





AT THE END OF HISTORY

LARGE PRINT GUIDE

Welcome to the large print guide for At The End of History

This exhibition is an interactive experience exploring how we engage with our history and objects. Who owns them? How do we use them? And what stories and objects do we value?

You are stepping through a portal to the near-future where museum objects have become the ammunition in a conflict. Our museums are a battleground, and our history has been defaced or destroyed, or else stolen and taken into private collections to be owned or censored.

What is left behind is that which is least valued by society—objects and stories of disability.

Currently, disabled people's lives and stories are under-represented in museums. But in a world where disability object are the last surviving artefacts connecting the public to their past, does this increase their value? Does it even make them priceless? And does seeing the world only through the lens of disability change our view as a whole?

You are not involved in the fight, though. Instead, you are charged with transporting those objects and deciding what to do with the stories you will be taking care of.

Credits

At The End of History is part of Curating Visibility, a project delivered with Accentuate and Screen South and funded by Arts Council England. Curating Visibility provides work opportunities for deaf, disabled and neurodivergent curators to uncover museum collections and reimagine disability perspectives.

Thanks to:

Dover Museum's Curating Visibility Fellow, Karl Anthony Mercer, who has spent 15 months researching the collections and working with local disabled people to create this intervention.

Credits (Cont'd):

Co-Producers:

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Gini Mitchell

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The Dover Museum Team

Dover District Council—Operational Support

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Ruth Garde—Accentuate Project Manager

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Credits (Cont'd):

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**Harshadha Balasubramanian—Consultant
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**Ruth Garde and Harshadha
Balasubramanian—Audio Description**

**Arts Council England
Art Fund**

Hard Work and Skill



Hard Work and Skill

Fewer than 2,000 people have successfully crossed the English Channel by swimming it solo. This is one of the world's great challenges, like climbing Mount Everest. Many disabled people count their names among those who have achieved this.

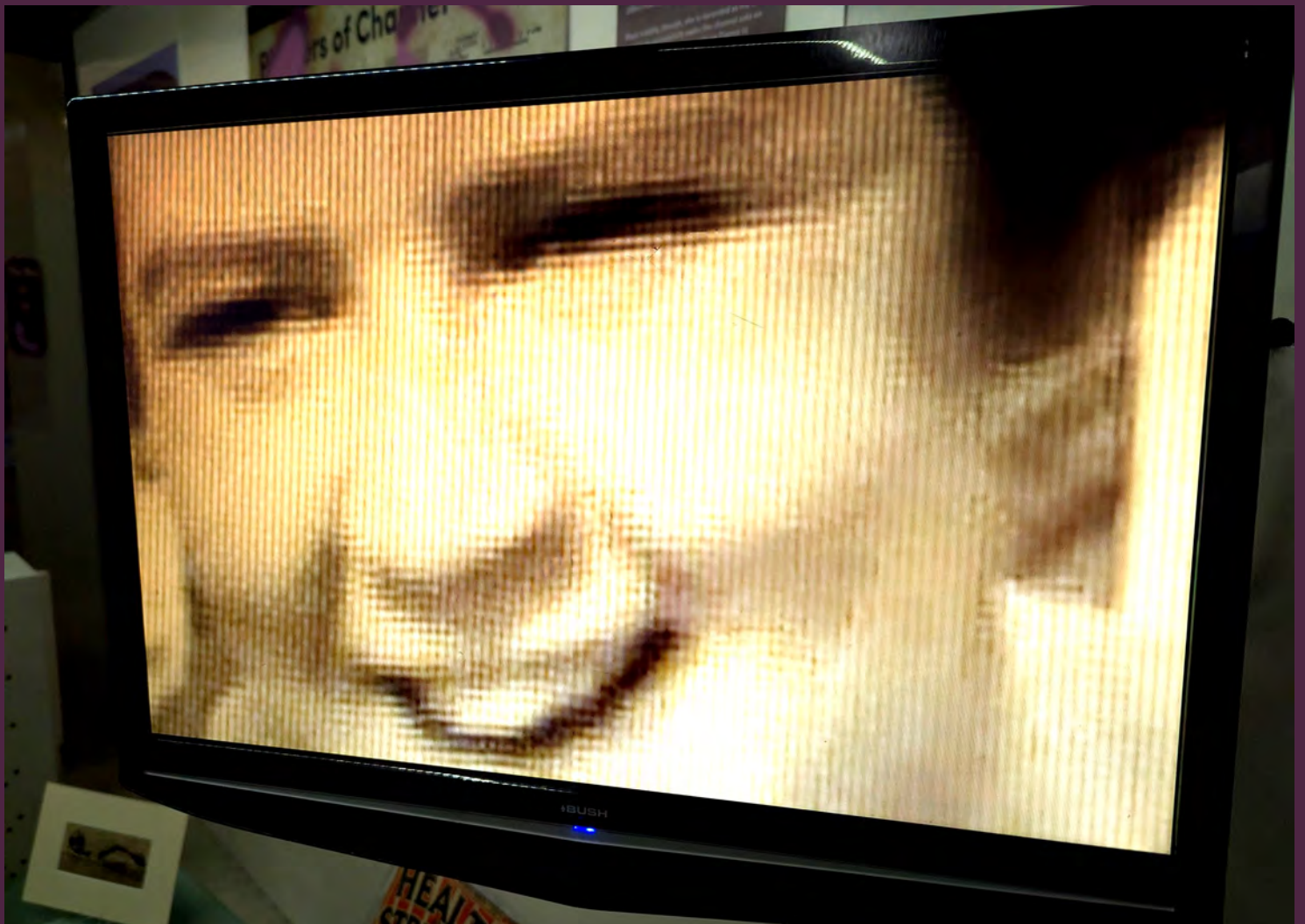
Disabled athletes can often be presented as 'superhuman' and held up as 'inspiration'. There is usually a focus on how they 'overcame' their perceived deficits, rather than highlighting and celebrating their achievements in their own right.

Disabled athletes can also be used to shame other disabled people, by suggesting if one individual can achieve it, so can anyone.

Truly Trudy

Silent Film

Duration 35s



Gertrude 'Trudy' Ederle was a successful swimmer. At the 1924 Paris Olympics she took home three medals; a gold medal for the 4 x 100m Freestyle Relay, and two bronze medals for the 100m Freestyle and 400m Freestyle.

Most notably, though, she is recorded as the first woman to successfully swim the channel solo on August 26th 1926. She crossed from France to England, landing at Kingsdown near Dover, after 14 hours and 34 minutes - a record time.

Gertrude was deaf from childhood and following the end of her swimming career she went on to teach deaf children to swim.

Below the Truly Trudy video is a collection of objects relating to Gertrude and her record-breaking channel swim.

A Medal which reads “In Commemoration of Swimming the English Channel Presented by the City of New York”



Two mounted photos of Gertrude



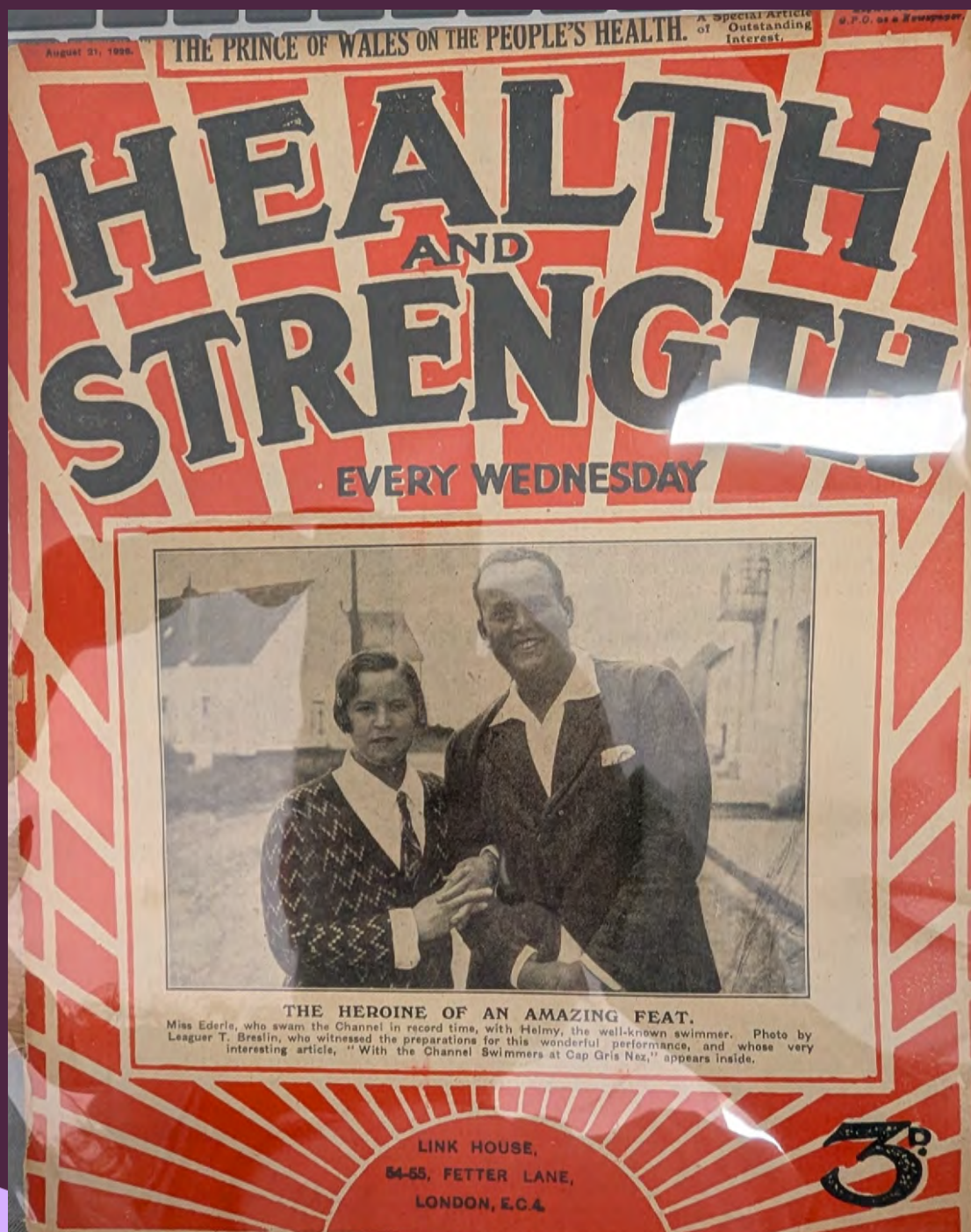
Bronze Medallion from the Channel Swimming Association. The inscription reads “Gertrude Ederle – First Woman to Swim the English Channel - August 6, 1926”



Silver medallion of Gertrude. The Reverse side reads “Gertrude Ederle – English Channel 1926 – The first woman to swim the English Channel, Gertrude Ederle completed the 35-mile crossing in 14 hours and 31 minutes, breaking the previous record by two hours”



The magazine "Health and Strength" from August 21st 1926, showing a photo of Gertrude next to Ishak Helmy, taken prior to her successful crossing. Helmy himself would successfully make the swim in 1928, becoming the first Egyptian to swim the Channel.



Bill Stein's Trophies

DOVRM 2016.107.1

DOVRM 2016.107.3



William ‘Bill’ Stein was a disabled Scottish endurance swimmer. He attempted to swim the channel in 1978 but was prevented by the challenging conditions. He struggled so hard against currents and weather he was awarded the Channel Swimming Association’s “Greatest Feat of Endurance” Trophy.

In 1979, Stein successfully completed a solo channel swim in 16 hours and 9 minutes. This led to him being the first recipient of the Channel Swimming Association’s “Special Award to an Impaired Swimmer” trophy, then called the “Audenaerde Handicap Trophy.”

Bill Stein's Trunks

DOVRM 2016.107.5



**“I was expecting something more obvious,
like one of the legs sewn up.”**

Co-Production Participant

**These cotton trunks belonged to Bill Stein.
He wore them for all of his swims,
including his successful channel swim.
Disabled people interact with everyday
objects daily.**

**To quote Curating for Change Fellow Amy
Thraves-Connor, “Any object can be a
disability object.”**

Necessity and Opportunity



Necessity and Opportunity

No two life experience of disabled people will ever be the same. Factors like socio-economic class, race, or levels of support from family, friends, doctors and society as a whole, can play a huge role in their lives and successes.

Here we present two stories of disability from Dover's Collection



Necessity

This story is of a smuggler in the early-to-mid 19th century, a time when the cost of living was high, pay was low, and working people were struggling.

Many turned to criminal activities such as smuggling. This smuggler lost his leg in a gunfight with customs forces, permanently changing his life through chasing opportunity.



Opportunity

The other story is of a botanical illustrator who was born with joint pain and immobility. Her family were supportive and encouraged her talents, and she went on to become one of the most successful botanical authors and illustrators of the mid-19th century.



‘Brown Bess’ Musket

DOVRM 2021.13.1.1



Necessity

James Bushell was a member of the Aldington Gang, who ran smuggling operations on the Southeast Coast from Deal to Hastings - including one ill-fated attempt to bring in smuggled alcohol in July 1826 at Dover beach.

On that occasion a member of the gang killed Richard Morgan, a midshipman of the Navy's anti-smuggling force. The murder increased pressure on the gang. Later in 1826 another firefight took place between Customs and the gang, resulting in James Bushell having his leg amputated after a gunshot wound.

Customs Sword Stick

DOVRM 2012.74



**Issued in the reign of King George III
(1760-1820)**

**Sticks like these were used by the Navy's
Customs Preventative Blockade forces.
They could be used as a weapon, or more
often, would be used to poke holes in
cargo to check for smuggled goods.**

Bottle Rock

Replica



Smugglers would have used clever methods to get their goods past customs.

One method was to carve hollows in soft rock, like this chalk, and hide bottles or barrels within.

Victorian Artists Box

DOVRM 0.63



Opportunity

Anne Pratt was described as a ‘sickly child’, with her symptoms likely showing either rheumatic fever or complications of rheumatoid arthritis. Her parents and family were incredibly supportive, paying for schooling at a time when it was not compulsory, where she was encouraged with her drawing and botany. Her siblings would often gather specimens for her to draw when she could not get out.

Anne Pratt Books

DOVRM 2025.1

DOVRM 2025.2

Wild Flowers

Things of the Sea Coast



Anne's work shows tremendous attention to detail. She combined scientific understanding and folk knowledge, and she discussed the use of the flowers in art and poetry to demonstrate the beauty and importance of flowers beyond purely scientific description. Her work was very popular. At the time botany was seen as an acceptable thing for women to do, however with increasing oversight from the mostly male scientific community, Anne's popularity was crowded out.



Dried Pressed Flowers

Supplied by Kayleigh Steele



Flower pressing was a popular hobby and pastime during the Victorian period.

Many people, particularly young ladies, would have gathered flowers and plants into a collection called a 'herbarium'.

Our Journey's End



Pilgrim's Badge
In 2015

These lead-pewter badges were common during the medieval period and were sold at pilgrimage routes and destinations. They are the medieval equivalent of the badges in the gift shop, like of our museum. This one was found in Rome, near San Pietro.

There were so many designs of the pilgrim's badge, often reflecting the location, shrine and saint visited. How did these reflect the individuality of the pilgrim? Would different people have had different beliefs or attitudes? Did these collections reflect something of the personality of the pilgrim?



Our Journey's End

A pilgrimage is a journey of spiritual or religious significance, and a person who goes on a pilgrimage is called a pilgrim.

In the medieval period Dover was a travel hub for Christian pilgrims. Some were travelling from the continent to make their way to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury. Others were making their way across to the continent to take pilgrimages to Spain, France and Italy, or even as far as Jerusalem.

Ideas of disability in medieval Britain were complicated.

Some may have seen it as their Christian duty to care for those with different impairments, leading to the establishment of many religious hospitals—especially for pilgrims. Dover's Maison Dieu was initially built for this purpose.

Others believed 'suffering' was holy and that the perceived struggles of disabled people in this life would lead to greater reward in the next.

There are also accounts of disabled people undertaking lengthy pilgrimages in search of a 'cure' for their conditions or impairments.

These pilgrimages reflect something positive that is still true today. Disabled people can take themselves on remarkable journeys.

Pilgrim's Badge

SA 251



These lead-pewter badges were common during the medieval period and were sold on pilgrimage routes and destinations. They are the medieval Christian equivalent of the keyrings in the gift shop, like at our museum! This one was found in Stonar, near Sandwich.

There were so many designs of the pilgrim's badge, often reflecting the churches, shrines and saints visited. How did these reflect the individuality of the pilgrim? Would disabled people have had favourite saints or shrines? Did these collections reflect something of the personality of the pilgrim?

Pilgrim's Bottle

DOVRM 0.243



This flask is made in the style of the drinking flasks pilgrims would have carried on their belts, often made of leather, metal or clay. By the 16th and 17th centuries these decorative versions were popular.

Community Art Piece



“About Us” is a collage celebrating the contributions of the co-producers who helped make “At the End of History.”

Co-production is the process of collaborating as peers and equals to make decisions, produce pieces of work, and build services. For this exhibition we worked with a whole community of disabled people from Dover District and Folkestone to ensure their voices were represented, and they had a part in decision making.

This collage represents the effort and energy of our co-producers by exploring their words.

Contributors

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&

Karl Anthony Mercer

The collage was put together with print-outs, and cut outs from old issues of Museums Journal, Archaeology journal, and other magazines. The buttons contain audio recordings from contributors.

Audio Transcript

Blue Button

Read by Michelle Stannard



**“At Dover’s heart a project bright
to shine a light and set things right.
For tales untold and lives unseen,
of disabled strength, a vibrant scene.
In museum walls where history slept
objects I held, secrets kept.
A rifle’s weight, a story old.
Anne Pratt’s bright book in hues of gold.”**

Audio Transcripts

Light Pink Button

Read by Karl Anthony Mercer



“There is nothing about us.”

Dark Pink Button

Read by Karl Anthony Mercer



“Without us there is nothing!”

Audio Transcript

Yellow button

Read by Jenny Winder



“Often people see my wheelchair and view it as a sign of disability. For me my wheelchair gives me the freedom to get about and be independent. I become able thanks to the chair and to the gadgets I use.”

Audio Transcript

Green button

Read by Karl Anthony Mercer



**“Nothing about
us without us!”**

Bartholomew Fair

By Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846)
DEAVM1998.15



Bartholomew Fair is a celebration on St Bartholomew's Day (August 24th) in London. The fair is known as a Charter Fair, as it was started by Royal instructions – a Charter – by King Henry I in 1133, to fund The Priory of St Bartholomew.

Front and centre there is a bald man holding out his hat as if begging. He has a prosthetic leg on a crutch and another crutch under his armpit. Next to him is a well-dressed black person of short stature. While this may be a child, the proportions and facial features suggest an adult person with achondroplasia, a condition commonly known as dwarfism.

At The End of History

VR Experience



**Who are you? Why are you where you are?
Where do you go from here?**

In this experience you find yourself on a boat, with mysterious boxes and keys. Interacting with them will unveil stories of people from Dover's past, their journeys, lives and jobs and how they navigated the world. Can this help you discover who you are and what to do?

Developed by BRiGHTBLACK, internationally renowned experts in crafting interactive, immersive experiences, Curating Visibility Fellow Karl Mercer and his co-producers, with consultation from Harsha Balasubramanian and Ria Patel.

The Smugglers Defeated

DOVRM 1992.88



This 19th Century coloured image shows a firefight between customs and smugglers—a common occurrence on the Kent coast when the Aldington Gang were active.

Rigging Out a Smuggler

DOVRM 1992.39.2



This satirical cartoon shows the bawdy nature of smuggling, as a topless woman is loaded up with smuggled goods such as tea and cognac.