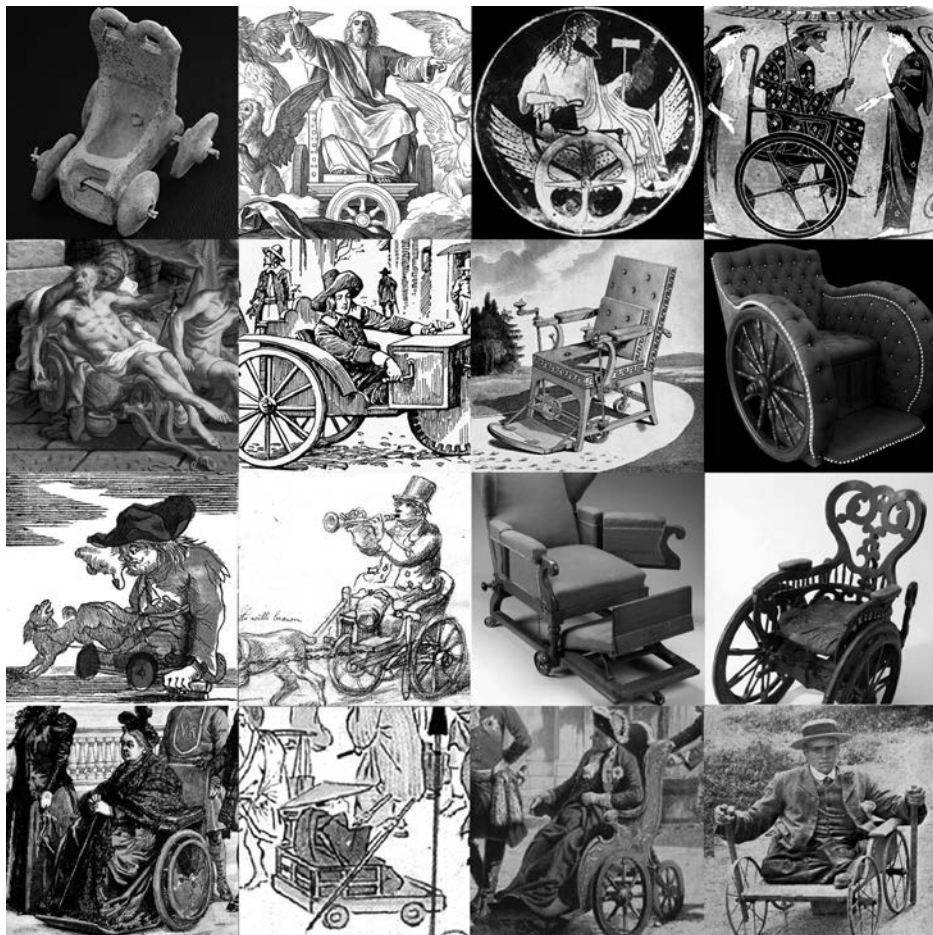


# WHEELCHAIR HISTORY

The Disability Action Research Collective



This zine is a chronological visual history of wheeled chairs dating back to ancient times. Disabled people have existed for as long as humanity, and for as long as there have been disabled people, we have crafted tools to make our lives easier. People who are new to being wheelchair users may not know the distinguished and fascinating history of their noble steeds. Wheelchairs predate many other wheeled chairs like bikes, cars or office chairs. They may go back to the invention of the wheel itself.

Wheelchairs have been used by saints, sages, generals, nobles, kings and queens for hundreds of years. In the past, wheelchairs have been for the privileged few, and sadly, that has not changed in modern times.

Some say that with better manufacturing processes and technology, we can provide wheelchairs for everyone on earth who needs one. But the truth is that we have been able to do this almost at every stage of civilisation. Inequality is not a technological problem, but a social one.

### **Currently....**

**132 million** people need wheelchairs, but only **22 million** have access to one.



First wheels were for pottery, 4200 BC.



First wheeled artifact, 3950 BC.



Solid wood wheel, 3600 BC



Toy chariot, 3000 BC.



Spoked wheels, 2600 - 3000 BC.





The Christian Bible describes God sitting on wheeled chair "...and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool, his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire." Daniel 7:9, 600 BC.



The disabled Greek God Hephaestus depicted as using a chair, 525 BC





The departure of  
Triptolemus, 530 BC.



"Everything has beauty but not everyone sees it" Confucius, 551 BC.



Zhugeliang was a Chinese statesman, 181 AD.



Saint Ephrem the Syrian, 375 AD.



525 AD.



525 AD.

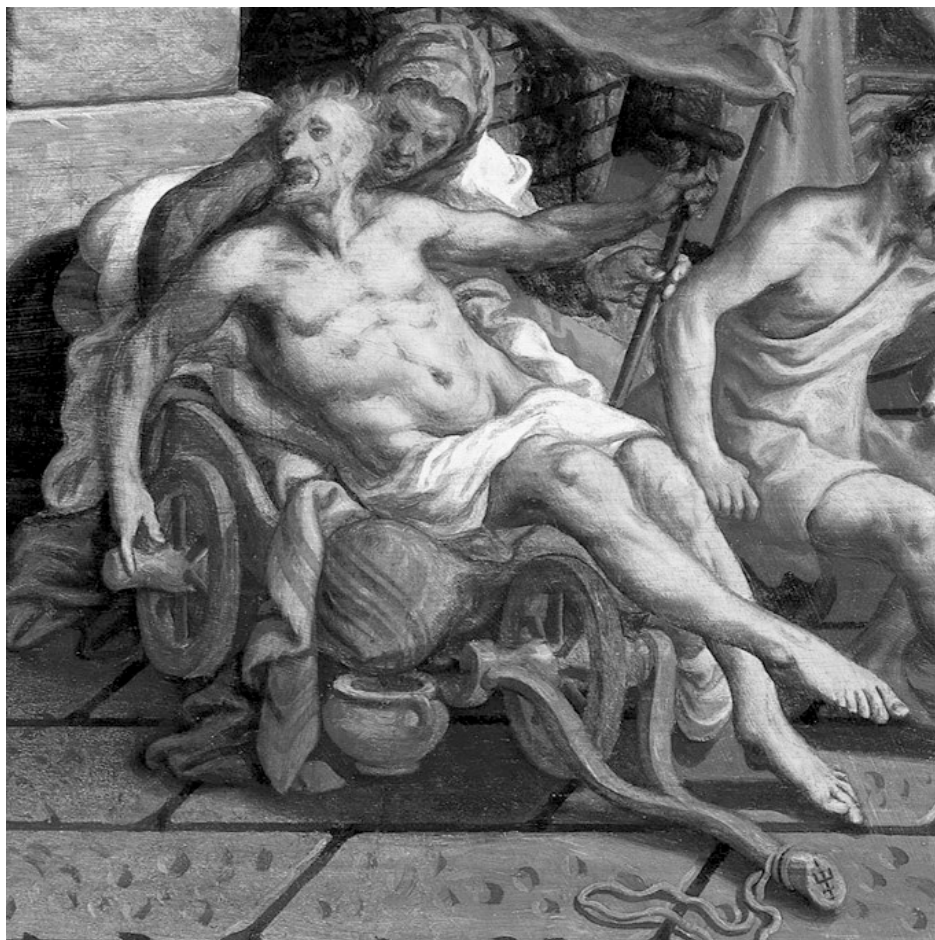


Wheelbarrow from the Luttrell Psalter, 1276.



1470.

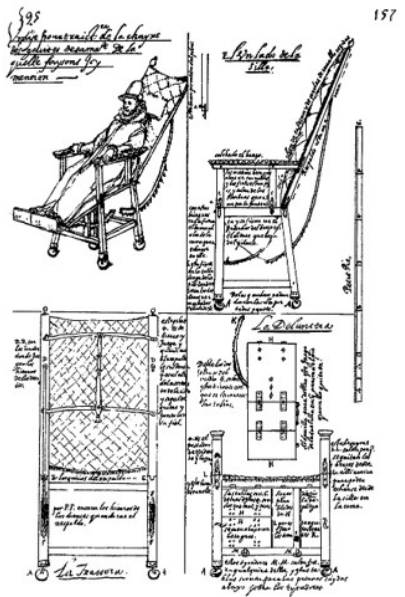




Top from Healing of the Paralytic  
at the Pool of Bethesda by Pieter  
Aetsen, 1575.



Side from Fountain of Youth by Lucas  
Cranach, 1549.

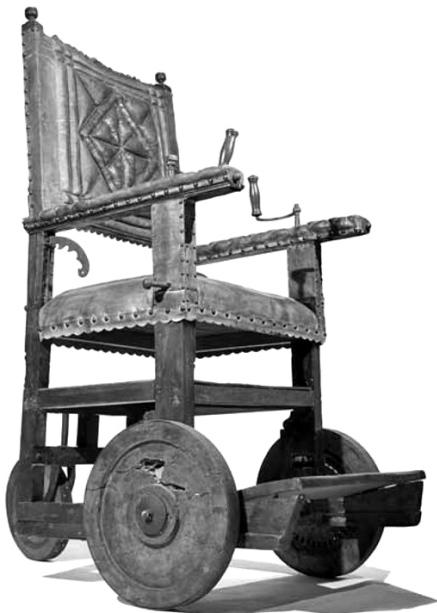


Adjustable wheeled chair of King Philip II of Spain, 1595.

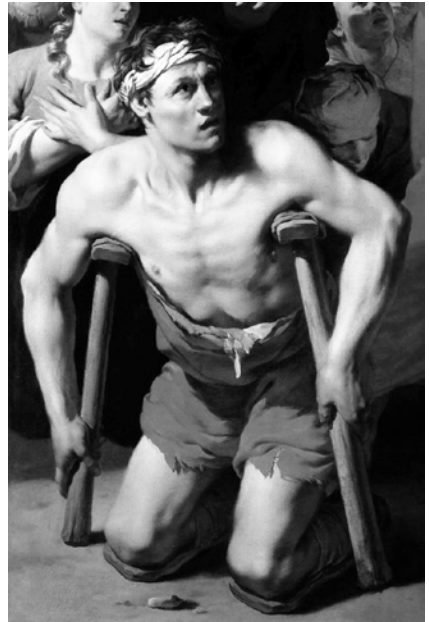


King of France Louis XIV, 1638.

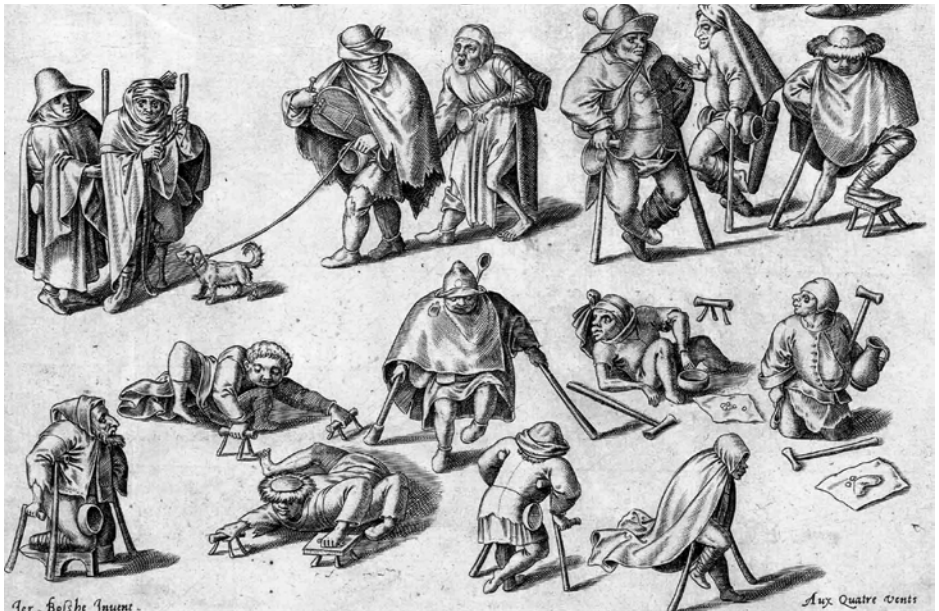




Chair of Sir Thomas Fairfax, 1642.



From St Paul Healing the Cripple at Lystra, 1663.



Life without access to a wheelchair



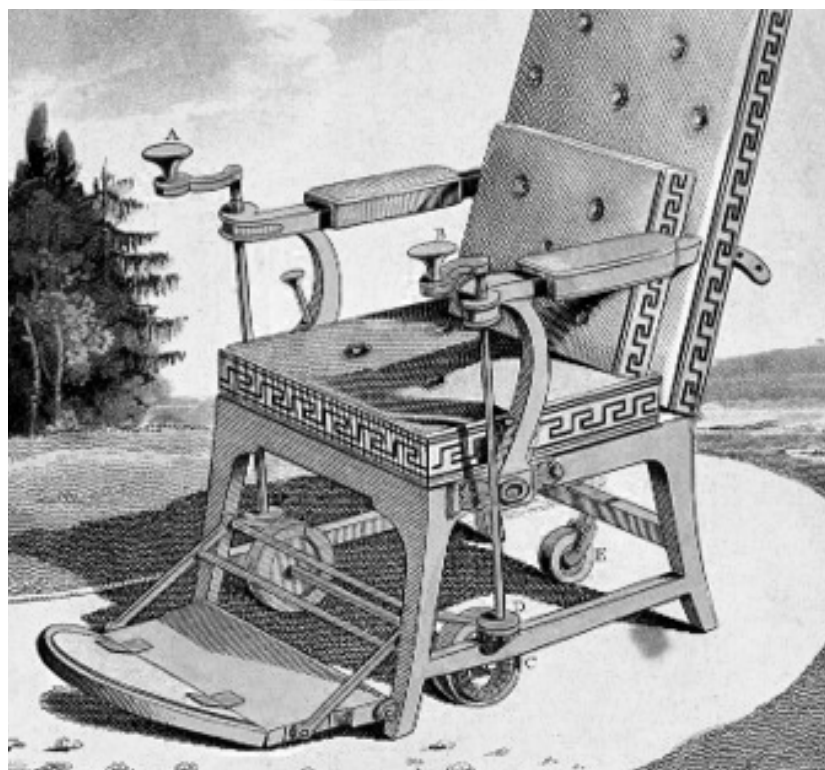


Stephan Farffler who invented gear driven wheelchair, 1655.  
(200 years before first bike)





Chair design by Rollerskate inventor  
John Joseph Merlin, 1735.





Holy Roman Empress Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbützel, 1740.



Disabled commoners, 1776.



Andrew Whiston "The King of the Beggars", 1770.



Above Wickerwork Bath Chair by John Dawson, 1783.  
Below Queen Mary and King George, and unnamed family.





Chair of French  
Revolutionary  
Georges Couthon,  
1795.







Same period, different social classes, 1800s.





Animal powered chairs, 1815.







Side hand velocipede with horse head, 1850.



Ward's improved recumbent chair with side transfer, 1880.



Side is first pushrims,  
1881.



Below is Queen Victoria,  
1899.

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Catalog showing various designs, 1900s.



Suffragette, Rosa May Billinghurst, in Rotary Invalid tricycle, 1920.



Intricately carved chair, 1890.



First wire spoked wheels, 1900.



John Conlon who travelled from London to Bournemouth on this machine in seven days, 1913.



Similar chair design seen in Asia in 1900s.



Frederick the Great of Prussia, 1904.

Different veteran support  
provided between 1928  
Germany and 1989 Russia



August Sander, 1928.



Anatoly Golimbievsky, 1989.





First electric wheelchair by George Klein, 1950.



Joystick controlled  
powered chair, Permobile,  
Per Udden, 1963.



Wide range of modern wheeled chair designs.





Self built wheelchairs using cheap materials.





Modern wheelchairs for children.



At most wheelchair services in the UK, electric wheelchairs are usually not provided if you only need them to leave the house, meaning that many people are stuck indoors, without access to nature, community, friends, family, employment or medical care. This is likely inconsistent with the following human rights legislation: By not providing outdoor mobility, there could be a failure to ensure the enjoyment of liberty on an equal basis with others, facilitate maximum independence, choice over personal mobility, and access to mobility aids. The UNCRPD requires standards towards the rights to be maintained or progressed. Any form of cut or reversing of progress would not be consistent with the commitment made when the UK signed the UNCRPD in 2009. By not providing electric wheelchairs that can be used outside the home, Article 5 may be breached as a person's liberty is infringed upon through inaction which may not be proportionate and justifiable. ECHR, made enforceable in the UK by the Human Rights Act 1998, Article 5, Liberty. As this is an issue that only affects disabled people, Article 14, which focuses on discrimination, must also be considered. Is the liberty of this group of disabled people given the same importance, consideration, and protection as the liberty of others? UNCRPD, Article 14: Liberty and security of person: 1. States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others: a) Enjoy the right to liberty and security of person; b) Are not deprived of their liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily, and that any deprivation of liberty is in conformity with the law, and that the existence of a disability shall in no case justify a deprivation of liberty. 2. States Parties shall ensure that if persons with disabilities are deprived of their liberty through any process, they are, on an equal basis with others, entitled to guarantees in accordance with international human rights law and shall be treated in compliance with the objectives and principles of the present Convention, including by provision of reasonable accommodation. UNCRPD, Article 20 - Personal mobility States Parties shall take effective measures to ensure personal mobility with the greatest possible independence for persons with disabilities, including by: a) Facilitating the personal mobility of persons with disabilities in the manner and at the time of their choice, and at affordable cost; b) Facilitating access by persons with disabilities to quality mobility aids, devices, assistive technologies and forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including by making them available at affordable cost.



This zine is produced by the **Disability Action Research Kollektive** (DARK), which is a disabled-led group working to make disability perspectives, history, and research more accessible to a general audience. We are always looking for disabled (and non-disabled) volunteers to help write, edit and share their perspectives. Be part of something bigger than yourself, join us in the DARK today!

This zine features work by  
**Richard Amm**