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# Disability in Herefordshire, 1851–1911

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## Abstract

*Disability history is a comparatively new field of study, and to date little use has been made of the British census as a source because of its perceived difficulties. This article shows that it is possible to study a local, disabled population in the second half of the nineteenth century from this source, even though the way in which individuals' disabilities are described can sometimes vary from one census to the next. Age distribution for each condition and was found to vary between those with congenital and those with acquired conditions. Among those with a handicap of sight, hearing or speech a higher proportion remained unmarried. Disabled people were likely to remain in the parental home until their late thirties, and when their parents died they moved in with siblings or became a lodger or inmate. Although few of the disabled children seemed to be receiving education, over 60 per cent of the adult males were found to be working and almost 25 per cent of the adult females. Disabled people, it appears, were viewed not merely as statistics, but were included as members of the local population, and not always dependent members.*

## Introduction

Tucked away in the General Report on the 1861 Census, which not many people read, is an account of a post-census survey set up to obtain more data about disabled people in the county of Herefordshire.<sup>1</sup> This article explores the nature and extent of disability in Herefordshire as revealed by the census reports and by the Census Enumerators' Books (CEBs). Previous published work on disability in the nineteenth century has either used literary sources in qualitative research or the annual reports of institutions or commissions for quantitative research.<sup>2</sup> There has been little previous quantitative work based on a local population and the place of disabled people within their community, apart from articles on Ceredigion and Derbyshire.<sup>3</sup> This article seeks to address that omission.

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- 1 1861 Census of England and Wales, *General report* [Vol. III.] BPP 1863 LIII (3221) 48–50, 63. This, and all subsequent references to the census reports, was accessed via the Histpop *Online Historical Population Reports*, URL: <http://www.histpop.org> [20 May 2011].
  - 2 M. W. Carpenter, *Health, medicine and society in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara, 2009); P. McDonagh, *Idiocy: a cultural history* (Liverpool, 2008); D. Wright and A. Digby, *From idiocy to mental deficiency: historical perspectives on people with learning disabilities* (London, 1996); A. Scull, *The most solitary of afflictions: madness and society in Britain, 1700–1900* (New Haven, 1993); K. Jones, *Asylums and after* (London, 1993); P. Bartlett, *The poor law of lunacy: the administration of pauper lunatics in mid nineteenth-century England* (London, 1999).
  - 3 E.A. Benjamin, 'Human afflictions: a study of the north Ceredigion census returns 1851–1871', *Ceredigion*, 10 (1985), 155–60; I. Gregory, 'The disabled in the nineteenth century', *Local History Magazine*, 45 (1994), 14–15; I. Gregory, 'The disabled in the Peak District', *Local History Magazine*, 51 (1995), 20–1.

## Disability in England and Wales, 1851–1911

In order to consider the extent of disability in Herefordshire it is necessary to view it in the national context. Table 1 shows the population of England and Wales at each census and the numbers and proportions enumerated with disabilities.

It can be seen that the proportion with loss of sight fell over the 60-year period, probably because of a reduction in the incidence of smallpox and improvements in surgical techniques for removing cataracts. The proportion with loss of hearing and speech decreased a little between 1861 and 1871, probably due to the introduction of mental disability as an additional category, and then rose dramatically in 1911 because of the change in classification to include those with hearing loss but without loss of speech. Throughout this article all those suffering loss of mental ability, variously described by contemporaries as ‘idiots, imbeciles or feeble-minded, and lunatics’, but without clear definitions, will be tabulated together. Indeed the 1891 and 1901 reports did not attempt to distinguish between them. Scull attributes the steady rise in the

**Table 1** The population of England and Wales and the numbers and proportions with disabilities

| Year | Population | Loss of sight |      | Loss of hearing and/or speech |      | Loss of mental ability |      |
|------|------------|---------------|------|-------------------------------|------|------------------------|------|
|      |            | N             | %    | N                             | %    | N                      | %    |
| 1851 | 17,927,609 | 18,306        | 0.10 | 10,314                        | 0.06 | N/A                    | N/A  |
| 1861 | 20,228,497 | 19,352        | 0.10 | 12,236                        | 0.06 | N/A                    | N/A  |
| 1871 | 22,712,266 | 21,590        | 0.10 | 11,518                        | 0.05 | 69,019                 | 0.30 |
| 1881 | 25,974,439 | 22,832        | 0.09 | 13,295                        | 0.05 | 84,503                 | 0.33 |
| 1891 | 29,002,525 | 23,467        | 0.08 | 14,192                        | 0.05 | 97,383                 | 0.34 |
| 1901 | 32,526,075 | 25,317        | 0.08 | 15,246                        | 0.05 | 132,654                | 0.41 |
| 1911 | 36,070,492 | 26,336        | 0.07 | 41,771                        | 0.12 | 161,993                | 0.45 |

- Sources:** 1851 Census of Great Britain, *Population Tables, II. Ages, civil conditions, occupations and birth-place of the people with the numbers and ages of the blind, the deaf-and-dumb, and the inmates of workhouses, prisons, lunatic asylums, and hospitals*. Vol. I. BPP 1852–53 LXXXVIII Pt [1691.I.] ccci.
- 1861 Census of England and Wales, *Population tables. Ages, civil condition, occupations, and birth-places of people: with the ages and occupations of the blind, of the deaf-and-dumb, and of the inmates of certain public institutions*. BPP 1863 III (3221) xciv.
- 1871 Census of England and Wales, *General report*. Vol. IV BPP 1873 LXXI Pt [C.872-I] 143–4, 146–7
- 1881 Census of England and Wales, *Vol. III. Ages, condition as to marriage, occupations and birth-places of the people* BPP 1883 LXXX [C.3722] xlvi.
- 1891 Census of England and Wales, *Ages, condition as to marriage, occupations, birth-places and infirmities*. Vol. III BPP 1893–4 CVI [C.7058] lviii.
- 1901 Census of England and Wales, *Summary tables. Area, houses and population; also population classified by ages, condition as to marriage, occupations, birthplaces and infirmities* BPP 1903 LXXXIV [Cd.1523] 284.
- 1911 Census of England and Wales, *Vol. XI. Infirmities. Persons returned as totally blind, totally deaf, deaf and dumb, lunatic, imbecile and feeble minded* BPP 1913 LXXIX [Cd.7020] 2.

proportion of the population with loss of mental ability to the increasing provision of asylums.<sup>4</sup>

### Disability at county level

The census reports included ‘league tables’ of counties for the various disabilities enumerated and Herefordshire was consistently at the top of the table, though the reasons for this remain unclear. Table 2 shows the population of Herefordshire at each census and the numbers and proportions enumerated with disabilities.

It will be noted that the population of Herefordshire fell after 1881, suggesting out migration from the county. Comparing Table 1 and Table 2 it will be seen that the proportion of people suffering loss of sight was consistently above that for England and Wales; that the proportion of people suffering loss of hearing and/or speech showed a

**Table 2 The population of Herefordshire and the numbers and proportions with disabilities**

| Year | Population | Loss of sight |      | Loss of hearing and/or speech |      | Loss of mental ability |      |
|------|------------|---------------|------|-------------------------------|------|------------------------|------|
|      |            | N             | %    | N                             | %    | N                      | %    |
| 1851 | 99,120     | 149           | 0.15 | 94                            | 0.09 | n/a                    | n/a  |
| 1861 | 106,796    | 154           | 0.14 | 107                           | 0.10 | n/a                    | n/a  |
| 1871 | 118,723    | 157           | 0.13 | 72                            | 0.06 | 315                    | 0.27 |
| 1881 | 118,147    | 145           | 0.12 | 76                            | 0.06 | 549                    | 0.46 |
| 1891 | 113,346    | 124           | 0.11 | 73                            | 0.06 | 566                    | 0.50 |
| 1901 | 112,549    | 105           | 0.09 | 51                            | 0.05 | 595                    | 0.53 |
| 1911 | 114,269    | 137           | 0.12 | 56                            | 0.05 | 748                    | 0.65 |

**Sources:** 1851 Census of Great Britain, *Population Tables, II. Ages, civil conditions, occupations and birth-place of the people with the numbers and ages of the blind, the deaf-and-dumb, and the inmates of workhouses, prisons, lunatic asylums, and hospitals*. Vol. I. BPP 1852–53 LXXXVIII Pt [1691.1] 527.

1861 Census of England and Wales, *Population tables. Ages, civil condition, occupations, and birth-places of people: with the ages and occupations of the blind, of the deaf-and-dumb, and of the inmates of certain public institutions*. BPP 1863 LIII (3221) 535.

1871 Census of England and Wales, *General report*. Vol. IV BPP 1873 LXXI Pt [C.872-I] 143–4, 146–7.

1881 Census of England and Wales, *Vol. III. Ages, condition as to marriage, occupations and birth-places of the people* BPP 1883 LXXX [C.3722] xlvii.

1891 Census of England and Wales, *Ages, condition as to marriage, occupations, birth-places and infirmities*. Vol. III BPP 1893–4 CVI [C.7058] lviii.

1901 Census of England and Wales, *Summary tables. Area, houses and population; also population classified by ages, condition as to marriage, occupations, birthplaces and infirmities* BPP 1903 LXXXIV [Cd.1523] 285.

1911 Census of England and Wales, *Vol. XI. Infirmities. Persons returned as totally blind, totally deaf, deaf and dumb, lunatic, imbecile and feeble minded* BPP 1913 LXXIX [Cd.7020] 17.

<sup>4</sup> Scull, *The most solitary of afflictions*, 334–74.

similar decrease in 1871 when loss of mental ability became a category of enumeration; and that loss of mental ability, while in 1871 below the level for England and Wales, increased rapidly in subsequent years.

Information on mental disabilities was not sought in either 1851 or 1861, but 'lunatic' was a category within the occupational classifications. In 1851 there were 3,421 males and 4,528 females defined as lunatics in England and Wales.<sup>5</sup> In Herefordshire the numbers of lunatics were 29 males and 89 females.<sup>6</sup> In 1861 the number of lunatics enumerated as a category of occupation in England and Wales was 2,339 males and 6,302 females.<sup>7</sup> However, in Herefordshire there were only two males and four females.<sup>8</sup> This sudden decrease would seem to be an artefact of the enumeration process, which was interested in occupation rather than lunacy.

The 1871 census was the first to require information on mental disabilities, under the categories of 'idiot, imbecile or lunatic'. It was suspected that there was considerable under-reporting of mental disability, particularly on the part of parents of young children. The presence of large institutions for the care of people with mental disabilities distorted the geographic distribution. In the 1901 census the term 'feeble-minded' was substituted for 'idiot', but it was found that a large number of persons who would previously have been returned as imbecile or lunatic were also being described as feeble-minded.<sup>9</sup> Whereas the proportions of the population enumerated as blind and deaf-and-dumb continued to fall, the proportion enumerated as insane rose. It was admitted that the change from 'idiot' to 'feeble-minded' had probably resulted in a more correct enumeration of those with a loss of mental ability, but that a considerable proportion of the elderly returned as feeble-minded were suffering from senile debility rather than insanity. In the 1911 census there were further changes to the disability question. The information required was on those 'totally deaf', 'deaf-and-dumb', 'totally blind', 'lunatic', 'imbecile', 'feeble-minded' and the age of onset. This was the last year until 1981 that questions were asked in the census about disability.<sup>10</sup>

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5 1851 Census of Great Britain, *Population Tables, II. Ages, civil conditions, occupations and birth-place of the people with the numbers and ages of the blind, the deaf-and-dumb, and the inmates of workhouses, prisons, lunatic asylums, and hospitals*. Vol. I. BPP 1852–53 LXXXVIII Pt [1691.I] ccxxv and ccxxvii.

6 1851 Census of Great Britain, *Population Tables, II. Ages, civil conditions, occupations and birth-place of the people with the numbers and ages of the blind, the deaf-and-dumb, and the inmates of workhouses, prisons, lunatic asylums, and hospitals*. Vol. I. BPP 1852–53 LXXXVIII Pt [1691.I] 453 and 455.

7 1861 Census of England and Wales, *Population tables. Ages, civil condition, occupations, and birth-places of people: with the ages and occupations of the blind, of the deaf-and-dumb, and of the inmates of certain public institutions*. BPP 1863 LIII (3221) lvi and lxx.

8 1861 Census of England and Wales, *Population tables. Ages, civil condition, occupations, and birth-places of people: with the ages and occupations of the blind, of the deaf-and-dumb, and of the inmates of certain public institutions*. BPP 1863 LIII (3221) 462 and 465.

9 1901 Census of England and Wales, *General report, with appendices*. BPP 1904 CVIII [Cd.2174] 155.

10 ESRC, *Census.ac.uk* <URL:[https://www.census.ac.uk/Documents/CensusForms/1981\\_England\\_Household.pdf](https://www.census.ac.uk/Documents/CensusForms/1981_England_Household.pdf)> [20 May 2011]. This only relates to persons aged 16 and over, to account for why they were not in employment or seeking work.

### The post-census survey

It had been noted in the report following the 1851 census that there was a high incidence of disability in Herefordshire.<sup>11</sup> When the high proportions of people with disabilities in Herefordshire were revealed again in 1861 George Graham, the Registrar General, William Farr and James Hammick determined to seek more information.<sup>12</sup> They sent survey forms to the clergy of each parish in which they had identified a blind person and received responses for 131 out of 154 cases, the remainder having died or moved away since the census. The survey requested information on whether blindness was congenital or acquired, and if the latter to what accident or disease the infirmity was attributed, whether other members of the family were similarly afflicted, whether the individual had received instruction in an institution or assistance from a charity, and to what extent they were able to support themselves by trade or occupation. Similarly they sent survey forms to the clergy of each parish where the 107 deaf-and-dumb people had been enumerated requesting information on whether the condition was congenital or acquired, what causal factors were involved, the age at onset for acquired conditions, whether other family members were similarly afflicted, whether the person was educated and whether married, if married how many children they had and whether they were afflicted, whether they were able to support themselves and what occupation they followed. Information was obtained for almost all the 107 individuals. However, they deemed the answers to some of the questions unreliable.<sup>13</sup>

From the responses by the clergy it was discovered that ten out of the 131 (seven males and three females) were born blind. Of those with acquired blindness, 25 were attributed to inflammation, two to scrofula, six to cataracts, two to amaurosis (loss of vision due to interruption of blood supply), and 40 to other forms of disease. Only one was attributed to smallpox. In addition 18 were attributed to old age, one to poor hygiene, or as the report put it ‘neglect of ablutions combined with the effects of wood smoke in a badly ventilated cottage’. Accidents accounted for 25 cases, including one due to lightning.<sup>14</sup> A footnote gives further details of seven of these accidents. Of 109 who became blind, 40 did so before the age of 20, 43 did so between the ages of 20 and 65, and 26 at ages over 65. The enquiry revealed evidence of familial tendencies among both congenital and acquired blindness. Two of the males born blind were brothers. Among the individuals with non-congenital blindness there were many instances of blindness among other family members, but it is not clear from the report how many of these were enumerated in the census, since most refer to previous generations. None of the principal institutions for the instruction of the

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11 1851 Census of Great Britain, *Population Tables, II. Ages, civil conditions, occupations and birth-place of the people with the numbers and ages of the blind, the deaf-and-dumb, and the inmates of workhouses, prisons, lunatic asylums, and hospitals*. Vol. I. BPP 1852–53 LXXXVIII Pt [1691.I] cx.

12 1861 Census of England and Wales, *General report* [Vol. III.] BPP 1863 LIII (3221) 48–50, 63–65.

13 1861 Census of England and Wales, *General report* [Vol. III.] BPP 1863 LIII (3221) 63–4.

14 Lack of full information on all cases means that the figures do not sum to 131.

blind were located in Herefordshire. Only 12 of the 131 had received instruction in institutions, but the authors of the report were gratified to find that nearly all of these were able to support themselves by the skills learnt. However, the majority of blind people were forced to take refuge in the workhouse or obtain outdoor relief from the parish. They compiled a table of means of support by sex and age group which showed only 21 out of 129 even partially supporting themselves. Of these, 16 were in the 20 to 59 age band. Two were serving as organists. Those aged 60 and over who were unable to support themselves had a range of sources of income in addition to parish relief not available to younger sufferers in the form of annuities from charities, pensions from former employers or the army, and almshouse accommodation.

Of the people who were deaf-and-dumb, 66 (34 males and 32 females) had congenital conditions and 23 (12 males and 11 females) acquired conditions. Superstitions, such as 'fright or morbid impressions acting on the mind of the mother during pregnancy', were reported by the parents of 20 congenital deaf-mutes to explain their condition. Acquired conditions were known to be due to infections affecting the organs of hearing and to diseases or accidents affecting the brain and nervous system. In none of these cases were other family members mentioned as being afflicted. Most of these occurred in infancy and all before the age of seven. Of the 66 born deaf 27 were known to have deaf-and-dumb relatives. In one case three out of six children were deaf-and-dumb. Only 19 out of 94 deaf-mutes had been educated. Of the 57 aged 20 years and over, four men and two women were married, five of the six having produced children, none of whom were deaf-mute.<sup>15</sup> Among the 94 deaf-mutes, 29 were children, 30 were adults wholly or partially able to maintain themselves, 13 were adults supported by relatives and ten were paupers.

While grateful for the additional information provided by the clergy, the census authorities did not feel justified in extending the survey to other areas of the country or repeating it after subsequent censuses.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Census Enumerators' Books**

Few studies of disability have been based on the CEBs, partly because of the reputed unreliability of the reporting of disability, but also because of the sparse number of entries and the difficulty of locating the individuals concerned.<sup>17</sup> Obtaining information about disabled people from the CEBs in the days when that meant winding through reels of microfilm to extract the very small numbers inhibited further research into disability. Now that the images of the CEBs are available online it would be easier to locate disabled

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15 The high proportion of deaf-mutes unmarried could have been because they had an undeclared mental impairment.

16 1861 Census of England and Wales, *General report* [Vol. III.] BPP 1863 LIII (3221) 64.

17 D. Mills and K. Schürer eds, *Local Communities in the Victorian Census Enumerators' Books* (Oxford, 1996), 9.

individuals, except that none of the commercial websites have indexed the books by disability.<sup>18</sup> It is only possible to search by name or by address.<sup>19</sup>

An alternative is to use the digitised version of the 1881 Census available from the UK Data Archive.<sup>20</sup> Researchers need to be aware that these are large files. When imported into Access the 121,095 records for Herefordshire are fully searchable on any combination of 33 fields including handicap and occupation. The 521 individuals with a recorded handicap were extracted. The occupation field was also searched for people who did not have a recorded handicap. A further 41 individuals were identified as having a disability that was preventing them working. Words such as 'bedridden', 'cripple', 'ill', 'infirm', 'invalid', and 'paralyzed' were used. In some institutions only initials rather than full names were given, making nominal record linkage virtually impossible. The City and County Lunatic Asylum was situated in the parish of Burghill and had 359 inmates.<sup>21</sup> No attempt was made to extract information on the institutional population because without accurate ages, birthplaces, occupations and details of other family members it is very difficult indeed to achieve reliable nominal record linkage.

For these 562 people a listing was prepared of their personal name, surname, age, marital condition, handicap, parish of enumeration and parish and county of birth. This included 163 idiots and imbeciles and 11 lunatics who were living in private households. All those aged 21 years or over were sought in the version of the 1861 census available from FindMyPast. This provided the 'key' to searching the other folios in each of the pieces for Herefordshire.<sup>22</sup> Using this method all 154 people who were enumerated as blind in the report, together with two who had only one eye, were traced. Eighty-three people who were deaf-and-dumb were traced and a further 14 people who were only enumerated as dumb. This is ten fewer than the number given in the report. These are accounted for by the ten who were enumerated as deaf from birth. The census authorities were not interested in those who had acquired a hearing disability, even in one case where it had been present for 30 out of the person's 58 years. A total of 201 people reported some degree of deafness. Although in 1861 no other disabilities apart from those blind or deaf-and-dumb were meant to be enumerated, ten people were enumerated with varying terms

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18 Current examples are <http://www.ancestry.co.uk>, <http://www.1901censusonline.com>, <http://www.1911census.co.uk>, <http://www.ukcensusonline.com>, <http://www.britishorigins.com> <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>

19 FreeCen, *UK Census online*, [2009–] ?URL: <http://www.freecen.org.uk>> [20 May 2011] appears to allow a search by year, county of enumeration and a tick box for disabled without requiring name or other identifiers, but came up with 'Sorry, we found no matches'.

20 K. Schürer and M. Woollard, *1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man (Enhanced Version)* [computer file]. Genealogical Society of Utah, Federation of Family History Societies, [original data producer(s)]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], November 2000. SN: 4177.

21 1881 Census of England and Wales, *Vol. II. Area, houses, and population. Registration counties BPP 1883 LXXIX [C.3563]* 363.

22 The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA) RG9/1808 through to RG9/1833.

**Table 3** Age distribution of people in Herefordshire in 1861 enumerated with blindness

| Age range         | Congenital blindness | Acquired blindness | Undefined blindness | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------|
| 0–9 years         | 7                    | 1                  | 5                   | 13    |
| 10–19 years       | 2                    | 0                  | 6                   | 8     |
| 20–29 years       | 0                    | 0                  | 9                   | 9     |
| 30–39 years       | 1                    | 3                  | 9                   | 13    |
| 40–49 years       | 2                    | 0                  | 13                  | 15    |
| 50–59 years       | 2                    | 0                  | 17                  | 19    |
| 60–69 years       | 2                    | 6                  | 20                  | 28    |
| 70–79 years       | 0                    | 2                  | 23                  | 25    |
| 80 years and over | 0                    | 3                  | 21                  | 24    |
| Total             | 16                   | 15                 | 123                 | 154   |

**Sources:** TNA CEBs RG9/1808 to RG9/1833.

indicating mental disability and three people were enumerated as ‘cripple’. In a further six cases the disability column was blank but the occupation column included a disability, such as ‘infirm through fits’, ‘invalid from birth’, ‘insane’, ‘idiot receiving parish relief’, ‘unable for work’.

The age distribution of those with visual handicaps was examined in three groups: those stated to be blind from birth, those stated to have acquired blindness, and those merely enumerated as blind without further details. Table 3 presents these findings.

Congenital blindness was most prevalent in children under ten years of age. In fact these children were all under six years of age and only one was subsequently found in the 1881 census. The total number of people suffering from blindness increased in each group from the age of ten years and it is likely that in most cases blindness was acquired rather than congenital, though the number of people stating that their blindness was acquired does not follow a consistent pattern. Just three of the people with acquired blindness had suffered an accident. The remaining 12 did not state the cause.

The age distribution of those with handicaps of hearing and/or speech was examined in five categories: those who were deaf-and-dumb, those dumb only, those deaf from birth, those with acquired deafness and those merely enumerated as deaf without further details. Table 4 presents these findings.

Only two of the children with a hearing or speech impediment were under five years of age, demonstrating either the difficulty of confirming this disability in very young children, or the reluctance of parents to admit to it. Either the incidence of this type of congenital abnormality had risen sharply in the past 40 years or few sufferers survived beyond the age of 40. Most of the undefined deafness, since it was not associated with lack of speech, would be acquired. It is noticeable that the incidence of this form of deafness increases with age. Thus, when these different forms of handicap are aggregated in the ‘Total’ column, there is no clear age pattern.



## Disability in Herefordshire, 1851–1911

**Table 4** Age distribution of people in Herefordshire in 1861 enumerated with disabilities of speech and hearing

| Age range   | Deaf and dumb | Dumb only | Deaf from birth | Acquired deafness | Undefined deafness | Total |
|-------------|---------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------|
| 0–9 years   | 9             | 5         | 1               | 0                 | 1                  | 16    |
| 10–19 years | 19            | 3         | 3               | 0                 | 8                  | 33    |
| 20–29 years | 18            | 3         | 2               | 0                 | 12                 | 35    |
| 30–39 years | 18            | 1         | 0               | 1                 | 10                 | 30    |
| 40–49 years | 8             | 2         | 0               | 0                 | 15                 | 25    |
| 50–59 years | 6             | 0         | 1               | 2                 | 16                 | 25    |
| 60–69 years | 4             | 0         | 2               | 0                 | 17                 | 23    |
| 70–79 years | 0             | 0         | 0               | 1                 | 15                 | 16    |
| 80 years +  | 1             | 0         | 2               | 0                 | 8                  | 11    |
| Total       | 83            | 14        | 11              | 4                 | 102                | 214   |

**Sources:** TNA CEBs RG9/1808 to RG9/1833.

Of the 297 individuals aged 20 years and over, 143 were unmarried (48 per cent), 88 were married (30 per cent), 64 were widowed (22 per cent) while the marital condition of the remaining two was unknown.<sup>23</sup> When the marital condition of the whole adult population of Herefordshire in 1881 was examined it was found that 28 per cent were unmarried, 60.5 per cent were married and 11.5 per cent were widowed. Thus among those with a handicap of sight, hearing or speech a higher proportion remained unmarried and, because of their age distribution, a higher proportion of those ever-married were already widowed.

Table 5 compares the relationship to the head of the household of the disabled individuals in 1861 with the whole adult population of Herefordshire in 1881. It shows that the proportion who were heads of household or the spouse of the head was slightly reduced, the proportion who were offspring of the head was reduced by about a quarter, while the proportions who were siblings or parents of the head were both five times higher. There was no change in the proportion of more distant relatives. The proportion of boarders or lodgers was three times higher, while the proportion of employees was about three times lower. The proportion of visitors was unchanged. Some of these changes are a result of the age distribution of the disabled group. As was noted earlier, only the deaf-and-dumb were predominantly under 40 years of age. This would partially account for the reduced proportion of children of the head and for the increased proportion of parents of the head. It is to be expected that the proportion of co-resident employees would also be reduced. The younger adult disabled were either living with their siblings or were lodgers or boarders. Few of them found residence with more distant kin.

<sup>23</sup> One person was blind and deaf.

**Table 5 Comparison of relationships to head of household of disabled people in Herefordshire in 1861 with population of the county in 1881**

| Relationship   | Disabled 1861 |        | Herefordshire 1861 |        |
|----------------|---------------|--------|--------------------|--------|
|                | N             | %      | N                  | %      |
| Head/spouse    | 127           | 32.98  | 43,486             | 35.91  |
| Child          | 116           | 30.13  | 49,803             | 41.12  |
| Sibling        | 22            | 5.71   | 1,382              | 1.14   |
| Parent         | 19            | 4.94   | 1,115              | 0.92   |
| Relative       | 16            | 4.16   | 5,082              | 4.20   |
| Boarder/lodger | 49            | 12.73  | 5,065              | 4.18   |
| Employee       | 10            | 2.60   | 9,801              | 8.09   |
| Visitor        | 5             | 1.30   | 1,471              | 1.21   |
| Inmate         | 16            | 4.16   | 1,413              | 1.17   |
| Unknown        | 5             | 1.30   | 2,478              | 2.05   |
| Totals         | 385           | 100.00 | 121,096            | 100.00 |

**Sources:** TNA CEBs RG9/1808 to RG9/1833 and RG11/2526 to RG11/5473.

**Table 6 Proportions of co-resident offspring of the head of household by age group**

| Age range   | Disabled offspring of head 1861 | All offspring of head 1881 |
|-------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
|             | %                               | %                          |
| 0–9 years   | 24.14                           | 48.87                      |
| 10–19 years | 29.31                           | 35.65                      |
| 20–29 years | 19.83                           | 11.08                      |
| 30–39 years | 21.55                           | 3.13                       |
| 40 years +  | 5.17                            | 1.26                       |
| Total       | 100.00 [n = 116]                | 100.00 [n = 47,053]        |

**Sources:** TNA CEBs RG9/1808 to RG9/1833 and RG11/2526 to RG11/5473.

Table 6 compares the age distribution of the disabled co-resident offspring in 1861 with the age distribution of all the offspring of the head in 1881, showing the percentage of the total co-resident offspring in each age range. Normal offspring began leaving home between the ages of 10 and 19 years, and most had left home by the age of 30.<sup>24</sup> Disabled offspring were more likely to remain in the parental home until their late thirties, by which time many of their parents would have died and they moved in with siblings, or became a lodger or boarder.

Only one of the blind and three of the deaf children were described as scholars; for most of the other disabled children the occupation field was left blank. Of the 16 blind from

24 R. Wall, 'The age at leaving home', *Journal of Family History*, 3 (1978), 181–202; R. Wall, 'Leaving home and the process of household formation in pre-industrial England', *Continuity and Change*, 2 (1987), 77–101; R. Wall, 'Leaving home and living alone: an historical perspective', *Population Studies*, 43 (1989), 369–89.

birth, one adolescent was a laundress and one adult male was a basket maker; the others had no occupation. Of the 15 with acquired blindness who were still working, one was an organist and two were labourers; four more gave former occupations, as agricultural labourers, a domestic servant and a tiler; the remaining eight people did not state an occupation. Among the 123 whose blindness was unspecified 33 were working, and in a variety of occupations. Some of these were the occupations associated with blindness, such as basket and mat making, and an organist. Others, who may have acquired their blindness gradually, were still working in a wide range of occupations: agricultural labourers, butcher's assistant, carriers and hauliers, cordwainers and shoemakers, farmers, general servant, hairdresser, innkeepers and publicans, ironmonger, labourers, miller, nailmaker, seamstress, shopkeeper and wheelwright. However, 86 had either given up work, or never had an occupation. Among these were two Chelsea Pensioners, a former agricultural labourer, an auctioneer, a carpenter, a farmer, a 'gloveress', a monthly nurse, a pedlar, a plumber, a servant and a washerwoman. Others in this category were landed proprietors, fund and share holders, proprietors of lead mines, and those receiving parochial relief. Some might not have declared an occupation even had they been fully sighted, such as the family members of farmers, the thatcher's widow and the wife of a vicar; 31 of the 40 for whom the occupation field was blank were women. Of the remaining nine males, three were aged less than ten years and two were aged over 70.

Being deaf-and-dumb did not necessarily preclude working, and appears to have been less of a barrier to employment than were visual handicaps. Among the occupations undertaken were agricultural labourer, artist, baker's assistant, billiard marker, blacksmith, carpenter, carter, dressmaker, farmer, 'gloveress', groom, kitchen maid, labourer at flour mill, limestone quarryman, mason, railway labourer, riddle and sieve maker, seamstress, shoemaker, tailor and timber sawer (sic). However, of the 97 who were dumb 57 had no occupation, but 34 of these were female and might not have declared an occupation even if they had not had a disability. Of the 23 males, seven were aged less than ten years but the remainder would normally have been employed. Those deaf from birth, but without a declared speech impediment, were working as agricultural labourers or general labourers, a servant, a shoemaker and a tailor. There was also a Chelsea Pensioner. Those without occupation were either aged under 13 or female. Those whose deafness was stated to be acquired worked as an agricultural labourer and as a washerwoman, while another (aged 78) had previously worked as a charwoman. The fourth was defined by her husband's occupation. Those whose duration of deafness was unspecified followed a variety of occupations, including agricultural labourer, bookbinder and maker, builder, butcher, carpenter, currier, domestic servant, dressmaker, garden woman, general labourer, grocer, hurdle maker, laundress, lodge keeper, mason, miller, nurseryman, porter, rag gatherer, seamstress, shepherd, shoemaker, stone breaker, tailor and woodman. Others, whose ages ranged from 59 to 83, declared former occupations as brickmaker, farmer, shoemaker, soldier and upholsterer. Of the 35 without recorded occupations, 31

were women who might not have had an occupation recorded even if their hearing had been normal. Only four deaf males were without recorded current or former occupations. One of these was aged 11 and another was a 62-year-old invalid.

Turning to those with other disabilities, of those with loss of mental ability, five were male and seven were female. They ranged in age from nine years to 78, with the majority being over 30. All were unmarried. One was a son, two were daughters, two were brothers of the head of the household, one was a granddaughter, one was a nephew, two were sisters-in-law, one was a lodger and two were inmates of a workhouse. Only one was an agricultural labourer, the rest having no recorded occupation, although the females might not have had an occupation recorded even if they had not had mental disabilities. Of those described as cripples, invalids or infirm, four were male and three female. They ranged in age from ten years to 65. All were unmarried except for a married 60-year-old head of household. There were three sons and two daughters with the 65 year old living as a lodger. None had occupations.

### Case histories

This section presents case histories of a few of the disabled people in Herefordshire who have been traced through several censuses. They are not statistically representative, but they may be typical of disabled people in this county at this time.

#### *John Webb*

John Webb was born at Upton Bishop in Herefordshire in about 1831. He was blinded in an accident and in 1851 was a pupil at the Blind Asylum in Bristol.<sup>25</sup> Having trained as an organist, in 1861 he was lodging in the household of John Gammond, a cordwainer at Broad Street in Ross.<sup>26</sup> In 1871 he was still working as an organist and lodging with John Gammond's widow, Charlotte.<sup>27</sup> There is no mention of his blindness. By 1881 he had changed lodgings and was now in the household of John Wood, a baker.<sup>28</sup> He was still working as an organist and was listed as blind, but there was no mention of the accident. By 1891 he had moved lodgings again, but remained in Ross, in the household of John Shock, a shoemaker.<sup>29</sup> He was still working as an organist and was listed as blind. In 1901 he was lodging at Station Street, Ross, in the household of Frank Brobyn, a carpenter.<sup>30</sup> He was described as a musician and blind by accident. He was lodging with the same family

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25 TNA HO107/1951 folio 49.

26 TNA RG9/1813 folio 53.

27 TNA RG10/2686 folio 103.

28 TNA RG11/2585 folio 69.

29 TNA RG12/2055 folio 52.

30 TNA RG13/2474 folio 55.

in 1911 and described as a retired organist, but the infirmity column is obscured in the online image.<sup>31</sup>

### *John and Edward Miles*

John and Edward Miles were both born blind, the sons of a farmer, John in about 1811 at Kingsland and Edward in about 1814 at Luston. They had a sister, Elizabeth, born in about 1803 with normal sight. She married John Jones, a farmer of 100 acres employing two men in Luston. In 1851 John and Edward were living with her.<sup>32</sup> The household also included her husband's brother, a nephew and three farm servants. By 1861 Elizabeth had died, but John and Edward were still boarding with her widower in Luston.<sup>33</sup> As he was now 72 he had a housekeeper and a bailiff to run the farm with two farm servants. He died between 1861 and 1871. In the 1871 census John Miles appears as head of a household in Luston, married to Jane who was seven years his junior.<sup>34</sup> He was described as an annuitant and in the household there is also his widowed aunt, ten years his senior. Meanwhile, Edward had remained single and living in Luston. He was boarding in the household of his younger brother Benjamin, an agricultural labourer, who was married with one son still at home and the daughter of a son who had left home.<sup>35</sup> In 1881 John and Jane Miles were still living in Luston.<sup>36</sup> Edward Miles was now one of two lodgers with a widow in Luston village.<sup>37</sup> By 1891 Edward had moved to Yarpole and become a lodger in the household of William Lloyd, a carpenter.<sup>38</sup> John Miles could not be found in the 1891 census and Edward was not in the 1901 census.

### *John Evans*

John Evans, an agricultural labourer in Much Marcle, and his wife Sarah had six children living with them in 1851.<sup>39</sup> Ann, born about 1832, was deaf and dumb. Mary, born about 1834, Charles, born about 1838, John, born about 1842, Rebecca, born about 1845, and Eliza, born about 1847, had no disabilities. In 1861 John and Sarah had been rejoined by a married daughter, Elizabeth Jones, born about 1825, with her three children, none of whom had disabilities.<sup>40</sup> Ann was still at home but no disability was mentioned. Charles

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31 TNA RG14PN15642 RG78PN952 RD336 SD2 ED2 SN172.

32 TNA HO107/1981 folio 437.

33 TNA RG9/1833 folio 54.

34 TNA RG10/2718 folio 56.

35 TNA RG10/2718 folio 51.

36 TNA RG11/2607 folio 57.

37 TNA RG11/2607 folio 51.

38 TNA RG12/2074 folio 122.

39 TNA HO107/1975 folio 416.

40 TNA RG9/1811 folio 107.

and John were also still at home without disabilities. It was Mary who was now enumerated as deaf from birth and Rebecca who was enumerated as deaf and dumb from birth. The younger Eliza, who would have been about 14, was not at home. By 1871 John had died. Sarah, his widow, was still living in Much Marcle and described herself as a market woman.<sup>41</sup> Living with her were five of her children and two of her grandchildren. Ann, Mary and Rebecca were also described as market women, but although Ann did not have a disability mentioned, Mary and Rebecca were each described as 'idiot from birth'. Sarah's son John was an agricultural labourer and the younger Eliza had returned home. Both were without disabilities. By 1881 the younger John, still unmarried, was the head of the household with four co-resident sisters, Ann, Mary, Rebecca and Eliza. Ann and Eliza were without disabilities, Mary was deaf and dumb from birth and Rebecca was dumb from birth.<sup>42</sup> None of the family could be found in 1891 but in 1901 they were living in the parish of Woolhope. The head of the household was Elizabeth Williams, a widow born about 1825. This was the Elizabeth Jones, who appeared in the 1861 census, who was the eldest daughter of John and Sarah Evans. With Elizabeth were her three sisters, Ann, Mary and Rebecca, now all described as 'Imbecile (feeble-minded)'.<sup>43</sup> None of them appear in the 1911 census.

#### *James Hayward*

James Hayward was born at Peterstow in about 1813. In 1851 he was living in Hentland with his wife Mary, born at Ruadean in Gloucestershire in about 1823, and their two children.<sup>44</sup> He was a carpenter and did not declare a disability. In 1861 the family had moved to Llangarron, where he was working as a carpenter and was deaf.<sup>45</sup> They had three daughters and three sons living at home. In 1871 the family was living at Llangarron with six sons and two daughters living at home.<sup>46</sup> In 1881 James and Mary were still living at Llangarron with their eldest and youngest sons at home and a granddaughter.<sup>47</sup> James was still working as a carpenter. None of the family could be found in 1891.

#### *Elizabeth Jones*

Elizabeth Jones was born at Llanbister, Radnorshire, in about 1826, the daughter of Nathan Jones, a farmer, and his wife Elizabeth. In 1851 they were living at Llanfihangel Rhydithou, near Knighton. Elizabeth had an older brother, Nathan, a younger brother, William, and

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41 TNA RG10/2684 folio 31.

42 TNA RG11/2583 folio 82.

43 TNA RG13/2472 folio 104.

44 TNA HO107/1976 folio 526.

45 TNA RG9/1815 folio 35.

46 TNA RG10/2688 folio 34.

47 TNA RG11/2587 folio 27.

two younger sisters, Mary and Margaret, living at home. All seem to have been healthy.<sup>48</sup> In 1861 all of them, except Mary, were living in the parish of Kingsland, but Elizabeth was listed as a cripple.<sup>49</sup> By 1871 Elizabeth's mother had died, Nathan was described as a partner on his father's farm, William had left home and the three daughters were described as 'Assistant at Home' with no mention of Elizabeth's disability.<sup>50</sup> In 1881 Nathan and Margaret were living together at Kingsland.<sup>51</sup> There was no mention of Elizabeth.

### Conclusions

Disability history is a comparatively new field of study, promoted by the Disability History Group.<sup>52</sup> Within disability history the British census is an under-used data source because of its perceived difficulties. Having reviewed the information on disability that can be obtained at county level from the census reports, this article has shown that it is possible to study a local disabled population in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Using the returns from the 1881 CEBs for Herefordshire, supplied by the UK Data Archive, and a commercial online census index for 1861, it was possible to locate all the people tabulated as blind, deaf and dumb in the 1861 census report, whose disabilities caused the census authorities to seek further information by way of a survey. In the course of locating these, other disabled people, whose conditions had not been tabulated, were found and a better grasp of the extent of disability in the county was gained. This methodology has also enabled information not included in the tabulations to be examined, including parish of residence, personal and family names, relationship to the head of the household, marital status, age and occupation. It seems clear that disabled people were seen not merely as statistics but as members of the local population, and not always dependent members. Age distribution for each condition was shown to vary between those with congenital and those with acquired conditions. Among those with a handicap of sight, hearing or speech a higher proportion remained unmarried and, because of their age distribution, a higher proportion of those ever-married were already widowed. Disabled people were likely to remain in the parental home until their late thirties. When their parents died they moved in with siblings or into a lodging, boarding or inmate situation. Although few of the disabled children seemed to be receiving education, over 60 per cent of the adult males were found to be working despite their disabilities and almost 25 per cent of the adult females. It was also possible by using nominal record linkage to trace a few individuals and examine their household situations across several censuses. This

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48 TNA HO107/2493 folio 285.

49 TNA RG9/1833 folio 79.

50 TNA RG10/2718 folio 80.

51 TNA RG11/2607 folio 74.

52 The Disability History Group, [2009–] <URL: <http://www.disabilityhistory.co.uk>> [20 May 2011].

demonstrated how the recording of handicap could change over time for the same individual.

Such a study could be replicated for other counties, though for larger counties this would involve a lot more work, and for counties with a lower concentration of disabled people would yield sparser results. However, it is hoped that the Integrated Census Microdata project [I-CeM] will bring together computerised versions of the censuses from 1851 to 1911, and enhance these through standardisation and harmonisation.<sup>53</sup> The I-CeM project will create a fully searchable dataset including information on disability. All the household information will be available in conjunction with the selected individual. It will no longer be necessary to estimate from samples, and it will be possible to construct customised tabulations from the raw data. It will be also possible to compare different parts of the country and explore change over time. This article is, therefore, a preliminary investigation, examining the value of the disability information in the CEBs prior to much larger and more detailed studies which will become possible once the I-CeM project is complete.

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53 E. Higgs, 'News from the universities', *Local Population Studies*, 84 (2010), 93–6.