some capacity.

## Other disabled mill workers

Workers like James, Henry and Fanny were not unusual. Disabled people's own accounts as well as government reports and investigations showed that disabled people were part of the workforce of the textile industry in the UK.

Industrial injury was a feature of early factory work. So there would have been a high proportion of workers who had some sort of impairment as a result. This wasn't necessarily equated with a lack of productivity, and many of these workers continued or returned to work. They were resilient, determined to avoid the even harsher conditions of the workhouse. Workhouses were run on the principle of "less eligibility", meaning that the standard of living there was lower than anywhere else.

Of course, there were people whose injuries meant that they were no longer able to work, and did go to the workhouse, or stayed at home supported by their family. But many other disabled people remained working in the mills, through sheer necessity - or because their experience was valued.

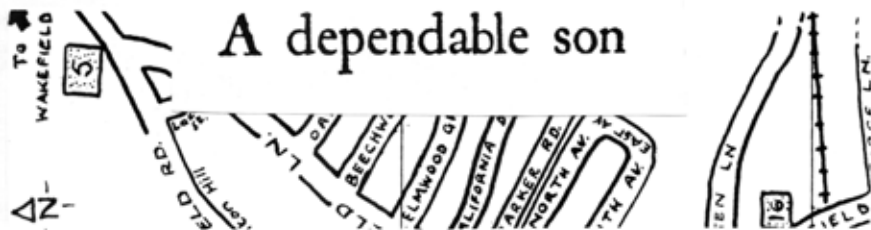


John Dawson of Leeds was one of many disabled mill workers who gave evidence to the Factories Inquiry Commission of 1833. He explained how he carried on working after becoming disabled:

I was hugging bobbins. I stopped at it two or three years: the pain and weakness growing worse all that time, and deformity evidently coming on: my father and mother both observed it: they did not make any application to the over-looker, or to the master, nor did I myself: I did not think so much about it then as I do now... My knees were quite bent at that time, as bad as ever they have been: I did not see any doctor about 'em until after we left Clayton's.

Other disabled people would have worked as well. There were some mill jobs that could be done sitting down, such as spinning yarn and twisting the ends of warp threads together. Other tasks were part time or temporary, away from the dangers of the machinery, such as clearing out the boilers or packing and moving lengths of cloth. Some disabled people might have been employed in these jobs, while others would have worked on the factory floor.

Many of James's schoolmates took up roles in mills across Yorkshire, including power loom weaver, wool comber, cloth finisher, bobbin winder, spinner, burler and pattern designer.



## A dependable son

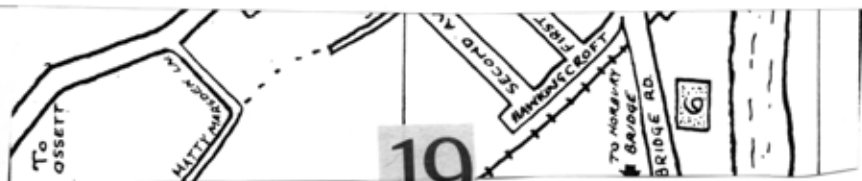
James never married, he carried on living with his mother, providing for her until she died. Mary didn't work. She'd been widowed shortly after her children were born. She came to depend on James and they lived at a few addresses within a small area of Horbury.



James was the only Deaf person in the family, and one of only two or three others in Horbury. This might have meant he was well known in the neighbourhood. Maybe some people, including colleagues at work, found ways to communicate with James. Mill workers often developed their own forms of sign language, because their workplaces were so noisy, so perhaps this helped with communication at work and at home.



Living in a small town, though, might have meant James was quite isolated as a Deaf person. Nearby Leeds was more of a hub for the developing Deaf community, so it's possible that James travelled to the city to meet up with other Deaf people, including old schoolmates.



# James's sister Agnes

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Scott Agnes. Weaver

Admitted 26<sup>th</sup> September 1880

Single. Church of England.

Age 44 months. Second a

medical treatment as

seen sense suppressed

not suicidal but

Scott Agnes. Weaver.

Name	Place (Present)	Date of Admission	Age	Sex	State of Mind	Discharge	Remarks
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
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28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
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32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
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36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36
37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38
39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39
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42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43
44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44
45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
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48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48
49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49
50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50



circumstances, namely  
 as by myself  
 & other facts  
 in relation to one  
 of her sisters  
 is with a knife  
 Dunn  
 & Street-Walpole

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James's youngest sister Agnes Scott was a weaver in Horbury. Her story is a reminder of the hold that Victorian institutions had over disabled people's lives.

In 1853, 21 year old Agnes was admitted to the West Riding Asylum, Wakefield, having been ill for over a year.

She remained there for the rest of her life, without much change in her condition until she got older, when she seemed to get more confused. She worked in the asylum laundry for many years. At first, she was described as industrious and orderly in her medical records, but prone to "outbursts of excitement". As the years passed, doctors used the word "demented" regularly, with "nothing fresh to note". A sense of exasperation with Agnes, now a large, rambling old woman, underlies the doctors' observations. Agnes died in 1902, aged 70. The 1901 census continued to list her last occupation:

*Weaver.*

So while James escaped incarceration, Agnes did not.

## Lighting the lamps

Eventually James ended up on his own, remaining unmarried. In later life he had the less demanding job of a lamplighter, although he would still have had to rise early to extinguish the lamps. And perhaps his role included being a 'knocker-up', tapping on the doors and windows of his neighbours to wake them up for work in the mills.

As an old man he lived in St Leonard's Hospital, Tithe Barn Street - not a hospital as we know it, but a small row of almshouses for older poor Horbury parishioners. James moved in sometime between 1901 and 1911.

There were four one-bedroom houses, with another dwelling behind for the parish nurse, on hand to look after the residents and help cook their food. Almshouses were the predecessor to sheltered housing, as the residents remained independent but support was available. James lived there rent free until he died in 1912, aged 83.





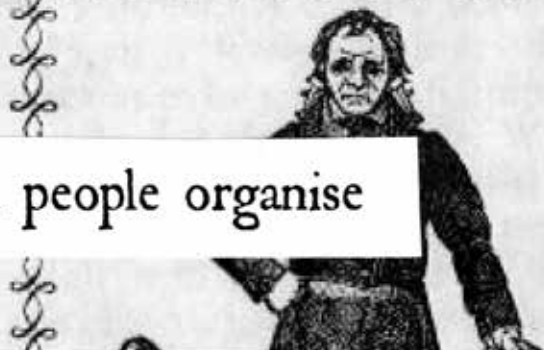
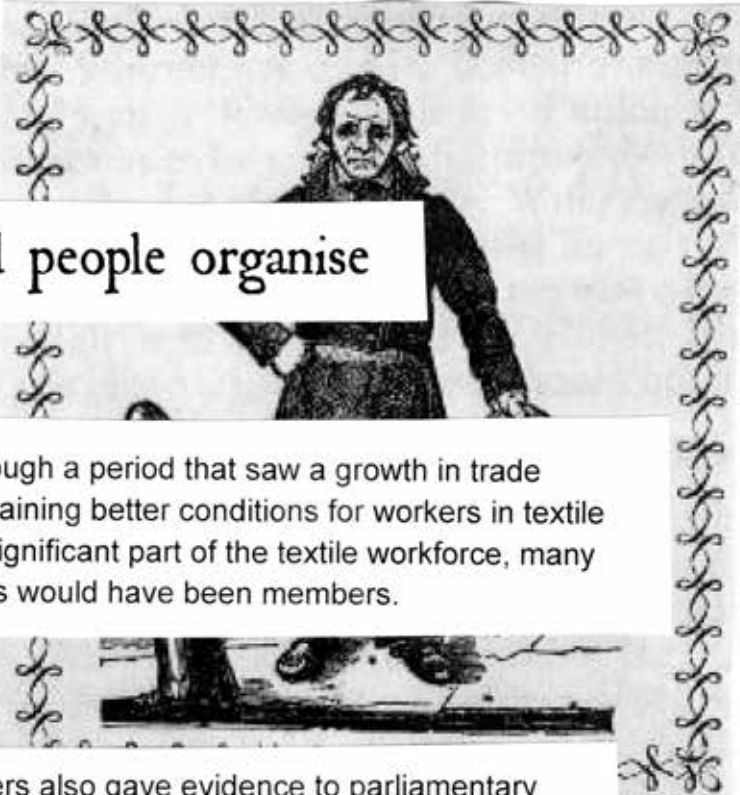
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Administrative County		Ward		The unshaded boxes on this sheet within the boundaries of the		Parish		Page	
Old Parish	Administrative County	Ward	Electoral Area	Electoral Area	Ward	Parish	Electoral Area	Ward	Page
St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
100	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
101	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
102	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
103	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
104	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
105	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
106	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
107	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
108	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
109	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
110	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
111	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
112	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
113	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
114	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
115	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
116	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
117	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
118	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
119	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew
120	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew	St. Andrew



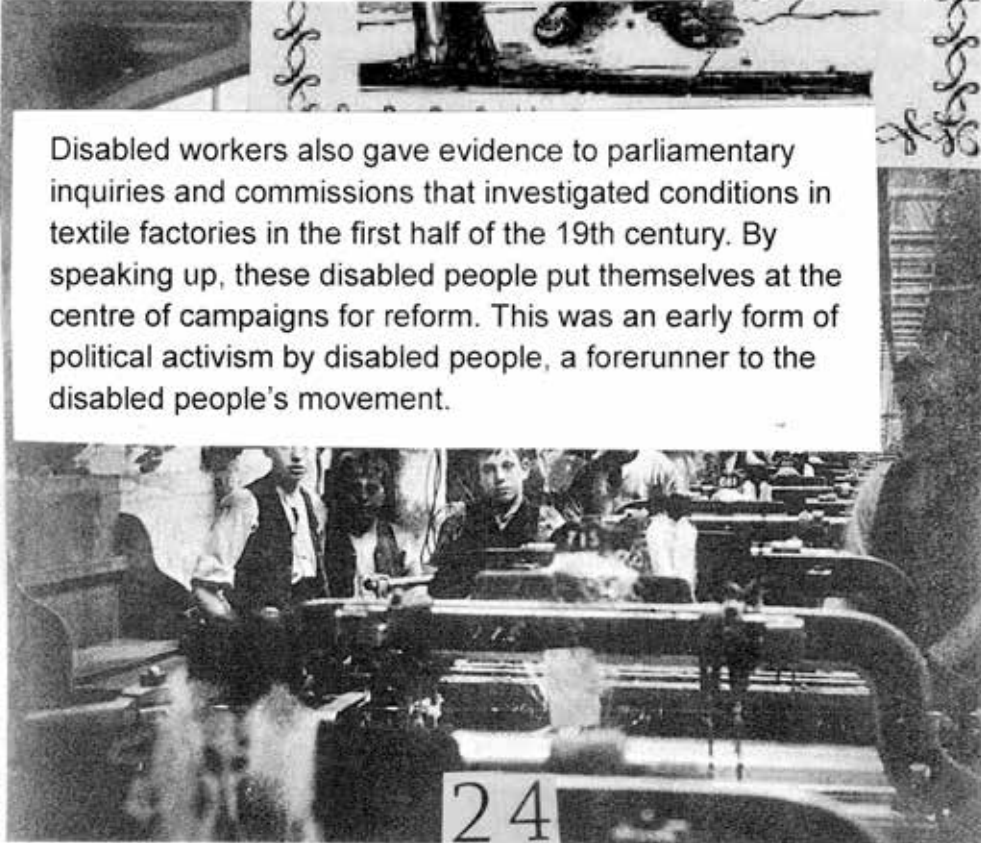
(For 2017)

BURIALS in the Parish of <i>St. Andrew</i>				
in the County of <i>York</i> in the Year 1912				
Date	Name	When Buried	Age	By whom the Burial was performed
1877	<i>Joseph Dallas</i>	<i>St. Andrew</i>	<i>Nov 2</i>	<i>73 yrs. H. A. Kinnear</i>
1877	<i>Henry Hunt</i>	<i>St. Andrew</i>	<i>Nov 6</i>	<i>73 years. By default.</i>
1877	<i>James Scott</i>	<i>St. Andrew</i>	<i>Nov 19</i>	<i>78 years. By default.</i>
1877	<i>John Burdett</i>	<i>St. Andrew</i>	<i>Nov 24</i>	<i>51 years. J. C. Denton, King's Cross Church</i>



## Disabled people organise

James lived through a period that saw a growth in trade unions, vital in gaining better conditions for workers in textile factories. As a significant part of the textile workforce, many disabled workers would have been members.



Disabled workers also gave evidence to parliamentary inquiries and commissions that investigated conditions in textile factories in the first half of the 19th century. By speaking up, these disabled people put themselves at the centre of campaigns for reform. This was an early form of political activism by disabled people, a forerunner to the disabled people's movement.

Deaf people's societies were established in cities around the country throughout the 19th century. In 1890 the British Deaf and Dumb Association was founded in response to the influence of the Milan Congress. This was the first disabled people's organisation in the UK, controlled by Deaf people themselves. It later became the British Deaf Association.

Closer to James's home, Wakefield Deaf and Dumb Society was established in 1901. It is now the Wakefield and District Society for Deaf People.

Around the same time, the National League of the Blind was founded, registering as a trade union in 1899. This radical disabled people's organisation marched on London in 1920 demanding "Justice Not Charity" for its members, setting itself against the many charities supposedly acting in disabled people's interests. A variation on the league's slogan, "Rights Not Charity", has become a rallying cry of the disabled people's movement, as relevant today as it was one hundred years ago.



It's fascinating to learn about the lives of the people who lived before us, imagining what their lives were like and putting ourselves in their position. But the stories of disabled people have been largely omitted from history, unless it is to portray disabled people as tragic victims, dependent on the goodwill of others, or as scroungers and benefit cheats.

As James Scott's story illustrates, this is not an accurate reflection of the variety and reality of disabled people's lives. Disabled people are resilient, reliable and valued members of communities. They take an active role in the world around them and work alongside others to bring about change.

Of course, work is not the only way to contribute. But in a society that values profit above all else, the ability to work has become an indicator of worth.

We need another narrative that recognises disabled people, whether part of the workforce or not, as equal citizens, to support our demands for justice, rights and respect.



## About the author

I am a disabled curator with a particular interest in the intersections of textiles - textile history as well as contemporary textile art - with disabled people's lives. I've organised a number of exhibitions and events that have textiles as the subject or that use textile materials. I first started researching the lives of disabled mill workers while preparing for an exhibition in Leeds called *Shoddy*, several years ago. I want to challenge stereotypes and to show that disabled people play a part in society, despite the barriers that society puts in our way. There are many more hidden stories of disabled people in the past, and the present, to be revealed.

*Gill Crawshaw*



Contact Gill at [gill.crawshaw@gmail.com](mailto:gill.crawshaw@gmail.com)

Instagram @gillcrawshaw



Thanks: Unlimited; Empath History Group; Horbury and  
Sittington History Group; Wakefield Libraries; Leeds Libraries;  
West Yorkshire Archive Service.



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This zine was made possible  
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